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Towards an Aesthetics of Blindness: An Interdisciplinary Response to Synge, Yeats and Friel

Towards an Aesthetics of Blindness: An Interdisciplinary Response to Synge, Yeats and Friel

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A Thesis submitted to the School of English
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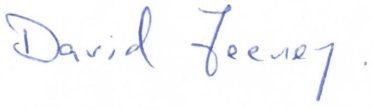
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Acknowledgements

For long spells throughout the writing of this thesis I felt compelled to remove myself from anything that might disrupt the triangular configuration of book – researcher – computer. Looking back, I can see that the most significant periods of progress were heralded by those occasions on which I appealed to others for help. The help came in a variety of guises, but it was always given with an eagerness that betrayed the folly of my initial hesitancy in seeking it.

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This project is dedicated to Thomas Martin, my grandfather.

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List of Abbreviations

Plays I	J.M. Synge, Collected Works, Volume III, Plays, Book 1, ed., Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press,1968)
Plays II	J.M. Synge, Collected Works, Volume IV, Plays, Book 2, ed., Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1968)
Prose	J.M. Synge, Collected Works, Volume II, Prose, ed., Alan Price (London: Oxford University Press, 1966)
VP	W.B. Yeats, The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B.Yeats, ed., Peter Allt, Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1957, reprinted 1973)
VPl	W.B. Yeats, The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats, ed., Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1966, reprinted, 1989)
MS	Brian Friel, Molly Sweeney (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: The Gallery Press, 1994)

Summary

This project represents an interdisciplinary investigation into particular instances of the process of aesthetic reception. I concentrate on the aesthetic experiences of the blind, and specifically on their reception of sites of beauty which the sighted experience in primarily visual terms. I compare a series of imaginative dramatic portrayals of certain aspects of the experience of blindness by sighted playwrights with corresponding passages from the autobiographies of certain blind people. The resulting contrast is set against a background of a consideration of the various ways in which the dialectic of vision and blindness lends itself to a process of metaphorization and is often burdened with a considerable amount of metaphysical connotation. I offer a marginalized perspective on the exclusionary rhetoric of traditional aesthetic theory which traditionally describes the process of aesthetic reception in terms of a disinterested spectatorial vantage. I try to understand the nature of the transition from representation to experience, and to gauge what ocular theory might offer an investigation of what an 'aesthetics of blindness' might entail. My objective is to place the seemingly disparate perspectives of the aesthetician and the theorist of marginality into a meaningful relation to one another in an effort to come to an understanding of the (dis)continuities between attitudes to blindness in art and in life.

The wide variety of materials I have chosen to examine are related to one another in accordance with a heuristic principle that progresses from theoretical accounts of the relationship between vision and blindness towards an insight into the actual experience of sightlessness. Chapter One marks out the conceptual boundaries of the thesis. I clarify exactly which aspects of the broad dialectic between blindness and vision are relevant to an investigation into an aesthetics of blindness. I give an account of the connections and divergences between an increasing number of theorists and artists who are trying to undo the traditional hegemony of vision and relate these interrelations to the discernible tendency in modern literature towards a brightening of the "Oedipal gloom". I explain the non-metaphorical and non metaphysical forms of significance which are central to the enquiry, and distinguish between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic experiences and achievements of the blind.

Chapters Two to Four represent the literary section of the project. They consider in turn the portrayals of blindness in Synge's The Well of the Saints, Yeats's On Baile's Strand and Friel's Molly Sweeney. I consider the extent to which Synge's capacity as a musician and sensitive listener, Yeats's background in the pictorial arts, and Friel's fascination with the limitations of language, can be said to inform their respective renderings of a non-visual reception of beauty. Chapter Five serves as a connective between my assessment of the plays and the testimony of the blind which is considered in Chapter Six. Certain aspects of the psychology of perception, or what is sometimes referred to as "the science of the laws of sensibility" are considered and projected both backward and forward as a means of merging the different levels of investigation which exist on either side of the chapter.

Chapter Six is devoted almost entirely to the testimony of the blind. At the beginning of the chapter I contrast the role assumed by order in the lives of the blind with the widely accepted centrality of order to the aesthetic experience. As part of a pattern that has obvious implications for the portrayals of blindness by sighted authors, the autobiographies considered recall a disinclination for a new aesthetic to emerge in the experience of the adventitiously blind while residual visual criteria still exercise their influence over conceptions of beauty. A period of bereavement for the lost images of faces and places often tends to herald a complete restructuring of experience which has a dramatic bearing on both the aesthetic experience and sense of identity of the adventitiously blind. Sites of beauty that had been experienced visually reveal new dimensions, while the entire body often becomes an organ of perception. What emerges as the actual experience of blindness is related to theoretical and imaginative probings of the condition is an insight into the significance of the rare ability of a sighted artist wishing to imaginatively portray the experience of blindness to resist aestheticizing the condition in visual terms.

Introduction.

Somebody is said to have once inquired of Aristotle why we spend so much time with the beautiful. "That," the philosopher allegedly responded, "is a blind man's question."[1] This entire project might well be conceived as a response to the assumptions underlying Aristotle's remark. It is an investigation of the ways in which the beauty which sighted people experience visually impresses itself on the consciousness of the blind. In the course of the investigation I engage with several very different disciplines and fields of enquiry, progressing through a series of debates traditionally assumed to fall in turn primarily within the carefully demarcated territory of the disability theorist, the aesthetician, the literary critic, the philosopher of language, the cultural anthropologist and the psychologist of perception. I try to effect a progressive shift in the understanding of each of these disciplines by relating them to one another, advancing each towards a comprehensive account of what an 'aesthetics of blindness' might entail by ultimately filtering their socio-political, philosophical and literary concerns through a review of certain encounters with beauty in the lived experience of the blind. The project as a whole addresses the question of how we might understand such translations between the conceptual, the representational, and the experiential.

The wide range of interests represented throughout these chapters is reflected in the diversity of material attended to. Following the trajectory dictated by a heuristic principle that progresses away from abstraction and towards a more experiential order of understanding, I shift my focus from philosophical treatments of certain aspects of the vision/blindness dialectic, to a body of imaginative dramatic representation of the experience of blindness, and from there onto an extensive sampling of real-life testimony. In the course of investigating the level at which representation interferes with reality, and considering what theoretical models have to offer such an investigation, I hope to illustrate the variety of ways in which the experience of the blind prompts questions of conventional attitudes towards beauty which are a great deal more probing and liberating than the one Aristotle dismissively attributes to them. I set out also to expose, in the process, just how disabling interdisciplinary barriers can be.

In order to clearly outline the terms along which my investigation is being conducted it will help to position its central concern in relation to the type of interest

traditionally elicited from the sighted by the phenomenon of blindness. As a sighted investigation into the general experience of blindness, this project is quite richly precedented. The majority of the blind people considered throughout both the literary and more experiential sections of this study are either adventitiously blind, or experience a period of vision after a life of blindness. Interest in certain aspects of the contrast between these sensorial perspectives predates by some way the earliest of the plays considered here. William Paulsen, in his Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France, endeavors to account for some of the reasons behind the captivating influence exercised by blindness on the minds of well renowned thinkers from a variety of disciplines. The preoccupation reached new heights, according to Paulsen, with the surgical advances in the eighteenth century which led to the possibility of cures for some congenital cataracts. The study of blindness, Paulsen suggests, "brings us face to face with some of the major and by now well known problems that have undermined confidence in traditional histories of ideas."[2] The study of the behaviour of the blind man made to see meant that theoretical speculation about the nature of philosophical sensationalism could finally be supplemented or replaced by experimental verification. Locke and his followers were granted a practical means of illustrating the contention that the mind's ideas derived from its "contact with earthly reality" and of dismissing the suggestion that these ideas were somehow innate or traceable back to ideal origins.[3] The absence of sight was regarded by such thinkers primarily as "a means of producing a moment of first sight."[4] In order to prove that understanding is acquired through experience, the philosophers of the eighteenth century were in need of minds deprived of certain bodies of experience, and in the blind they discovered exactly what they needed:

> Summoned to bear witness before the bar of philosophy, the blind man is of interest to his hearers for his prior sensory lack, for his negativity, for the unused portion of his understanding where certain acquisitions have not yet been made. He also interests them insofar as he can be cured, made suddenly like (and yet unlike) one of the seeing.[5]

Bryan Magee continues and refines this line of philosophical investigation into the experience of blindness through his publication, in 1995, of a series of letters which he embarked upon with a blind man with the avowed aim of exploring the

relationship of humans to "unapprehended dimensions of reality"[6]. In his first letter to his blind correspondent, Martin Milligan, Magee tells him he is interested in the difference made by blindness to Milligan's knowledge and the forms his knowledge and concepts take. He admits to having an "ulterior motive" in discussing Milligan's experience of blindness. The questions he wants to discuss with Milligan "lie at the foundations of philosophy":

> How do we acquire our knowledge and understanding of the world, including our knowledge of one another? What is the relationship between knowledge and experience? Is what we can understand limited by what we can experience? Is what can be communicated in language limited by the experience of language users?[7]

This study shares with Magee's the awareness that investigating the difference made by blindness entails investigating the intelligibility to both the blind and the sighted of the significance of the discrepancy between their sensorial capacities. In many respects, however, this project differs significantly from those of Magee and his predecessors. I do not presume, for one thing, to make anything like as broad a contribution to the historical investigation into the nature of reality and human knowledge of it.

I have chosen to situate my project within a preliminary sketch of the type of unease elicited among theorists from a range of contemporary fields by the traditional hegemony of vision within philosophical discourse, but then promptly to remove my analysis from the type of metaphor and metaphysical connotation with which the ocular rhetoric of such theorizing tends to be loaded. The entire dialectic between blindness and vision has certainly been subjected to a lot of theoretical and artistic metaphorization. William Paulsen has observed in this regard that in addition to being a real perceptual experience, blindness is a cultural and artistic construction which differs from time to time, place to place, and from one discursive form to another[8]. The non-abstract, non-metaphysical meaning of blindness concentrated on here, however, is dictated by the descriptions of the actual lived experience of the blind who feature throughout Chapter Six. One of them, for example, responds to the archetypal dramatic depiction of the condition of blindness with a certain resentment:

> The physical blindness of Tiresias is obscured by the magic of his gift. Actual blindness is repressed and dismissed. Who needs material vision when there is a paranormal and superior kind? Blindness is a good thing, after all. Tiresias is identified with ecstasy, grace, astonishment, instinct, hallucination, the soul.
>
> Blindness and the soul and the judgments of God form a palimpsest. No real blind person can avoid the inner prickles of discomfort that accompany this metaphysical terrain.[9]

I do not try to homogenize or even to address all of the levels at which an alleged "dominant ocularcentric bias" and what Martin Jay terms "spectatorial epistemologies" have traditionally permeated the philosopher's world-view.[10] Rather than try to cover all of the ground over which ocularcentric theorists do battle with their anti-ocularcentric adversaries who try to reverse the process of the domination of the eye, I concentrate specifically on the realm of aesthetics. I am interested primarily in the aesthetic significance of the everyday encounters of physical, sentient beings with their environment. I focus on the sense in which aesthetic awareness is a situated knowledge rather than the result of a view from nowhere, and a corporeal practice dictated by material circumstances rather than a form of disembodied savoring. The refined and isolated discipline of objectively contemplating beautiful forms which have been separated from the energies and tensions of everyday life in a way that is designed to reward premeditated and learned forms of abstraction, is, as we will see, of no great significance to the blind. Because aesthetics itself is such an expansive discipline, with different branches of it incorpating the study of perception, art and beauty, it is necessary at the outset of this project to outline the 'type' of aesthetics it is concerned with and the ways in which this aspect of the study overlaps with its other concerns.

I should clarify from the outset, for example, that though the appreciation of music obviously falls within the aesthetic spectrum of the blind, music and musical theory receive very little direct attention in the course of this project. Even the most 'sightist' of aesthetes would, one presumes, acknowledge that access to visible beauty is not necessary for an appreciation of music, and often actually impedes it. Aestheticians such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Wagner, Pater, and others, have hailed music as the quintessential aesthetic medium, and blind musicians are a feature

of almost every historical epoch since the time of Homer.[11] Perhaps the simplest way to explain the reasoning behind my decision to ignore the experience of music in blindness is to suggest that if I were writing a thesis on the aesthetics of deafness, music would be near the top of my list of phenomena to explore. Such an investigation would entail a consideration of how music can lend itself to non-auditory modes of perception This project limits itself to those instances in which the blind are taken to lack the sensory apparatus required to derive aesthetic pleasure or satisfaction from an encounter with a particular site of beauty. Eyesight, with all of its attendant visual distractions, and not blindness, would seem to be the more obvious impediment to an appreciation of music. The fact that all of the plays considered were written by sighted dramatists has been another factor in my decision to limit my inquiry to the relation of the blind to instances of beauty which the sighted think of in primarily visual terms.

In each of the plays considered it is true to say that either a restoration of vision is effected, or that the blindness depicted is not congenital. The relation of the various characters while blind to a beauty they know to be perceivable through the eyes therefore assumes great aesthetic significance. Likewise, the majority of the autobiographies which feature in the final chapter are written by blind people who find themselves appreciating through different senses sites of beauty which had earlier made their appeal to the eye. The sense of hearing is discussed when we encounter instances of blind people perceiving through that faculty sites of beauty which are generally assumed to be peculiar to the modality of vision. Such instances are particularly frequent in the chapter on Synge. In a letter to Bryan Magee, the philosophy professor Martin Milligan, who was blind practically from birth, admits that when he first heard about the intention of certain deaf people to pursue a career in music he was very sceptical. When Milligan reflected on his own aesthetic experiences as a blind man, however, he promptly disavowed his initial opinion:

> ... partly because one should not be dismissive of surprising claims by other people in areas about which one knows little oneself; and also because I recognise that I ought to have remembered that there are ways of becoming aware of vibrations other than through the ears; that rhythms in particular, which are a very fundamental part of music, may well be very enjoyable to deaf people, both to perceive and to create; that

> perception of the structures within music, which should be open to deaf people, is for some hearing people a great part of the pleasure of music; and that some good hearing musicians get a good deal out of just reading music, without hearing it ...[12]

By considering in this way the appreciation through non-auditory channels of an aesthetic experience which is universally associated with the faculty of hearing, Milligan is outlining within the acoustic realm a project which corresponds to this investigation into the experience of blindness.

I initially place this investigation of a non-visual aesthetic within a description of a general weariness among contemporary artists of spectacular forms which target the eye, and an eagerness to address their audience through other sensorial modalities. Modernist aesthetics has widely been regarded as "the triumph of pure visuality, concerned solely with formal optical questions."[13] For some time now, however, as I point out in my opening chapter, art has been in the process of eschewing the type of divorced spectatorial attitude traditionally associated with it, and is gradually liberating itself from its traditional service to visual beauty. Daniel Herwitz observes that although postmodernist artists still tend to formally exhibit their work, the postmodern suspicion of the aesthetic criteria bequeathed to modernity by the eighteenth century is targeted at both components of that period's dual inauguration of the culture of the museum and the theoretical prescription of universal aesthetic principles:

> Postmodern art, when concerned to expose the dark underside of aesthetic practices, focuses not only on the social codes inscribed in works of art but also on the modes of voyeuristic omnipotence cultivated in art making and art viewing, and the museum is seen to play a central role in what postmodern art history has called (if not fetishized as) "the gaze." [14]

The chapters which follow feature various forms of aesthetic beholding which might be thought of as non-visual equivalents of the increasingly demonized gaze.

The guiding objectives of my application of aesthetic theory to representations and experiences of certain aspects of blindness are relatively modest. I do not attempt to decisively resolve the traditional cognitive ambiguity of the aesthetic. I am not

categorically championing a type of sensible intuition which operates independently of conceptual understanding, or arguing unequivocally that aesthetic judgments entail a harmonious interrelationship between the faculties of sense, understanding and reason. I simply proffer this study of the aesthetic experience of the blind as a way of setting seemingly disparate developments in aesthetic theory and in matters pertaining to the marginalized experience of disability in meaningful relation to one another, while taking care not to discount the radical differences between the fields of aesthetics and disability studies. I take issue with certain omnipresent tenets of traditional aesthetic theory which seem to me to engage in a conflicting manner with the concerns of the disability theorist. Each of the plays studied depicts the relation of a blind character to a particular site of beauty. I consider each relation on its own merits and outline what I take to be their aesthetic qualities in terms of their deviation from the qualities conventionally associated with aesthetic experience. In Chapter Four, for example, I question the applicability to Molly Sweeney's experience of the general requirement that every non-trivial response to beauty will exercise and exhibit the 'relational totality' of the cognitive and sensory faculties. In doing so I am not exemplifying any grand aesthetic theory but challenging the traditionally unqueried pervasiveness of such universalizing and normative hypotheses.

Aesthetic theorists have indefatigably tried to identify certain universals behind all of the diversity of art and human interactions with sites of beauty in general. While theorists no longer seriously deny the variability of responses to art, many of them contend that if we transcend this diversity a definite universality will emerge. Perhaps the most commonly encountered claim is that aesthetic evaluations are united by their disinterestedness. Aesthetic evaluations are held to be those based purely on what one finds good in an object when contemplating it in isolation from considerations of the objects relation to one's own personal circumstances. This is what disinterested evaluation amounts to. Most famously Kant, in his Critique of Reason, insists on disinterest and universality as aesthetic criteria. Aesthetic evaluations are those which are grounded in shared human nature rather than in anything particular to individual predilection or background. The very concept of an aesthetics of blindness appears to violate the terms stipulated by the exclusion of non-aesthetic, or personal, social, or political interests. In terms of aesthetic judgment, interest is often regarded as a ruinous or spoiling influence. Such detachment, or freedom from interest, requires an isolated interest in formal appearance. The impartiality that accompanies the

discounting of personal circumstances in instances of aesthetic evaluation is conventionally regarded as the only basis for universality. According to this logic, even if subjectivity is admitted, because everyone is capable of experiencing the same disinterested, or impersonal pleasure, our pure judgments of taste will claim the assent of all objective aesthetic beholders.

The discipline of aesthetics has laboured long under this illusion of its own socio-political removal. In recent times, however, an increased emphasis on identity politics has seen an increased undermining of assumptions about the social isolation and ideological neutrality of the discipline of aesthetics. Maurice Berger points out, for example, that throughout the 1990s the postmodern interrogation into the discipline of history and the accompanying scrutinizing of relationships between knowledge, representation, ideology and power, began to permeate the fields of art history, criticism, and curational practice and to challenge the "narrow ideological basis" upon which they are traditionally constructed.[15] This interrogation of the methodological shortcomings of the discipline of history, together with the emergence of what Berger calls "community or identity-based history projects" has served as an important incitement towards the identification and acknowledgment of the richly composite nature of every historic moment. Theorists across a wide range of disciplines have begun to realize that

> the postmodern task of witnessing those who are different and forging dialogue between such persons ... cannot rest assured by previous acts of legitimation, since the point is to find and invent modes of listening, speaking, and connection that are ... not captured by existing rules.[16]

The play considered in Chapter Four has been described as postmodern by virtue of the nature of its appropriation of its sources.[17] By attending to a differential aesthetic in the way that it does it exhibits more than a trace of the postmodern suspicion of the broad, essentializing strokes with which prevailing ideologies legitimate their dominance. Synge's championing of the rights of the marginalized to an aesthetic that corresponds to their unique experience anticipates postmodern impatience with long universalized aesthetic standards. I present my study of imaginative dramatic depictions of an aesthetics of blindness as a means of exploring some of the common interrogative ground which is just beginning to be shared by the

contemporary aesthetician and the theorist of marginality. The "witnessing of difference" which has caused the emergence of enterprises such as subalternist, gay, lesbian, race, and feminist studies, have brought together theorists, activists, and workers from several disparate disciplines to address the question of the bias towards homogeneity which they see as the basis of the social agenda of history. The aspect of this development which is of most importance to this study is the manner in which theorists from within the fields of aesthetics and disability studies are beginning to recognize the extent of the potential which postmodern scepticism towards universalizing principles holds for their respective disciplines. Writing in 2000, for example, Penny Florence and Nicola Foster describe the "shift in most critical approaches to the aesthetic" which they trace through "the last few years"[18]. The "shift" in question relates to the subjection of the traditionally restrictively pre-demarcated domain of the disinterested experience of the beautiful to the 'meddlesome' interrogative strategies of a 'swarm' of postmodern upholders of differential rights. As recently as 2002, Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare announced that disability theorists have been too slow to embrace the radical implications for their discipline which is latent in the postmodern perspective:

> Whereas theorists of race, gender and sexuality have embraced and explored the contributions of postmodernism, disability theorists have proved reluctant to take on board new perspectives. Disability and impairment have been largely excluded from mainstream postmodern analysis and this analysis has so far failed to impact significantly on how we perceive, think about and produce disability in the twenty-first century.[19]

Advocating what was a cherished goal in the earlier part of the last century, the theorist of equality is now widely seen as posing a considerable threat. In her appraisal of the accomplishments of feminist aesthetics, for example, Rita Felski claims that one of the most important achievements of the woman's movement has been to "repoliticize art on the level of both production and reception ..."[20] Florence and Foster indicate the way in which this plethora of emerging discourses on the experience of marginality disrupts the allegedly 'universal' applicability of aesthetic principles when they observe that "feminism as an interrogation of the notion of

disinterest is always already in the position of antagonist in relation to central aesthetic assumptions and tenets."[21] The contingent, historical and ideological nature of qualities that have traditionally been regarded as universally aesthetic is beginning to be widely realized through various discourses on marginality. Though postmodernity has witnessed, to a certain degree, what Florence and Foster term a "differentiated redefinition" of aesthetics, proponents of a marginalized aesthetics remain in something of a bind. Despite the fact that the concept of disinterest has largely been displaced, when theorists draw attention to the importance of contingent considerations such as gender and sensory capacity to different aspects of the aesthetic experience, they risk coming across as 'crude' exponents of a 'properly refined' discipline. "Despite claims for universality in discussions of the aesthetic", as Florence and Farr see it in relation to their own discipline, "females remain on the margins of or outside the aesthetic altogether."[22] Disability theorists find themselves in a similar quandary.

The aesthetician's embracing of postmodern principles has meant that aesthetic theory is now able to become inclusive of the concerns and inclinations of everybody. As it has become less universalized, it has become more egalitarian. Daniel Herwitz describes the postmodern aesthetic in relation to Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge -- a text whose central tenets are also beginning to be embraced by disability theorists. Most crucially, Herwitz reports, the postmodern is identifiable by our age's suspicion towards the legitimating capacity of meta-narratives. Meta-narratives are absolutist accounts of various forms of knowledge which determine the relations between subject (humanity), object, knowledge, and the socio-cultural and socio-historical spheres. The meta-narratives that concern this project are the classical or foundational aesthetic theories which have been responsible for the prevailing conception of genuine aesthetic receptivity as a disinterested, distanced, and universally experienced process. One of the stipulations of the prevailing ideology of aesthetic value is the conception of a sensorial hierarchy which regards vision as the "noblest" of the senses, the best suited to aesthetic evaluation, and regards the various "lower" senses in relation to it. The capacity for distanced appreciation appears to be one of the defining criteria in the construction of the hierarchy, with non-distance senses functioning primarily to ratify the findings of hearing and vision. The emergence of interrogations of the exclusionary rhetoric of these theories, however, has seen a collapse of their previously unquestioned authority

to justify institutionalized aesthetic practices. The ideal of a universal mind and universally arranged sensory faculties, has been displaced by an appreciation of a plurality of minds, subjects and aesthetic beholders which reflect a multitude of social positions and physical constitutions. Herwitz makes the general observation that, partly because of "our suspicions of what our totalizing ideas have wrought in this century", old meta-narratives of legitimation are no longer viable:

> The world is interdisciplinary, multiperspectival, and shifting, thus denying all the old repertoire of justifications for the forms of knowledge. Nor are any new large-scale pictures of legitimation adequate to the terms of the age. Thus, we are skeptical about all general concepts of legitimation. The contemporary instability of knowledge practices to shift and realign themselves also has, according to Lyotard, its positive side; it provides for the possibility of new and creative modes of knowledge in which disciplines converge and social institutions realign. These new sources of knowledge can only be legitimated contextually: in terms of their specific modes of application.[23]

The current project is reflective of this tendency towards interdisciplinary convergence. It is the product of its age's sensitivity to the orders of difference that have historically been overlooked in order to further the legitimacy of arch validations of prevailing social relations.

In an attempt to redress the prolonged shunning of postmodern perspectives by disability theorists, Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare, who also discuss the importance of Lyotard's postmodern revisioning of traditional approaches to knowledge, suggest that "it could be argued that disability is the ultimate postmodern concept."[24] The traditional application of social and medical models of disability have come to be seen as resulting in totalizing approaches which disregarded crucial aspects of the experience of disability in their attempts to universalize it. Considering the wide variety of conditions that are collected under the term 'disability', the often dissimilar ways in which certain conditions affect different individuals, and the obvious potential for dialogue between disability studies and theorists of other forms of inequality and marginality, Corker and Shakespeare are critical of the misleading and distorting essentialism which results from the reluctance of disability theorists to

include their field in the postmodern landscape that surrounds them. The experience of disability is usually omitted from those grand stories of progress which have been fundamental to the legitimation of modern forms of knowledge, culture and society. The postmodern emphasis on differentiality, which has an obvious significance for those marginalized by divergence from physical or sensorial 'norms', has been central to the stripping of these metanarratives of their once unquestioned authority. The postmodern shift from metanarratives to more localized accounts of meaning, and from general, ahistorical theories to more individual and practical approaches, naturally appreciates the type of difference disregarded by broader validating ploys. With the emphasis on different social locations and physical and sensorial configurations comes an appreciation of the plurality of minds, subjects and knowledges. Difference, ambiguity and conflict are not only tolerated but also rejoiced in, within the postmodern world-view. An appreciation of this fact has started to filter through the barriers erected by the initially sceptical disciplines of aesthetics and disability studies at roughly the same time.

This emphasis on intertextuality and contextualized rather than idealized forms of legitimation accounts for what may initially seem an unlikely juxtaposition of aesthetic theory and a sampling of the testimony of the blind. My choice of literary material, however, requires some further explanation, both in terms of the plays I have selected for analysis and in relation to my attempt to incorporate their analysis into the wider scope of this project as a whole. The three plays which feature in chapters Two, Three and Four suggested themselves as convenient test-cases for my exploration because they represent variations on a common theme and demonstrate patterns which invite contrast and comparison on a number of levels. Being written within a single theatrical tradition, the three plays are linked intertextually by the authors' awareness of one another's work. Some of my own reservations in relation to the task of investiging a sensory condition I have never experienced are also reflected in my selection of three portrayals of blindness by sighted playwrights.

The plays are encompassed within the terms of the thesis because the concept of authorship I bring to my analysis of them does not preclude reflection on the materiality of the practice or of its informing ideas. It therefore accommodates the consideration of aesthetic encounters as episodes of embodied reception of beauty. In this way, for example, Synge's musicianship and his sensitivity as a listener, and Yeats's irreducibly visual aesthetic are considered as crucial factors in an assessment

of their respective treatments of blindness. The plays, which attempt in different ways to portray the experience of blindness, are situated in relation to a brief analysis of a body of theory which addresses the debate about the significance of the ocular on levels which patently have little contact with the lived experience of the blind. The analogy to night runs through the literary chapters in order to reflect the disparity between the experience of blindness and the depiction of certain aspects of the experience by sighted authors. The dawn which inevitably succeeds the playwright's night is an obvious point of reference in each of the plays. The extent to which visual criteria encroach upon the various portrayals of blindness becomes a major factor in my attempt to grasp the significance of the transitions between the conceptual, the representative and the experiential.

In the course of investigating the type of interdisciplinary fusion prompted by these large questions, issues arise which pertain to the aesthetic significance of the mediating role played by language in the acquisition of certain types of knowledge by the blind. The proficiency with which the blind protagonists of the plays make use of the descriptive language on which they are so dependent, masking almost perfectly its figurative, reductive, and not often strictly referential characteristics, points to an element of blindness which certain aesthetic theorists and philosophers of language are quick to identify as infiltrating human communication. I investigate how beauty fares within the famously literary nature of Irish dramatic representation and assess the considered portrayals of the aesthetic experience of the blind in relation to Diderot's conviction, illustrated in the opening chapter, that beauty for the blind is just a word. Corresponding distinctions are made throughout the thesis between 'experiential' and 'conceptual', or 'propositional' and 'perceptual' forms of knowledge. I not only look at the 'aesthetic testimony' of the blind, but also look behind it, to determine whether it relates to anything that can actually be said to fall within the range of their experience. The centrality of the word to these dramatic portrayals is also considered in relation to the quality of ineffability which is often associated with aesthetic experience.

The six chapters of the thesis follow a line of enquiry which progresses from an account of the ways in which blindness and vision have historically lent themselves to abstraction, towards am experiential order of understanding. The plays in the middle serve as a sounding board against which to inspect certain theories of the senses before contrasting them directly with the experiences of the actually blind.

In Chapter One I mark the boundaries of the investigation. As part of a clarification of exactly which aspects of the ever-broadening dialectic between blindness and vision are relevant to an investigation into an aesthetics of blindness, metaphysical and metaphorical concerns are briefly described in terms of their inapposite relation to the terms along which this investigation is being conducted. Theoretical and artistic reactions to the traditional hegemony of vision are contrasted against one another and the divergence between them is in turn related to the experience of the actually blind. Within the general critical reaction against the hegemony of vision I isolate anti-ocular tendencies within the art world and the discipline of aesthetic criticism, and relate these reactions against visual beauty to the "brightening of the Oedipal gloom" which Georgina Kleege sees as characterizing many modern literary depictions of the condition of blindness. I explain the general disregard throughout this project for concerns about the potentially deceptive influence of the apparent "causal muteness" of sites of beauty, and distinguish between aesthetic appraisal and forms of identification and orientation for which the blind also display an impressive capacity.

The literary core of the thesis represents a search for an alternative to the much celebrated 'moment of vision' within aesthetic experience. I consider the different ways in which the featuring playwrights present the heightened awareness of their blind protagonists of the various objects, events, and atmospheres they encounter while blind. The 'moment of vision', traditionally peculiar to the province of poetry, became a characteristic of modern fiction during the time that the plays considered here were written. I set out to discover whether the various blind protagonists experience a type of heightened momentary sensory awareness that might be compared, for example, with Lily Briscoe's moment of vision at the very close of To the Lighthouse, or with the theories of epiphanies expounded in Stephen Hero – those most precious and evanescent of moments, related to Aquinas's theories of the radiant, in which the total meaning and beauty of events or objects are realized. Beauty is conventionally thought of in terms of appearance.[25] Among the questions considered throughout this study is whether there exists a non-visual equivalent to the type of appearance which we think of as instigating the epiphanal experience. Does the largely sequential nature of the perceptual experience of the blind necessarily preclude the experience of a moment of expansive and intensified aesthetic realization? (The achievements of Woolf and Joyce were the product, after all, of the challenging of the received tradition whereby the writing of a novel invariably

entailed the description of a sequence of external events.) I distinguish between those dramatists who describe a remembered moment of vision from the perspective of blindness by simply resorting to a depiction of visual memory from those who actually incorporate the distinctive features of the aesthetic experience of the blind into their portrayal of a non-visual counterpart to such moments of illumination.

Portraying the experience of sightlessness, as each of them does in its own way, the three plays are considered here as one might consider a series of monochromes. The plays are assessed individually, but have been collected here in the belief that we can derive a broader understanding of what is involved in the portrayal of blindness by a sighted author by assessing the contribution of each of the featuring playwrights in the context of the two related works. Aspects which seem inconspicuous when regarded on their own attain a particular relevance when considered in terms of corresponding events in the related plays. This significance attains a further dimension when considered in the context of similar episodes from the lived experience of the actually blind. Viewed in relation to the visual theory considered throughout the earlier stages of the project, the plays can be interpreted as challenging what David Batchellor terms "the conceptual dimensions of the monochrome".[26] Viewed in relation to the autobiographies of the blind considered in Chapter Six, the plays can be interpreted as explorations of the sensorial dimensions of sites of beauty conventionally experienced in visual terms.

My treatment of Synge's The Well of the Saints appears in Chapter Two. I suggest that it is Synge's sensitivity as a listener, developed by his background as a musician and a naturalist, which enables him to render non-visual sites of beauty as impressively as he does. I defend the non-visual world depicted in the play from a general critical presumption of its unreality, and challenge the corresponding identification of non-visual reality with dreamlike state. I contrast the play's portrayal of an aesthetics of blindness with the ascetic imperative which informs the conception of beauty harbored by its miracle working Saint and outline what I describe as the "synaesthetic drift" of the perception of the play's blind couple, Mary and Martin Doul. While taking issue with many of the criticisms which have been leveled against the play, I displace them with some of my own. There is a sense, for example, in which blindness is represented in the play as a haven or refuge from the type of aesthetic aversion which is such a prominent aspect of the couple's sighted experience. Because this particular capacity for discrimination does not seem to

transfer from the sighted to the blind world, there emerges an impression that the beauty Mary and Martin find in non-visual aspects of their surroundings might be partly attributable to a relaxation of the discernment which underlies their disgust with certain features of the visual world. I also consider whether there might be a sense in which the figural terms in which non-visual beauty is described undoes the urgency with which Martin and Mary actively seek out a non-visual source of aesthetic gratification. The greater part of the chapter, however, is dedicated to the impressive reserves of auditory receptiveness which Synge brings to the task of portraying Martin and Mary's engagement with their environment.

Chapter Three, on Yeats's On Baile's Strand, resists easy synopsis. Because the character of Blind Man is allocated only a marginal role, the play cannot be aligned in any simple way with the plays considered in chapters Two and Four. The Well of the Saints and Molly Sweeney both constitute relatively significant and direct portrayals of certain aspects of the experience of blindness. The blind protagonists feature prominently and there is considerable emphasis on their experience of the beauty of their surroundings. In Yeats's play, by contrast, the figure of Blind Man is relegated to the periphery of the main plot, while the condition of blindness itself is rendered in a strictly metaphorical way. I suspect that those familiar with Yeats's drama would expect to see his The Cat and the Moon in the chapter actually occupied by On Baile's Strand, and feel that a brief explanation of the reasoning behind its omission may be in order.

More obvious parallels can be drawn between The Well of the Saints, in particular, and The Cat and the Moon, which was actually commenced in 1917 although not published until 1924, or performed until 1926. The play portrays the experience of two beggars, one lame, the other blind, as they travel in search of a cure which is eventually granted to them by the compassionate Saint who resides over a miracle-dispensing well. It seems safe, therefore, to conjecture that Synge's play, which Yeats greatly admired, was a conscious influence, and that both plays were in turn influenced by Andrieu de la Vigne's late fifteenth century farce Moralité de l'Aveugle et du Boiteux which deals with the same theme. Although The Cat and the Moon appears to present itself on a number of levels as a companion piece to Synge's play, I feel that in terms of the sensory experience of its blind protagonist it cannot be said to mark a significant advance on Synge's earlier portrayal. Bloom's declaration that the play seems "lame, blind and impotent beside Synge's treatment of a vaguely

similar theme"[27] appears, at least in relation to the admittedly particular concerns of this project, to be justified.

The strategy adopted in my approach to On Baile's Strand differs markedly from that adopted in the other two literary chapters. I explain firstly that because the metaphorical figure of Blind Man seems to owe his existence almost entirely to plot related functions, there is little by way of substance in Blind Man's aesthetics to get one's critical teeth into. I interpret the play in terms of the defining influence of various invisible forces that dictate the course of its events. I suggest that something of Yeats's real attitude towards an aesthetics of blindness can be ascertained from the painterly portrayal of the play's most significant absentee. In my interpretation Blind Man is also recast as a central character despite his apparent marginality, by virtue of the beauty he has seen before being blinded for putting a curse on the wind. I also assess the significance, in aesthetic terms, of the play's treatment of the phenomenon of resemblance, and Blind Man's relation to it. The chapter ends with the suggestion that blindness appears at certain junctures to be resorted to by Yeats as a concealing literary device designed to invest his imagery with a peculiar prominence.

In Chapter Four I deal with Friel's Molly Sweeney. Of the three plays considered, Friel's involves the most explicit politicization of the process of aesthetic reception. I use the play as a means of exploring the limits of the circulation of aesthetic experience and the significance of certain discontinuities between the perceptual experience of the blind and the sighted. Throughout much of the chapter the debate about aesthetics is transferred to the classroom as I consider the aesthetic education Molly receives as a young girl from her father in relation to some of the obvious ways in which aesthetic education in general is inherently problematic. I examine the relation between knowledge, experience and testimony and assess the play's depiction of some of the problems that arise from the servile replication of unassimilated knowledge. Molly's treatment at the hands of her father, husband, and ophthalmologist also invites postcolonial and feminist readings. While I outline the lines along which these readings might be taken, it seems to me to be an aspect of Friel's drama which has already been too heavily worked by other critics to warrant comprehensive inclusion here. Molly's few stolen moments of what appears to be genuine aesthetic pleasure prompt an examination of the extent to which a lack of critical appraisal can be said to trivialize aesthetic experience. I examine Friel's verbal undermining of the power of language in relation to the largely cerebral absorption of

his championing of sensory enjoyment, and observe how his treatment of beauty is at odds with the general suspicion of the credulity of the senses that we might expect of a postmodern portrayal of some of the impressive capacities of blindness.

Chapter Five functions as a connective between my analysis of the plays and the autobiographies of the blind considered in the final chapter. I begin the chapter by revisiting the phenomenon of synaesthesia rather briefly alluded to in Chapter Two, and giving a more expansive account of its significance, both as a feature of the sensory experience of the adventitiously blind, and as a feature of imaginative description. I then outline the reservations of the psychologist G. Révész in relation to the aesthetic significance of non-visual perception. His scepticism towards the very possibility of an aesthetics of blindness is assessed in relation to the considerably more optimistic views of Thomas Carroll. I question Carroll's confidence in the possible continuity of aesthetic enjoyment in the aftermath of blindness on the grounds that the initial pleasure is rarely afforded directly by the visual qualities of the aesthetic objects in question. The opinions of Pierre Villey, Thomas Cutsforth and Alan Eaton are also consulted for the psychological insight they bring to some of the questions considered in relation to my analysis of the various imaginative depictions of an aesthetics of blindness. Their observations also anticipate some of the issues that arise in the last chapter of the thesis.

Chapter Six is full of 'last words' on the nature of the aesthetic experience of the blind. I am very conscious that the investigation I am proposing smacks of a normativism which assumes that the aesthetic experience of every blind person will be essentially similar. Rather than actually pursuing a single, definitive "aesthetics of blindness", however, I situate a range of theoretical assumptions and widely appreciated aesthetic forms in relation to the experience of a collection of blind people, who are alike only insofar as they are all particularly sensitive to beauty. In his lecture on 'Feminity', Freud said to his audience:

> People have always pondered the riddle of femininity. ... Those of you who are men will not have been spared this pondering either. It is not expected of the women among you, for you yourselves are the riddle.[28]

In order to avoid adopting such an approach to the blind, I conclude this study with a chapter which is dedicated almost entirely to the aesthetic experience of the blind. I

begin the chapter, however, by enlisting the help of Ruth Lorand and Harold Osborne in order to compare the type of order that has traditionally been hailed as a characteristic of the aesthetic experience with the "discursive" order which the blind are dependent on in many ways. Then, concentrating on the autobiographical accounts of the adventitiously blind, I outline the importance for the development of a new aesthetic of a complete restructuring of experience in the aftermath of the departure of vision, and illustrate the impediment presented by the persistence of sighted criteria and standards of beauty in blindness.

I outline a pattern which unites several of the autobiographies whereby a new aesthetic begins to emerge once the blind people in question manage to come to terms with the practical irretrievability of well beloved images. I assess the relation of visual memory to the aesthetic sensibility of the adventitiously blind and explore the roles assumed by the remaining senses. The question of the self-identity of the adventitiously blind is shown to be contingent on the same restructuring process, as an uncanny sense of personal disintegration is slowly displaced by the development of new aspects of personality. Although the contemplation of formally aestheticized objects is not a common feature of the aesthetic experience of the blind, I illustrate how the gradual transformation of the entire body into an organ of perception means that for certain blind people everyday existence becomes imbued with the type of aesthetic excitement that tends, among the sighted, to be restricted to allocated times spent in front of pre-selected and properly distanced objects. The experience of the blind often tends towards a more intimate engagement than the type of distanced spectatorial vantage we associate with the visual aesthetic experience. For the most part I let these autobiographies speak, most movingly, I feel, for themselves. David Michael Levin has written at length of the importance of putting an element of humanism back in our vision.[29] This project attempts to reclaim blindness from hypothesis and metaphor, and to reinvest it with some stirringly documented life. The thesis is designed in a way to encourage the reader to return to the plays after sampling some of the lived experience of the blind in order to assess for themselves the extent to which the plays, the autobiographies, the philosophical texts and the discourses on various elements of culture and difference can be said to interfere with, penetrate, and nourish one another.

[1] Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, trans, R.D. Hicks (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1972, 1st publ., 1925) p. 463.

[2] William R. Paulsen, Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987) p. 16.

[3] Ibid., p. 10.

[4] Ibid., p. 26.

[5] Ibid., p. 26.

[6] Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan, Sight Unseen (London: Phoenix, 1998, 1st publ., as On Blindness byOxford University Press, 1995) p. xiv.

[7] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[8] Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France p. 4.

[9] Stephen Kuusisto, Planet of the Blind (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) p. 187.

[10] Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought (London: University of California Press, 1994) p. 80, p. 150.

[11] For a history of the prevalence of musicianship among the blind, see James Wilson, Biography of the Blind, collected from the four original editions of 1821-38, ed., Kenneth A. Stackey (Washington: Library of Congress, 1995) pp. 107-190.

[12] Sight Unseen, pp. 75-76.

[13] Downcast Eyes, p. 160.

[14] Daniel Herwitz, 'Postmodernism and the Classical Concepts of Aesthetics', David Kelly, ed., Encyclopedia of Aesthetics Volume 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 62. Herwitz discusses the suspicion of "the gaze" in relation to the theories of Édouard Manet and Marcel Duchamp.

[15] Maurice Berger, 'Difference and Culture', David Kelly, ed., Encyclopedia of Aesthetics Volume 4, p. 21.

[16] Daniel Herwitz, 'Theories of the Postmodern', Encyclopedia of Aesthetics Volume Four, p. 61.

[17] See Christopher Murray, 'Brian Friel's Molly Sweeney and its Sources: A Postmodern Case History', Études Irlandaises, 23, 2, (1998) 81-98.

[18] Penny Florence and Nicola Foster, eds., Differential Aesthetics. Art practices, philosophy and feminist understandings (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) p. 2.

[19] Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare, eds., Disability/Postmodernity. Embodying disability theory (London: Continuum, 2002) p. 13.

[20] Rita Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989) p. 175.

[21] Differential Aesthetics. Art practices, philosophy and feminist understandings p. 2.

[22] Ibid., p. 94.

[23] Daniel Herwitz, 'Theories of the Postmodern', Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, Volume 4, p. 61.

[24] Disability/Postmodernity. Embodying disability theory p. 15. Corker had actually outlined some of the areas of interest shared by disability theory and postmodernism four years previously. See her essay

'Disability Discourse in a Postmodern World', Tom Shakespeare, ed., The Disability Reader. Social Science Perspectives (London: Cassell, 1998) pp. 221-233.

[25] See Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought (London: Harper and Row, 1971) p. 81.

[26] David Batchelor, 'In bed with the monochrome', Peter Osborne, ed., From an Aesthetic Point of View. Philosophy, Art and the Senses (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000) p. 153.

[27] Harold Bloom, Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 333.

[28] Sigmund Freud, 'Die Weiblichkeit', Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse, Studienausgabe, V.I., 545. Quoted by Silvia Bovenschen, 'Is there a Feminist Aesthetic?', Ecker, Gisella, ed., Feminist Aesthetics, trans., Harriet Anderson (London: The Woman's Press, 1985) p. 38.

[29] See David Michael Levin, The Opening of Vision. Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation (London: Routledge, 1993), and his The Philosopher's Gaze. Modernity in the Shadows of the Enlightenment (London: University of California Press, 1999).

Chapter One.

Surveying the Terrain: Blindness without Metaphor, Beauty without Metaphysics.

At the outset of this investigation it is important to distinguish those aspects of the broad dialectic between blindness and vision which impact on the question of the aesthetic experience of the blind from those which do not. With this purpose in mind I begin this opening chapter by briefly outlining the irrelevance to the aesthetic experience of the debate over the philosophical significance of vision that has been contested since the time of Plato. I then explain the importance to a study of aesthetic perception of a deconstruction of the metaphorical rendering of vision and blindness by both traditional metaphysicians, and the modern theorists who have tried to undo the historical privileging of the eye. After detailing the ways in which blindness has been affected by the traditional metaphorisation of the ocular, I proceed to isolate the type of intense sensory awareness that constitutes my chief concern throughout this inquiry.

Rather than elaborating on the philosophical reaction to the hegemony of vision, I concentrate on the reaction within modern aesthetics to the traditional hegemony of visual beauty and briefly relate certain tendencies of modern imaginative portrayals of the experience of blindness to it. Addressing the type of aesthetic experience that is depicted within the different portrayals of blindness that feature throughout the literary and autobiographical sections of this project, I then argue that the aesthetic experience of natural beauty is particularly distanced from the concerns of the metaphysician. I outline why the collapse of the distinction between appearance and reality within the aesthetic realm means that the irritable searching of the philosophically minded observer for a means of transcending visual illusion is both misguided and futile. Finally I make a crucial distinction between the aesthetic perception of the blind and the varieties of cruder forms of identification and orientation for which they often develop a special talent. The distinctions made here recur frequently in various guises throughout the remainder of this study.

1.1. Dislodging the ocular from the 'borrowed dwelling' of metaphor.

The historically alleged affinity between vision and knowledge has received a lot of critical attention. Hannah Arendt, for example, has observed that "(f)rom the very

outset", of formal philosophy, "thinking has been thought of in terms of seeing."[1] The same knotted conceptual cord is described by Heidegger when, in Being and Time, he observes that "from the beginning onwards the tradition of philosophy has been oriented primarily towards 'seeing' as a way of access to beings and to Being."[2] Vision, or at least a certain type of it, is of obvious pertinence to an investigation into an aesthetics of blindness. Yet a great deal of philosophy's traditional concern with vision lies beyond its scope. The type of vision that is a concern within this thesis is not covered by the terms of the metaphysical covenant that, since its inauguration in ancient Greece, has bound vision to knowledge.

The virtues of vision are extolled throughout Plato's body of work. In the Timaeus, for example, he declares that:

> ... sight in my opinion is the source of greatest benefit for us, for had we never seen the stars and the sun, none of the words which have been spoken about the universe would ever have been uttered . . . And from this source we have derived philosophy, than which no greater good ever was or will be given by the gods to mortal man.[3]

In this treatise a distinction is made between the creation of the sense of sight, which Plato groups with the creation of human intelligence and the soul, and that of the other senses, which are regarded as components of man's material being. The vision which Plato presents as the exemplary model for knowledge, however, is primarily that of the 'third' or 'inner' eye of the mind. Plato's philosophy is full of cautionary avowals in relation to the knowledge received through the bodily eye. Platonic metaphysics does not actually privilege visual form. It turns resolutely against exterior appearance, transcending it to access the cherished region of inner acquaintance with eternal forms. The senses distract from true philosophy. To arrive at reality the philosopher has to leave the 'cave' of the sensible world in search of true enlightenment. It is from such hostility to the senses, for example, that Democritus seems to have taken his cue when he blinded himself so that he could be more sensitive to the promptings of his intellect.[4]

It is true, as Heidegger observes, that sight was regarded by the Greeks as the foremost of the senses because it constituted the most obvious way in which things could be regarded as having presence. The 'ocularcentrism', of the Greek philosophers -- their privileging of the eye -- is not generally a straightforward one, however. David Michael

Levin observes, for example, that though we can now see that the Greek privileging of vision predates Plato and can be discovered in some extracts of both Heraclitus and Parmenides, we can also see that "these philosophical teachings repeatedly insisted on calling to mind all the dangers in placing too much trust in vision or its objects."[5] This long-standing ambiguity over what exactly is in question when visual terms are employed theoretically is reflected in modern critical attempts to reverse the process of the ocularcentrism of the ancients. In the modern era presence has been replaced by, or at least become inextricable from, representation, and the debate about the general hegemony of vision has spilled over the boundaries of formal philosophy and into the realm of cultural politics.[6] Martin Jay acknowledges that the doctrines of the Greek philosophers were removed from the sensory aspect of the vision they championed. He points out, however, that the critical projects which are united by an aspiration towards a loosening of the grip of imagistic thought, the relaxing of the traditional concern for visual presence and of the modern fixation on forms of representation, are equally remote from the bodily sense of eyesight. He identifies the significance of this aspect of ocular rhetoric when he notes that

> (w)hat might be called the alternating traditions of speculation with the eye of the mind and observation with the two eyes of the body provided fertile ground for the varieties of ocularcentrism that have so deeply penetrated Western culture.[7]

The dependence of metaphysics on visual metaphor alluded to by Heidegger and Arendt, together with what Martin Jay terms "the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern era" has provoked a profound and widespread unease among modern theorists from a wide range of critical fields, and prompted them to set about the task of undoing our enchantment by the spell of visuality.[8] Mark Edmundson draws our attention to the abundance of literary critics whose work enjoyed popularity within Anglo-American academia in the latter half of the twentieth century, and who "aimed their polemical energies at forms of thinking that, as they understand it, uncritically use the experience of seeing as an ideal image for understanding."[9] He also observes that the 'blindness and insight' dialectic introduced by DeMan permeates a great deal of modern critical theory on a number of levels.[10] Derrida is foremost of those critics identified by Edmundson as spending the second half of the last century busily prompting a critical

volte-face in relation to this traditional propensity to grant paradigmatic status within the field of knowledge to vision. For Derrida, the history of metaphysics had been directed by a largely ocularcentric agenda. Within the domain of literary theory he introduced an emphasis on textuality, suggesting that ". . . the signified concept is never present in and of itself" in an attempt to disrupt the favouring of vision and of visible presence which he sees as characterising the entire history of metaphysics.[11] Edmundson argues that Derrida's criticism of the traditional philosophical aspiration towards a transcendence of visible appearance to arrive at a supra-sensory realm purged of sensory illusion, (he aims his polemic at Kant, Hegel and Heidegger as well as Plato) is actually a continuation of the work done by the very thinkers his energies are directed against. Derrida identifies the tendency of the metaphysician to transfer to his analysis the immediate and irresistible credibility of the senses while at the same time regarding the knowledge acquired through the senses as preliminary and deceptive. Rather than explore the physical vision at the base of the metaphysical construction of vision, however, in Derrida's own writing he devises another, more sophisticated means of neglecting all that simply represents itself to the eye. "What Derrida is doing", according to Edmundson,

> is bringing the philosophical tradition's suspicion about the image another step forward, refining it. ... He is not ... doing what he claims, trying to put an end to metaphysics, rather he is improving on it; making it more severe, abstract, unworldly, than it has previously been.[12]

In terms of the nature of both the knowledge and vision in question, this entire debate is pitched at the wrong level to be of direct relevance to an inquiry into an aesthetics of blindness.[13] The complexity of the history of our attitudes towards vision may well be due in part to the varieties of ways in which the medium of light lends itself to figurative application. Hans Blumenberg has traced the history of the subjection of light to metaphor. He observes how metaphors of light are unique in both their "expressive power" and their "subtle capacity to change." "Light," according to Blumenberg,

> can be a directed beam, a guiding beacon in the dark, an advancing dethronement of darkness, but also a dazzling super-abundance, as well as an indefinite, omnipresent brightness containing all: the "letting appear" that

> does not itself appear, the inaccessible accessibility of things. Light and darkness can represent the absolute metaphysical counterforces that exclude each other and yet bring the world-constellation into existence. Or light, as the absolute power of Being, which reveals the paltriness of the dark, which can no longer exist once light has come into existence. Light is intrusive, it is abundance, it creates the overwhelming, conspicuous clarity with which the true "comes forth"; it forcibly acquires the irrevocability of Spirit's consent. Light remains what is while letting the infinite participate in it; it is consumption without loss. Light produces space, distance, orientation, calm contemplation; it is the gift that makes no demands, the illumination capable of conquering without force.[14]

Rather than look in greater detail at this aspect of a metaphysics that has little direct bearing on this project, I will illustrate how the process of the metaphorisation of the senses occurs and how it has affected portrayals and popular conceptions of blindness. I will then outline the reasons why the metaphorical and metaphysical aspects of vision are not relevant to aesthetics and give an account of the aspects of the dialectic between blindness and vision that are a central concern throughout this investigation.

Derrida denounces rather than overlooks the significance commonly attributed to forms of vision in general. His clearest critical analysis of the metaphorical nature of philosophical sites of vision appears in his essay 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy.' In this essay Derrida illustrates the process by which many "physical discourses" have been eradicated by what he refers to as the "metaphysical metaphor". Rephrasing the same observation, he claims that "metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene which has produced it."[15] The consequence of this erasure of physical discourse is that we permit to be called sense "that which should be foreign to the senses."[16] The ideological structure which revolves around a distinction between the sensual and the spiritual, the sensible and the intelligible, constitutes, or so Derrida would have us believe, "the space of the possibility of metaphysics."[17] In the essay Derrida argues that there is a sensory figure concealed within every abstract concept and illustrates the process undergone by words in their transformation from a physical to a metaphysical signification.

The "solar metaphor", which is depicted in Derrida's essay as being at the source of the traditional privileging by western society of light over darkness, is singled out for

special attention. Related to the traditional metaphor of light is the "optic metaphor" which "opens up every theoretical point of view under the sun."[18] Derrida refers to Hegel's description of the two-step process of metaphorisation. Firstly, metaphors "arise from the fact that a word which originally signifies only something sensuous . . . is carried over . . . into the spiritual sphere."[19] On the level of literal meaning, many words which relate to forms of knowing have a purely sensuous content which is lost in the exchange that takes place between the sensual and the spiritual within the movement of metaphorisation, which Derrida likens to the movement of idealisation. The second stage of the process, as Hegel describes it, consists of the gradual disappearance of consciousness of the metaphorical element, as discourse on the spiritual level is taken for literal expression, until finally "image and meaning are no longer distinguished, and the image directly affords only the abstract meaning itself instead of a concrete picture."[20] Derrida then focuses his attention on the figure of the sun, describing it as "the paradigm of the sensory and of metaphor"[21] To supplement his argument that the sun "structures the metaphorical space of philosophy"[22] Derrida presents us with Du Mursais's definition of metaphor:

> When one speaks of the light of the spirit, the word light is taken metaphorically; for just as light in the literal, proper sense makes us see corporeal objects, so the faculty of knowing and perceiving enlightens the spirit, and puts it in a position to bear sound judgments . . . the word which one uses in the metaphor is taken in another than the literal, proper sense: it is, so to speak, in a borrowed dwelling, as one of the ancients says.[23]

The "solar metaphor" derives from the traditional privileging of the sun as the chief means of signification. The entities of gold and the eye are grouped with the sun as the dominant forces in the fields of rhetoric and philosophy. Although Derrida does not refer specifically to the condition, blindness does not escape such metaphorisation. "Punctum caecum," or the notion of blind-spots is, Martin Jay informs us, a privileged deconstructionist term, functioning as "metaphors for the unknowable that no amount of revelation could illuminate."[24] The figure of blindness is subjected to metaphorisation even within the alleged deconstruction of metaphor.

Throughout this study I am beckoning blindness from its station abroad in the impossibly incorporeal territory of metaphor, back to the spectrum of human senses in

order to re-invest it with its original bodily significance. The metaphysician's habit of availing of sensory denotations while purging his doctrine of sensuous limitations, renders his perspective largely extraneous to the concerns of this particular project. Martin Jay also addresses the fact that talk of hearing and seeing rarely involves reference to a simple case of reception by the senses. "No metalanguage of literal concepts," he assures us, "could purify thought of its metaphoric pollution, no supersensible realm could free itself of its entanglement in the sensual."[25] It would be surprising if blindness were not also subjected to such metaphorical treatment. Andrew Potok, an artist whose experience of going blind will be described in the final chapter of this study, exemplifies the type of myths and metaphors that surround blindness in the popular imagination by admitting that in the cases of a lot of the non-congenitally blind people he knew it took years for their blindness to become "the inability to see with our eyes, nothing more."[26] A meaning of blindness that corresponds to this metaphorical aspect of vision is in question when Michael Monbeck argues that "Sight and blindness obviously mean much more than the ability to see and the inability to see" and proceeds to look beyond the eye as a mere organ of sense in order to arrive at an estimation of the "fundamental values and significance of sight and its loss."[27] Alan Gowman, following a similar line of inquiry, notes that many of the common reactions are to "the symbolic content of blindness."[28] Chevigny and Braverman are also making a related point when they comment that the process by which we allocate value to our limbs, organs and senses, is highly influenced by irrational meanings we associate with them.[29]

My concern with blindness here is for nothing other than the inability to see, specifically, the inability to see beauty. I am not overly concerned with the symbolic meanings of blindness, with its associations with death or with castration anxiety, or with the school of thought which regards blindness as a boon on the basis that it protects us from visual distraction and brings us closer to the 'really important' things in life. In his Moments of Vision Kenneth Clark firmly disregards the metaphorical conception of vision as it has traditionally been evoked by preachers and public speakers and others who held firmly that "things which a man can see with his own eyes are not sufficiently awe-inspiring to be communications of the divine."[30] This project is informed by a similar impatience. It is the impossibility of moments of intense visual awareness and the range of feasible alternatives which is of concern here. To a person who is in the habit of abandoning his or her eyesight in order to see clearly, the arrival of blindness is not likely to constitute a significant landmark in the progress of their lives. Truth for Plato, for

example, was the epitome of beauty. Since truth was not available to the bodily eye, however, beauty was only a show for the soul. The view adopted throughout this thesis is that beauty is more immediately available than this; that blindness is of more material significance than is generally assumed even by those theorists who labour to redress the historical privileging of the ocular.

1.2. Isolating the aesthetic significance of blindness.

While it details the centrality of the eye to traditional metaphysical doctrine, Hannah Arendt's The Life of the Mind also appears to support my argument that the foundation for an investigation into an aesthetics of blindness cannot be established before the metaphorical interjections of metaphysics have been given the order of the boot. Arendt notes a tendency among thinkers from Plato to Bergson to display a curious ambivalence towards the largely uncelebrated objects of wonder we encounter through our everyday perception. "Nothing", Arendt suggests

> . . . is more surprising in this world of ours than the almost infinite diversity of its appearances, the sheer entertainment value of its views, sounds and smells, something that is hardly ever mentioned by the thinkers and the philosophers.[31]

Convinced of the necessity of the development of our powers of abstraction, these thinkers are invariably at a remove from the world of appearance which is considered only, if at all, as the metaphysician tarries before transcending. The views, sounds and smells referred to by Arendt are aesthetically significant in themselves. By emphasising them in this way she raises the possibility of an ocularcentric aesthetic that corresponds to the visually prejudiced metaphysics with which she deals more explicitly. Aesthetic qualities are arguably regarded primarily in visual terms, both popularly and traditionally. John Ruskin, for example, in the process of advocating a 'new ideal of specificality' over more transcendental criteria for the creation and appreciation of works of art, famously declared that

> . . . the greatest thing a human soul does in this world is to see something and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion all in one.[32]

In more recent times Camille Paglia has claimed that an aesthete, "is not necessarily someone obsessed with fashion, décor, and art", but "someone who lives by the eye."[33] The traditional ocularcentrism of aesthetics, like that of metaphysics, has come in relatively recent times to be challenged by artists who present various alternatives to visual sites of beauty. Much of the literary core of this project examines specific instances of such presentations in detail.

The modern reaction against the traditional equation of knowledge and presence with vision may be interpreted as being partly a reaction to the audacity behind the idea of thought without shadows entertained by the ancient Greeks, which resurfaces in eighteenth century France. Nietzsche warned us in his The Will to Power of an eclipse which would inevitably follow in the wake of the Enlightenment.[34] It is not the deliberate obscuring of the clarity of rational thought that is a concern here, however, but a corresponding eclipse of visual beauty. Writing at the tail end of the twentieth century, David Levin observes that we have reached a stage where "we look for enlightenment even in the shadows", because, Levin suggests, we have learned to divine in them "a certain beauty and value."[35] It is the aesthetic quality of the concealing, obscuring and veiling qualities of shadows, rather than any metaphysical insight they might yield, which is of interest to an investigation into an aesthetics of blindness.

The Renaissance rivals the Enlightenment in the ubiquity of its visual references and its unashamed privileging of the eye. Aesthetics during this period is famously centred around the eye. The Renaissance presented to the world the silvered glass mirror and, most fatefully, it bestowed on the visual arts the notion of perspective -- the technique of creating within the two dimensions of the flat canvas the illusion of three-dimensional space. In his Ways of Seeing, John Berger gives an account of the consequences for perception of the introduction of such a device:

> The convention of perspective, which is unique to European Art and which was first established in the early Renaissance, centers everything on the eye of the beholder. It is like a beam from a lighthouse -- only instead of light travelling outward, appearances travel in. The conventions called those

> appearances reality. Perspective makes the single eye the center of the visible world. Everything converges onto the eye as to the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God.[36]

Hostility to the particular implication of perspective has generally taken two forms: criticism of the reduction of the self to a predominantly passive role and of the world to representation, or of the resultant redundancy of modes of perception other than the eye. Thus, Robert Romanyskyn observes how

> within this landscape of linear perspective vision, the self becomes a spectator ensconced behind his or her window on the world, how the body, now divorced from this self, becomes a specimen, and how the world, as a matter for this detached and observing eye, becomes a spectacle.[37]

Commenting on the enforced redundancy of the non-visual senses within the configuration of window, artist, and model which constitute the employment of perspective, David Howes argues that such an application

> screens out all the smells and sounds, tastes and textures. It 'steps up' the natural power of the eye to survey things from afar, while at the same time de-emphasizing the other senses as ways of knowing and communicating.[38]

Levin suggests that we now derive a certain enjoyment and aesthetic satisfaction from the role played by shadows in the structure of our knowledge. This aspect of our development has obvious repercussions for the arts. Peter Osborne has observed that "Contemporary visual art stands on the ruins of beauty", and that "[t]his has left the place of aesthetic in the experience of contemporary art uncertain and confused."[39] The feminist movement has played its part in prompting this confusion through its deconstruction of the beauty myth. Wendy Steiner has observed that

> [I]n modernism, the perennial rewards of aesthetic experience – pleasure, insight, empathy -- were largely withheld, and its generous aim, beauty, hedged with deprivation, denial, revolt.[40]

Laura Mulvey has famously introduced a paper with the proclamation: "It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article."[41] Mario Vargas Llosa has remarked that "[c]ontemporary aesthetics has established the beauty of ugliness, reclaiming for art everything in human experience that artistic expression had previously rejected."[42] A collective weariness of traditional sites of beauty would appear to have infiltrated the domains of art and aesthetic criticism.

This shift in critical theory towards an undermining of the hegemony of visual beauty is accompanied by a tendency among creative writers to present portrayals of the blind that are more positive than those provided by their literary predecessors. Scanning the history of literary representations of blindness Georgina Kleege notes that in the twentieth century "the Oedipal gloom brightens a bit."[43] This is not the place for a survey of non-dramatic depictions of blindness, but it is worth mentioning that such surveys have been carried out by Jessica Langworthy, Janet Patterson, and Jacob Twersky.[44] Patterson makes the point that blindness is selected for portrayal more frequently than other physical handicaps and Twersky also comments on the frequency with which the blind have been a source of fascination for sighted authors.[45] The patterns detected by these surveys resist easy synopsis, but Michael Monbeck ventures the observation that "this new perspective is only rarely encountered until very recently."[46] The association of blindness with a sense of despondence infiltrated many literary depictions of the condition. Milton's Samson comes to mind, as does Charlotte Bronte's portrayal of Edward Rochester. In Schiller's William Tell, the son of Henry of the Halden, after the blinding of his father, cries "To die is nothing -- nothing: but to live/ And not to see -- is misery indeed."[47] Kipling concludes his The Light That Failed with a presentation of the only congenial solution to the predicament of his blind protagonist, Dick Helder -- whose "luck held to the last, even to the crowning mercy of a kindly bullet through the head", all stand out as being memorably bleak.[48] Portrayals of blindness which, as Kleege expresses it, began to "chip away at the lingering remnants of the Oedipal image"[49] include Henry Green's novel Blindness; H.G. Wells's "The Country of the Blind"; J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians; D.H. Lawrence's short story "The Blind Man"; and Raymond Carver's "Cathedral". These works do not all concentrate on the aesthetic experience of their blind protagonists (of the selection Green's novel offers arguably the only comprehensive portrayal of an aesthetics of blindness) The fact, however, that artists are

engaging positively with what they see as the creative opportunities inherent in blindness is significant in itself.

Much of this thesis is concerned with imaginative dramatic portrayals of certain aspects of the experience of blindness. Within these formally artistic representations, however, the depicted aesthetic concern is not for the beauty of 'art-objects', but for instances of a more naturally occurring beauty. This fact is very significant for the distancing of this project from concerns for the metaphysical implications of visual knowledge. The theories of Levin, Osborne, Steiner, Mulvey and Llosa indicate that beauty has become outmoded in art and the philosophy of art. Through the aesthetics of nature, however, beauty retains a certain cherished significance in popular culture. T.J. Diffey begins his investigation into the exemption of natural beauty from the influence of metaphysical reflection with a general point about the accrediting of the aesthetic experience with philosophical significance:

> ... unless speaking of beauty is what is what is central or necessary to the beautiful, we cannot make beauty a subject of philosophy if philosophy is concerned with the meaning, rationality and truth of some very general thoughts as expressed in what is said (or written).[50]

He then proceeds to give an account of the ease and the danger of "falling into traditional metaphysics and losing the present" when reflecting specifically on instances of natural beauty. [51] He does this by means of comparison with the aesthetics of art. Addressing the type of philosophical undermining of beauty as a foundation for art described above, Diffey makes the point that although beauty has not actually disappeared, it has "disappeared for intellectuals." It does not further our understanding of anything, has no place in contemporary ideologies and is bereft of any sort of philosophical prestige. Because beauty is no longer taken as having any "intellectual relevance", art, particularly modern conceptual art, has been largely "freed from service to the ideal of beauty."[52]

While beauty has become a "contestable ideal" for art, there is so little controversy surrounding a reference to a beautiful landscape, for example, that the expression is virtually a truism. Natural beauty has survived the purge suffered by other forms of beauty only because it innately lacks the pretensions towards philosophical significance harboured by works of art. Writing as an obvious 'lover of nature', Diffey does not want to belittle what people derive from sites of natural beauty, but claims that

natural beauty does not provide access to any kind of "transcendental truth." He suggests that the type of "spiritual sustenance" widely associated with rural excursions might entail no more than relief to the senses offered by a temporary escape from a bleak urban environment.[53]

Diffey considers the claims of art to be revelatory of the transcendent to be more plausible today than those of natural beauty. He realises that to a certain extent this state of affairs represents a reversal of the corresponding relationship in the age of the early Romantics. Citing Wordsworth's apprehension that the inspiration he derived from nature might have been founded on what was "but a vain belief", Diffey claims that

> [f]or Wordsworth, it seems clear that however his attitude to the transcendent is to be finally judged, his feeling for nature at any rate was not, or was not primarily, an aesthetic matter, where this means responding with pleasure to the look of things and their effects on the other senses, without the assurance of any kind of belief that these appearances are supervenient upon some deeper reality.[54]

Though the relation of truth to art is still quite ambiguous, according to Diffey, it has more "initial purchase" in relation to art than to nature. Diffey deduces from the fact that the aesthetics of nature, unlike art, cannot "manage" without beauty, that natural beauty is for us the paradigm of beauty. We appreciate nature for its beauty rather than for its truthfulness. If we are not to slip away into the territory of metaphysics or of the sublime in appreciating beauty, we cannot "fall back on" the Wordsworthian transcendent or the Kantian noumenal. In the case of art we can consider a work under the category of truthfulness as well as that of beauty. In the case of nature there is only beauty to contemplate and savour. In the chapters which follow the beauty in question is that of the countryside, the natural elements, and the human countenance. These entities are considered only in relation to the impression they make on the senses. Their 'truthfulness' or any supra-sensory profundity that might be attributed to them is not a concern.

1.3. Stopping at appearance: why the question of reality does not arise.

Edmundson provides another reason for discounting from this inquiry the theoretical argument about the limits of the knowledge yielded by vision when he describes a formation which is a feature of much modern critical theory whereby visibilia are repeatedly displaced by verbal description. He observes that although the treatises produced by modern theorists are by no means homogenous,

> they share a tendency to split experience into two opposing registers, verbal and visual, and to put forward scenarios in which a more enlightened word intervenes on a scene of visually generated error.[55]

The vulnerability to error of visually based judgements is not contested here. I do not wish to take issue, for example with John Tyndall when, referring to Helmholtz's 1855 Treatise, he detailed the "long list of indictments" which can be brought against the functioning of the eye, and concurred with Helmholtz's observation that if an optician sent him "an instrument so full of defects" as the eye, that he would promptly send it back to him "with the severest censure."[56] The shortcomings of visual perception in relation to the acquisition of knowledge are undoubtedly many, and are gleefully exploited by the critics of ocularcentrism. Touch, for example, is often called upon to play a compensatory role in the wake of visually generated error, direct physical contact coming to the rescue of the credulous eye. Furthermore, inaccurate as visual perception is, its critics are rarely slow to point out, it only operates to its full potential when the object is ideally distanced from it, extreme measures of proximity or distance being inconducive to clear vision. The majority of the visible spectrum escapes the human gaze, and the eye's blind-spot, although actually fully compensated for by the functioning of the other eye, is often a symbolic point of attack in the rage against visual dominance. In Thomas Carlyle's Manuscript on Creeds, we encounter one of the most comprehensive and memorable underminings of the authority of the eyes:

> A notable tendency of the human being in case of mutual motions on the part of himself and another object, to misinterpret the said motion, and impute it to the wrong party. Riding in his wheeled vehicle, how the hedges seem to be in full gallop on each side of him; how the woods and houses and all the

> objects but the fixed blue of heaven seem to be madly careering at the top of their speed, stormfully waltzing round transient centres, the whole Earth gone into menandic [sic] enthusiasm, he himself locked all the while into dead quiescence . . . Sitting still in his railway carriage at some station when an opposite train is getting underway, his eye informs him at once that he is at length setting out and leaving his poor friends in a stagnant state. How often does he commit this error; it is only in exceptional cases, when helps are expressly provided, that one avoids it, and judges aright of the matter. This is the law of the poor creature's eyesight, and often a considerable sorrow to him. How often does he commit -- [above] stagnant state! [sic] It is very notable of the outward eye; and would be insupportable, did not the experience of every man incessantly correct it for him in the common businesses and locomotions of this world.[57]

Related to the criticism that vision is prone to error is the equally accusatory observation that it can be misleading. Again, however, this criticism does little to impinge on the aesthetic significance of vision. Despite the traditionally widespread tendency to equate vision with knowledge, this long history of what Adorno has called "peephole metaphysics", the privileging of vision is rarely accompanied by a comprehensive elaboration on the particular virtues that have gained for vision the lofty station it occupies. This is a void which Hans Jonas in his essay "The Nobility of Sight", attempts to fill. In this essay Jonas conducts a detailed comparison of the different senses, the conclusion of which involves the finding of "the ancient claims for sight substantiated and at the same time qualified."[58] What is of interest to us here, following on our recognition of the need for a distinction between two levels of ocular rhetoric, is the nature of Jonas's reservations about the authority of vision and the implications of these doubts within the aesthetic domain.

According to Jonas it is its "image performance" that has earned for vision its traditional elevated status among the modalities of sensory perception. Implicit in the term "image" are three characteristics: (1) simultaneity in the presentation of a manifold; (2) neutralisation of the causality of sense-affection; and (3) distance, in the spatial and mental senses of the term.[59] It is the second of these three traits which is of interest here. It is the complete absence of a causal dynamic, of "any intrusion of causality" into the relation between subject and object, viewer and viewed, which distinguishes sight:

> This complete neutralisation of dynamic content in the visible object, the expurgation of all traces of causal activity from its presentation, is one of the major accomplishments of what we call the image function of sight, and it results in a subtle balance of gain and loss in the cognitive economy of man.[60]

The profit derived from the causal detachment of visuality is objectivity. The "causal muteness", the withholding of any indication of causality which accompanies such objectivity, however, is regarded by Jonas as a negative aspect of vision.[61] It is largely on account of the fact that "causality is not a visual datum" that Jonas holds that vision is the "most sublime" rather than "the primary" mode of sense perception.[62] It is only when supplemented by the data gathered by the 'more elementary' human functions that the evidence of sight does not falsify reality. When "arrogantly rejecting" the assistance of other senses to engage with the world on more elementary terms, sight becomes "barren of truth."[63] "This means", Jonas explains, "only that we have to integrate the evidence of sight with evidence of another kind which in the exclusiveness of "theoria" is all too often forgotten."[64] The price paid, in other words, for the distanced objectivity which has qualified vision for so many philosophical honours, is that it is limited to the delivering of "a becalmed abstract of reality denuded of its raw power."[65]

The arguments of Jonas, compelling as they are, serve here only as another reminder of why we are compelled to abandon the domains of metaphysically-based theory in our search for enlightenment about the nature of the relation between the blind and the beautiful. For within the aesthetic domain the fact that the presentation of pure form does not betray a hint of its causal genesis is by no means regarded as a loss. In fact, as Vincent Tomas explains, the suppression or elimination of traces of causality lies at the very heart of the aesthetic experience. Tomas takes it to be a condition (necessary, though not sufficient) of aesthetic vision that our attention is drawn towards and committed to appearances, to the extent that "the question of reality does not arise."[66] When the myths, legends, and philosophical treatises present blindness as a type of blessing, a means of access to a realm into which mortal vision cannot penetrate, they are elevating blindness over what Schopenhauer refers to as "the common way of looking at things" as opposed to a more aesthetic mode of visual perception. When we see things in 'the common way' we are concerned with what is signified by the object that appears before us. We are often oblivious to the way a common object actually appears. The

phone bill looks like we have been speaking too freely with our overseas acquaintances -- the colour scheme and the type font used in the letterhead design generally go unapprehended. Conversely, when our attitude is dictated by aesthetic concerns, appearance is dwelt upon. J.O. Urmson ventures a very relevant observation when he declares that what makes an appreciation aesthetic is that "it is concerned with a thing's looking somehow without concern for whether it really is like that; beauty, we may say, to emphasize the point, is not even skin deep."[67]

The distinction between how a thing appears and how it actually is, is of vital importance to the epistemologist. The aesthete, on the other hand is not even remotely concerned with it, the aesthetic attitude, with disbelief always already suspended, being contingent on a complete lack of awareness that such a distinction actually exists. By restricting my concern to the aesthetic I am focusing here on any relation that exists between a perceiver and an entity which is characterised by the concern of the perceiver for the appearance of the entity without troubling him or herself with concerns for the nature of the 'reality' which the illusionary surface of the entity might happen to be concealing. Within an aesthetics of blindness the concept of appearance is simply extended to include non-visual impressions. The question of reality, as Tomas persistently reminds us, does not arise. Diffey identifies the same feature in the aesthetic experience of the natural environment. Many natural-looking scenes are the product of a simulation which involves quite an amount of human agency. This does not interfere with their aesthetic quality, however:

> For a scene to be naturally beautiful is not so much for it to be in an unmanaged state as for it to look as if it were. This echoes some of those older accounts of art which required the skill of the artist's craft to be concealed from the spectator of the finished work.[68]

Whether we look at a man or his portrait, when we look aesthetically we use the word 'man' to describe an appearance, not, crucially, only the object that happened to cause that appearance. Jonas's chief reservation about the status of vision within the hierarchy of the senses does not undermine the role played by the eye in the experience of aesthetic satisfaction.

To illustrate his own theory, and as though to distance it from the implications of Jonas's, Tomas points to the experience of attending the cinema. It is important, he tells

the reader, to keep in mind that "the aesthetic viewer is not an aesthetic producer" and so what he sees on the screen is not an illusion or impression of motion, but motion.[69] The distinction between the real and the illusionary, the appearance and the cause, which prompted, for example, the self-blinding of Democritus, is not a concern from an aesthetic point of view. Tomas refers us to a passage from Rudolf Arnheim's Film as Art to clarify his point:

> . . . in film, the single pictures of the sequence exist only technically, not in what is experienced by the audience. As far as the eyes of the spectator go, there is no synthesis of phases but an invisible continuum . . . the beat of the intermittent motion in the camera and the projector has no bearing on the aesthetic rhythm of the picture.[70]

The verb 'to see', like much of the language which refers to perception, has many uses -- it means one thing when used in everyday speech, another thing when used by the metaphysician, and yet another within the vocabulary of the aesthete. What we are referring to here as an aesthetic sense of the verb 'to see' could equally be termed the 'phenomenological sense'. When, to take Tomas's example, I claim, in this sense, to see a man, I am not alive to either the fact that what is stimulating me visually is an entity which consists of flesh and blood, or that it is only an artist's impression of a man. I am claiming simply that an appearance, a phenomenological object is before me which I call a man. Jonas's accusation of "causal muteness", his regarding of sight as the least realistic of all the senses, is simply not applicable within the aesthetic realm, and so the 'deep seeing' that has traditionally been attributed to blind figures is in this sense redundant. Our enquiry into the existence of an aesthetics of blindness must adopt another approach.

1.4. Identification, orientation, and genuine aesthetic appraisal.

This distinction between aesthetics and the realms of metaphysics and epistemology should help to clarify the nature of the concern of this project for the capacities of the blind for a truly aesthetic appraisal - their ability to do the equivalent of what an artist does when he 'really sees', as the distinction from mere 'seeing' is often made by painters, writers, and their critics. When the perceptual skills of the blind are described,

they usually seem to constitute an equivalent to the more 'mundane' sense of 'seeing' which, by aesthetic standards, is relatively crude. Thomas Carroll describes in some detail the process of training or acclimatisation of the other senses in the wake of the onset of blindness. The achievements of the trained blind are astounding in a variety of ways, but from Carroll's description it is not clear that it is possible for the blind to replace the ability to 'really see' through the development of a heightened non-visual mode of sensory awareness.

The blind person, for example, must work on his or her capacity for the recognition and identification of sounds so that when they are moving about they can locate themselves by the identification of places by their characteristic sounds.[71] A heightened capacity for the discrimination of sounds makes walking through a city a considerably less perilous task, as does the ability to determine where the sounds are coming from. Carroll emphasises the need to accustom the blind to the various available means of detecting the presence of objects, and of approximating their size and shape.[72] The blind person's sense of touch can also be more finely tuned to help him or her with the gathering of vital information, with orientation, and mobility. Michael Monbeck also singles out for examination the importance of developing ways to enhance the ability of the blind to detect the presence of an object without touching it, through a phenomenon called 'facial vision' which is further described in some of the autobiographies we consult in the final chapter.[73] In Diderot's "Addition" to his Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those who can See, he describes in great detail some of the more commendable achievements and abilities of his blind friend Mademoiselle de Salignac:

> When people spoke to her, she judged of their height by the direction of the sound . . . When her glass was being filled, she knew by the sound of the liquid as it fell, when it was full. She fed herself with surprising dexterity . . . When she had gone over a house, its plan remained in her head, so that she would warn others of little obstacles or dangers in their way. 'Take care,' she would say, 'the doorway here is low, you will find a step there'. . . She knew the elements of astronomy, algebra, and geometry. . . 'The geometrician,' she added, 'spends almost all his life with his eyes shut'. . . She played reverses, mediateur, and quadrille quite well. . . 'If you trace on my hand with a point, [she would say] a nose, a mouth, a man, a woman, or a tree, I should be sure

to recognise them; and if the tracing was correct, I should hope to recognise the person you had drawn; . . .[74]

Although James Wilson in his Biography of the Blind does point to some noteworthy achievements by blind writers and artists, most of his book is dedicated to the task of illustrating corresponding feats by blind people involved in education, religion, science, medicine, the military, government, law, and the trades. Wilson also describes certain achievements by blind members of the gentry -- including that of a blind man from Puiseaux who "judged the fullness of vessels by the sound of the liquors while they were decanted, and of the nearness of bodies by the action of air on his face", who made "very exact balances of his arms" and "almost infallible compasses" of his fingers, and who once hit his brother smack in the middle of his head with a stone.[75] He also informs us of the case of a certain Blind Lady of Geneva who "distinguished day from night" and who, "when any person stood between her and the light" could "distinguish, by the head dress, a man from a woman. . ."[76] Two blind brothers in Philadelphia, Wilson also informs us, could tell, by the sound emitted by the ground underneath their feet, when they approached a particular post while crossing the street, and who "could tell the names of a number of tame pigeons with which they amused themselves in a little garden, by only hearing them fly over their heads."[77]

These achievements of the blind are all either instances of a deductive acquisition of knowledge rather than instances of an appreciation of beauty, or they appear to represent the 'common way' of perceiving rather than aesthetic savouring. Most of the accomplishments mentioned here are related to basic, or what, by aesthetic standards, seem coarse or rudimentary forms of identification, recognition, and orientation, whose very practicality seem to distinguish them from modes of aesthetic awareness. Deductive knowledge, an attribute which the blind put to an impressive range of different uses, does not usually play a determining role in aesthetic appraisal and can sometimes get in the way of aesthetic experience. Beauty, to introduce a distinction which will feature throughout many of the chapters which follow, is arguably an instance of knowledge that is a result of direct acquaintance or experience, rather than the type of knowledge that is deduced from or mediated through description. The knowledge that the blind gather about the size, location, and even description of objects, however beautiful, is related to that beauty in a manner that seems comparable to the relation of a comprehensive knowledge of art history, and an intimate knowledge of the life of particular artists to the

beauty of particular works of art. In terms of the aesthetic appreciation of the beauty, such knowledge seems to be peripheral at best. The status of this knowledge within the aesthetic domain seems to fall under the category of what in John Ruskin's time was known as the 'problem of association'. This is how Robert Hewison describes the separation by Ruskin of knowledge from aesthetic vision:

> 'Rational association' may summon up what is known about an object -- its history, for instance -- but that is nothing to do with beauty. 'Accidental association', chance connections and memories individual to each perceiver, gives every object a personal association which often enhances them; but this, he argues, is in order to guide our conscience, and it is not in itself a perception of beauty. These individual associations add interest and variety, but they cannot take into account the absolute basis on which beauty rests.[78]

Related to this phenomenon is the concern expressed by A.E. Housman in his The Name and Nature of Poetry about the true nature and quality of older Wordsworthian criticism. Housman concurs with Matthew Arnold in suspecting that a great many Wordsworthians were "apt to praise their poet for the wrong things." They were moved by the metaphysical or philosophical aspects of his art -- his belief, for example, in the morality of the universe, or his depiction of nature as a sentient and benevolent entity, but, Housman observes, "[t]o that thrilling utterance which pierces the heart and brings tears to the eyes of thousands who care nothing for his opinions and beliefs, they were not notably sensitive."[79] Though the philosophical beliefs informing the verse are related to it in a very significant way, they are, according to Housman, to be distinguished from the poetry itself. Although these critics and devotees greatly admired Wordsworth, their admiration was not for his poetry and it was not aesthetic. Housman puts this school of Wordsworthian criticism firmly in its place with the observation that

> . . . most readers, when they think that they are admiring poetry, are deceived by inability to analyse their sensations . . . they are really admiring, not the poetry of the passage before them, but something else in it, which they like better than poetry.[80]

This raises a question about whether a similar charge might be levelled at the blind in relation to their appreciation of visual beauty. Does the restructuring of the hierarchy of the senses in blindness mean that the blind, having to make do with verbal descriptions of the arrangement and significance of sites of visual beauty, invariably appreciate something other than the beauty in question which can only be known experientially? Or can the visual beauty be experienced directly through non-visual channels of perception? Can hand, ear, nose, body, memory, vocabulary and imagination be applied to this perceptual task, or are they redundant in the presence of a beauty that manifests itself visually. It is in the hope of discovering an insight into some of these issues that we now, having eliminated those aspects of traditional inquiries into blindness and vision which have no bearing on aesthetic experience, turn our attention to the dramatic portrayals of blindness by Synge, Yeats, and Friel.

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[1] Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind. Volume One – Thinking (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978) p. 110.

[2] Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, transl., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973) p. 187.

[3] Plato, Timaeus, 47, 1174-5, trans., Benjamin Jowett, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., The Collected Dialogues of Plato, including the Letters (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961)

[4] Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought (London: University of California Press, 1994) p. 27, Marie Hildegarde Mahoney, 'The Blind Man in Greek Legend and Literature', diss. Fordham University, New York, 1940, pp. 63-65.

[5] David Michael Levin, ed. Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision, (London: University of California Press, 1993) p. 1.

[6] For a detailed description of this process see Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays , transl., William Lovitt (London: Harper and Row, 1977) especially pp. 129-130, Richard Kearney The Wake of Imagination (London: Hutchinson, 1998) p. 2.

[7] Downcast Eyes p. 29.

[8] Martin Jay, Force Fields: between intellectual history and cultural critique (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 114.

[9]Mark Edmundson, Literature Against Philosophy. Plato to Derrida. A Defence of Poetry (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp. 67-68. Edmundson instances, amongst other anti-ocularcentric theories, Lacan's critique of immersion within the visual world of the Imaginary, Rorty's deconstruction of philosophical mirror language, Baudrillard's observations on media-generated illusions, Foucault's vision of an all-surveying panoptic society, the feminist treatment of the male gaze, and Derrida's polemic against the metaphysics of presence.

[10] Ibid., p. 94.

[11] Jacques Derrida, 'Difference', Margins of Philosophy , Transl., Alan Boss (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982) p. 11.

[12] Literature Against Philosophy p. 94.

[13] For a comprehensive consideration of the traditional alignment between vision and knowledge, see Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay, eds., Vision in Context. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight (London: Routledge, 1996), Mark Edmundson, Literature Against Philosophy, Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes, Martin Jay, Force Fields, David Michael Levin, Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision, David Michael Levin, ed., Sites of Vision. The Discursive Construction of Sight in the History of Philosophy (London: M.I.T. Press, 1997), David Michael Levin, Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation (London: Routledge, 1993), David Michael Levin, The Philosopher's Gaze. Modernity in the Shadows of the Enlightenment (London: University of California Press, 1999)

[14] Hans Blumenberg, 'Light as a Metaphor for Truth', David Michael Levin, ed., Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision, (London: University of California Press, 1993) p. 31.

[15] Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', Margins of Philosophy, pp. 212-213.

[16] Margins of Philosophy, p228.

[17] Ibid., p. 226.

[18] Ibid., p. 224.

[19] Ibid., p. 225.

[20] Ibid., p. 225.

[21] Margins of Philosophy p. 250.

[22] Ibid., p. 251.

[23] Ibid., p. 253.

[24] Downcast Eyes p. 497.

[25] Downcast Eyes p. 508.

[26] Andrew Potok, Ordinary Daylight. Portrait of an Artist Going Blind (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980) p. 163.

[27] Michael Monbeck, The Meaning of Blindness (London: Indiana University Press, 1973) p. 111.

[28] Alan Gowman, The War Blind in American Social Structure (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1957) p. 199. (Quoted by Monbeck, The Meaning of Blindness p. 113.)

[29] Hector Chevigny and Sydell Braverman, The Adjustment of the Blind (New Haven Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1950) pp. 70-71.

[30] Kenneth Clark, Moments of Vision, (London: John Murray, 1981) p. 1.

[31] The Life of the Mind. Volume One - Thinking p. 20.

[32] Robert Hewison, John Ruskin. The Argument of the Eye (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) p. 7.

[33] Camille Paglia, Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertili to Emily Dickinson, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990) p. 60.

[34] David Michael Levin, The Philosopher's Gaze. Modernity in the Shadows of the Enlightenment (London: University of California Press, 1999) p. 415.

[35] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will To Power, trans., Walter Kaufman and R.J.Hollingdale, ed., Walter Kaufman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967) pp. 55-56.

[36] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, Penguin, 1972) p. 16.

[37] Robert Romanyskyn, Technology as Symptom and Dream (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 31.

[38] David Howes, The Varieties of Sensory Experience (London: University of Toronto Press, 1991) p. 5.

[39] Peter Osborne, ed., From an Aesthetic Point of View. Philosophy, Art and the Senses (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000) p. 7.

[40] Wendy Steiner, The Trouble With Beauty (London: William Heinemann, 2001) p. xiii.

[41] Quoted from Mulvey's Feminisms (p. 434) by Edmundson, Literature Against Philosophy, p. 109.

[42] Quoted from Llosa by Steiner, The Trouble with Beauty, p. xiii.

[43] Georgina Kleege, Sight Unseen (London: Yale University Press, 1999) p. 74.

[44] See Jessica L. Langworthy, 'Blindness in Fiction. A Study of Authors' Attitudes Towards Their Blind Characters' Journal of Applied Psychology 14, 1930, 269- 286; Janet G. Paterson, 'The Blind in Fiction', Outlook For the Blind 6, 1912, 68-76; Jacob Twersky, Blindness in Literature: Examples of Depictions and Attitudes (New York: American Foundation for the Blind 1955.)

[45] The Meaning of Blindness pp. 19-37.

[46] Ibid p. 30.

[47] The Meaning of Blindness p. 29; Blindness in Literature: Examples of Depictions and Attitudes, p. 27.

[48]Rudyard Kipling, The Light That Failed (New York: Doubleday and McClune, 1899) p. 339.

[49] Sight Unseen p. 90.

[50] T.J. Diffey, 'Natural beauty without metaphysics', Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds., Landscape, natural beauty and the arts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 46.

[51] Ibid., p. 48.

[52] Ibid., p. 57. Diffey traces what he presents as the conspiracy to drive beauty out of art, back to the nineteenth century, and connects it with the modernist avant-garde intuition that to appraise a work of art primarily in terms of its beauty is to seriously underestimate its potential and significance. pp. 56-57.

[53] Ibid., p. 54.

[54] Ibid., p. 59.

[55] Literature Against Philosophy p. 92.

[56] Quoted by Gillian Beer, 'Authentic Tidings of Visible Things', Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay, eds., Vision in Context. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 91.

[57] Quoted from Carlyle's Manuscript on Creeds, Murray Baumgarten, 'Carlyle and "Spiritual Optics"' Victorian Studies Vol X1, No. 4 (1968), 514-515.

[58] Hans Jonas, The Phenomenon of Life. Towards a Philosophical Biology (New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1966) pp. 135-156.

[59] Ibid., p. 136.

[60] Ibid., p. 146-147.

[61] Ibid., p. 149.

[62] Ibid., p. 149.

[63] Ibid., p. 149.

[64] Ibid., p. 147.

[65] Ibid., p. 148.

[66] Vincent Tomas, 'Aesthetic Vision', The Philosophical Review, Vol. LXV111 (1959), 53, 55.

[67] J.O. Urmson, 'What Makes a Situation Aesthetic?', The Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Vol. XXX1 (1957), 89.

[68] Landscape, natural beauty and the arts p. 48.

[69] The Philosophical Review, Vol.LXV111 (1959), 59.

[70] Quoted from Arnheim's Film as Art, in The Philosophical Review, Vol. LXV111 (1959), 59.

[71] Reverend Thomas J. Carroll, Blindness. What It Is, What It Does, And How To Live With It (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1961) p. 105.

[72] See Carroll's treatment of what he terms "reflection detection, types A, B, and C", Blindness. What It Is, What It Does, And How To Live With It pp. 102-110.

[73] The Meaning of Blindness p. 17.

[74] Denis Diderot, 'Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those who can See', Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature and Other Philosophical Works, transl. and ed., David Adams (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 1999) pp. 193-199.

[75] James Wilson, Biography of the Blind (Washington: Library of Congress, 1995) pp. 467-468.

[76] Ibid., p. 486.

[77] Ibid., p. 488.

[78] John Ruskin. The Argument of the Eye p. 56.

[79] The Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume XXX1 (1957), 84.

[80] Ibid., p. 85.

Chapter Two:

The Musician's Night: Moving to the Beat of the Panorama in J. M. Synge's The Well of the Saints.

> Must be strange not to see her. Kind of a form in his mind's eye. The voice, temperatures: when he touches her with his fingers must almost see the lines, the curves. His hands on her hair, for instance. Say it was black, for instance, Good, We call it black. Then passing over her white skin. Different feel perhaps. Feeling of white.[1]
>
> "Busty, he can't see. Let him check you braillewise"[2]
>
> "Oh it's lovely, but I can't see it"[3]
>
> Whatever happened to my eyes
> Happened to your beauty[4]

2.1. The Perceptual Capacities of the Playwright.

In the course of his recommending a general development of our perceptual capacities, David Michael Levin suggests that we could do worse than to take our cue in this project from the figures of the naturalist and the musician. These figures are considered exemplary by virtue of their aloofness from the modern craze for visuality. "Going out into nature," Levin approvingly observes,

> the naturalist works to improve his skilfulness as a listener. He listens for animals, birds, winds, and waters, and when he hears them, he listens to the sounds they make. He learns to make differences; he learns how to recognize different patterns of sound and to associate these patterns with

> different sources and different situations. Being quiet, inwardly as well as outwardly, cultivating silence, the naturalist listens to the sounds of nature. Being quiet, alert, and attuned, he listens with such care that even the different winds become familiar in their differences.[5]

Another dimension of the 'listening skilfulness', which Levin regards as being conspicuously lacking in modern society, is nurtured through the loosely kindred exertions of the musician who, possessing also an inner and outer silence, with well trained ears, "breathes in an atmosphere that is filled with music" and

> cultivates her ear for pitch and timbre, tonal register, harmonies and discords, changes in key, subtle inversions and questions. Allowing her body to become, itself, a medium, an instrument, for the resonance of sound, the musician can hear sounds, fields of sound, choirs of sound, that the rest of us will never hear.[6]

Being held in the thrall generated by the spectacle, a condition which Levin considers to be characteristic of a large portion of our modern existence, is not conducive to the cultivation of such a discriminating sense of hearing. Some of the artists who feature in this thesis are more iconically minded than others. Though they all at some stage address the theme of sightlessness, none of them were blind (although both Yeats and Friel experienced considerable trouble with their eyes). All of the plays that feature throughout the following chapters either present protagonists who are 'adventitiously' rather than congenitally blind, or revolve around the restoration of a protagonist's vision. The ensuing interplay between memory and sensation receives a great deal of attention throughout this literary section of the project. A certain degree of preoccupation with visuality can blind us to the possibility that we have as many memories as we have senses, and, to put it in terms of this project, as many aesthetics. The following chapters illustrate that the question of whether the shaping force of the different plays can be said to be the memory of vision, the memory of blindness, or more linguistically and philosophically centered concerns, depends on what we might term the 'sensorial

inclination' of the respective playwrights. The question of whether the current of the plays runs from darkness to light or from light to darkness, is presented here as betraying intimate and illuminating truths about the nature of the creative force that is behind each of the dramatic representations of blindness under review. Within the realm of what I am calling an 'aesthetics of blindness', the literary section of this study will indicate that in cases where blindness is portrayed within the dimensions dictated by an overtly ocularcentric perspective, the blind protagonist is often exiled from his or her own aesthetic, and we are left with a curiously extravagant manifestation of what David Carroll calls "... an aesthetics turned against itself or pushed beyond or beside itself, a faulty, irregular, disordered, improper aesthetics ... [and later] ... a bastard, parasitical, transgressive, critical aesthetics ..."[7]

The likelihood of the emergence of such a state of affairs depends in part on the individual relations of the respective playwrights to the domain of visuality. The extent to which vision dominates the 'sensory constitution' of the featuring playwrights, and the corresponding intensity or feebleness of impressions registered through non-sensory channels becomes a determining characteristic in relation to the portrayals of blindness considered throughout the literary section of this chapter. It is no coincidence that in attributing such significance to the organisation of the sensory recesses of Synge, Yeats and Friel I am following the lead of a blind man who recognises that

> the element which comes to us from outside is, immediately, submerged by a rush of recollections, and it is this rush which gives all its signification to the senses[8]

Our sensations, Pierre Villey observes, are enriched considerably by their journeying through the reserves of consciousness that accumulate as part of each individual experience of the world. The portion of that experience which each of our senses is permitted by the others to savour has a major role to play in the formation of the characters of our individual aesthetic sensibilities. The hegemony of vision alluded to in the previous chapter becomes a factor when we consider the different levels of indebtedness to visuality of the creative instincts of Synge, Yeats and Friel. Implicit in

the notion of visual hegemony, as we shall discover in both this chapter and Chapter Five, is a psychological loneliness or aloofness which acts as an impediment to the type of inter-sensory transferences which these chapters describe as being a common feature of the aesthetic experience of the blind. Shortly after the time that Synge and Yeats were completing their dramatic depictions of blindness, informed consensus regarding inter-sensory relation began to undergo quite radical revisions. The older psychological thinking which had imagined the evidence of the different senses as existing in the mind in what Chevigny and Braverman describe as "a sort of compartmentalized arrangement" was gradually dispensed with. The loss of sight no longer automatically conjured up the image of a compartment which, if not completely empty, was no longer capable of accumulating new experience. [9] The measure of advancement which thinking about sensory relations had continued to achieve by 1930 is reflected, for example, in Villey's contention that:

> the greater the number of the elements of consciousness to which an impression is attached, the more chances it has to live again. All that is isolated in the consciousness perishes, so that in psychical life, too, it is very true that "Union is Strength"[10]

In the case of a sighted person, and, as the plays illustrate, in the case of a blind person who has seen, the storm of consciousness which animates or enlivens the external impressions tends to consist predominantly of visual images. Because of the dominance of vision within the network of the senses, the sighted are often not significantly moved by what appear to us, if they appear at all, as the relatively faint excitements of the non-visual senses. A sense of this 'psychical isolation', or 'unsociability' of visual consciousness is conveyed, for example, in the poet's lament:

> ... why was the sight
> To such a tender ball as th' eye confin'd,
> So obvious and so easie to be quencht,
> And not as feeling through all parts diffus'd,

That she might look at will through every pore?[11]

It is in this context that, as the titles of the respective chapters indicate, it is seen as crucially significant that in Chapter Three we are dealing with a playwright who, notoriously tone-deaf, and with a background in the visual arts, seems at times to resort to the motif of blindness as a crude concealing device when his instinctive keenness for visual beauty comes into particular conflict with his craving after what he takes to be the "essence" of things; in Chapter Four we encounter a play which, briefly scanning the history of epistemological conjecture, and based on a relatively contemporary psychological/anthropological field study, removes itself from the sensory realm it endeavours to depict; while in the current chapter we are confronted with a playwright, whose fascination with literature, to quote one of his most eminent critics, "grew as much out of his musicianship as from his boyhood studies of nature".[12]

2.2. Gauging the Significance of Synge's Achievement.

Donna Gerstenberger accounts for Alan Price's finding in The Well of the Saints "perhaps Synge's most profound and sombre work", by suggesting that the play merely happened to fulfil the preconceived agenda that Price, as a 'preoccupied critic' brought to the play. I am very much aware that all that separates my approach from that of Price in this regard is the fact that we are operating under the grip of entirely different preoccupations. In this chapter I assess different aspects of Synge's portrayal of the experience of beauty of his blind protagonists of The Well of the Saints. I do so initially by examining how it fares in a comparison with another, more familiar or 'mainstream' non-visual aesthetic which I identify as coexisting with it throughout the play. When I come to focus exclusively on the 'aesthetics of blindness' within the play, I argue that its salient characteristics are attributable to my portrayal of Synge as a listener. The lines along which Synge defended the play in the face of accusations that many of its most admirable traits are spoiled by an unrelenting bad-temperedness provide a convenient portal into an examination of what I will be describing here as the 'synaesthetic drift' of the play's logic. This feature of the play's aesthetic is in turn accounted for by a survey

of the different components of Synge's education, and the instinctive enthusiasms which were a feature of his development as a man and artist.

The heavily theoretical critical response to the play is a constant source of reference. I identify some elements of the ocularcentrism referred to in the previous chapter as surfacing in the almost universal interpretation of the play in terms of a dream/reality divide which unambiguously equates reality with vision. My appreciation of Synge's dramatic rendering of a non-visual aesthetic is not without reservation, however. Blindness seems at times to be depicted by Synge as something like a haven or a refuge from aesthetic aversion. The implicit assumption that either the blind are not capable of aesthetic discrimination or that somehow ugliness is tolerable within blindness, is hardly conducive to the establishment of an aesthetics of blindness. Also, the figural language, in which the blind protagonists' aesthetic appreciation is occasionally expressed, suggests a degree of reflection, as though beauty were being contemplated rather than experienced, and which, as an instance of satisfaction, jars with what we know about the cravings of the two blind protagonists. There is a sense in which this contemplative qualifying of sensation undoes the urgency with which we feel compelled to defend the play from its theoretically-minded critics. At the heart of the aesthetics of blindness we are about to review is a fine auditory receptiveness, an aliveness and attunement to the rhythms of the world's manifold musics, tongues, cries and movements which was nourished by Synge's background in naturalism and music. Central to the aesthetic of the play is a certain hearkening, the harvesting of an invisible abundance, the tracing of a pulse.

The play represents Synge's first concerted attempt at the three-act form, and is often depicted as something of a rung which had to be stepped on before he could scale the heights of what is generally regarded as his supreme dramatic achievement -- The Playboy of the Western World. The Well of the Saints, begun in 1903, depicts the plight of a blind couple, Martin and Mary Doul who, when we are first introduced to them, are living a relatively contented life ("happy and blind" is how Mary describes their condition), begging for subsistence on the periphery of a village community in the east of Ireland (Plays 1, p.143). They enjoy each other's company, and seem to be regarded fondly by the villagers to whom they supply rush-lights. The compassion of the

community is undermined, however, by their heartlessly mirthful assuring of Martin and Mary that they are an uncommonly handsome pair. Martin and Mary also take great delight, although it is often overlooked by the play's critics, in their natural environment.

The couple's peace of mind begins to dissipate, however, as soon as word reaches them of the impending arrival of a wandering Saint, who has transported from "a place across a bit of the sea" (Plays I, p.79) some water with healing properties capable of restoring to Martin and Mary the eyesight they had lost in early youth. Upon being unblinded, the couple seem less concerned with what actually confronts them than with the discrepancy between their own appearances and the flattering descriptions they had been encouraged to derive so much gratification from. After surmounting of some preliminary problems in the task of identification they discover each other's ugliness with a perfectly reciprocated contempt, and have trouble throughout most of the remainder of the play seeing beyond the unsightly.

Grey light, a run down forge, the bleeding feet of a ridiculously malnourished Saint – all provoke a nostalgia for their previous condition, a return to which soon becomes their most pressing need. Martin's attempts to woo Molly Byrne, the village belle, are cruelly thrown back in his face, and he discovers painfully the type of unpleasantness that a pretty face is capable of concealing. Shortly after Martin's episode with Molly, the Saint's work begins to come undone, and blindness once more descends on the couple. Blind once more, but armed this time with a body of disconcerting experience, troubled by a store of repulsive visual memory, the couple are now 'dismayed and blind'. In an effort to attain their old contentment, they, by a feat of imaginative consolation, decide that the trouble with their appearances is that they have not sufficiently matured for their seemliness to bloom, and accordingly busy themselves designing images of the grey-headed knockouts that a little time and refusal to groom, will make of them.

At this stage the unwelcome ring of the miracle-worker's bell sounds again, and we find the couple going from busily perfecting the appearances they are about to grow into, to pitifully regretting that they have appearances at all, because they are recognizable by virtue of them. Despite their best, and very amusing efforts to conceal themselves, they prove to be all too easy to track down, and so find themselves subjected

to the barely resistible wishes of the villagers that their vision be permanently restored. Mock compliance with the ritual proves the only feasible means of resistance, and at a crucial moment Martin violently knocks the can of sacred water from the grasp of the incredulous Saint. This seemingly feckless act provokes hostility among the villagers, and the couple resolve to escape southward, to, crucially, I will argue, a heretofore unseen environment.

The critical investigation into Synge's sources has been too well documented elsewhere to warrant elaboration here. The central idea of the play -- the notion of the restoration of blindness as an unhelpful miracle, and the essential plotlines, were to a certain degree derived from the Burgundian Andrieu de la Vigne's fifteenth century farce Moralité de l'Aveugle et du Boiteux, a play which, interestingly enough, is also implicated in the genesis of Yeats's The Cat and the Moon, which we will encounter in the next chapter.[13] The local colour of the play was provided by Synge's adventures with the people of the Aran Islands and in the Wicklow hills -- the well of the play being based on one on Aranmór, near the Teampall an Ceatrair Alainn -- the Church of the Four Beautiful Persons.[14] The accusations of plagiarism which The Well of the Saints met with upon its opening are not a relevant factor here. What is of utmost concern, on the other hand, is the exact nature of the antagonism which seems to exist between the Saint and Martin, two champions, as I see it, of a kindred aesthetic.

The main body of this Chapter has been subdivided into various components to coincide with the range of concerns just outlined. In the first of these sub-sections (2.3.) I try to illustrate the ways in which interpretation of the play in terms of a broad dialectic between dream and reality fails, as I see it, to appreciate Synge's positive rendering of a world constructed from non-visual stimuli. The specific language of sound, touch, and smell, and the indebtedness of Synge's achievement to his background as a musician and a naturalist, are central to the interpretation I offer as an alternative to the largely theoretically driven criticism that the play generally attracts. In the remaining two of the Chapter's main sub-sections (2.4. and 2.5.) I examine the radically different ways in which the aesthetic of the play's miracle dispensing Saint and that of Martin and Mary Doul can be said to be concerned with the invisible. The primary distinction between the 'rivalling' aesthetics, I will try to illustrate, is that while the conception of beauty

harboured by the ascetically-minded Saint is contingent on an abstraction of the visible, the experience of beauty attested to by the blind couple is very much grounded in the senses. I also outline the connection, as I see it, between the play's impressive evocation of a non-visual aesthetic and Synge's resolute resistance of the conventional demands of the theatre, and his own cast, for the application of higher colour and more variation. Finally, I offer an account, in two additional sub-sections (2.6. and 2.7), of some of the reservations I hold in relation to Synge's portrayal of the aesthetic experience of his blind protagonists. Aversion, for example, does not seem to be a possible response within the aesthetics of blindness as it is depicted. The eventual introduction of an explanatory rhetoric of the visual into Martin's key apologia for his choice of blindness also seems to entail a reduction or betrayal of the sense of beauty that has been developing so impressively throughout the play. The discordance with Synge's portrayal of an 'aesthetics of engagement' effected by Martin's feat of critically distancing himself from the immediacy of his experience is identified as one of the few inconsistencies in an impressively 'harmonious' realisation of an aesthetics of blindness.

2.3. The Critical Misapplication of Theoretical Concerns.

The second time the Saint approaches the blind couple bearing gifts, Martin firmly rejects the offer of another restoration, replying

> We're not asking our sight, holy father, and let you be walking on and leaving us in our peace at the crossing roads, for it's best we are this way, and we're not asking to see (Plays 1, p.139)

and then

> It's wonders enough I seen in a short space, holy father, for the life of one man only (Plays 1, p.139)

A great many of the play's critics have responded to the exchange that takes place between Martin and the Saint towards the end of Act Three as though Synge had volunteered it as the resolution of a philosophical dilemma which the play as a whole ponders. Nicholas Grene, in his introduction to the play, remarks that:

> ... a problem with much of the criticism of the play has been its tendency to focus almost exclusively on thematic interpretation. The argument has turned on ideas rather than dramatic significance, and the attempt has been to puzzle out where Synge himself stood on the relation between imaginative illusion and reality[15]

Rather than attempting to redress the imbalance which Grene correctly identifies here, I want to illustrate how the general critical consensus regarding the thematic significance of the play is born largely of a collective overlooking of many of the components of the aesthetics of blindness which I see as being of far more significance to Synge's dramatic undertaking than any epistemologically preoccupied agenda. We have seen that from the Saint's perspective 'reality' starts exactly where it ends for Martin -- at the vanishing point of the various senses. It is interesting to consider the general critical conception of what constitutes reality for Martin and Mary in relation to this distinction between the perspectives of Saint and sinner.

Maurice Bourgeois set this dream/reality ball rolling in 1913 when he prefaced his elaborate documentation of the play's sources with the assertion that The Well of the Saints is

> the story of two blind, ugly, weather beaten old beggars ... whose lifelong sitting at a lonely crossroads, "hearing the birds and bees humming in every weed of the ditch and the swift flying things racing in the air," has taught them to replace reality by dreams ... [16]

It is exactly "the tension between dream and actuality" which Alan Price identifies as being central to this, and practically all of Synge's plays.[17] Price goes as far as to devise

what he calls a 'scale of awareness of the tension' which he sees as existing between these two entities, his character analysis amounting to the allocation of a position on the register to the respective characters.[18] What emerges is the concoction of a curious ranking system, a hierarchical alignment within the spectrum of dream which displays the relatively self-aware figures of Martin and the Saint perched over a cast of irremediable dreamers. While Mary, for example, is constantly in the throes of some self-centred fantasy or other, Martin is salvaged by the occasional harassing doubt which he experiences. When Price says that after their unblinding, Martin and Mary "see actuality" it is evident from the context that he means not that they are seeing actuality as opposed to hearing it, smelling it, or feeling it through their bodies, but that they are actually experiencing reality for the first time since they became blind.[19] Shortly after their unblinding "naked actuality is having an unwholesome effect on them", giving them "nothing but ugliness and brutality".[20] The dream that Martin and Mary have been living does not, in their sighted world, "withstand the first touch of actuality"[21]. Martin, because of his alleged kinship with the poet, unlike the residents of the workaday world whose perception is unblinded by habit, "sees actuality clearly when he is given his sight"[22]. Once again, the clear meaning is that reality had not been accessible before the restoration of his vision. By the end of Act Two, accordingly, Martin "knows now that he can never have more than dreams". Price's disregarding of all in the play which is disclosed through non-visual senses is epitomised, for example, by his observation that, lacking religious belief, Martin

> prefers (as a cloak against actuality) the vision which his imagination creates from the sounds and smells and rhythms of the natural world; a vision of an imaginary world (made perfect by art, in which things appear not as they are, but as they should be) far more satisfying than the actual world.[23]

This observation by Price is representative of the type of ocularcentric approach to the play that I want to take issue with. The sounds, smells and rhythms referred to here by Price are real components of a real world and are not subordinated within the play, by

a sense of imaginative vision. It is true that Martin himself recognises that he is a dreamer. He admits as much with his talk of:

> a bad black day when I was roused up and I found I was the like of the little children do be listening to the stories of an old woman, and do be dreaming after in the dark night that it's in grand houses of gold they are, with speckled horses to ride, and do be waking again, in a short while, and they destroyed with the cold, and the thatch dripping maybe, and the starved ass braying in the yard (Plays 1, p.113)

The materials of the dream, are not, however, as Price suggests, the sounds, smells and rhythms of the natural world, but rather the deceitful chronicling by their acquaintances of a development that never took place. Martin and Mary are 'dreamers', to the extent that they are, not because they attend to non-visual aspects of reality, but because they are the victims of a cruel ruse, a prank which entrusts them with a store of misinformation. Martin's dream is that the treasures of vision can be delicately and harmoniously fused with his non-visual perceptions of the world's beauty. The expectations with which the conspiracy of his co-villagers have filled him, together with the 'unsociability' of vision, alluded to at the outset of this chapter in relation to its psychical isolation from the other sensory modalities, however, impede such a harmonious integration. The profits, or proceeds of vision blind them to what Nicholas Grene has called "the multiple nature of reality as it is dramatized in the play" [24]. Martin and Mary's 'dream' is not the product of their engrossment in 'unreal' aspects of the non-visual world. It is not symptomatic of any aesthetic which is native to their physical condition but vicariously derived through the fabrication of their co-villagers.

The indirectness of the way in which Martin and Mary accumulate the information about the world that they take for 'truth' is captured in the very supplementarity of the construction 'to hear tell' which is often used to describe the process. Mary, for example, has "heard tell" that the "splendour" of her appearance is partly accountable for in terms of the wet south wind that she has been exposed to for so many years (Plays I, p.71); Martin is assured that "it's a grand thing to see a young girl

walking the road" (Plays I, p.75); he becomes aware of strange happenings in the village, such as the killing of an old man for his gold by "hearing tell" of them (Plays I, p.77). Likewise, Mary is told that "it's a great sight to see a man hanging by his neck" (Plays I, p.77), and is asked by Timmy if she has "heard tell" of the "grave of the four beautiful saints" (Plays I, p.79). In terms of communicable information, 'hearing tell' can be, depending on the reliability of those who are doing the telling, an adequate means of enlightenment. When the matter of aesthetic education is in question, however, there is no substitute for direct experience. We might say that when a verb is applied in an auxiliary form, it tends to indicate that the process in question is not of a high aesthetic significance. Martin and Mary, as we shall see, suffer from no shortage of direct experience, although their particular attunement to beauty is not of the sort that can assist them in arriving at a true estimation of the state of their visual appearance. For this they must subject themselves to the mediatory function of the verbal descriptions of a community of pranksters. In Act One, when Martin questions the beauty of Mary because of her cracked voice, Mary reminds him that he's heard Timmy the smith, Mat Simon "and a power besides" speaking appreciatively of the beauty of her face (Plays I, pp.71-73). Martin's means of comparing the beauty of Molly to that of his wife is equally based on what he can garner from the local gossip. The inadequacy of hearsay as a source of aesthetic awareness is implicit in Martin's declaration:

> I've heard him say a power of times it's nothing at all she is when you see her at the side of you, and yet I never heard any man's breath getting uneasy the time he'd be looking on yourself (Plays I, p.75)

Martin also remarks that although the girls of the village lack the courage to approach him "they do be saying" that he is "a handsome man" (Plays I, p.87). Mary reminds Martin that he's married "with a woman he's heard called the wonder of the western world" (Plays I, p.87). Martin concedes that he's "heard tell her yellow hair, and her white skin, and her big eyes are a wonder surely" (Plays I, p.87). Towards the end of Act One, when Martin is trying to identify his wife after the restoration of his sight, the role previously played by mediation in his reception of her beauty is illustrated by his

decision that it is Bride rather than Mary on the grounds that she is "more the like of what they said" (Plays I, p.95). The point is that beauty is not something to have on authority, especially not the eminently equivocal authority of Timmy the Smith and Molly Byrne. It is something that must be experienced directly. It is simply not appropriate to dismiss Martin and Mary as a pair of idle dreamers either by virtue of the fact that the reality they experience is non-visual, or because they are perpetually ready to take a joker at his word. Yet it is along such lines that a lot of the play's criticism operates.

When Price informs us, for example, that in the third Act "the Saint and the villagers join in trying to force sight and actuality upon the blind" it is obvious that the two entities go hand in hand.[25] Martin's knocking the can of healing water from the hand of the Saint "expresses with clarity and force," according to Price, "their wholehearted decision to renounce actuality"[26]. The renunciation of actuality which Price sees as characterizing the close of the play, is largely the product of an ocularcentric reading. Robin Skelton aligns himself with Price in this regard when he observes that "the dream of perfection which is possible to the blind cannot be sustained in the world of reality"[27]. Martin is characterised by Skelton as an "idle dreamer, blind to reality", whose aesthetic sense is nurtured by the "fancied beauty" of his and Mary's appearances, rather than on his direct perception of the sounds and smells that surround him.[28] Unconvinced of the reality of these auditory and olfactory aspects of experience Skelton speaks highly of the "lyricism of their fantasies"[29]. When Martin talks, for example of the 'great joy' he derives from hearing Molly's voice, Skelton interprets this as a reversal back "to his earlier way of dreaming"[30].

Price and Skelton are only two of a number of critics who observe that blindness is cherished by Martin and Mary because of the illusion it affords about reality.[31] Blindness, however, is clearly not represented in the play simply as an alternative to reality. The most lyrical passages of the play, as we shall see, owe nothing to fantasy. We can see emerging within the critics of the play's portrayal of the dream/reality divide, a qualification of their dismissal of Martin and Mary as dreamers. In the designing of their own illusion, it is commonly granted, Martin and Mary are at least avoiding the figurative blindness that manifests itself in the worship of materialistic values. Skelton, for example, identifies as one of the play's salient concerns the idea that "the physically

blind may 'see' glories to which the seeing are blind", and conversely that "physical sight may result in that love of material beauty that is spiritual darkness"[32]. After dismissing Martin as a dreamer Skelton admits that the blind couple are no more deluded than their deluders. "The blind," he suggests:

> may father false appearances upon reality by creating fantasies based on hearing only. The seeing may be equally deluded by placing too great a reliance upon appearances.[33]

This reading of the play is completely at odds with my own. Gerstenberger gets it equally wrong, in my opinion, when she suggests that Martin and Mary have "accepted from the sighted world an emphasis on physical appearance" and that the function of the by-play by the villagers in Act I to rehearse the arrival of the Saint was "to establish the theme of the meaninglessness of outward appearance"[34]. In order to illustrate my objection to this reading of the play we must examine Martin's behaviour in the immediate aftermath of the restoration of his sight. Just after his ecstatic reception of the gift of eyesight, upon catching sight of Molly Byrne, he mistakes her for Mary:

> .... Oh, it was no lie they told me, Mary Doul. Oh, glory to God and the seven saints I didn't die and not see you at all. The blessing of God on the water, and the feet carried it round through the land. The blessings of God on this day, and them that brought us the saint, for it's grand hair you have..., and soft skin, and eyes would make the saints, if they were dark awhile and seeing again, fall down out of the sky... (Plays I, p.95)

Upon beholding what he thinks is his wife's face, he feels "richer" than "the great kings of the east." The function of a character who is capable of being transported, through direct sensory experience, to such ecstatic heights, is hardly to issue cautionary reminders about the superficiality of the visible world. Martin's experience reminds us that vision is wasted on us, that we do not recognise either the significance of visibility, or the immediacy of this significance. The newly ocularized Martin resembles the

trilobite, that "first awe-struck witness to the world" described in Alain Buisine's essay 'The First Eye'.[35] The trilobite was the first creature to have eyes capable of seeing. The marine organisms that preceded it confined themselves to a wonderless existence on the ocean floor: "...all remained blind and dumb; the waves murmured and nothing could hear them; rocks crashed out of the ocean and there was no eye to see them"[36]. There is a sense in Synge's play in which the spectacular, the breathtakingly beautiful does not exist until the blind man can see[37]. The world is forced temporarily out of darkness under his newly awakened gaze, though his pure, unfiltered vision is regarded in the village as senseless mania. Buisine's thesis is more visually orientated than mine, equating as he does the idea of the word 'origin' with having been seen, and fulfilling the conditions of representability. The terms in which he speaks of the gaze of the trilobite, the world's first witness, are applicable to Synge's representation of the restoration of Martin's vision to a certain degree. Contemplating the relation between 'the origin' and 'the gaze', Buisine argues that

> ... the beginning is envisioned rather than theorised. When the knowledge of the origin becomes popularized, its presentation is much more visual than speculative, spectacular rather than theoretical[38].

In a play about blindness it is inevitable that metaphorical manifestations of the condition will be a concern for the critic. The villagers of this play are not, however, figuratively blinded in the sense that these critics suggest. Martin's experience illustrates that rather than being consumed by superficial considerations, the villagers underappreciate the value of exteriority, even as they fail to acknowledge the capacities of their non-visual senses. Vision is utterly wasted on them. Nowhere is this more evident than in Martin's wooing of Molly. That there is a type of looking which befits an object of beauty is suggested by Martin's suggestion that if Molly were to marry a man to whom all seeing is habitual it would be a case of putting pearls before swine. "You'd do right," he recommends, in almost Ruskinesque fashion, "... not to marry a man is after looking out a long while on the bad days of the world, for what way would the like of him have fit eyes to look on yourself..." (Plays 1, p.117)

In the context of the play's general dolefulness, Martin's glimpse of Molly represents a first clarity. There is a spirituality, an innate sense of indebtedness to a higher power, which seems reminiscent of the aesthetic of the Saint "Every time I set my eyes on you," Martin tells Molly, "I do be blessing the saints, and the holy water, and the power of the Lord Almighty in the heavens above" (Plays 1, p.111).

The ascetic resembles a grand symbolist of sorts, but one who is neglectful of the material existence of his symbols. John Ruskin used to talk in terms of the eye as an "intellectual lens and moral retina" -- the lens dutifully accumulating impressions of the wonders of the world while the retina processed the wonder in a suitably creative way that still acknowledged the blessedness of the visibilia.[39] Synge's chief reservation about the ascetic, it seems to me, is his forgetfulness of the 'lens-work' once its function has been completed. By seeing Molly in his own intense way, by attending closely to her outward form and relating it to the beautiful sound he already associates with her, Martin Doul is engaging in an attention to form, in all of its manifestations, that has no place within the 'aesthetic' of the Saint. His attention to Molly's visual beauty has an equivalent which both precedes and succeeds Martin's brief spell as a seeing agent and which cannot, it seems to me, be reconciled with the critical consensus that blindness in the play represents a refuge from the trials of 'reality'. This form, whether seen or heard, is real. Martin's aesthetic is unrelated to concerns for a transcendent 'reality' which this form serves only to conceal.

The type of inattention to sensory components which I have identified as informing much of the play's criticism is also a feature of the perspective of the play's Saint. The debate which emerges between the Saint and Martin can in one sense be interpreted as an illustration of variations on the denigration of the visual. I will attempt to illustrate now that the ascetic outlook of the Saint entails an aesthetic which is founded on the immediate transcendence of the type of worldly beauty that is accessible to the senses. The notion of extra-sensory reality is not, however, a concern for Martin, who has had to learn the hard way about how unrewarding it is to overly concern himself with what cannot present itself directly to his senses. The world Martin concerns himself with is deemed insignificant by the Saint because only a show for the senses, and 'unreal' by most of the play's critics because it is a show for the wrong senses. The aesthetic

experiences of the Saint and Martin, and the criteria according to which they appraise the various sites of beauty they both encounter, cannot, as I will now endeavour to illustrate, be likened to one another in any meaningful way.

2.4. The Case of a Rivalling Non-Visual Aesthetic.

Nicholas Grene makes the point that the aesthetic of the miracle working Saint, which "glorifies the poor, the mean, the underfed as the inheritors of spiritual grace", "makes little contact" with the everyday realities of the villagers of the play, who do covet "strength of body, beauty, comfort", because such entities, as Grene points out, "are their realities".[40] The distinctions outlined in the previous chapter between aesthetic and other forms of experience serve partly to illustrate why we might not, however, necessarily expect the Saint's aesthetic to "make contact" with anybody's "reality", even his own. Grene's attribution of an aesthetic to the Saint seems to me to urge a reassessment of the commonly held assumption that the ascetic concern for the primacy of the spirit is anti-aesthetic, on account of its wariness of the worldliness of all form. The similarities and divergences between the rivalling aesthetics is a concern I share. More importantly, a preoccupation with the dialectic relationship between the ascetic and the aesthetic, is something which clearly featured throughout the life and art of Synge himself.

As Synge was portraying this relationship, William James was pondering it through a less dramatic medium. In the third of a series of lectures collected in 1902 under the title The Varieties of Religious Experience, James opens with the declaration that

> Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. This belief and this adjustment are the religious attitude in the soul.[41]

The phenomenon of religious faith, according to James is a showcase for the instrumentality of pure ideas, with belief in the existence of a divine personage depending as it does, upon the fact that "nothing in the individual's past experience directly serves as a model" for the object of belief.[42] The majority of James's lecture is given over to extracts from personal testimony which serve to illustrate the contingency of religious zeal upon the notion of invisibility. The reviewing of this relationship leads James to deduce that

> the absence of definite sensible images is positively insisted on by the mystical authorities in all religions as the sine qua non of a successful orison, or contemplation of the higher divine truths. Such contemplations are expected ... to influence the believer's subsequent attitude very powerfully for the good.[43]

His explanation of the blindness he sees as characterising the psychology of negative theology betrays a certain scepticism:

> Our conceptions always require a sense-content to work with, and as the words 'soul,' 'God,' 'immortality,' cover no distinctive sense-content whatever, it follows that theoretically speaking they are words devoid of any significance. Yet strangely enough they have a definite meaning for our practice. We can act as if there were a God; feel as if we were free; consider Nature as if she were full of special designs; lay plans as if we were to be immortal; and we find then that these words do make a genuine difference in our mortal life. [44]

Finally in this regard, James observes that

> The sentiment of reality can indeed attach itself so strongly to our object of belief that our whole life is polarized through and through, so to speak, by its sense of the existence of the thing believed in, and yet that thing,

> for purpose of definite description, can hardly be said to be present to our mind at all.[45]

Experience for both the Saint and the blind couple entails, albeit for different reasons, contending with the unseen. The question is what effect this has on their respective experiences of beauty. If we amend the interpretative strategy pursued by Nicholas Grene, and compare Martin's aesthetic rather than his reality to the aesthetic of the Saint, we will find that though it may be difficult to ascertain exactly how much contact they make with each other, it cannot be said that they oppose each other in any simple way.

The Saint's reprimanding of Martin in Act III -- "I never heard tell of any person wouldn't have great joy to be looking on the earth, and the image of the Lord thrown upon men" -- is a very telling one in relation to an assessment of the nature of his aesthetic sensibility. Martin's rejoinder is equally revealing:

> That's great sights holy father.... What was it I seen my first day, but your own bleeding feet and they cut with stones, and my last day, but the villainy of herself you're wedding, God forgive you, to Timmy the smith... That was great sights maybe...(Plays 1, p.141)

By bringing attention to the condition of the Saint's body in this way, Martin is actually identifying the primary manifestation of the 'ascetic aesthetic'. In his study of the ascetic perspective, Geoffrey Gald Harpham explains that virtue is obtainable for the ascetic primarily through physical acts which establish a mastery over one's body rather than the more common human predicament of being subjected to the whims and desires of one's body. The Saint looks to the lives of his predecessors for beautiful examples and imitable patterns because their subjection of the body to a process of symbolization makes it intelligible and controllable, immune to the wayward fluctuation of human moods and desires. "We look to a work of art," Harpham observes

> for evidence of a will seeking expression by imposing itself upon alien matter. The ascetic body is in this sense an exemplary artefact; what the

> ascetics displayed to their audience was precisely their form. Early Christian asceticism was supported by a highly articulated theology, but essentially it was driven by the same desire to which Greek thought, for example, was so responsive -- to live coherently, to stabilize life so at to make it knowable. [46]

Portraiture, Harpham informs us, was inevitably the art of choice for the early Christians, with "the self" often "conceived as painter, paint, and image".[47] Gregory of Nyssa writes of asceticism as a repetition of Christ's original "taking form", a phenomenon which presented the world with "a beauty in accord with the character of the Archetype". Gregory, writing in the fourth century, held that we are the painters of our own lives, choice being "the craftsman of the work" while the virtues are "the paints for executing the image". A concern for beauty was chief among considerations in the construction of the ascetic image. Hasty preparation, the use of impure pigments, could easily result in an ugly, unbecoming portrait of the Prototype, and so the imitation of Christ requires an artist's meticulous attention to detail, and the 'unmixed paints' of uncontaminated virtue. Even the impulse guiding the infliction of bodily disfigurement was born of an "artistic formula for the imitation of beauty".[48]

The "useless and atrocious tortures" inflicted on themselves by what Gibbon in his The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Chapter Thirty Seven) regards as a group of "hideous, distorted, and emaciated maniacs" were in fact manifestations of traditional artistic virtues as "mastery of one's materials" and "technical control of the medium".[49] In order to reduce individuality to pure form, the ascetic gleefully sacrifices the personal elements which are prone to tardiness, triviality, vacillation, the love of ease, and other such vices. As life is devoted to incessant prayer and deprivation, all that is superfluous to interests of pure form is either forced into sober capitulation to the terms of the aesthetic project, or simply not given space or time to develop or be dwelt upon. Harpham records instances of various ascetic sects competing with one another in feats of self denial in order to establish proximity and resemblance to some emaciated predecessor, to illustrate the relevance of Thomas Mann's description of early Christians as "professional devotees of high art". The boast of the victor in such contests -- "I am deader than you" seems, at

least to the uninitiated, to represent an instance of devotion gone mad.[50] This would certainly appear to be the conclusion arrived at by Martin when he says to the Saint:

> Go on now, holy father, for if you're a fine saint itself, it's more sense is in a blind man, and more power maybe than you're thinking at all. Let you walk on now with your worn feet, and your welted knees, and your fasting, holy ways have left you with a big head on you and a thin pitiful arm (Plays 1, p.149)

All, it is important to keep in mind, is performed in the name of a certain type of beauty which occupies a certain territory within the history of art. "The romantic artist," Harpham contends, descends from the Holy Man.[51] The ascetic applies a highly controlling attitude to his body that is comparable with the rigid self-editing discipline of the artist at work. It is an analogy which James has brought attention to:

> That law which impels the artist to achieve harmony in his composition by simply dropping out whatever jars, or suggests a discord, rules also in the spiritual life. To omit, says Stevenson, is the one act in literature: "if I knew how to omit, I should ask no other knowledge." And life, when full of disorder and slackness and vague superfluity, can no more have what we call character than literature can have it under similar conditions.[52]

The exchanges between Martin and the Saint are instructive in relation to the notions of venerated precedence and imitability which are key components in the unique fusion of self-denial and aesthetic sensibility native to the ascetic world-view. The heavily disciplined lifestyle of the Saint, far from being remote from considerations of beauty, can be interpreted as an incredibly resolute undertaking of the project of forging a fast and binding alliance between human life-practices and aesthetic form. The play is riddled with references to the Saint's repressive inclinations. By considering the ascetic imperative which dictates the Saint's conception of perfection in the light of the theories

of William James and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, we can illustrate how this repressive impulse constitutes the foundation of a quite widespread aesthetic.

Even before the Saint makes his entrance we hear about his "naked feet". Timmy the smith gives Martin an intimation of what to expect in his confrontation with the miracle-worker when he informs Martin that

> ... He's straying around saying prayers at the churches and high crosses, between this place and the hills, and he with a great crowd going behind -- for it's fine prayers he does be saying, and fasting with it, till he's as thin as one of the empty rushes you have there on your knee - ... (Plays I, p.81)

After the Saint does make his first appearance, Timmy's appraisal, "Isn't it a fine, beautiful voice he has, and he a fine, brave man if it wasn't for the fasting" (Plays I p.91) displays an awareness of the two components -- beauty and denial -- which are central to the Saint's aesthetic. At the conclusion of the opening act of the play, shortly before he retires to a bed of stone, on which a misogynistic predecessor used to sleep, the Saint emphasizes the misanthropic aspect of his aesthetic with his parting cautionary avowal to the blind pair:

> May the Lord who has given you sight send a little sense into your heads, the way it won't be on your two selves you'll be looking -- on two pitiful sinners of the earth -- but on the splendour of the Spirit of God, you'll see an odd time shining out through the big hills, and steep streams falling to the sea. For if it's on the like of that you do be thinking, you'll not be minding the faces of men, but you'll be saying prayers and great praises, till you'll be living the way the great saints do be living, with little but old sacks, and skin covering their bones... (Plays I p.101)

The notion of conforming to the behavioural standards set by an unworldly precedent is implicit in the Saint's advocacy of modelling one's life on that of the saints, and of concerning oneself only with the (invisible) divine visage in whose image ours

were moulded. His devotion is reminiscent, to the extent that it is centred around the concept of denial, of the description by the pseudo-Clement in The First Epistle Concerning Virginity of St. Paul as a celibate who, by "treading down and subjugating the body" presented himself as "a beautiful example and pattern to believers" (Ch 9:58).[53] The Saint's distinction between 'sight' and 'sense', a distinction which is a recurring feature throughout the play is symptomatic of a world-view which advocates the loving of one's neighbour -- not for the qualities which present themselves to our human sensorial capacities but rather by virtue of their sacred and ineffable glimmer of resemblance to a higher power. This coupling of a sense of self-denial, which manifests itself in a resolve to starve the 'animalistic' elements out of the human condition, with the ascetic conviction of the significance of the imitability of the ways of sacred predecessors, is central to the Saint's conception of beauty. The human body is eminently controllable, and meets all of the criteria for artistic representation. The discipline that is entailed in unrelenting self-denial can be interpreted as a structuring device, by virtue of which asceticism is essentially a form-producing discipline.

The Saint obviously derives an element of gratification and empowerment from the emaciation-inducing discipline he inflicts upon himself. 'Skin and bones' suggests control, the rigid suppression of appetite. By virtue of the successive imitations to which a documented saintly neglect of bodily form is subjected, the body assumes a symbolic function. Neglect is simultaneously a form of veneration. Recording this 'neglect' is the ascetic's chosen form of communication. He relates to God through the Word, devoting his life to becoming the referent for that Word -- a goal encapsulated by the desire for one's life to be cast in the 'mould' of Truth. There are more than traces of this connection between gratification and mortification in the regard in which the Saint initially holds the blind couple. Before the Saint encounters Martin and Mary, Timmy describes their daily existence:

> ... they do be always sitting here at the crossing of the roads, asking a bit of copper from them that do pass, or stripping rushes for lights, and they not mournful at all, but talking out straight with a full voice, and making game with them that likes it (Plays I, p.89)

The Saint seems to mistake their utter poverty for thrift and abhorrence at extravagance, as though the couple had somehow decided to spare themselves or forego a life of luxury which was available to them. He approves of the abhorrent and degrading conditions in which Martin and Mary are forced by circumstances to live:

> It's a hard life you've had not seeing sun or moon, or the holy priests itself praying to the Lord, but it's the like of you who are brave in a bad time will make a fine use of the gift of sight the Almighty God will bring to you to-day ... It's on a bare starving rock that that there's the grave of the four beauties of God, the way it's little wonder, I'm thinking, if it's with bare starving people the water should be used ... So it's to the like of yourselves I do be going, who are wrinkled and poor, a thing rich men would hardly look at at all, but would throw a coin to, or a crust of bread (Plays I, p.89)

Although I am drawing attention here to the coincidence of a non-visual aspect of their respective aesthetics, the Saint is here clearly seeing a kinship which doesn't exist. The Saint and Martin, for example, are in the throes of two completely different manias -- the Saint's manifests itself in self-denial, while the salient characteristics of Martin's are vanity, lechery, and laziness. The point is that the Saint's approval, however misguided, is illuminating in terms of an understanding of his aesthetic and of how it diverges from that of the blind pair.

Something of the perfectionism of the artist is captured also in William James's description of the search by the saintly after what James calls 'Purity of Life': The saintly person, according to James,

> becomes exceedingly sensitive to inner consistency or discord, and mixture and confusion grow intolerable. All the mind's objects and occupations must be ordered with reference to the special spiritual excitement which is now its keynote. Whatever is unspiritual taints the pure waters of the soul and is repugnant. Mixed with this exaltation of

> the moral sensibilities there is also an order of sacrifice, for the beloved deity's sake, of everything unworthy of him.[54]

Hence the danger that the Saint sees in the gift that God is bestowing through his mediation, to Martin and Mary -- that it can be put to bad use. The Saint derives a purely 'spiritual excitement' from his experience of the beauty of the world around him. The sense of his hostility towards the type of pleasure and contentment afforded by the senses is strengthened through his imploring of Martin after his refusal of a second restoration of vision:

> Did you never set eyes on the summer and the fine spring in places where the holy men of Ireland have built up churches to the Lord, that you'd wish to be closed up and seeing no sight of the glittering seas, and the furze is opening above, will soon have the hills shining as if it was fine creels of gold they were, rising to the sky? (Plays 1, p.141)

Inherent in the gaze of the ascetic is a power for transcendence which is a key to his aesthetic. The 'shining' of the hills he alludes to is very much a metaphysical radiance, and one which plays no role within Martin's aesthetic. For all of the 'unseen' qualities which unite their respective aesthetics, the Saint and Martin seem to harbour radically divergent conceptions of beauty.

We can discern another link between the 'aesthetics of blindness' that is our overriding concern, and its ascetic counterpart, by comparing briefly the desire harboured by the cured blind man to be returned to his former condition with the ascetic rendering of desire. Within the ascetic perspective we cannot contemplate desire in isolation from the corresponding, highly structuring faculty of resistance. On the face of it there may seem to exist something of a kinship between the type of resistance we associate with asceticism, and a desire for blindness. Blindness and incessant prayerful deprivation may conceivably be regarded by one who is not alive to the presence of non-visual sites of beauty, as fulfilling a common function -- that of stopping every crevice through which the temptation of worldly beauty may advance. In the thirteenth century, for example,

Bonaventura advised his readers "to be deaf, dumb and blind, quite indifferent, in fact, to everything in which spiritual profit is not found." [55] Sensory deprivation was viewed as a means to achieving the ascetic objective of being alive to the spirit while at the same time dead to the world. Blindness guarantees a scrupulously maintained disregard for worldly beauty.

The juxtaposition of the Saint and Martin appears to confront us with a contrast between a somewhat perverse and universal denial of desire, and a more humanistic openness to the whims that occasionally take possession of us. Harpham talks at length about the inconceivability of desire without resistance. Asceticism, he says, "is essentially a meditation on, even an enactment of, desire"[56]. Without desire there is no repression; without repression there is no structure; and the ascetic's life is very much an exercise in structure and order. An impediment to the perfection of human life, desire is also integral to the arrival of human life at a state of perfection, complicit as it inevitably is in any movement towards ideality. For all of his talk of looking upon the wonders of the world, we feel, such is the transcendental bent of his rhetoric, that the Saint would not be averse to a spell of blindness, provided, of course, that it did not interfere negatively with his spiritual optics.

Harpham draws our attention to Denis de Rougemont's contention that what we desire is the obstacle[57]. If what we actually desire is the frustration of our desires, how are we to account for the psychology of one who actually desires and treats himself to blindness? It depends, as one would imagine, on whether blindness is regarded as a positive or a negative entity, and on whether the condition actually represents the termination of aesthetic sensitivity that sighted people often associate with it. The ascetic project broadly entails the managing of human impulses and desires by harnessing resistance. From a certain point of view blindness might seem like the perfect harnessing of the ultimate resistance. It is vital for an appreciation of what The Well of the Saints has to offer, that we realise the extent to which Synge would have been repelled by such a negative perspective. We can account for the aesthetic nature of a desire for blindness, in a non-ascetic sense, by taking into consideration, as Synge did, the versatility of the non-visual senses, and the capacity of words for a beauty that has little to do with their propositional function.

There is something celebratory in the Saint's talk of summer and "fine spring", of "glittering seas", "big hills" and "steep streams". The exaltation that is a feature of his relation to nature is comparable, by virtue primarily of the strength of its force, to the joy, which we shall examine shortly, derived by Martin from the visual experience of Molly. If we look at the language which the Saint uses to describe the world of the senses, however, it becomes clear that what he has in mind when he refers to "all knowledge that would soil the soul or the body of a man" (plays I, p.91) he is in fact talking about the field of sensory experience which impedes, even as it facilitates, the 'good use' he imagines eyesight can be put to. I have already referred to the Saint's wish that the Lord who had granted sight to the blind couple might in addition give them a little sense. In the third Act, after offering to the pair the 'gift' of a second restoration, the Saint says to Mary

> There's little use maybe, talking to the like of him, but if you have any sense, Mary Doul, kneel down at my feet, and I'll bring the sight into your eyes (Plays 1, p.143)

When Martin feigns eagerness for the second cure, the Saint concludes that he has found the "right mind", and that "his sense is come to him". (Plays 1, p.147) It is a distinction that has become integrated into our everyday speech. The Saint is not the only person on stage to use the word 'sense' to imply a level of abstract knowledge. After being subjected to Martin's passionate outburst of frantic desire, Molly Byrne asks Timmy "Did ever you hear that them that loses their sight loses their sense along with it...?" (Plays 1, p.119). The frequency with which the abstract form of the word "sense" is used in very close proximity to the sensory phenomena of vision and blindness is hardly coincidental. It is noticeable also that, in what might be regarded as a reversal of traditional depictions of the blind, the relation of Martin and Mary to the word owes nothing to abstraction. For the Saint the sensory world is just a medium of transcendence. His frequent allusions to "the splendour of the Spirit of God" (Plays I, p.101) and variations on the preoccupation, are reminiscent of the responses of certain apologists for imagery to the phenomenon described by Kenneth Clark as 'iconophobia'.

Clark recounts St. Basil's attempt to justify imagery on the strength of the argument that "the honour paid to the image passes to the prototype." He also brings to our attention the commonly cited argument that we should not alienate ourselves from depicting our fellow men because we have been made in the image and likeness of God. [58] Martin's appreciation of the sensory world, by contrast, stops at a direct and ecstatic appreciation of form, in all of its auditory, olfactory and (temporarily) visual aspects.

The final feature of significance to be noted about the aesthetics of asceticism and how it relates to the aesthetics of blindness we are about to outline, is its reversal of a distinction we habitually make between the senses of seeing and hearing. Sounds are rarely issued or received in isolation from each other. Our usual experience of any one sound is as part of a sequence of some sort, a melody, in which each sound heralds its successor. Sight is arguably more conducive to repose and composure -- it does not as often fill us with agitation about what is coming next. The distinction is between the spatiality of vision and the temporality of sound. Artists have historically extracted from the expanse of their visual horizon a 'moment of vision'. When a similar extraction is attempted within the duration of a sound sequence, the 'moment' arguably loses much of its aesthetic quality. This distinction is attended to by Jacques Ellul in his The Humiliation of the Word. "Sound", Ellul observes

> generates an immediate, unconscious, interrogation: What now? What sound will come next? Naturally, sight also can, on second or third thought, give rise to the question: What is beyond? I see the horizon; what is beyond it? But anyone can see the difference between the two. The question "what lies beyond" is secondary and indirect, it is based on thought.[59]

Ellul's observations certainly have a ring of truth – they tally with our everyday experience. Crucially, however, they do not tally with the experience of Synge's protagonists. The question regarding what exists 'beyond' is constantly uppermost in the Saint's mind, it immediately filters his every vision. His perception is innately thought-based, the world being transcended immediately on its being beheld. One is tempted to

call it a senseless aesthetic, but it is quite obviously engaged in a relationship of sorts with the senses. It is the nature of this relationship which has prompted W.J. Mc Cormack to identify the play's "negative metaphysics", a feature of which is that "the spiritual or transcendental is indicated purely by the manifest inadequacy, triviality, incoherence of the material"[60]. If we follow Mc Cormack's logic and identify within the Saint's conception of the world's existence, a set of beliefs which pertain to the beauty of the world, we could call this set of beliefs a 'negative aesthetics'. Martin's world, on the other hand, consists almost entirely, as we shall see, of unfiltered sensation. At the close of the play, just before embarking on his southward journey, Martin argues his case to the Saint in terms of rights. If the Saint has a right to starve and pray, then himself and Mary have a right to their blindness. Their decision to exercise this entitlement has been critically interpreted, as we have seen, as the escape of a pair of idle dreamers from the world of reality. A closer inspection of exactly what it is that Martin and Mary choose and of Synge's portrayal of all that is entailed in their preference reveals that it resists simple interpretation as a rash gesture of renunciation.

2.5. The Fiddler's Take on the Aesthetics of blindness.

Synge's refusal to capitulate in the face of his cast's recommendations that he rethink his characterization in order to relieve what they perceived to be the play's general and unrelenting bad temperedness reveals a lot about the nature of his conception of an aesthetics of blindness. When confronted by Willy Fay about the matter Synge replied, with an obstinacy that was part of his personal legacy to Martin Doul, that he had wanted to write "like a monochrome painting, all in shades of one colour."[61] Such a statement affords the critic an opportunity to concentrate on the artistry of Synge's achievement rather than those lessons which, according to the ideological conjecture prompted by the play, can be learned from it. On the face of it the analogy seems typically humbling, presented, as it is, by an artist fond of likening himself to an old tramp. Monochrome painting jars somewhat with our conception of a work of art as a skilful exhibition of a learned and dextrous technique. If we examine the play carefully, however -- attending to the 'brushwork' of the composition rather than its epistemological connotations -- some

vital questions regarding the notions of repetition and identity emerge. As I read the play Act One is a monochrome, and Act Three is a remaking of a corresponding monochrome after the intervention and subsequent departure of vision. The question of how to differentiate between the blindness of the first and last Acts holds the key to appreciating both the subtlety of the playwright's craft and the nature of the aesthetic experience of the play's blind protagonists. As the original cast members saw it, the price to be paid for the play's 'monochromicity' was the type of interest that can be generated by plays which entail significant variation. The blindness of Act Three, however, together with the ideal of beauty harboured within it, resounding as it does with the fluctuations introduced by a spell of vision and the corresponding store of recent visual memories, differs significantly from the aesthetic ideal cherished in Act One. The significant similarities that do persist, surviving, as it were, the shock of vision, are undone by the fact that by Act Three Martin and Mary have been radically transformed from the vision-covetting pair they had been in Act One: "... the blackness", as Mary observes, "wasn't so black at all the other time as it is this time..."(Plays 1, p.125). The restoration of their vision has had an irreversible effect on their 'aesthetics of blindness'. The phenomenon assumes a vital role in Friel's Molly Sweeney and so will be considered at greater length in Chapter Four. For now our concern is for another implication of the reasoning behind Synge's decision against relenting to the demands of his cast for more conventionally dramatic variation.

Fay was voicing a genuine concern. The contributions of the different characters of the play tend to take the form of complaint, mockery, tirade, invective, or cautionary avowal. The alleviating feature of Martin's ecstasy is shot down as soon as it emerges. Yet Synge did not claim that he was composing in monotone. His characters do not look alike. Indeed the development of a central theme of the play is contingent on this fact. The confusion of the literary arts with the art of painting, of the senses of hearing and vision, of which Synge's analogy is symptomatic, is in turn characteristic of a mildly synaesthetic logic that pervades the play as a whole. What is in question is what Bacon refers to as the "vestigia communia" of the senses -- "the latency of all in each" -- and comparable to what Hazlitt has in mind when he explains that "gusto in painting is where the impressions made on one sense excites by affinity those of another"[62]. Mary King is appreciating this aspect of Synge's portrayal when she explains Martin and Mary's

tendency to describe place in terms of movement by alluding to "the acute synaesthetic perception of the blind."[63] Such interrelation among the senses is a major component of the play's aesthetic. It is a phenomenon, as we shall see, which the experiences of Synge's formative years, together with the nature of his formal education, led him to appreciate. As a feature of the play, a synaesthetic element is pervasive on two separate levels.

In Act One Martin makes a connection between a sweet voice and a beautiful face (PlaysI, p.71). The arrival of the Saint is heralded by the sounding of a bell which Martin describes as "sweet" (Plays I, p.85). Mary's attributing of a "little silvery voice" to the bell is reminiscent of Keats's

> ... other harmonies, stopt short,
> Leave the dinn'd air vibrating silverly[64]

There are various possible explanations for Mary's association. We think of Locke's blind man who was adamant that the sounding of a trumpet is scarlet. Mary was sighted in early youth and may well be familiar with the image of a bell. That 'silveriness' is a property of a bell is something that Mary could well have deduced in the course of her interaction with the sighted villagers. Whether Mary's association is conceptual or sensory, its effect is to contribute to the synaesthetic effect of the play. That darkness is in itself a catalyst in the process of cross-sensory stimulation is suggested by Martin's description of

> sitting alone in the cold air, hearing the night coming, and the blackbirds flying around in the briars crying to themselves, the time you'll hear one cart getting off a long way in the east, and another cart getting off a long way in the west, and a dog barking maybe, and a little wind turning the sticks. (Plays 1, pp.125-127)

The overriding synaesthetic effect of the play however, takes the form of what I will call here a sort of 'collaborative synaesthesia', whereby the characters on stage

articulate an appreciation of an auditory or olfactory aspect of an experience which the sighted theatre-goer thinks of primarily in visual terms. This seems to me to an inherent quality of the dramatisation of an aesthetics of blindness which Synge manipulates to great effect. Instead of enticing Molly to join him on his sojourn southward, for example, by painting a vivid picture in her mind of the spectacular masses of wild flowers, Martin assures her that once there, they will not be able to take two steps without "crushing fine flowers, and making sweet smells in the air" (Plays 1, p.117).

Because what I see as the extended juxtaposition of an aesthetics of blindness and an ascetic approach to beauty is primarily illustrated through Martin's protracted dispute with the Saint, I have been focusing almost exclusively on Martin's aesthetic rather than Mary's.[65] Mary does, however, provide one of the play's clearest articulations of an aesthetics of blindness. The enraptured state to which she is capable of being transported by means of senses other than eyesight is attested to by her avowal

> There's the sound of one of them twittering yellow birds do be coming in the spring-time from beyond the sea, and there'll be a fine warmth now in the sun, and a sweetness in the air, the way it'll be a grand thing to be sitting here quiet and easy, smelling the things growing up, and budding from the earth. (Plays 1, p.131)

Mary's description of the sun in terms of its "fine warmth", and of the air in terms of its "sweetness", together with her reference to a "silvery bell", is a defining component of Synge's creation. Such involvement in one type of sensory stimulation of experience from another sense is regarded by certain theorists as being central to the aesthetic experience. Elisa Steenberg, for example, defines the aesthetic experience as

> ... an experience of visual or auditory form as having synaesthetic and/or emotive properties, and the experience having a pleasure-displeasure component that makes the subject attribute a positive-negative preference value to the form experienced.[66]

In terms of the effectiveness of Mary's description it does not matter whether her description of the air's sweetness is the product of a purely synaesthetic process, or whether sweetness relates to an emotional quality she associates with the coming of summer. The audience will receive it in synaesthetic terms either way. Steenberg argues that because a subject cannot "communicate verbally" what she terms "beauty-ugliness" properties, all he can do is refer to "certain synaesthetic and/or emotive experiences of visual or auditory form as explanatory reasons for his aesthetic value experience."[67] When Mary identifies the noise as a bell, and experiences the bell synaesthetically as "silvery", the initial identification is non-aesthetic, while 'silveriness' refers to an aesthetic quality of the noise. Likewise, when she experiences the air emotionally as sweet she is referring to an aesthetic property. The presence of a "synaesthetically complex experience" is regarded by Steenberg as a necessary condition for the rendering in verbal terms of an aesthetic experience.[68] Applying Steenberg's logic to the 'collaborative synaesthesia' which I have identified as being latent in the dramatic portrayal of an aesthetics of blindness would help to explain the peculiar clarity which characterises the sites of beauty described by Martin and Mary. This potential for collaborative synaesthesia, however, is not exploited (or at least not to the same extent) by Yeats and Friel, as we will discover in chapters Three and Four.

It is a testimony to Synge's sense of dramatic timing that he places Mary's account of her appreciation of what in the Saint's vocabulary would be referred to as the wonders and glories of the Lord, before the Saint himself is granted an opportunity to respond to the couple's refusal of the second gift of sight:

> Did you never set eyes on the summer and the fine spring in places where the holy men of Ireland have built up churches to the Lord, that you'd wish to be closed up and seeing no sight of the glittering seas, and the furze is opening above, will soon have the hills shining as if it was fine creels of gold they were, rising to the sky? (Plays 1, p.141)

The refusal of the second gift of vision is a dramatic instance of the "preference value" which completes Steenberg's account of the aesthetic experience. When considered in the

context of the depth of Mary's capacity for wonderment, the Saint's chastisement is exposed as the ocularcentric doctrine that it is. Martin had responded to Mary by actually continuing her line of thought, an occurrence which exemplifies the play's evocation of the harmony that is native to the dark as opposed to its general depiction of the acrimony of light:

> I'm smelling the furze a while back sprouting on the hill, and if you'd hold your tongue you'd hear the lambs of Grianan, though it's near drowned their crying is with the full river making noises in the glen. (Plays 1, p.133)

The sighted do not usually recognise growth by its smell. Our awareness of the presence of lambs is not ordinarily impeded by the sounds of a full river. The presence of a full river does not register itself upon our awareness by virtue of its sound if it is within our line of vision. The Saint's reprimanding of the blind couple encourages us to ask why Martin and Mary should settle for 'hearing tell' of summer when they can hear it and smell it. It encourages the equally important question of why the sighted should stop at the seeing of summer. The type of collaborative synaesthesia that is a feature of the above exchange between Martin and Mary is the product of a negotiation of sorts between two parties. Its effectiveness is contingent on both the ever-reliable visual-bias of the sighted audience, and the influence of a sensitive ear -- a function which Synge was supremely well equipped to provide. Synge's view of the synaesthetic nature of artistic creation, and his personal emphasis on the auditory aspect of the process are both illustrated towards the beginning of the prose passage published under the hopeful title 'Autobiography':

> Every life is a symphony, and the translation of this life into music, and from music back into literature or sculpture or painting is the real life of the artist. (Prose, p.3)

The series of displacements which his education comprised also played their part in nurturing the type of sensory versatility that is integral to the synaesthetic process. At sixteen the taking up of the violin resulted in a temporary neglect of his naturalist pursuits -- the violin having in turn to compete for Synge's attention with books of language and literature. The love of nature, music, literature and language were mutually supportive to the extent that Synge expressed a wish "to be at once Shakespeare, Beethoven and Darwin" (Prose, p.12). It is, above all however, Synge's adeptness as a listener -- a capacity nourished by all of these endeavours, which lies at the heart of what he volunteers as an aesthetics of blindness.

While acknowledging "the intensity with which Synge's own senses were attuned to the sounds and sights of nature", Ann Saddlemyer notes that he was "Above all, a listener"[69]. Yeats identifies the same quality in Synge's work when, in his "Mr Synge and His Plays", which served as his preface to the first edition of The Well of the Saints, he talks of the resemblance that Synge bears to the great dramatists by virtue of

> a preoccupation with what is lasting and noble, that came to him, not, as I think, from books, but while he listened to stories in the cottages, and contrasted what they remembered with reality. (Prose, p.67)

To illustrate her own point Saddlemyer refers us to Synge's own Preface to The Playboy:

> When I was writing *The Shadow of the Glen*, some years ago, I got more aid than any learning could have given me, from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen. (Plays II, p.53)

It is not, however, the type of listening alluded to by Saddlemyer and Yeats that is central to the aesthetics of blindness as it is depicted in Synge's play. Martin and Mary practice another form of listening which invalidates, for example, Mary King's suggestion that beauty in The Well of the Saints is only "word deep"[70]. The type of

listening I have in mind bears a greater similarity to the type forced upon Synge while he was in company of Old Mourteen in Kilronan:

> Then he [Old Mourteen] sat down in the middle of the floor and began to recite old Irish poetry, with an exquisite purity of intonation that brought tears to my eyes though I understood but little of the meaning. (Prose, p.56)

Eyes, as much as any individual character, are cast as the villain of the piece. Martin, for all of his lechery, criticises young girls for their "sharp terrible eyes" (Plays 1, p.135), while Mary talks of the "gaping" and "spying eyes" of the villagers (Plays 1, p.75). Ears, on the other hand, are spoken of in much more flattering terms. Timmy assures Martin that he has "good ears" (Plays 1, p.77) while in Act III Mary reminds Martin of his boast that he has "a great ear for hearing the lies in a word" (Plays 1, p.129). This boast notwithstanding, however, the auditory attunement which Martin displays throughout much of the play, is not of the type that is concerned with the detection of lies. A brief charting of the development of his infatuation with Molly illustrates this.

At the beginning of the play Martin is trying to reconcile Mary's "queer cracked voice" (Plays 1, p.71) with the visual beauty he has been assured she possesses. The discrepancy upsets an association that he's been harbouring in his mind since, as a young sighted boy, he noticed a pattern whereby the women with beautiful faces were the ones who were also blessed with attractive voices. That a sweet voice conjures up the prospect of a corresponding beauty of visual and tactile form in Martin's imagination is attested to by his first avowal of affection for Molly Byrne. When Mary defensively dismisses Molly as a liar, Martin counters:

> If it's lies she does be telling she's a sweet beautiful voice you'd never tire to be hearing, if it was only the pig she'd be calling, or crying out in the long grass, maybe, after her hens . . . [*Speaking pensively*] It should be a fine, soft, rounded woman, I'm thinking, would have a voice the like of that (Plays 1, p.73)

When, in Act II, Martin sees Molly, he declares his feelings for her in a very revealing way:

> If it was a queer time itself, it was great joy and pride I had, the time I'd hear your voice speaking and you passing to Grianan ... for it's of many a fine thing your voice would put a poor dark fellow in mind, and the day I'd hear it, it's of little else at all I would be thinking (Plays 1, p.113)

A little later Martin tells Molly that he has been

> Lying down across a sop of straw, and I thinking I was seeing you walk, and hearing the sound of your step on a dry road, and hearing you again, and you laughing and making great talk in a high room with dry timber lining the roof. For it's a fine sound your voice has that time, and it's better I am, I'm thinking, lying down, the way a blind man does be lying, then to be sitting here in the grey light, taking hard words of Timmy the smith (Plays 1, pp.113-115)

Martin is not responding to the meaning of Molly's words. Her words, just as her steps on the road, her laughter, and the summoning of her hens, have the profound effect they do on Martin by virtue of their sound. Mary King has written of the "downgrading of language" in When the Moon has Set, and of the play's fascination with music as non-representational art[71]. Traces of the same disregard for at least the descriptive function of language are observable throughout this play. Martin's heedlessness of the logical content of Molly's utterances illustrates a particular aspect of what Saddlemyer refers to as 'Synge's Soundscape'.

The progress charted in the journal of a 'mad fiddler' published under the title 'Étude Morbide' would seem to indicate that the contrasts and similarities between aesthetic fervour and ascetic zeal were a recurring preoccupation for Synge. The journal is commenced under the sway of an unequivocal belief in the coincidence of the 'joy' of

the ascetic and that of the musician. The subsequent entries chronicle the emergence of what come to be regarded as 'flaws' in the 'spiritual system' the diarist had adopted from his reading of the saints. The flaws do not however, contaminate his musical sensibility and something of an acrimonious rift develops between the two aspects of his spirituality. An early entry, for example (Jan 4) begins

> I am trying to co-ordinate the inner life of this monk and my own inner life as a musician. It seems as I read him that his joy in its essence was identical with my own. (Prose, p.31)

Later in the same entry he talks of an "ecstasy" which "exists as essentially in prayer as in the sound of the violin"(Prose, p.31). The "same joy" is known, we are assured, by the monk and the musician. Six days later he is expressing the same enthusiasm:

> Beyond my readings of the saints and philosophers which I turn to three times a day... I take some beautiful thing every morning and regard it till my imagination ends in a moment of passionate ecstasy. This is my equivalent for the adoration of the saints. (Prose, p.31)

Before the end of the month, however, the musician is questioning "whether this religious ecstasy I live in is not a morbid growth," and admitting to sometimes feeling like a fool by virtue of it (Prose, p.32). On March 11 the roles played by precedence and imitation which we looked at earlier are undermined as part of the growing pains of a certain type of morally scrupulous artist:

> A magnificent spring day. In thus moulding myself upon the model of the saints am I gaining the glory of a marble statue, or only the contortion of mosaics? Is my personality worth the effort I spend upon it? Could any sculptor work with real ecstasy if he had only decayed wood for his material? (Prose, p.32)

On May 5 a "loss of interest" in the saints and stoics is expressed. His experimenting with saintliness seems a "childish escapade" which has no connection with the sense of joy which prompts people to "leap and skip with exultation" when he plays his fiddle for them (Prose, p.33). His impatience with the ascetic project comes to a head on November 23, when we read the following extract:

> I am sick of the ascetic twaddle of the saints. I will not deny my masculine existence nor rise, if I can rise, by facile abnegation. I despise the hermit and the monk and pity only the adulterer and the drunkard ...(Prose, p.34)

And in February his friend the Chouska encapsulates all of his newly-won wisdom in the declaration "Mon ami, our love is religion." (Prose, p.35)

From a social perspective, Martin and Mary are relatively isolated from the rest of the villagers. Excepting his wife, there is nobody in the village who is willing to lend him the sympathetic ear that Martin so desperately needs. Whatever about the villagers being figuratively blind, they prove to be collectively deaf. Martin's aesthetic does not further his detachment from his environment, however, in the way that formal, or more traditional aesthetics has a reputation for doing. It actually brings the world closer to him. William Atkinson has written that "Synge rejected aestheticism because it severed art from reality, creating autonomous artworks that valued the artificial over the natural".[72] The influence of the aesthetics of blindness as it is depicted by Synge, however, has anything but a sundering effect. While the aesthetic of the Saint issues in disjoining perceiver from environment, Martin's aesthetic experience seems almost to compensate for his social aloofness.

When Synge notes about Dante that "Light in general is his special and chosen source of beauty" he is implying belief in the existence of an alternative to light-shown beauty.[73] This is a fascination which his 'Autobiography' traces back to his early youth, in the course of which, the purchasing with a cousin of a telescope led, significantly, one cannot help but feel, to some unspecified "trouble":

> The following spring I had measles and gave up school finally. When I recovered I began to collect moths and butterflies and other insects, a pursuit which kept me engrossed for several years. It gave me a great fondness for the eerie and night and encouraged a lonely temperament which was beginning to take possession of me. (Prose, p.9)

Scanning Synge's autobiographical works and other prose pieces, one gets the sense that darkness was often conducive to a heightening of the sensitivity of his non-visual senses, particularly his musical ear. The sense of collaborative synaesthesia that I have tried to illustrate as pervading the play is a product of two facts. The first is the general industriousness of the non-visual senses in the dark. The second is the fact that while Synge's two leading protagonists are blind, the audience, (with the obvious exception of any blind people who may be in attendance) can see. It is as though the audience somehow taps the sensory awareness of the blind couple, their collective eyes supplementing the function served by Martin and Mary's ears and noses. It is worth looking at what Synge has recorded about his own sensory activity in darkness and considering the extent to which it is related to his musicianship.

Synge presents us with a description of the process of synaesthetic perception, for example, in 'Etude Morbide':

> I have passed the threshold and seen the face of the unseen ... I have seen symphonies of colour that moved with musical recurrence round centres I could not understand. (Prose, p.34)

At another stage in his 'Autobiography', Synge is reflecting on his early endeavours as a budding naturalist:

> To wander as I did for years through the dawn of the night with every nerve stiff and strained with expectation gives one a singular

> acquaintance with the essences of the world. The obscure noises of the owls and rabbits, the heavy scent of the hemlock and the flowers of the elder, the silent flight of the moths I was in search of gave me a passionate and receptive mood like that of early man. (Prose, pp.9-10)

He then continues to observe the tendency of the poet to let "his intellect draw the curtain of connected thought between him and the glory that is round him" (Prose, p.10). It is otherwise with Synge. Recounting an episode from his early youth, Synge accounts for his fear of the dark by describing "the fearful and genuine hypnotic influence such things [lights in the mist] possess upon the prepared personality" (Prose, p.10). Darkness plays an important role in the 'preparation' of the personality for a certain type of aesthetic experience. This is one of the ways in which it is clear to see the extent of the influence of Synge's own experiences on his artistic creation. The detail of a story he tells in 'Vita Vecchia' in order to convey his youthful sense of the brevity of life also attests to the phenomenon of sensory overdrive in darkness.

> [I stood] on the side of [a hill] watching the stars and the moon and listening to the crying of the snipe ... [An] earth breath came up across the bogs, carrying essences of heath, and obscure plants, the ferment of the soil...(Prose, p.20)

In *The Aran Islands* also, while relating yet another nocturnal escapade, Synge describes a noise he heard on night.

> It came closer to me, gradually increasing in quickness and volume with an irresistibly definite progression. When it was quite near the sound began to move in my nerves and blood, and to urge me to dance ... (Prose, p.99)

Donna Gerstenberger suggests that the implications of The Well of the Saints suggest "a position which Synge had not taken elsewhere", and that "it is a position which the evidence of the notebooks and the other works would indicate that he could not seriously have accepted beyond his immediate commitment to this particular dramatic situation".[74] Gerstenberger's entire focus seems to be on a metaphysical region 'beyond' the drama itself, which the experiences of Martin and Mary Doul merely serve to exemplify or negate. I am more concerned with attending closely to what The Well of the Saints actually presents. As I see it, the play's greatest achievement, realized in the dark, is a synaesthetically perceivable resplendence, not an epistemologically–based apology for escapism. This 'radiance', which is not specific to any one sensory modality, is perhaps most obviously manifest in Martin's appreciation of Molly Byrne's beauty. When the Saint talks of hills "shining" like creels of gold, (Plays 1, p. 141) he has in mind a divine spark which presents itself only incidentally to the human senses. When Martin can see he says to Molly '... it's few sees the like of yourself, though it's shining you are, like a high lamp would drag in the ships out of the sea" (Plays 1, p. 117) he is merely describing the visual extension of what he had experienced as the 'shining' of Molly's laughter in the darkness.

This auditory shine is not divorced from Molly's attractiveness as Martin experienced her as a material being. It is not a figment of the imagination any more than any aspect of the synaesthetic experience is. Erich von Hornbostel, whose theory will be alluded to in Chapter Five, holds that brightness is a universal sensory dimension and argues for the existence of a real identity between the brightness of lights, touches, sounds and odours.[75] John Paul Nafe has observed that "It has often been remarked that auditory experiences terminate, at the lower end, in a pressure-like, dull, flat quality, and at the upper end, in distinctly painful bright tones".[76] At certain stages of Act II when Synge presents us with a sighted man reverting to earlier, blind ways of experiencing beauty he reverses the ploy of resorting to visual memory which, as we will see in the next chapter, is a more common feature of portrayals of blindness. When Martin recounts his blind experience of Molly Byrne's laughter, of the spring-time, and of the approach of night, the rest of the Act is thrown into

shadow. The 'auditory brightness' that is evoked glosses the 'monochromicity' of Acts I and III with such a variegated lustre, that any concerns for the play's alleged lack of diversity are exposed as the understandably 'sightist' concern that they actually represent.

2.6. Wonders Enough: The reasoning behind the refusal of vision.

At certain junctures throughout the play blindness seems to be represented as something of a refuge from aesthetic aversion. Martin and Mary's choice of blindness constitutes a fleeing from something as well as a running towards all of the non-visual experiences already detailed. It seems at times as though blindness is resorted to or aspired towards merely as a means of escaping the grey light, the bleeding feet, the harsh skies, the dirty days and bad mornings, the muck, the grave-bound, rotting women that the couple encounter on their re-entry into the sighted world. Martin and Mary are ultimately trying to escape the 'dirty twists' and 'crumpled whelps' that appear when they finally set eyes on one another. They would be rid of all of this, and blindness volunteers itself as a facilitating medium. It serves as a balm to soothe their horrified desire. Blindness is also depicted as a lazy choice. The workaday world is not only ugly and heedless of beauty, it is hard work. In their blindness, the couple became accustomed to being the beneficiaries of the charitable instincts of the locals. Sighted, and no longer deemed worthy of such charity, the couple have to work for subsistence and Martin in particular finds the experience horrific. After blindness has re-established itself, and the Saint comes brandishing his can of healing water, threatening the couple with the prospect of a second, permanent cure, Martin implores him:

> Keep off yourself, holy father, and let you not be taking my rest from me in the darkness of my wife. (Plays 1, p. 45)

And later asks him

> ... what is it you want coming for to break our happiness and hour of ease. (Plays 1, p.145)

Mary, for her part is equally inclined to decline the Saint's offer:

> Let us be as we are, holy father, and then we'll be known again as the people is happy and blind, and we'll be having an easy time with no trouble to live, and we getting halfpence on the road. (Plays 1, p.143)

To the extent that this suggests that ugliness is an exclusively visual phenomenon, that the discriminatory faculties become dulled with blindness so that things which occasion disgust among the sighted become tolerable, the portrayal in the play of something which can genuinely be called an aesthetics of blindness, seems destined to be undermined.

To understand the nature of Martin's disgust we must first understand his immediate elation upon the restoration of his vision.

> [*ecstatically*] Oh, glory be to God, I see now surely ... I see the walls of the church, and the green bits of fern in them, and yourself, holy father, and the great width of sky (Plays 1, p.93)

The description in the stage directions of Martin being "foolish with joy" heightens our sense of his ecstasy. His joy is related to his expectations. The intensity with which he was anticipating finally seeing the wife he had 'heard tell' was

breathtakingly beautiful is reflected in his reaction to seeing Molly Byrne and mistaking her for Mary:

> Oh, it was no lie they told me, Mary Doul. Oh glory to God and the seven saints I didn't die and not see you at all ... (Plays 1, p.95)

Martin is reacting at least partly to the correspondence that he mistakenly thinks exists between his wife and what he has been told about her. In his search for Mary he is forced to settle for less rigid forms of the correspondence. His repulsion upon finally seeing her is partly prompted by the fact that this correspondence was not corroborated but completely undermined. Without his expectation there would not have been such a strong element of aversion. We all subject our senses to unpleasantness. In the course of drafting this thesis I have probably consumed half of my body weight in Bic plastic. Though I find the thought slightly disconcerting, it arouses no disgust. I don't expect to enjoy the taste of plastic. Martin has devoured the villagers' fabricationary accounts of his wife's beauty. When he ultimately chooses to remain blind all of the positive considerations which dictate the preference seem to be accompanied by a desire to erase his knowledge of Mary's true visual appearance from his awareness. While Martin's aesthetic is not derivative of either visual memory or verbal discription of visual beauty, to the extent that it involves a 'flight from', in addition to all of its acoustically experienced attractions, it cannot really be considered a thoroughly positive entity.

The couple's refusal of a second gift of sight is a telling consequence of the type of transformations undergone by lust or desire once their object has been obtained. If considered outside the context of the rest of the play, the couple's hiding for cover when the Saint comes to find them, and Martin's insistence upon being found that "It's wonders enough I seen in a short space for the life of one man only" (Plays 1, p.139) appear to constitute a rather sterile reaction to the visual ugliness that has been "tormenting their souls" since the first miracle. The holding of one's nose when sampling an exotic, but vile-smelling dish, for example, may effect a similar evasion

of disgust. If the measure does not alert another, non-olfactory sensory modality to the presence of a pleasant taste that had been concealed behind a repulsive smell, however, the holding of one's nose can hardly be regarded as a means of arriving at aesthetic satisfaction. Blindness, as we have seen, does, in The Well of the Saints, effect a rechannelling of aesthetic energies and sensitivities. Because of the way the play is structured however, at the moment that Martin commits his audacious act, the desperate need to escape the torment of visual ugliness may appear to play a more important role in his decision than the sites of non-visual beauty which exercise such a hold over his aesthetic preferences.

It could also be argued that blindness is the quintessentially aesthetic response to their situation. What are Martin and Mary to do with their disgust? Did they have another outlet for it other than blindness? Other emotions like anger or grief have various outlets, but with disgust it is otherwise. When we are weighed down by grief, for example, we can cry, or seek solace in a friend. When we are angry we can shout or go about thumping whoever or whatever prompted the emotion in us. When we are disgusted, however, the only sensible course of action is to avert one's gaze. Disgust usually has to be transformed into another emotion, usually anger, before it can be acted upon. The reaction of audiences to Synge's plays is in itself illustrative of this phenomenon. A story is told about a performance of The Playboy in New York, during the course of which, one member of the hostile audience threw his watch at one of the actors, only to reclaim it at the ticket office as he was filing out of the theatre.[77] This gesture can be usefully compared with Martin's knocking of the can of miracle water from the grasp of the Saint. If the theatre-goer at the performance of The Playboy had been initially disgusted by certain aspects of the play, he managed to convert the disgust into an emotion which was more conducive to positive manifestation. "Let possible action suggest itself" David Pole writes in an essay on disgust, "and disgust or 'mere horror' has changed into something else"[78]

In a sense Martin wants desperately to avert his gaze, although, as we have seen, his choice of blindness is a much more creative action than this suggests. It is a measure of Synge's skill as a playwright, a reflection of the dexterity of his dramatic vision, that he manages to contrive a physical outlet for disgust, creating an intensely

spirited dramatic moment out of an emotion that is usually associated with passivity. Martin's gesture is partly an aesthetically-minded rejection. Disgust is disgusting. The fact that blindness is chosen as a means of avoiding it, however, poses certain problems for this project. Disgust pervades the play. With the exception of Martin's disparaging remarks about Mary's jealous dismissal of Molly's "loud braying laugh" (Plays 1, p. 73) -- the sense of revulsion is all provoked by visual appearance. The relative lack of non-visually aroused disgust is compounded to a certain extent by the unanimity of the joy which the couple derive from the various non-visual aspects of their natural environment. There is something alarmingly consensual about their appreciation. An aesthetics of blindness, if it is to warrant that appellation, should be characterised by a greater degree of discernment, and a capacity for rejection on aesthetic grounds which we are not sure Martin and Mary possess. It is highly significant however, that once the couple have rejected the offer of vision, they head for an environment which they have not seen before. Not only have they eliminated what they have learned to be the detrimental hope for vision, they also guarantee that the features of their surroundings will have no corresponding visual memory to compete with in their endeavor to impress themselves on the aesthetic awareness of the couple. Indeed one of the most refreshing aspects of the play is that the retrospective aspect which the couple developed during the time they could see, and which prompted their ultimate refusal of vision, is a complete reversal of the type of wistful, retrospective aesthetic which one might expect to be a feature of the portrayal by a sighted artist of the experience of blindness. Synge's musical background, as I hope to have conveyed, plays a major role in this reversal.

2.7. Literature First – Blindness Afterwards.

I have looked at some of the thematic lines along which Synge's play is generally interpreted as operating. Mc Cormack presents quite a moving account of Synge's prophetic sense of the brevity of his life. The impression that emerges is that any form of over-theorized 'vision' which encroached upon the dominion of the physical eye,

which lessened by even one the number of minutes, hours and days devoted to sampling the environment through the senses, would have tried his patience and frustrated his appetite. As a man and artist he seemed set on developing all of the possibilities of sensation, on exploding the inhibitions that the demands of the intellect impose on the senses. Yet if we distinguish between the type of theory which is either formulated and practiced from outside art, or crudely engrafted onto it, and the type of theory which arises more organically from within a work of art, a comparison of sorts can be made between the climax of Synge's play and the character of the criticism which has been neglectful of a great deal of its dramatic worth. Nicholas Grene brings to our attention that of all the works in the Synge canon, The Well of the Saints is unique by virtue of the fact that it emanated from an idea, rather than from the type of folk tales, stories, and myths which influenced the genesis of his other plays.[79] Most of the play reads as though it started from a theoretical vision but that the drama got in the way and even transformed it. At a critical juncture in the play however, the idea firmly re-establishes itself. The passage I have in mind is one of the most beautifully crafted of the entire play, and one which Synge reworked meticulously for the 1908 production (though without significantly redressing the aspect of it I will focus on here). Having opted to remain in blindness, Martin feels compelled to account for his decision:

> [*fiercely*] Isn't it finer sights ourselves had a while since and we sitting dark smelling the sweet beautiful smells do be rising in the warm nights and hearing the swift flying things do be racing in the air [*Saint draws back from him*] till we'd be looking up in our own minds into a grand sky, and seeing lakes and broadening rivers and hills are waiting for the spade and plough. (Plays 1, p.141)

The consequences of this highly lyrical passage for the aesthetic I am trying to outline here are essentially twofold. Firstly, it signals the reversal of the direction in which the momentum of the play's aesthetic has been building, and does so in a

conspicuously literary manner. Secondly, the passage is pervaded by a suggestion that the non-visual experience of beauty serves primarily to supplement a visual form of aesthetic appreciation. By relating his experience in visual terms, Martin seems to be both undermining the independence of a non-visual aesthetic, and displaying a level of self-consciousness that distances him from the sense of sensory immersion that has been developing so impressively throughout the play.

Mat Simon's immediate rejoinder to Martin's lyrical outburst -- "[*roaring laughing*] It's songs he's making now, holy father" (Plays 1, p.141), is a very telling one. Synge knew better than most the type of derision it meets with in certain rural environments. After his arduously learned lesson about the triviality of what exists outside his own perceptive capacities, and the type of dangers risked in the endeavor to transcend them, Martin seems by this stage of the play to have obstinately resolved to settle for nothing other than direct experience. Yet in this passage he is accommodating a foreign aesthetic, meeting the sighted villagers and the audience half-way in his defence of the decision to remain in blindness. The concession that seems to be involved in describing his experience of beauty as a series of 'finer sights', in re-adopting the terms of a perspective which he has so recently alienated himself from and which he has learned to despise, seems uncharacteristic of Martin, beneath him somehow. Why should he persevere with ocular rhetoric when he is fleeing so desperately from vision? Why should he consent to reverse the perspective that had him pining retrospectively for the beauties afforded by blindness after he had relinquished them? To a certain extent the figurative nature of the passage is accountable for in terms of the restoration of eyesight and of the fact that he is endeavouring to explain to a sighted community (and audience) the nature of the beauty he is experiencing. Community and audience can smell and listen and touch, however. Martin's explanation, suggestive as it is of a degree of inter-sensory correspondence, actually comes close to signaling the undoing of the collaborative synaesthesia which has been developing until this juncture. The different sensory components of this effective synaesthesia had been developed in isolation from one another, the correspondence between them being stronger for being unspoken. After

Martin decides to explain this connection, it is hard to lose sight of the phenomenon as literary synaesthesia.

Erika von Erkardt–Siebold draws attention to the fact that the most frequent form of literary synaesthesia are comparisons. This observation prompts her to ask

> How far are these comparisons imaginal or conceptual, that is immediate involuntary consequences of the poet's own impression, or the results of an intention to produce a certain artistic effect?[80]

I am not suggesting that Synge himself experienced a clinical form of synaesthesia, that he should have portrayed Martin as experiencing it, or that Martin should somehow have lost the capacity to differentiate between the different senses. Because Synge has allocated to Martin in this passage a mediating role that his complete absorption in his surroundings really should prevent him from perfecting, our attention is drawn to the playwright's hand. The consequence is that the passage in question resounds with a suggestion of artistic effect. One cannot help feeling however that it is an effect which Synge achieved largely in spite of himself. The effect is at odds, for example, with Synge's decision to reject 'When the Blind See' as a title for the play on the grounds that it was too overtly figurative. The artistic effect of the climax of the play is, on the other hand, in keeping with Synge's writing in a letter to Frank Fay that

> The whole interest of our movement is that our little plays try to be literature first -- i.e. to be personal, sincere, and beautiful -- and drama afterwards.[81]

Sound affords to Martin his chief joy. He is not interested in understanding the sounds he hears. He does not hear Molly Byrne's lies, for example, because they sound so beautiful. It is also the effect of sound on the audience which gives the play its beauty. It is what prompted George Moore to write to the editor of The Irish Times (Feb. 13,

1905), upon the play's first performance, of "the abundance and the beauty of the dialogue ... one listens to it as one listens to music." And while the play was still in rehearsal Yeats wrote:

> Above all, he made word and phrase dance to a very strange rhythm, which will always, till his plays have created their own tradition, be difficult to actors who have not learned it from his lips. It is essential, for it perfectly fits the drifting emotion, the dreaminess, the vague yet measureless desire, for which he would create a dramatic form. It blurs definition, clears edges, everything that comes from the will, it turns imagination from what is present, like a gold background in a religious picture, and it strengthens in every emotion whatever comes to it from far off, from brooding memory to dangerous hope. (Prose, p.64)

By resorting to a visual memory, analogy, or a ploy of visualization which has him "seeing lakes and broadening rivers", Martin seems to be disputing the claim that the element of sound is in itself an independent source and form of beauty. He seems, in short, to be betraying his own aesthetic. By endeavoring to explain through words the nature of the correspondence between sound and vision, Martin runs the risk of creating the impression that what is involved in this correspondence is primarily an exchange of vocabularies. The urgency with which he attempts to warrant his individual aesthetic is reflective of the resolve of a character to disregard inappropriate standards when appraising beauty. This urgency seems to me to be accompanied by the competing sub-conscious instinct of a poet to steer our appreciation of the aesthetic he has crafted. Raymond Williams has written of certain instances throughout the play which arouse an "acute embarrassment" by virtue of "a direct appeal to the audience or reader", which he sees as being compounded by what he regards as the unnecessarily intricate stage directions.[82] It is true that throughout much of the play the stage directions seem to exercise an almost authoritative influence. At the climax of the play authority shifts to the figuratively constructed lyrical outburst of Martin.

Though the authority is established largely through the beauty of its expression, the very fact that the expression of non-visual sites of beauty is locked within an explanatory rhetoric of largely visual terminology has a strangely counter-productive effect on the phenomenon it is endeavoring to explain and contextualize.

When the critics attribute to the play certain theoretical values they grant it a form of knowledge which conflicts with the form of knowledge which Synge is interested in expressing through his art. In a comparable fashion, when Martin articulates an awareness of sensory correspondence he is expressing himself in terms of the type of knowledge which he now knows to spell ruin for his genuine sense of beauty. His regained aesthetic shows traces of disavowal in its very culmination. The passage reads as though all of his and Mary's experience of the sound of flying birds, the warmth of the sun and the sweetness of the air, the smell of growth and the aroma of bloom, the sound of lambs and laughter and human voices, is relatively insubstantial and in need of completion. The analogy of these sense experiences to sight explains the process that is undergone by beauty in the transfer from blindness to vision, it can be seen as representing a finishing off of non-visual beauty in the same way that the theories of the critics complete the design of the play, telling us what it has accomplished, how to read it and what to see in it.

There is a level of reflection at the climax of the play which is not a component of the direct, unmediated experience which, according to my reading of the play, Martin has been in frantic pursuit of since his tolerance of the lies of the villagers was exhausted. Within the visual arts, the question of whether colour or drawing is the more essential component of painting has traditionally been hotly contested. Colour is taken to please the senses while drawing informs the mind about the shape of things and the connections between them. Throughout the play the main service supplied by Martin could be described as a type of auditory pigmentation. At the climax of the play his role seems to have shifted to that of supervision and explanation of design. Despite his eventual assumption of an elucidatory role of sorts, however, Martin's relation to the aesthetic portrayed throughout the play is not comparable with that of the critics who are so eager to explain the significance of the play in terms of the aversion of the blind couple to reality.

The boundaries of an alternative aesthetic are impressively set, however. Mary and Martin can imaginatively project themselves into a region where, as Martin expresses it, "the people will have kind voices maybe, and we won't know their bad looks or their villainy at all." (Plays 1, p.149) Understandably convinced that they have "seen too much" of their present environment, the pair decide to venture southward in order to exercise their newly re-established aesthetic in towns where they will be free of the restraints of visual memory and the menace of callous neighbors. Timmy's casual response to Martin's proposal is pitched at the wrong level to invalidate the aesthetic that informs the impulse towards relocation. Brutally dismissive of Martin's plan, Timmy replies:

> There's a power of deep rivers with floods in them where you do have to be lepping the stones and you going to the south, so I'm thinking the two of them will be drowned together in a short while, surely. (Plays 1, p.151)

A distinction was made in the previous chapter between feats of orientation and instances of genuine aesthetic appraisal. If the couple were to lose their way on their journey southward it would represent a failure only in terms of the former category. Even if Timmy were to usher the couple craftily into the next ditch, his easy success in foiling Martin and Mary's project would not have any bearing on the 'legitimacy' or otherwise of the aesthetic imperative that propels them away from the village. It is in keeping with the general crudeness of his character that Timmy regards the couple's attempted relocation exclusively in terms of navigation and is incapable of imagining the sensory delights they might encounter while feeling their way southward.

What my discussion of the incongruity of the critical response to the play comes down to, however, is the question of the compatibility between the sensitive forms of which the knowledge derivable from art consists, and the more conceptual form of knowledge that is distinctive of a more theoretical territory. When Martin transcends the boundaries of his own sensory experience in order to attend to its significance in

terms of vision, he does not, however, accompany the theoretician on his journey beyond the sensorial domain into the realm of metaphysical significance. Sylviane Agacinski helps us to put the nature of the difference between Martin and the critics into perspective when she declares that

> The conflict between the theoretical and the empirical is always one of the eye, and it takes place between the sensitive vision of the body's eye and the intellectual vision of what Plato called the eye of the soul.[83]

Martin stops at the sensory. He is not remotely inclined to take the step beyond it which the theorist can rarely resist taking. Martin's explanation of his aesthetic experience in terms of "finer sights" and of seeing hills and rivers and lakes, might be construed as a filtering his own ecstatically felt experience through what Grene identifies as Synge's initiating idea. Alternatively, Martin's explanatory analogy might be regarded simply as the only means of communicating with the sighted villagers, or as indicating the extent to which two different standards of beauty have their own claim on the aesthetic of the recently blinded person. I suspect that all three of these factors are simultaneously at work at the end of the play.

However it is interpreted, Martin's appeal does not usher the play beyond the domain of "the concreteness of reality" where Sidnell correctly judges its action to take place.[84] It is not clear whether it can any longer be said to represent the present reality of the blind protagonists, however. The disparity between Martin's unseen present reality and the highly visual terms in which he communicates this reality seems symptomatic of what we might call a 'borderline aesthetic'. At the conclusion of the play an element of doubt arises in relation to the extent to which the border in question is that which separates a partly conceptually-driven sighted playwright from the experience he is portraying, or that which separates a recently departed vision from a blindness which has not yet entirely installed itself. Martin's visually biased justification of his decision to remain blind seems suggestive of a degree of vacillation at the threshold of a new world. His determined course of action betrays no hint that he

ever harbored thoughts of withdrawing a hesitating foot, however. The protracted frustration of a long-divided aesthetic culminates in a fierce resolve to leave visual standards behind once and for all. His newly restructured sensory hierarchy dictates the complete restructuring of his experience, including his ideas of beauty. Passages from the autobiographies of the blind which describe the torment of a residual sighted aesthetic and the resolutions made at equivalent junctures to break free from the hold of visual memory will, I believe, help to further our understanding of the positive significance of what I regard as Martin and Mary's critically misconstrued decision to flee.

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[1] James Joyce, Ulysses (London: Penguin, 1986, 1st publ. 1922) p. 149.

[2] David Blackhall, The Way I See It (London: John Baker, 1970) Quoted in Robert V. Hine, Second Sight (London: University of California Press, 1993) p. 82.

[3] J.M. Synge, Collected Works, Volume II: Prose, ed. Alan Price (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) p. 124. [Synge overheard the words spoken by a young girl while travelling on a train from Galway to Dublin.]

[4] Leonard Cohen, I Left a Woman Waiting.

[5] David Michael Levin, The Listening Self: Personal Growth, Social Change and the Closure of Metaphysics (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 84.

[6] Ibid., p. 84.

[7] David Carroll, Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida (London: Methuen, 1987) p. xiv.

[8] Pierre Villey, The World of the Blind: A Psychological Study (London: Duckworth, 1930) p. 98.

[9] Hector Chevigny and Sydell Braverman, The Adjustment of the Blind (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1950) p. 133.

[10] The World of the Blind p. 94.

[11] John Milton, 'Samson Agonistes', II, 94-97, The Complete Poems, ed., B.A. Wright (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1980) p. 445.

[12] Ann Saddlemyer, 'Synge's Soundscapes', in Irish University Review Vol 22, No.1 (1992) Special Issue 'Serving the World', 60. [Reprinted in Nicholas Grene, ed., Interpreting Synge: Essays from the Synge Summer School, 1991-2000 (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000) pp. 177-192.

[13] See Gertrude Schoepperle, 'John Synge and his 'Old French Farce'', North American Review, No. 214 (1921), 504-13.

[14] I am using the spelling of the place-name as it is presented in David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens, J.M. Synge 1871-1909 (New York: Collier Books, 1961) p. 140.

[15] J.M. Synge The Well of the Saints , ed., Nicholas Grene (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982) p. 25.

[16] Maurice Bourgeois, John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre (Bronx: Benjamin Blom, 1965, 1st. publ. 1913) p. 183.

[17] Alan Price, Synge and Anglo Irish Drama (New York: Russell and Russell, 1972) p. 139.

[18] Ibid., p. 157.

[19] Ibid., p. 142.

[20] Ibid., p. 148.

[21] Ibid., p. 148.

[22] Ibid., p. 149.

[23] Ibid., p. 155.

[24] Grene, The Well of the Saints, p. 25.

[25] Synge and Anglo Irish Drama, p. 156.

[26] Ibid., p. 156.

[27] Robin Skelton, The Writings of J.M. Synge (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971) p. 99.

[28] Ibid., p. 100.

[29] Ibid., p. 95.

[30] Ibid., p. 98.

[31] See also Eugene Benson, J M Synge (London: Macmillan, 1982) p. 91, Donna Gerstenberger, John Millington Synge (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964) pp. 55-58.

[32] The Writings of J M Synge p. 95.

[33] Ibid., p. 100.

[34] John Millington Synge, p. 57, p. 60.

[35] Quoted from Edgar Quinet's La Création, Vol I, Alain Buisine, 'The First Eye', trans. Carla Frecerro, Yale French Studies No. 61 (1981), 270.

[36] Ibid., p. 266. (Buisine quotes from Henri du Cleuziou, La Création du l'homme et les premiers âges de l'humanité)

[37] It is interesting to compare Martin's immediate reaction to the visual world to the following extract from the 'Notebooks' Synge was keeping while on the Aran Islands:

A heavy roll from the Atlantic is today on the north west of the island and the surf line is of wonderful splendour. I am used to it now and look backwards to the morning a few weeks ago when I looked out first unexpectedly over the higher cliffs of Aranmore, and stopped trembling with delight. A sudden gust so beautiful is a danger. It is well arranged that for the most part we do not realize the beauty of a new wonderful experience till it has grown familiar and safe to us. If a man could be supposed to come with a fully educated perception of music, yet quite ignorant of it and hear for the first time let us say Lamoureux's Orchestra in a late symphony of Beethoven I doubt his brain would ever recover from the

shock. If a man could come with a full power of appreciation and stand for the first time before a woman – a woman perhaps who was very beautiful – what would he suffer? If a man grew up knowing nothing of death or decay and found suddenly a grey corpse in his path what would [he] suffer? Some such emotion was in me the day I looked first upon these rising magnificent waves towering in dazzling white and green before the cliff; if I had not seen waves before I would have likely lost my sense. It would be an interesting if cruel experiment to bring some sensitive nature from the central position of Ireland – who had never seen the sea – to carry him blindfold to Aran on a calm day and keeping [him] in confinement till a great storm arose lead him on the cliff and take away the cloth from his eyes. I am not able to imagine any shock so great! (Prose, pp. 97-98n)

[38] Yale French Studies No. 61 (1981), 270.

[39] Robert Hewison, John Ruskin – the argument of the eye (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) p. 212.

[40] Grene, The Well of the Saints, pp. 20-21.

[41] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (Middlesex: Penguin 1982, 1st publ. 1902) p. 53.

[42] Ibid., p. 54.

[43] Ibid., p. 54. A more recent rendering of the same phenomenon is provided by Jacques Ellul. Writing in 1985, Ellul draws a connection between nihilism and the modern tendency towards ocularcentrism, claiming that "The triumph of things visual involves a radical negation of Christianity." The sense of continuity with James's thought is perhaps most evident when Ellul makes the following suggestion: "It is not by accident that the enormous popularity of the 'death of God' was born in our world of images: the impossibility of representing God visually leads inevitably in our day to the impossibility of his existence." Jacques Ellul, The Humiliation of the Word transl. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1985) p. 198.

[44] The Varieties of Religious Experience p. 55.

[45] Ibid., p. 55.

[46] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. xv.

[47] Ibid., p. 23.

[48] These extracts are taken from Gregory of Nyssa, On Perfection 110- 111, which appears in V.W. Callaghan trans, Ascetical Works, vol 58, in Roy J Deterrari et al eds The Fathers of the Church 55-122 (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967) (See The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism pp. 23-25.)

[49] The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism p21, p24.

[50] Ibid., p. 24.

[51] Ibid., p. 31.

[52] The Varieties of Religious Experience p. 296.

[53] Quoted by Harpham, The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism p. xiv.

[54] The Varieties of Religious Experience p. 290.

[55] Twenty Five Points to Remember, No 9, The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism p. 30.

[56] Ibid., p. 45.

[57] Ibid., p. 62.

[58] Kenneth Clark, Moments of Vision (London: John Murray, 1981) p. 41.

[59] The Humiliation of the Word pp. 13-14.

[60] W. J. Mc Cormack, Fool of the Family. A Life of J.M. Synge (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000) p. 280.

[61] W.M.G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre (London: Rich and Cowan, 1935) pp. 167-8.

[62] Irving Babbit, The New Laokoon. An essay on the confusion of the arts (London: Constable and Co., 1910) p. 127.

[63] Mary C. King, The Drama of J.M. Synge (London: Fourth Estate, 1985) p. 107.

[64] John Keats, 'Hyperion' II 127-8, Complete Poems , ed., Jack Stillinger. (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982) p. 259.

[65] Another factor in the reasoning behind my decision not to provide a more comprehensive account of Mary's aesthetic is that in Chapter Four I consider the extent to which the differential nature of an aesthetics of blindness can be argued to connect it to a feminist aesthetic.

[66] Elisa Steenberg, 'Verbalizing the Aesthetic Experience', British Journal of Aesthetics Vol. 32, No. 4 (1992), 343.

[67] Ibid., 346.

[68] Ibid., 344.

[69] Irish University Review Vol. 22 No. 1, (1992), 56.

[70] The Drama of J.M. Synge p. 108.

[71] Ibid., p. 164.

[72] William Atkinson, 'J.M. Synge's Vagrant Aesthetic', Alexander G. Gonzalez, ed., Assessing the Achievement of J.M.Synge. (London: Greenwood Press, 1996) p. 167.

[73] Quoted in Fool of the Family p. 229 (from Trinity College Dublin Manuscripts, 4379 ff 46-7.

[74] John Millington Synge p. 55.

[75] Erich von Hornbostel, "The Unity of the Senses", Psyche, 7 (1927), 83-89.

[76] J.P. Nafe, "The psychology of Felt Experience", American Journal of Psychology , 39 (1927), 383.

[77] W.B. Yeats, 'The Bounty of Sweden', Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1979) p. 203.

[78] David Pole, Aesthetics, Form and Emotion, ed., Georges Roberts (London; Duckworth, 1983) p. 221.

[79] Grene, The Well of the Saints, p. 8.

[80] Erika Von Erkardt – Siebold,'Harmony of the Senses in English, German and French Romanticism', Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, 47 (1932) 588-89.

[81] Quoted by Ann Saddlemyer, in 'Deirdre of the Sorrows: Literature First ... Drama Afterwards', Daniel J. Casey, ed., Critical Essays on John Millington Synge (Oxford: Maxwell Macmillan, 1994) p. 176.

[82] Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971) p. 134.

[83] Sylviane Agacinski, 'Theoretical Excess: Transformations of Painting', Peter Osborne, ed., From an Aesthetic Point of View.Philosophy, Art and the Senses p. 98.

[84] M.J. Sidnell, 'The Well of the Saints and the Light of this World', S.B. Bushrui, ed., Sunshine and the Moon's Delight. A Centenary Tribute to John Millington Synge 1871-1909 (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe and The American University of Beirut, 1972) p. 53.

Chapter Three:

The Portraitist's Night: Apertures of Memory in Yeats's On Baile's Strand.

In 1905, the year of the production of The Well of the Saints, Yeats was busy revising a play he had initially written some two years previously. The play in question, On Baile's Strand, is based on a story from Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne, entitled 'The Only Son of Aoife'. It was first performed on 27 December 1904, as part of a triple bill which marked the inauguration of the Abbey as the home of the Irish National Theatre Society, and received very enthusiastically. First published in In the Seven Woods in 1903, the play underwent quite a radical revision before its inclusion in the 1906 publication of Poems 1899-1905. Yeats derived a great deal of relatively unqualified satisfaction from what was to become the most frequently produced of his plays on the Abbey stage. It represents the dramatic portrayal of a theme which Yeats had addressed a dozen years earlier in the narrative poem 'Cuchulain's Fight With the Sea', and which remains an obsession with the poet until the end of his life. It is in his mind, for example, when, glancing back from the lofty vantage of what was to be collected as one of his Last Poems, he recalls:

> And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread
> Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea;
> Heart-mysteries there, and yet when all is said
> It was the dream itself enchanted me[1]

Although in chronological terms the revised version of On Baile's Strand (which I shall be focusing on here) falls between the plays considered in chapters Two and Four, in a number of ways the positioning of this chapter at the centre of an investigation into an aesthetics of blindness is misleading. The play is included largely out of interest for the many significant ways in which it deviates from the concerns which are actually central to this enquiry.

Yeats's treatment of blindness in On Baile's Strand cannot, for reasons that will become evident, be said to fulfil all of the non-metaphorical and non-metaphysical criteria outlined in the opening chapter as being relevant to a consideration of what I am calling an 'aesthetics of blindness'. It is not even strictly accurate to say that the play in its entirety presents a portrayal of blindness in the way that The Well of the Saints, for example, does. Neither the character of Blind Man nor the condition of blindness itself are central to the play. Although events both begin and conclude with an exhibition of Blind Man's pragmatic and exclusively self-serving cleverness, the main plot of the play, which depicts the consequences for Cuchulain of his swearing of an oath of allegiance to Conchubar, the High King of Ulster, scarcely involves the figure of Blind Man at all. He remains very much on the fringes of the main plot, his peripheral role designed largely to further the progress of events that do not directly involve him, and to invest events with a largely metaphorical significance. As such, the play cannot be aligned in any simple way with either The Well of the Saints or Molly Sweeney, the play we will be considering in the next chapter. In many ways the critical approach to the play in this chapter represents an inversion of the strategies I adopt towards Synge and Friel. The change of approach corresponds to what I regard as the fascinating and instructive departure of Yeats's play from the terms of this thesis. Only a very strained interpretation would claim that the play itself explicitly contributes much that is of direct significance to an investigation into the experience of beauty in blindness. In terms of the level of interplay between material and representation, and between abstracted, heavily metaphricized representation and the located perspective and corporeal practice of aesthetics, however, many aspects of On Baile's Strand are fraught with what, in the context of the broader interests of this project, we might term a 'leading significance'. The interpretation which follows of a highly visual perspective on blindness also encourages a concise and self-reflective review of the nature of the interaction between some of the very different components of this interdisciplinary investigation.

In this chapter I outline what I regard as the primarily metaphorical function of blindness within Yeats's On Baile's Strand. The withholding of knowledge, and the ungrasped significance of much of the information that is acquired by characters throughout the play heightens the extent to which inadvertence, a metaphorical rather

than physical form of blindness, is the most pressing concern of the dramatist. I contend that the intensely visual aesthetic which underlies the play's portrayal of sightlessness is betrayed by the painterly character of Yeats's portrayal of influences which are actually absent from the stage. In spite of his relegation to the margins of the play, I argue, Blind Man attains a pivotal role by virtue of the beauty he has seen. The importance to the play of invisible forces is shown to upset the conventional dramatic experience by isolating the audience from the described spectacle. The theme of resemblance is central to the dramatic effect of the play. I concentrate on an assessment of its significance, and that of Blind Man's relation to it in aesthetic terms. The play's 'fascination with what's hidden' is reflected in the fact that what I take to be the most pervasive influence throughout the play -- that of the feminine spirit represented by Aoife and the Sidhe -- does not make a physical appearance at any stage. I consider the significance of Yeats's instinct to 'remedy' such visual absence by employing a backward, image-restoring glance, rather than hailing the conditions of sightlessness as an opportunity for an exploration of the capacities of the non-visual senses.

Yeats's approach to blindness is considered as a convenient medium through which to study the "deep contradictions" within his mind which have been pointed out by critics such as Jeffares, Ellmann, and the poet himself.[2] On Baile's Strand is presented in this chapter as a very telling example of peculiar productivity of this friction. In addition to being the son of a pre-Raphaelite painter, after all, Yeats was a student of the hidden thing and an avid frequenter of darkened rooms. I try to effect a reconciliation of sorts between the comprehensive accounts of Yeats's visuality provided by critics such as Giorgio Melchiori, F.A.C. Wilson, Frank Kermode, Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, T.R. Henn, and others, and the accounts presented by Richard Ellmann A. Norman Jeffares, Thomas Parkinson, and others, of Yeats's tendency towards concealment. I might dramatically canvass what I present in this chapter with the observation that while love may have tortured him, and age and death tested him, it was blindness that tore Yeats apart. The insight we can gain into Yeats's aesthetic through a consideration of his treatment of blindness illustrates that such a statement is not quite the hyperbole it seems. I suggest finally that Yeats's treatment of blindness can be regarded as a literary device, a strategy to upset and defamiliarize the conventional process of literary hermeneutics. The

effect of the careful concealment of beauty in On Baile's Strand, I will argue, is to render the visual uniquely conspicuous. The result is a new and sophisticated feat of vision as a metaphorical rendering of blindness is resorted to as a means of building up to what David Clark refers to as "recognition scenes".[3]

The most immediately pressing task is to illustrate why, in the context of the interests of this enquiry, the lack of vision exhibited by the Blind Man of On Baile's Strand has little to do with the physical condition of blindness, and why the knowledge which he parades is equally removed from the type of sensory awareness which is of interest here. While the character of Blind Man is peripheral, the condition itself is metaphorical, and the insights it yields owe much to a type of deductive reasoning and practical intelligence rather than aesthetic awareness. Both sources of deviation from the driving preoccupations of this project as a whole can be shown, nevertheless, to have a significant, albeit predominately eliminatory, bearing on this investigation into what an aesthetics of blindness might entail.

3.1. All Metaphor, Blind Man: Blindness that is delighted to be but clever.

The Blind Man and the Fool are the two principals of the subplot which is one of Yeats's most significant additions to his source, and has been widely critically hailed as demonstrating Yeats's "growing mastery of construction".[4]Yeats himself said of the play that the subplot copies the main plot "much as a shadow upon the wall copies one's body in the firelight"[5] As the play progresses the subplot seems to serve the dual function of parodying and determining the events and characters of the main plot, with the cleverness or spiritual blindness of the Blind Man corresponding in obvious ways to the prudential motivation of Conchubar. The derivative and peripheral role of Blind Man in the play has been described by many of the play's critics. S.B. Bushrui, for instance, refers to the Fool and Blind Man as "equivalents" of Cuchulain and Conchubar, but "on a lower scale", while John Rees Moore observes that Blind Man functions as a "reflector" of the main events of the play, a "degraded Tiresias" who exemplifies the type of "sinister small-minded prudence and greed forever gnawing at heroic pretension", his association with the Fool representing a sort of "unheroic alliance"[6]. Knowland describes the insight

provided by the lowly, or "squalid and puerile" pair as a "destructive commentary" which is "continually reductive", and Barton Friedman uses terms such as "reduction" and "shrinkage" to convey the nature of the relationship between main plot and subplot[7].

With the opening lines of the play – the Fool's proclaiming to Blind Man "What a clever man you are though you are blind! There's nobody with two eyes in his head that is as clever as you are." – questions in relation to the nature of Blind Man's astuteness are immediately thrown open. Much in Yeats's experience before the writing of On Baile's Strand might lead one to expect that he would attribute a level of perceptual or sensory knowledge to Blind Man. There was a considerable sensory component, for example, connected with the appeal which his delvings into the occult held for him. Of his time spent with the Theosophical Society, Jeffares has commented that "what mainly interested him was the romantic figure of Madame Blavatsky and the air of mystery that her house possessed", while Giorgio Melchiori observes that the interest in magic which developed in early youth and led to the founding of the Hermetic Society "has an essentially aesthetic origin."[8] Observing the same aesthetic fascination with the dark, Ellmann recalls "Everything about spiritualism was fascinating to him, from the small number of collaborators to the darkened rooms and atmosphere charged with suspense and hidden drama."[9] Some ten years before the completion of On Baile's Strand Yeats had composed a much celebrated description of a "bee-loud glade" where midnight was "all a glimmer" with "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore", and evening "full of the linnet's wings", which, in its subordinating of visual beauty to an auditory equivalent, is comparable with what was described in the last chapter as the "auditory panorama" of The Well of the Saints. Whatever spirit inspired the elevation of non-visual modes of perception in an early poem such as 'The Lake Isle of Inisfree', however, does not seem to have been consulted in the depiction of the experience of the Blind Man from On Baile's Strand.

The Fool and Blind Man had been given the names Barach and Fintain in the 1903 version of the play. Bushrui suggests that the decision to deprive the pair of names was a gesture towards the creation of "aesthetic distance". The two characters become "types", or "humour figures", or what Louis MacNeice refers to as "fable types", the significance of which, or so Bushrui would have us believe, would only be lessened by the application

of names. In the revised play the pair have become "neutral agents", "symbols of humanity", rather than "mere individuals".[10] The consequences of such a reductive approach to characterization -- the addition of grotesque masks was to be a further reductionist afterthought -- for any portrayal of the specifics of an individual aesthetic sensibility are, not, self-evidently, very favourable. Blind Man's most pronounced characteristics are his knowingness and the opportunism afforded to him by this practical omniscience. The knowledge he has accumulated, however, is not of the sort which interests us here. It is the knowledge which is unique to the one Cuchulain describes as "old listener at doors" rather than one who exercises the type of listening that is central to the achievement of The Well of the Saints, for example. It is overheard rather than heard, it is hearsay, gossip, the spoils of the eavesdropper which we have seen Synge contrast so effectively with a state of engrossed attunement to a non-visual aesthetic. The nature of the knowledge which Yeats attributes to Blind Man becomes evident when the Fool continues:

> Who but you could have thought that the henwife sleeps everyday a little at noon? I would never be able to steal anything if you did not tell me where to look for it. (VPl, p.459)

The appropriately crude ends to which Blind Man applies his cleverness are also indicated through the Fool's praise:

> And what a good cook you are! You take the fowl out of my hands after I have stolen it and plucked it, and you put it into the big pot at the fire there, and I can go out and run races with the witches at the edge of the waves and get an appetite, and when I've got it, there's the hen waiting inside for me, done to the turn. (VPl, p.459)

Blind Man's sinister repetition of the expression "done to the turn" awakens us to the fact that he has more than the chicken on his mind. Yeats's description of Cuchulain in a

letter to Frank Fay emphasizes the metaphorical aspect of the blindness that he was endeavouring to portray:

> The touch of something hard, repellent and yet alluring, self assertive yet self immolating, is not all but it must be there. He is the fool – wandering, passive, houseless and almost loveless. Conchubar is reason that is blind because it can only reason because it is cold. Are they not the cold moon and the hot sun?[11]

The blindness in question here is a type of mercenary single-mindedness that measures satisfaction in terms of fullness of stomach and the ability to cheat a comrade out of his dinner. The hunger is not depicted as the basis of anything that we might call a gustatory or culinary aesthetic, however, and as the play develops and the audience gradually becomes wise to Cuchulain's ever thickening blindness, it removes itself further and further from the realm of sensory experience. The Fool, by contrast with Blind Man, is extremely naive and gullible. His function seems to be to extract the worst – or the 'spiritual' blindness - from Blind Man. Exhibiting a blindness of his own, the Fool proceeds to 'praise' Blind Man for his 'good plans' and 'good cooking'. When Blind Man's seemingly knowing reaction to feeling the back of Conchubar's chair -- "Ah-ah" -- arouses the curiosity of the Fool, he obligingly enlightens him, and the audience, about the events that are about to unfold:

> I know the big chair. It is today the High King Conchubar is coming. They have brought his chair. He is going to be Cuchulain's master in earnest from this day out. It is that he is coming for (VPl, p.463).

As the Fool presses the Blind Man for more details about the oath-taking process, Blind Man responds condescendingly (though not altogether unjustifiably) "You have no wits to understand such things" (VPl, p.463). Shortly afterwards Blind Man will accuse Cuchulain himself of ignorance and attribute his lack of knowledge to the fact that the warrior has "his head in the clouds" (VPl, p.469). In compliance with the patterns of

interconnections between characters described by Yeats in his letter to Fay, Blind Man literally assumes the role of Conchubar, playing him against the Fool's Cuchulain, as part of his attempt to enlighten the Fool, and accurately predicts the course events are about to take by asking "...what sons have you to pay your debts and to put a stone over you when you die? Take the oath, I tell you. Take a strong oath" (VPl, p.465). Shortly afterwards Blind Man confides to the Fool the means by which he has accessed his store of knowledge: "When you were stealing the fowl, I was lying in a hole in the sand, and I heard three men coming with a shuffling sort of noise. They were wounded and groaning" (VPl, p.467). Relaying information to the Fool at a pace that he knows to be in accordance with the way his appetite is aroused, Blind Man tells of a fight that has taken place on the shore after a young man landed there and refused to reveal his name to the men who were guarding the shore. All the while, the Fool is becoming more and more hungry, trying to bring the conversation back to the chicken that is in the pot: "That's enough. Come on now to the fowl" (VPl, p.467). Blind Man distracts him from thoughts of the chicken which he does not particularly want to share, by relaying more gossip:

> I know who that young man is. I heard the men who were running away say he had red hair, that he had come from Aoife's country, that he was coming to kill Cuchulain (VPl, p.467).

When the Fool tries again to incorporate the fowl into the conversation, Blind Man replies:

> No hurry, no hurry. I know whose son it is. I wouldn't tell anybody else, but I will tell you, a secret is better to you than your dinner. You like being told secrets (VPl, p.469).

The secret in question is that "That young man is Aoife's son", and that this son had been raised to kill Cuchulain. The Fool's hunger gets the better of his curiosity once more, and Blind Man responds:

> Listen. I know who the young man's father is, but I won't say. I would be afraid to say. Ah, Fool you would forget everything if you could know who the young man's father is (VPl, p.473).

Before the Fool has a chance to force the withheld information out of Blind Man Cuchulain is heard approach and the Blind Man encourages the Fool to ask the warrior about the parentage of the new arrival, which the Fool resolves to do, but falls comically and crucially short of doing:

> I'll ask him. Cuchulain will know. He was in Aoife's country. [*Goes up stage*]. But, no, I won't ask him, I would be afraid. [*Going up again*]. Yes, I will ask him. What harm in asking? The Blind Man said I was to ask him. [*Going down*]. No, no. I'll not ask him. He might kill me. I have but killed hens and geese and pigs. He has killed kings. [*Goes up again almost to big door*]. Who says I'm afraid? I'm not afraid. I'm no coward. I'll ask him. No, no, Cuchulain, I'm not going to ask you. (VPl, p.475).

And so we are kept in the dark. These scenes between Fool and Blind Man parody the exchanges between Cuchulain and Conchubar which follow, with blindness being depicted as symptomatic of the atrophication and abasement of heroism and imagination in the contemporary world. The knowledge which Yeats attributes to Blind Man is clearly not of an aesthetic order. Blind Man does derive his knowledge through his senses however – by feeling the back the High King's throne, for example, or overhearing the conversations of others. He is not, in other words, isolated from the aesthetic realm by virtue of being banished to the transcendental region which has been the blind man's traditional haunt. There are suggestions of this transcendental association with the dark in Yeats's essay 'Magic', written two years before the first version of On Baile's Strand,

when Yeats champions "the visions of the truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed"[12]. It is there too in Yeats's admiration for Blake's blind seer Tiriel who experiences a harmony with the "mood essences" of every living being by virtue of his being "no longer bound by the experiences of his body". The capacity for individual, subjective aesthetic appreciation, of a mind which has "passed into the impersonal portion of his own mind" and thus "perceives that it is not a mind but all minds" is not likely to be very great. That there are few traces of kinship between the seer and the Blind Man of On Baile's Strand, however, is indicated by the latter's supplying of the detailed background of the events that present themselves to the audience. Blind Man's self-interested immersion in the political significance of the day to day events of the turbulent time is also indicated by the coincidence of the information he has garnered with the knowledge which Cuchulain so desperately lacks.

While assessing the climax of the play Harold Bloom makes the point that Cuchulain has been "warring against the sea, against blind inadvertence, from his first entrance."[13] It is largely because they are juxtaposed with the worldliness of Blind Man and Conchubar that Cuchulain and his 'shadow', the Fool, are made to appear so naive. Practically every character on stage, in other words, exhibits the symptoms of one metaphorical variation of blindness or another. Both the hero's defiant groping towards his own tragic destiny, and the spiritual blindness of the practically alert perspectives of Blind Man and Conchubar are more central to Yeats's vision than the physical condition of Blind Man. Cuchulain, for example, has no suspicion of the significance of his declaration when he responds to Conchubar's attribution of his recklessness to his childlessness by boasting

> I would leave
>
> My house and name to none that would not face
>
> Even myself in battle. (VPl, p.485)

When the young man arrives he staunchly refuses to enlighten Cuchulain, insisting that

I am under bonds

To tell my name to no man; but it's noble (VPl, p.502)

As ill equipped as the Fool to make the connections between the instalments of information that are being released to him, Cuchulain says to the Young Man:

I would meet them all in arms

If I'd a son like you . . .(VPl, p.510)

and, even more 'blindly',

If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me

As certainly as if I had a son

And fought him, I should be deadly to him (VPl, p.511)

Just as the warmth of a new friendship threatens to make its way into Cuchulain's increasingly affectionless life, the potential is checked by what John Rees Moore describes as Cuchulain's "inadvertent though purposeful act of violence."[14] The hero's task is one of unblinding, as his loyalty to the principles of the heroic life leads him to realise the extent of the cost it will exact from him. The preserver of inadvertence, the agent of dramatic irony, Blind Man keeps everybody in the dark by taking care not to give the game away. Blindness is made, in turn, to masquerade as guile, cunning, naivete, treachery, appetite, fate, and dramatic irony, while the physical condition itself, and its consequences for aesthetic experience, is subordinated to such metaphorical applications of it. Because a ruse inspired by a condition of spiritual destitution is more pertinent than the condition itself to Yeats's depiction of blindness, his Blind Man seems vaguely akin

to that character from a late poem who, stalking "through the terrible novelty of light", admits to being "All metaphor". (VP, pp.622-623) It is only, as I see it, when the 'unheroic alliance' are joined onstage by their heroic equivalents, that the play begins to shed a certain light, albeit by means of a somewhat oddly refracted beam, on some of the questions that are at the forefront of this inquiry.

3.2. Beauty as a light-report on that woman's remembered countenance.

As soon as Blind Man exits by a side door in procrastinatory mode, Cuchulain and Conchubar enter by the main door, engaged in tumultuous debate. Conchubar has summoned Cuchulain to him because the liberty-taking warrior's negligence in guarding the shore has enabled "a youngster out of Aoife's country" (Scotland) to land undetected and unchallenged. In the ensuing conversation the High King does his best to subdue or regulate the wild ways and ecstatic spirit of his maverick servant by convincing him to take an oath of allegiance. Naturally affronted, Cuchulain reminds Conchubar of the lengths he has always gone to to protect Conchubar, and asks

> Am I
>
> So slack and idle that I need a whip
>
> Before I serve you? (VPl, p.479)

In the ensuing debate about the respective importance of responsibilities to family and state, and the right to individual freedom, Conchubar informs Cuchulain that his children, who are poised to assume the throne after Conchubar relinquishes it, have become wary of the liberties which the warrior's cavalier attitude to service has prompted him to take with his duties to the King. When Cuchulain then embarks on a tirade against the High King's children on the basis that "they have no pith", and "will lie soft" where

their predescessors "lie hard", Conchubar counters in exactly the way "old listener at doors" had foreseen, in an attempt to enforce the oath on Cuchulain:

> You rail at them
>
> Because you have no children of your own (VPl, pp.481-483)

When Conchubar reminds Cuchulain that he has heard him cry in his sleep about his desire for a son, Cuchulain is adamant that it is just as well that he leaves

> No pallid ghost or mockery of a man
>
> To drift and mutter in the corridors
>
> Where I have laughed and sung (VPl, p.483)

Cuchulain, in contrast to Conchubar, claims that he is content to "leave names upon the harp". It is at this juncture that Conchubar resorts to making an appeal to what he knows to be the most tender of Cuchulain's weaknesses, and changes the entire dynamic of the play. He recalls to Cuchulain that he had once confided to him while they had been drinking that he longed to have a child with Aoife, "that fierce woman of the camp" in Scotland. Aoife, we recall, is the woman who has been reduced to the figure of a cap thrown in the air by the Fool in his attempt to visualize the series of events related to him in Blind Man's cunningly fragmentary instalments. Cuchulain's rendering of the same invisible entity is central to the play's particular relevance to the questions pursued throughout the course of this study. Hurled into an immediate frenzy by the mere allusion to his former lover, he accuses Conchubar of admiring only servility in women, and continues:

A fierce woman of the camp!

But I am getting angry about nothing.

You have never seen her. Ah! Conchubar, had you seen her

With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers

Thrown backward, and the bowstring at her ear,

Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes

Full of good counsel as it were with wine,

Or when love ran through all the lineaments

Of her wild body – although she had no child,

None other had all beauty, queen or lover,

Or was so fitted to give birth to kings. (VPl, p.487)

This is Aoife exclusively as light waves reported her to Cuchulain. Much of the critical attention received by this passage focuses on its autobiographical significance. A.S. Knowland, for instance, refers to the "verbal echoes in Cuchulain's description of Aoife of passages in the poems that relate to Maud Gonne and himself."[15] In the commentary on the plays which Knowland and Jeffares offer jointly, this description of Aoife's beauty is mapped onto specific poetic descriptions of Maud Gonne, such as the description of her in 'No Second Troy' as "Being high and solitary and most stern"; the reference to "Such a high delicate head" in the poem 'Peace', and the passage from 'The Trembling of the Veil' in which Yeats describes Gonne's "look of exultation as she walks with her laughing head thrown back."[16] The passage definitely seems to threaten the validity of claims such as Melchiori's that despite his background in the visual arts, Yeats's art is "in no sense pictorial." In Samhain 1904 Yeats himself observes, for example, that "poetry and indeed all picturesque writing is perpetually making little pictures"[17]

The aspect of this portraiture which assumes an importance in the context of this study is not the autobiographical reference it provides, but the fact that it does not reflect his dear tormenting friend in all of the aspects and qualities that he knew her to possess, but only as he knew her to appear to his heightened consciousness of visual experience. As such they also testify to his awareness of the laws governing the effective assimilation of visual imagery. The question of the extent to which Yeats's poetry was informed by his background in visual arts has been exhaustively examined by critics already alluded to here. Countless autobiographical episodes could be instanced as influencing the highly visually evocative nature of descriptions such as this one of Aoife. One might start with the visual compliment to the youthful initiation into the delights of romantic poetry provided by his father's sketching of pre-Raphaelite beauties into the margins of his first Shelley, or with the effect of an early move to a house in Bedford Park which was "like those we had seen in pictures", and the people there who were to be seen around tables at which "Sinbad the Sailor might have sat", "dressed like people in story-books"[18]. The climate in which he himself admits to having learned to think, permeated as it was by both the influence of Walter Pater, and a devotion to certain pre-Raphaelite principles, also helped to nurture a conception of beauty in terms of iconicity.

That Yeats never quite managed to relinquish these principles is evidenced by a late expression of satisfaction upon the completion of the tower at Thoor Ballylee: "It is a great pleasure to live in a place where George makes at every moment a fourteenth century picture"[19]. The emphasis on highly stylised pattern and visual symbolisation which was a characteristic of his interest in magic might also be mentioned in this context, together with his association with the likes of George Russell, Madame Blavatsky and MacGregor Mathers. The link between poetry and visual images provided by his early discovery of esoteric systems can be included among Yeats's visual influences, as can the details in the philosophy he developed which seem to have appealed, as Wilson points out "to the poet's rather than to the logician's eye"[20]. The point to be emphasized is that the lyrical passage in which, as John Rees Moore observes, "Aoife is remembered in poses typical of her athletic prowess" is largely the product of Yeats's familiarity with the conventions of visual art[21].

A more naive portraitist would have endeavoured to realise his/her subject as she presented herself to their entire consciousness in terms of that very particular unity which characterises the laws of vision. Yeats does not try to force an exhaustive description of all that Aoife means to him into his account of her physical beauty. He is sufficiently familiar with painterly conventions to understand that when such undisciplined and unrefined ardour is brought to the task of portraiture, it inevitably results in the dissolution of the unity of the visual image. Although Aoife's influence pervades the play, as we shall see, Yeats knew better than to compress into this brief description anything more than what Charles Biederman terms "the image resulting from the light bouncing off" his subject, thus maintaining "the unity peculiar to the forms of objects when conveyed by light"[22]. Whether we discuss it in terms of Cuchulain's description of Aoife or of Yeats's description of Maud Gonne, the painterly feat accomplished entails the transposition and ordered filtering of an entire sensorial familiarity with a subject into and through the principles which govern the relationship between visual imagery and the medium of light. However vehemently Yeats came to deride this painterly instinct and try to conceal or suppress it, a more ambitious, or 'comprehensive' – a less exclusively visual – depiction of Aoife, might well have captured her more 'truly', while achieving less of a semblance of her visual appearance. Yeats, as Charles Biederman might have expressed it, is less concerned with capturing Aoife as a three-dimensional living entity, than with relaying "light-reports" of her appearance, and with registering her exactly as she registered herself exclusively on his own visual receptors.[23] What is most extraordinary about Yeats's depiction of blindness is that the only thing that threatens to save Cuchulain from the 'romantic isolation' traditionally the lot of the solitary recipient of such visual beauty, is that Blind Man has encountered it too.

In his study of the "cult of isolated joy", the cost of the Image, Frank Kermode describes at length the "sense of irreconcilable difference and precarious communication" experienced by English poets, the torment of alienation imposed on the beholder of the "romantic image"[24]. It is an indication of the visual nature of Yeats's depiction of blindness that in On Baile's Strand it falls to the Blind Man to spare Cuchulain this particular agony. Describing the estrangement that necessarily accompanies perception of the radiant Image in relation to such writers as Joyce and Pater, Kermode describes the

'price' to be paid in the "very costly matter of beatific visioning" as "not only to be separate from all others but to have not even one friend", and as "the sacrifice of a thousand possible sympathies."[25] Cuchulain's judgment that his exchange with Conchubar is superficial because of Conchubar's exclusion from the privileged group who have been granted a glimpse of the beautiful queen is an exemplification of the phenomenon described by Kermode when he observes that

> The Image, for all its concentration, precision, and oneness, is desperately difficult to communicate, and has for that reason alone as much to do with the alienation of the seer as the necessity of his existing in the midst of a hostile society.[26]

The loneliness described by Kermode threatens to engulf Cuchulain until he happens upon the unlikely solace of a blind man's company.

3.3. Blind Man and the balancing centredness of the periphery.

In the opening scene between the Fool and Blind Man the following exchange takes place which radically influences the complexion of the blindness depicted:

Blind Man: That young man is Aoife's son. I am sure it is Aoife's son, it flows in upon me that it is Aoife's son. You have often heard me talking of Aoife, the great woman-fighter Cuchulain got the mastery over in the North?

Fool: I know, I know. She is one of those cross queens that live in hungry Scotland.

Blind Man: I am sure it is her son. I was in Aoife's country for a long time.

Fool: That was before you were blinded for putting a curse on the wind. (VPl, pp.469-471)

The investing of Blind Man with a visual memory, as Yeats was to do with Hanrahan in 'The Tower', has radical implications for the type of contribution we can expect the play to make to this investigation. Changing darkness into light, and absence into remembered visual presence, it also isolates the audience from that exclusive group of witnesses to arguably the play's most pervasive influence, which consists only of Cuchulain and Blind Man. Because a considerable portion of the significance of Blind Man's presence is a consequence of his having seen Aoife, an analysis of the nature of the centrality of the absent queen's influence will in turn help to establish the significance of the figure of Blind Man.

The play attracts a lot of attention for its formal accomplishments. A.S. Knowland's praise of Yeats's feat of dramatic construction has already been alluded to. John Rees Moore has written of Yeats's "skilful leading from storytelling into drama", pointing out that "(s)imply as dramatic narrative the play makes an economical and expert structure out of a situation chosen with Yeats's sure instinct for dramatical effect."[27] Peter Ure praises the skilful interlocking of the play's central episodes which "makes a double knot of his singly knotted source", while Lennox Robinson thought On Baile's Strand "perhaps his [Yeats's] most perfect verse play."[28] Bloom is reacting to a feature of Yeats's work that has been widely critically observed when he refers somewhat less enthusiastically to these structural features as "the barren splendors of [the play's] agile but contrived ironies, neatly spun but highly schematic sub-plot". He says of the characters of Blind Man and Fool:

> They are a mystic geometry Yeats inserts into his play, in prophecy of a system not fully developed until decades later, and they trouble the play's deeper meanings as much as they help its theoretical actions[29]

Speaking in general of the "mental pattern" at the base of Yeats's poetry, for instance, Melchiori claims that it "approached a geometrical scheme", while Donald Stauffer, describing the typical Yeatsian pattern as progressing "towards revelation, through visual evocation", makes the point that

> At the beginning and end of his career, then, his natural instincts were toward pattern, toward revelation through visual evocation. He is a descendant of the Pre-Raphaelite poet-painters, who wrote pictures and painted sonnets. Art for Yeats is a vision; at times it is almost geometry. To such a mind, the story is nothing, the image is everything, the image of his secret life.[30]

By inviting the type of attention to the formal configuration of plot and sub-plot which it has received, the play actually detracts attention from the medley of hidden forces which underlie its visible components and are secretly interwoven between them. Much of the criticism of the play betrays this type of geometrical obsession. Accordingly, many interpreters of the play, regarding centricity in terms of physically staged location, allocate a primacy of significance to the oath on account of the middle position it occupies among depicted events. An alternative reading of the play, however, forced by the invisibility of many of the play's forces (Aoife, the Sidhe, a displaced heroism, the notion of resemblance, and fate) into a more intuitive divination of centricity and significance, might concentrate its attention elsewhere. The reading of the play that I am proposing, for example, is based around the assumption that the structure of the play is not determined solely by the completeness of its visually realised and overtly executed components. In the play Cuchulain is the victim of gravitational pushes and pulls operating with conflicting motivations and in opposite directions. When the play is

regarded 'kinaesthetically', in terms of the total impact on the dramatic structure, of the various forms, forces, and centres of influence which are contesting with one another for dominance, rather than exclusively visually, or as a 'feat of geometry', it begins to appear as comprising various forces trying to coerce their opposing influences into servility. It comes down to a battle between Conchubar and Aoife for the treasured allegiance of Cuchulain. Conchubar, representing the attraction of the threshold and hearthstone informs Cuchulain

> There is not one but dreads this turbulence
>
> Now that we're settled men. (VPl, p.493)

He pits his force against the ecstatic and dangerous force of Aoife, who, as he tries to convince Cuchulain,

> Now hates you and will leave no sublety
>
> Unknotted that might run into a noose
>
> About your throat, no army in idleness
>
> That might bring ruin on this land you serve. (VPl, pp.487-489)

The play is balanced around Aoife's absence, or the memory of her visual presence, as much as it organises itself around the signing of the oath. As many forces issue from and converge towards the hungry Queen of Scotland as are generated by the presence of promises of allegiance. In the context of Cuchulain's heroic spirit, the oath exerts a repressive force while Aoife generates the positive energy of the ecstatic life. Her influence over proceedings introduces a distinction made in another context by the art theorist Rudolph Arnheim, between presence and what he terms "retinal presence".[31] In his study of the play, for example, Bushrui makes the point that

> Aoife's influence is always felt in the action, although she never treads the boards. By touch after touch, allusion after allusion, Yeats makes us see her as clearly as if she stood before us. Her name is on the tip of everybody's tongue; her influence and personality pervade their lives. She is a woman of relentless will and fiery passion; like Cuchulain himself, she is the heroine of her race.[32]

Because the centricity of Aoife's pervasive and dynamic, yet invisible influence does not coincide with the play's visual centre – that space being occupied by the oath – the play's composition can be said to have a binary basis. The distraction from the visible centre creates a third centre, poised midway between the two. This 'balancing centre' is Blind Man, who mediates between Conchubar's spiritual blindness, and the ecstatic force of Aoife. Ironically, though crucially, he assumes this centricity by virtue of what he has seen. Because of his kinship with Conchubar, and because he has seen "the will of woman at its wildest", and, more crucially, the face of woman at its most beautiful, Blind Man also mediates between the audience and the unknowable centre that troubles their experience of the play. Despite his tangential relation to the main sequence of dramatic events, Blind Man becomes a solitary and pivotal dynamic connection between the polar forces of prudence and heroism. Despite the peripheral status of the role consciously allocated to him by his creator, it seems that if the play were balanced on the tip of one's finger, the distribution of the weights and forces that are competing for Cuchulain's allegiance are such that the point of support must be placed directly underneath the blind swindler in order for the play to maintain its equilibrium.

In his study of composition in the visual arts, Rudolph Arnheim observes the "tendency of every object to complete itself" in a way that brings to mind the image of a gypsy's ear-ring – we can easily supply the missing link to complete the regular geometrical shape.[33] Though Cuchulain comes as close as we could expect any wordsmith to in securing a seamless fusion of the two ends of the play where Aoife's beauty begins and ends, even he cannot get us closer than to within an informed guess's

distance from it. The play cannot quite "complete itself" for the audience because we reside outside the privileged group, consisting only of Blind Man, of people who have also seen the entity the words relate to. We are led to believe that certain lineaments are visible in the figure of her son, but his appearance cannot fill the cavity that exists at the heart of the spectacle presented by the play. It is the uncertainty which surrounds the play's presentations of visual beauty and resemblance which arguably constitute its chief aesthetic achievement. The invisibility of several of the play's central forces, and the degree of dramatic conflict which is centred around these absences afflicts and torments our appreciation of it, upsetting both the spectacle and the relation which conventionally holds between blindness and vision. Aoife's 'no-show', and our inability to meaningfully compensate for it through Cuchulain's description of her, exemplifies the distinction between perceptual and propositional knowledge which features in some form throughout practically all of the chapters of this study. Cuchulain's paean to Aoife is a hopeless, though aesthetically intriguing, show of protest on behalf of the retinally present portion of the presentation against its visual incompletion, a 'token', or self- consciously futile claim of ownership of or entitlement to its 'missing link'. The blindness which Yeats presents to and inflicts upon his audience is that which exists in every endeavour to inductively appreciate a specific but absent site of beauty.

Of course Aoife is not the only instance in the play of a retinally absent yet pervasive force. Hidden behind the two forces overtly competing for Cuchulain's loyalty – the heroic identity which his younger self and Aoife represent, and Conchubar's oath – lurks the unquantifiable danger represented by the mind-troubling intent of the Shape Changers. Just as Cuchulain consents to take the oath, a chorus of women intervene to ward off these witches who, allied to the wind and sea, treat Cuchulain's mind as a plaything. It is the Fool who first alerts us to the presence of this invisible feminine force. "Wait a minute", he says in an early scene with Blind Man:

> I shouldn't have closed the door. There are some that look for me, and I wouldn't like them not to find me. Boann herself out of the river and Fand out

of the deep sea. Witches they are, and they come by in the wind, and they cry, 'Give a kiss, Fool, give a kiss', that's what they cry. (VPl, p.461)

The chorus of women treat us to a more elaborate description. The Shape Changers, we are told, "can put/Ruin on a great King's house". They are referred to in the women's song as:

> The women none can kiss and thrive,
> For they are but whirling wind,
> Out of memory and mind.

They possess bodies that can "never tire" or "grow kind", and, we are told:

> the man is thrice forlorn
> Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,
> That they follow, for at most
> They will give him kiss for kiss
> While they murmur, 'After this
> Hatred may be sweet to the taste.' (VPl, pp.495-497)

Their affection is described as being especially destructive, and they seem to be very taken with Cuchulain. Their menacing influence renders Conchubar's reasoned arguments in relation to the taking of the oath seem incidental, and in their contest for Cuchulain's allegiance they serve to further the play's manifest fascination with the invisible by effectively internalising his conflict. L.E. Nathan describes the severity of the force they exert on Cuchulain in the following way:

> It is, in fact, these powers, female in their attractiveness and shape-changing, that Cuchulain, as a Yeatsian hero, has always pursued, through love which turns to hate through strength to conquer which turns to self-injury. The end of his quest is the severing of his connection with all human life and a grief which finds only the sea its fit object. Like heroic love, heroic hatred is beyond human objects and touched with witchcraft.[34]

The significance of the Shape Changers in the context of this study can be assessed in relation to the extent to which they heighten the intrigue which is brought to the play by Yeats's strategy of defamiliarizing relations between presence and absence, and upsetting the perceptual hierarchy that is inherent in conventional dramatic representation.

Although critics have rightly highlighted the kinship that exists between Blind Man and Conchubar, as indeed they have been prompted to do by Yeats's letter to Fay, the centrality, as I see it, of Blind Man as a force in the play, which owes much to his visual knowledge of Aoife, manifests itself principally through his relationship to the character of the hero. A.S. Knowland has written of the "alienation" and "madness" experienced by Cuchulain in a way which corresponds to Kermode's treatment of the isolating function of the beatific image.[35] Making a related point, John Rees Moore remarks that:

> ...it was not until the second version, that of 1906, that [Yeats] realised in dramatic terms how to make Cuchulain's tendencies both more unequivocal and more affecting. The solution of the problem was isolation. In the later version Cuchulain really has no followers; even the Young Kings are on Conchubar's side. The hero faces a world full of enemies, both natural and supernatural. The important chorus of women is added, and the Blind Man and the Fool, who both frame and parody the action of their betters, are at an even greater distance from their hero – and they bring out more effectively the superhuman wonder and terror Cuchulain inspires in lesser mortals.[36]

The deepening of Cuchulain's isolation alluded to by Moore, although not the most obviously dramatic of the revisions undergone by the 1903 version of the play, is highly significant.[37] It involves a heightening of emphasis on Cuchulain's supposed childlessness as well as the elimination of an element of camaraderie that existed in the earlier version between Cuchulain and some of the Young Kings. The respect that Cuchulain commanded in that version is evidenced, for example, in the following exchange:

First Young King: You have hurled that stone beyond our utmost mark time after time, but yet you are not weary.

Second Young King: He has slept on the bare ground of Fuad's Hill this week past, waiting for the bulls and deer.

Cuchulain: Well, why should I be weary?

First Young King: It is certain his father was the god who wheels the sun, and not king Sualtam. (VPl, pp.472-474)

In the 1906 version the interaction between Cuchulain and the Young Kings is much more sparse and antagonistic. My hypothesis in this regard is that Blind Man's visual memory represents Cuchulain's only hope that his progress towards tragic isolation might be checked or impeded. In his first scene with Conchubar, Cuchulain is told:

...every day my children come and say:

'This man is growing harder to endure,

How can we be at safety with this man

That nobody can bid or bind?

We shall be at his mercy when you are gone;

He burns the earth as if he were a fire,

And time can never touch him' (VPl, pp.479-481)

And after Cuchulain has indulged in his reminiscence of Aoife's beauty, a clearly wary Conchubar urges him to

Look at the door and what men gather there --

Old counsellors that steer the land with me

And younger kings, the dancers and harp-players

That follow in your tumults, and all these

Are held there by one anxiety.

Will you be bound to obedience

And so make this land safe for them and theirs? (VPl, pp.489-491)

When the other kings are moved to make a direct plea to Cuchulain to change his ways and relinquish those indulgences which put their security in peril, the sense of descending isolation is strengthened:

A Young King: Cuchulain, take the oath.

There is none here that would not have you take it

Cuchulain: You'd have me take it? Are you of one mind?

The Kings: All, all, all, all.

Conchubar: There is not one but dreads this turbulence

Now that they're settled men. (VPl, pp.491-493)

The isolation intensifies, as we shall see presently, in the aftermath of the appearance onstage of the Young Man from Aoife's country. Cuchulain needs desperately to make an appeal to somebody who has seen Aoife's beauty and can comprehend its impact, but his unknowing fixation on the resemblance between mother and son is universally considered "a fancy lighter than air". It is this intense experience of isolation which is behind the despairing urgency of the inquisition to which he subjects Blind Man shortly before the close of the play. Having returned after killing the youthful invader, Cuchulain is led, through the increasingly frantic exchange which issues between himself and the 'unholy alliance' of Fool and Blind Man, through a masterfully contrived array of emotions which range from an initial unsuspecting though civil lack of interest, through troubled detection of kinship, to terrible recognition. The befogged mirror of blindness clears, gradually evaporated by the progressively compelling urgency of the luckless warrior's desperate interrogation -- "You knew him then?", "You were in Aoife's country?", "What queen, what queen?" -- by this stage he is seizing Blind Man -- "Was it Uathach, then? Speak! speak!", until an unbearable comprehension is finally achieved:

Blind Man: Somebody is trembling, Fool! The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

Fool: It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is Cuchulain who is shaking the bench. (VPl, pp.521-522)

Unblinded, despite Blind Man's most valiant efforts to keep him in the dark, the knowledge sends Cuchulain further into madness. The relief so momentarily suggested by the unearthing of the spoils of Blind Man's memory does not have time to effect its balm before the terrible realisation displaces it.

3.4. "The very tint": resemblance and the 'aesthetic moment'.

The significance of the figure of the Young Man, whose unchecked arrival is what occasions the controversy surrounding the oath, is presented chiefly in terms of the extent to which an antecedent is recognisable in him. He is valued primarily, that is to say, as a vessel for or exhibition of certain obscurely perceived residual qualities rather than for any qualities which can be said to be uniquely his. Of course the corollary of this is that Aoife's remembered wildness and beauty, and, although to a lesser extent, the forsaken values of heroism, are conjured up by a contemporary incarnation, an 'artefact' of the present. The idea of resemblance, therefore, is central to the Young Man's significance as a determining force in the play. Naturally, because of the intrigue which surrounds Aoife's beauty, the likeness which the Young Man semi-reputedly bears to her, heightens and informs our interest in him. In the context of this study of the nature and extent of Yeats's contribution to an 'aesthetics of blindness', his portrayal of the dynamics and significance of resemblance, and a consideration of the differences in the ways which Blind Man and Cuchulain relate to this significance, is very revealing on a number of levels. It is arguably the relation of the chronological disparity inherent in the concept of resemblance to the moment of intense awareness traditionally associated with aesthetic experience, which reveals the most about the aspect of Yeats's portrayal of blindness which we are investigating.

Cuchulain's consciousness of a likeness, however incomplete his awareness of it happens to be, is a key factor in his isolation – he is the only character to have seen both of the allegedly resembling entities. Not only does Conchubar refuse to attribute any significance to the likeness, referring to it as "a fancy lighter than air" (which, of course, it is), and "a whim of the moment" (which it most definitely is not), he is quick to regard

it as delirium – "Some witch of the air has troubled Cuchulain's mind" – even though, having admittedly never seen Aoife, he is hardly in a position to present himself as an authority on the matter. He accounts for the eccentricity of Cuchulain's behaviour in the presence of the intruder by admitting that:

> A witch of the air
> Can make a leaf confound us with memories
> They run upon the wind and hurl the spells
> That make us nothing, out of the invisible wind.
> They have gone to school to learn the trick of it (VPl, pp.508-509)

Another of the old kings is equally disparaging, claiming that

> Some witch has worked upon your mind, Cuchulain.
> The head of that young man seemed like a woman's
> You'd had a fancy for. Then of a sudden
> You laid your hands on the High King himself (VPl, p.512)

The invisibility at work here is three-fold: most obviously, Aoife is nowhere to be seen, except, of course, in the memories of Cuchulain and his ally in matters aesthetic, Blind Man; the witches to whom the responsibility for Cuchulain's uncommon behaviour is attributed also remain beyond the fringes of visibility; and the entity or notion of resemblance itself, as will presently be illustrated, is itself invisible, and detectable, more often than not, only by virtue of a certain initial concealment. Cuchulain, by contrast with the more sceptical kings, is, at least intermittently, in no doubt about the existence of the likeness. Looking "hard" at the Young Man and dragging him "Hither into the light", he explains to a not very interested Conchubar:

The very tint

Of her that I was speaking of but now,

Not a pin's difference

[*To Young Man*] You are from the North,

Where there are many that have that tint of hair --

Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come nearer, boy,

For I would have another look at you.

There's more likeness -- a pale, a stone-pale cheek.

What brought you boy? Have you no fear of death? (VPl, p.504)

A little later Cuchulain elaborates further on the nature of the resemblance and of its effect on him:

He has got her fierceness,

And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.

But I will keep him with me, Conchubar,

That he may set my memory upon her

When day's fading. (VPl, p.505)

And on the strength of this likeness, Cuchulain immediately offers his assailant an unqualified offer of friendship.

You will stop with us,

And we will hunt the deer and the wild bulls;

And, when we have grown weary, light our fires

Between the wood and water, or on some mountain

Where the Shape-Changers of the morning come

and assures the Young Man that

The head grows prouder in the light of dawn,

And friendship thickens in the murmuring dark

Where the spare hazels meet the wool-white foam. (VPl, pp.505-506)

The insistence that darkness strengthens a friendship, belies the fact that the friendship was initiated on the strength of an appearance that daylight revealed. A comparison of Synge's portrayal of blindness with Yeats's toying with its possibilities as a metaphorical device, illustrates that, excepting overheard gossip, there is very little about the darkness of On Baile's Strand that could be said to 'murmur'. It appears as though the distinction Yeats depicts as existing between vision and blindness actually only amounts to that between directly perceived picture and remembered picture. There is no trace in the play of a non-visual manifestation of beauty.

An exchange of gifts between hero and pretender swiftly follows. Cuchulain eliminates the Young Man's only reservation about developing a friendship with the man he has been assigned to kill -- that his mother would think him a coward -- by humiliating himself to preserve the integrity of the Young Man he has developed such a sudden affection for:

O! tell her

I was afraid, or tell her what you will.

No; tell her that I heard a raven croak

On the north side of the house, and was afraid. (VPl, p.508)

The robustness of the newly forged alliance is further indicated when Conchubar's followers threaten to fight the Young Man. Cuchulain jumps to his defence, forcefully suggesting that the other kings should not affront his nobility by taking up a challenge which he has refused. In the Young Man's eagerness to accept the challenges issued to him Cuchulain recognises his younger self -- "That's spoken as I'd have spoken it at your age" -- while remaining blind to the significance of the recognition. Crazed with the recognition which successively offers itself to and shies away from his consciousness, Cuchulain's frenzy culminates in his physically seizing the High King -- an act which instantly, if not altogether plausibly, returns him to sobriety and to a readiness to comply with the terms of the oath.

The fact that Blind Man hasn't seen the Young Man, or perceived him in any way, isolates him, in turn, from this 'resembling' element of the significance of the beauty he has been privileged enough to witness. Cuchulain, for example, is gripped by the vague rekindling of past infatuations and attitudes which the Young Man's appearance provokes. The disconcertingly unascertainable familiarity of the recognition that flirts with his consciousness is alive with the undiagnosed reawakening of an old conviction -- tha Aoife is a great beauty. For all of its vagueness, his encounter with this talisman of a naneless continuity is intensely moving for Cuchulain. Not having perceived the Young Man, Blind Man knows nothing of the troubled pleasure afforded by instances of half-recognised resemblance. The little we see of Blind Man's relation to the world of appearance resides exclusively on the wrong, or far, side of the bridge which links present to past. His appreciation of what moves Cuchulain so dramatically begins and ends in what has become an alien sensory modality. As it is presented by Yeats, Blind Man's visual memory serves as the only indication that he possesses an aesthetic sensibility at all. His essentially passive corroboration of the elaborate visual description supplied by Cuchulain seems to exhaust his aesthetic repertoire, as Aoife's beauty seems to be exhausted by a visual description of her.

What Blind Man's dispassionate substantiation of Cuchulain's account of Aoife's beauty amounts to is not, according to one way of looking at it at least, a perception in itself, but a conspicuously solitary component of a resembling relation. Blind Man's impression of Aoife is characterised by a certain temporal priority, but the precedent, if we can even call it that, set by his memory of Aoife's visual beauty, does not culminate in an awareness of non-visual beauty in his blind experience. Yeats's treatment of resemblance is also revealing in relation to the supremely conscious refinement of his own rendering of visual beauty. There is an element of subtlety implicit in the spotting of a resemblance which nobody else is alive to. It is not as simple a matter, for example, as the detection of an identical replication[38]. In the course of the bonding ritual between the unwitting father and son in the play, Cuchulain demands:

> Let's see that arm. I'll see it if I choose.
> That arm had a good father and a good mother,
> But it is not like this (VPl, p.505)

The resemblance is only obscurely recognised. There is a certain opacity suffusing its detection, as though the sense of familiarity does not quite register itself on Cuchulain's consciousness as a specific resemblance:

> Put up your sword; I am not mocking you.
> I'd have you for my friend, but if it's not
> Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye,
> I cannot tell the reason. (VPl, p.505)

Rather than halting at a perception of the husk of outer appearance, Cuchulain's stare transcends the veil of visible difference distinguishing his own arm from that of the

Young Man in order to disclose, however incompletely, the truth of a hidden kinship. To be discouraged by the superficial difference, the scene seems to suggest, is to risk missing the discovery of the essence of kinship, the shared heroic pedigree and mould. An overriding stability, or fixity, prevails over and subtly informs certain instances of physical or 'superficial' variation which those of us who are happy to stop at outer appearance cannot appreciate. This essential component of resemblance remains steadfast though often concealed by the 'incidental' differences that are unique to each individual family or group member.[39] Through the ambiguous nature of Cuchulain's recognition Yeats manages to convey the sense that there is somehow something more, and something less than visual detection at the heart of resemblance. What is in question is a hidden quality of the relation that exists between the resembling entities. Yeats's incorporation of the metaphor of blindness into the margins of On Baile's Strand seems to have been inspired more by a fascination with what is not visible to the common eye, than to any particularly fervent interest in the physical condition itself. By filtering the theme of resemblance through that of blindness he permits himself to indulge his instinctive predilection for visual beauty while maintaining what, in another construal of blindness, he refers to as the "indifference" of the artist "to all the eye sees at common moments."[40] His elaborate rendering of the hidden, as we have been discovering, is supremely visually oriented.

3.5. Blindness as a means to effecting the defamiliarisation of the visual.

Yeats was justifiably satisfied with the final scene of the play. In it he confirms Blind Man in his status as the measure by which the fall of heroic and imaginative man can be gauged, rather than offering an insight into the nature of any aesthetic appreciation or aversion of which Blind Man might be capable. The Fool narrates the stages by which Cuchulain storms off to do battle with the sea in a way which tests and dramatically ratifies Diderot's suggestion, in the 'Letter on the Blind' referred to in Chapter One, that in certain contexts verbal description is more effective than direct perception[41]. During the Fool's compelling description of the meeting of sword and wave, Blind Man

intermittently interjects to ascertain details which are of much greater interest to him than the fate of the hero. The workings of his opportunistically mercenary mind are betrayed by his asking at different intervals throughout the unfolding tragic resolution:

> Where are the kings? What are the kings doing? ;
>
> You say they are running out of the houses? There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool!

and finally:

> There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens. (VPl, pp.524-525)

"In the end", as Bushrui puts it, "heroism serves the thievish purposes of the Fool and Blind Man."[42] That the blindness in question has very little to do with the physical condition of any of the characters on stage is suggested by Knowland's observation that the "eyes of the world through which the last heroic gesture is seen belong to the Fool whose will is mastered by Blind Man who sees that gesture as another opportunity for a display of degeneracy", adding that taken together the thievish pair "embody a disease of the spirit, which mocks, and by its mocking, devalues heroic dignity."[43] The blindness Yeats concentrates on is that of the absorption in the task of stealing another's dinner against the backdrop of the extinguishing of an entire heroic tradition. Blindness is offered as an analogy for the manifold moral and imaginative disorders which Yeats sees as afflicting the modern population. Together with Conchubar's domesticated instinct towards securing a prosperous and trouble-free future for his children, Blind Man's conniving and self-absorbed mentality represents the inevitable descent from a Golden

Age when Cuchulain danced on the shore with the Shape Changers and lived "like a bird's flight from tree to tree".

Blind Man is quite heavily involved in the play's addressing of various themes, his small victories serving as a warning of the cost of a prolonged captivation or enchantment by one particular ideal or objective. Apart from the issuing of this warning, the play illustrates the extent of the ill will generated by the refusal of the exceptional person to subordinate those very qualities by virtue of which they stand out, to the demands and responsibilities of society. It outlines also the difference between what it means for one's actions to be in accordance with those compulsions and partialities generated from within, and what it means to pledge a mindlessly servile compliance to laws imposed from without. It brings attention to the modern disrespect for and fear of individual rights and instincts, together with the rewards we offer for their suppression. It also questions the extent to which that which motivates believers in an ecstatic rather than conformist life is inherently self-destructive and so cannot be bequeathed from one generation to the next. Blindness is there -- it permeates these themes in a variety of metaphorical guises, the most general of these being inherent in the warning issued by one member of the chorus of women that

> Life drifts between a fool and a blind man
>
> To the end, and nobody can know his end. (VPl, p.514)

The warning can be said to correspond, in the nature of the blindness that is implicitly alluded to in it, to the Yeatsian contention that "ultimate reality can be symbolised but not known", and to the variation of the same maxim he provides in a late letter: "It seems to me that I have found what I wanted. When I try to put it all into a phrase I say 'Man can embody truth but he cannot know it'"[44] By the close of the play, however, though Blind Man has revealed a lot to us, we know little about him other than that when he is in the vicinity it is best to keep one's oven tended.

Unlike the other plays which feature throughout this study, visual absence is depicted in On Baile's Strand not at all in terms of some form of non-visual presence, but exclusively in terms of remembered visual presence. The play reads like a mirror defogging, with inadvertence gradually being displaced by comprehension and revelation. As some of the prose assertions recounted earlier attest, Yeats 'talks a mean blindness' -- criticizing Shakespeare, for example, for his commerce with "the whole spectacle of the world" – but, at least judging by the admittedly specific criteria outlined at the beginning of this study, he does not quite deliver.[45] The condition of blindness itself appears to fall into the category outlined by Jeffares in his description of that symbolism which is "more important for [Yeats's] love of secrecy than for any undertones which it gave to the work it belonged to."[46] The fascination with the hidden thing which I have tried to illustrate as being at the heart of Yeats's several depictions of and references to blindness is, it seems to me, similar to what Ellman has in mind when he declares that "(a)ll secrets became congenial to him, for secrets gave strength", and that as Yeats's art developed he wanted to "ferret out more and deeper secrets which were witheld from logicians and literalists."[47] It seems related too, to Kermode's observation that Yeats was trying to "shake... off" some of the "dreaminess" of his earlier verse "earlier than is usually supposed", as well as to what Jeffares describes as the poet's "youthful desire to conquer bodily inclinations and live a lonely life of wisdom."[48] Yeats's attitude towards blindness could, for example, be interestingly considered alongside the connection made in a work like 'The Tower' between wisdom and the withdrawal from the living transience of the sensual world.

There are times too when Yeats seems to equate the sensory world with the visual world – one thinks of the expressed wish in an early poem that the sun, moon, and stars be "rooted out" of the sky, and so effect the end of the world, and of Martin Hearne's insistence in The Unicorn From the Stars that the whole world – the light of the stars, sun and moon – be put out like a candle "till we have brought everything to nothing again." (VP, p.155, VPl, p.709) This presentation of darkness as a sensory void in turn brings to mind Yeats's description of "those two blind people of The Well of the Saints", who "are so transformed by the dream that they choose blindness over reality."[49] The tendency for blindness to present itself to Yeats in terms of a more extensive removal from sensory

awareness is symptomatic of his visual predilection and of his regular refusal to heed the advice he dispenses to his reader in a relatively late poem to

> Recognise the five
>
> That make the muses sing. (VP, p.601)

Many features of the play which serve primarily structural and plot-related functions become conspicuous when critical concern is extended from the strictly literary merits of the play to the broader range of interests which are reflected throughout this study. The tenuous indication that Blind Man was ever alive to beauty begins and ends in what has become an alien modality. Yeats's own preoccupation with questions of lineage and vestiges of earlier epochs seems almost to be crying out to be applied to the ruptured sense of identity occasioned by the succession of a visual by a non-visual aesthetic in the case of the adventitiously blind. It is not a lineage which Yeats has any interest in exploring, however. The main attraction which conditions of obscured vision and understanding seem to have held for Yeats were the opportunities for dramatic revelation that they eventually occasion. In order for revelation to occur, and to be accompanied by a considerable dramatic impact, a certain amount of preliminary concealment is necessary. Because Yeats is not interested in the current state of Blind Man's sensory awareness, his visual memory is not presented as being properly or sufficiently exotic in relation to his present situation. Yeats elects to isolate Aoife's image within Blind Man's awareness rather than filter visual memory through contemporary sensations. The implicit suggestion that there is something inevitably "old hat" about the aesthetic awareness of the blind is an impression that this project as a whole is designed to dismiss.

Yeats's literary output in all of the genres he put his hand to is littered with expressions of derogatory-sounding exclamations of weariness of the superficiality of the wisdom imparted by daytime vision, and of a certain amount of envy for the blind man who cannot, as it is expressed in one poem, see ladies "go gallivanting by" (VP, p.552). When he actually comes to include a blind character in a dramatic portrayal, however, his

emphasis is placed quite squarely on all that has been relinquished in order to arrive at whatever insight the blind figure in question has achieved. Hence the culmination of Blind Beggar's involvement in The Cat and The Moon in a gleeful flurry of expressions of thankfulness upon the restoration of his vision, the spiritual bankruptcy and moral degeneracy implicit in the slaying of Cuchulain for the fee of twelve pennies in The Death of Cuchulain, and the unlikely centrality of Aoife's remembered beauty ('Oh, audience,' he seems to be teasing, 'had you seen her!') to On Baile's Strand. In dealing with blindness Yeats seems to be playing with, rather than directly to, his strengths. The centrality of visual memory arises because visual beauty is taunting him in the dark like an itch that refuses not to be scratched.

Throughout On Baile's Strand, Yeats seems to be amusing himself by playing with our perceptual categories. The perspective which enjoys optimum visual access to the dynamic centre of the play described so beautifully by Cuchulain is unique to a blind man. There is something, we cannot help but feel, profoundly 'amiss' with the picture as it is presented. As though toying with blindness as a concept or literary device rather than setting out to substantially explore the aesthetic implications of adventitious blindness, Yeats has invisibility disrupt the hermeneutical conventions and compositional balance of the staged performance. The cast list does not by any means represent an exhaustive inventory of the forces represented by the play. Invisibility in the play is a result of the eccentric positioning of some of the play's salient forces rather than an indication of absence. The resulting isolation of the audience from sites and events that are anchored in absence leaves us looking to Blind Man for guidance. Yeats's manipulation of blindness troubles conventional audience-response. Members of an audience tend to take their seats with the unquestioned assumption that it is the only external entity which is a genuine component of the staged situation.[50] The dynamic centre of On Baile's Strand, however, because only there 'by proxy', deputised for by description and allusion, manages to completely 'out-externalize' and 'out-marginalize' the relatively contained spectators. The withholding from our line of vision of what Blind Man has seen upsets our assumption that our presence in front of the stage is a condition of that of any of the portrayed characters upon it.

Yeats asked in Samhain 1904 "Has not the long decline of the arts been but the shadow of declining faith in an unseen reality?"[51] On Baile's Strand reads like an elaborately constructed endeavour to redress this situation. As Aoife's influence grows in power the disharmony between the staged spectacle and its dynamic centre thickens. The overriding impression is that blindness is being resorted to as a device to effect a dramatic function much like the literary device of defamiliarization identified by the Russian Formalists. Visual memory perforates blindness and though the reign of visual beauty is not overthrown, it is displaced from its automized context, presented in unconventional, yet still highly visual terms. Blindness, because accompanied by visual memory, serves a function similar to that achieved by the poet's employment of a discovered collar bone:

> I would find by the edge of that water
> The collar-bone of a hare
> Worn thin by the lapping of water,
> And pierce it through with a gimlet, and stare
> At the old bitter world where they marry in churches,
> And laugh over the untroubled water
> At all who marry in churches,
> Through the white thin bone of a hare. (VP, p.330)

Despite Cuchulain's lyrical recollection of Aoife (or perhaps because of that very description?) and its apparent ushering of the play towards visual completion, the play remains plagued by a wonderful unreadibility which demands that absence be assessed as a perceptual force. The significance of much of the play is contained in that image which leaks through after Blind Man has ruptured his night with the 'piercing gimlet' of visual memory. My response to Yeats's adoption of such a strategy is admittedly not reflective of strictly literary concerns. It is informed by a sense of disappointment with the

underlying assumption that within an aesthetics of blindness the beautiful thing has always already been and gone.

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[1] W.B. Yeats, The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats, ed., Peter Allt, Russell K. Allspach (New York: Macmillan 1957, reprnted 1973) pp.629-30.

[2] Richard Ellman, W.B. Yeats. The Man and the Masks (London: Faber and Faber, 1969, 1st publ., 1949) p. 2. Norman Jeffares, W.B. Yeats. Man and Poet (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, 1st publ., 1949) p. 84.

[3] David R. Clark, W.B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1965) p. 16.

[4] A.S. Knowland, W.B. Yeats. Dramatist of Vision (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1983) p. 87.

[5] W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961) p. 215.

[6] S.B. Bushrui, Yeats's Verse Plays: The Revisions 1900-1910 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) p. 54, John Rees Moore, Masks of Love and Death. Yeats as Dramatist (London: Cornell University Press, 1971) p. 104, p. 108.

[7] W.B. Yeats. Dramatist of Vision p. 89. Barton R. Friedman, Adventures in the Deeps of the Mind. The Cuchulain Cycle of W.B. Yeats (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) p. 33, p. 40.

[8] W.B. Yeats. Man and Poet p. 51. Giorgio Melchiori, The Whole Mystery of Art. Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W.B. Yeats (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1961) p. 27.

[9] Yeats. The Man and the Masks p. 196.

[10] Yeats's Verse Plays: The Revisions 1900-1910, p. 54. Louis MacNeice, The Poetry of W.B. Yeats (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979, 1st publ., Oxford University Press, 1941) p192.

[11] W.B. Yeats, The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats. Volume Three, 1901-1904 , Gen. Ed., John Kelly, eds., John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 527.

[12] Essays and Introductions p. 28.

[13] Harold Bloom, Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 157.

[14] Masks of Love and Death p. 104.

[15] W.B. Yeats. Dramatist of Vision p. 90.

[16] A. Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland, A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1975) p. 103.

[17] W.B. Yeats, Explorations (New York: Macmillan, 1985, 1st publ. In this edition, 1962) p. 177.

[18] W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1926) p. 43.

[19] W.B. Yeats, The Letters of W.B. Yeats Ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954; New York: Macmillan, 1955) p. 683.

[20] F.A.C. Wilson, Yeats's Iconography (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1960) p. 25.

[21] Masks of Love and Death p. 113.

[22] Charles Biederman Art and the Evolution of Visual Knowledge (Minnesota: Red Wing, 1948) p. 30. (That portion of what follows here with regard to portraiture which is not the result of my own frustrated attendance of life-drawing classes is indebted to Biederman).

[23] Ibid., p. 31.

[24] Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London: Routledge Classics 2002, 1st publ. 1957) p. 9.

[25] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[26] Ibid., p. 8.

[27] Masks of Love and Death p. 109, p. 123.

[28] Peter Ure, Yeats the Poet. A Commentary on Character and Design in the Major Plays (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) p. 66. Lennox Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History 1899-1951 (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat, 1968) p. 46.

[29] Yeats p. 153.

[30] The Whole Mystery of Art p. 3. Donald Stauffer, The Golden Nightingale (New York: Hafner, 1971, a facsimile of the 1949 edition) p. 57.

[31] Rudolph Arnheim, The Power of the Center. A Study of Composition in the Visual Arts (London: University of California Press, 1982) p. 3.

[32] Yeats's Verse Plays: The Revisions 1900-1910 p. 66.

[33] The Power of the Center p. 3.

[34] L.E. Nathan, The Tragic Drama of W.B. Yeats (London: Columbia University Press, 1965) p. 7.

[35] W. B. Yeats. Dramatist of Vision, p. 55.

[36] Masks of Love and Death pp. 125-6.

[37] The disclosing of knowledge about the Young Man's parentage is radically altered for the 1906 version of the play. In that version the audience is kept in suspense until Cuchulain eventually discovers that he has killed his son. In the 1903 version Fintain, the precursor of Blind Man, gives the game away at a relatively early stage in the following exchange with Barach, the character who would become the Fool in the 1906 version:

Fintain: When I hear the young girls talk about the colour of Cuchulain's eyes, and how they have seven colours, I have thought about it. That young man has Aoife's face and hair, but he has Cuchulain's eyes.
Barach: How can he have Cuchulain's eyes?
Fintain: He is Cuchulain's son.
Barach: And his mother has sent him hither to fight his father.
Fintain: It is all quite plain. Cuchulain went into Aoife's country when he was a young man that he might learn skill in arms, and there he became Aoife's lover. (p466)

[38] E.H. Gombrich, for example, claims that

... it is not really the perception of a likeness for which we are originally programmed, but the noticing of unlikeness, of that departure from the norm which stands out and sticks in the mind.

E.H. Gombrich, The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Perception (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982) p. 113.

[39] The idea that the detection of a family likeness is not contingent upon the presence of a glaringly obvious similarity is suggested in a letter Petrarch wrote to describe the difficulties of imitating the style of an admired artist. The type of similarity to be aimed for, according to Petrarch, should be similar to that which exists between a father and son, where what Petrarch calls an 'aria' testifies to the consistency of essence through change:

...though there may often be a great difference between their individual features, a certain shadow, and, as our painters call it, *air* perceptible above all in the face and eyes produces that similarity that reminds us of the father as soon as we see the son, even though if the matter were put to measurement all parts would be found to be different; some hidden quality there has this power. So too we should take care that when one thing is like, many should be unlike, and that what is like should be hidden so as to be grasped only by the mind's silent enquiry, intelligible rather than discernable.

Translated from Petrarch's 'Le familiari', xxiii, 19, 78-94, by E.H. Gombrich, in his 'The Style all' antica: Imitation and Assimilation', E.H. Gombrich, Norm and Form. Studies in the art of the renaissance 1 (London: Phaidon, 1978, 1st publ. 1966) p. 122.

[40] Essays and Introductions, p. 280.

[41] In his 'Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those who can See', Diderot tactfully breaks the news to his addressee that he has failed to secure for her a perch among the audience at a performance of the removal of cataracts from a blind patient by assuring her:

If you would know why that wonderful operator makes a great secret of experiments at which you think too great a number of intelligent witnesses cannot be present, my answer is that the observations of such a celebrated person do not so much stand in need of spectators, whilst making, as of hearers when made. (Denis Diderot, Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature and Other Philosophical Works, ed., David Adams (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 1999) p. 149)

Commenting on this aspect of the 'Letter', P.N. Furbank suggests that "in investigating blindness ... one should try inwardness and reflection as much as outward observation and, in a word, attempt to do without eyes." (P. N. Furbank, Diderot. A Critical Biography (London: Secker and Warburg, 1992) p. 57)

[42] Yeats's Verse Plays: The Revisions 1900-1910 p. 60.

[43] W.B. Yeats. Dramatist of Vision p. 97.

[44] Quoted in Parkinson's W.B.Yeats. The Later Poetry, p. 123, p. 180.

[45] Essays and Introductions p. 162. ('The Symbolism of Poetry')

[46] W.B. Yeats. Man and Poet p. 52.

[47] Yeats. The Man and the Masks p. 55, p. 57.

[48] Romantic Image p. 34. W.B.Yeats.Man and Poet p. 233.

[49] Essays and Introductions p. 254.

[50] This is a point that Arnheim makes in relation to the visual arts. See The Power of the Center, p. 49.

[51] Explorations p. 170.

Chapter Four:

The Replicator's Night: Brian Friel's portrayal of a maladministered aesthetic priming in Molly Sweeney.

There are certain obvious structural parallels between Molly Sweeney and the play considered here in Chapter Two. As Synge does in The Well of the Saints, Friel juxtaposes two periods of sightlessness, each on either side of what his central character refers to as a "visit", or "brief excursion", into the world of vision. Thematically also, Friel revisits some of Synge's concerns, including that of the sensory and aesthetic experience of the blind. Traditionally, aesthetics -- champion among academic disciplines of discernment -- has neglected to take into account the various factors which differentiate one subject from another. Philosophy has always sought to remain 'above', or to somehow exempt itself from the concerns of the individual in order to provide and maintain a universal concept of aesthetic experience. After the contingent, accidental, historically and biologically variable components have been extracted from the experience, a good education, it has traditionally been thought, can render the common man with a sensibility fine enough to appreciate a perfectly realised site of beauty. For much of the time separating the writing of The Well of the Saints and Molly Sweeney western philosophy trailed disdainfully behind as relatively radical disciplines such as feminism, gender studies, post-colonialism and the many guises of materialism adopted more interrogative strategies and prompted modern thought to become generally more socially and culturally oriented.

The later stages of the interim, however, witnessed a tendency towards what has been called a "differential redefinition" of the aesthetic experience.[1] Aesthetics, as Yeats might have expressed it, finally came to realise that it had to get down off its stilts in order to clarify some of its central tenets in relation to specific embodiments of them. The analytic aesthetics that flourished in the eighteenth century carefully isolated aesthetic questions from other types of philosophical inquiry as part of its advocacy of disembodied universality and disinterestedness. Throughout the last decade of the twentieth century a range of fields of scholarship began to reverse this process by doing

exactly the opposite. By the time Friel wrote Molly Sweeney feminist and post-colonial aesthetic perspectives had come to suggest that the exclusionary assumptions and implications of traditional aesthetic discourse can only be exposed when aesthetic questions are shown to be intimately connected to the variety of considerations from which they have been deliberately positioned at a convenient remove. This chapter considers the different ways in which Friel's upsetting of traditional conceptions of the paradigmatic aesthetic experience with differential concerns appears to have been informed by the contemporaneous shift in critical understanding undergone by certain universalising aesthetic principles.

Florence and Foster describe the concept of the differential as "the relation of the physical/material to all energies, ideas, and psychological elements that are often posed as non-material."[2] The perspective of a person whose sensory capacities are at significant variance with those of most aesthetic beholders will inevitably be characterised by a certain marginality. Molly Sweeney is the dramatisation of an account of a blind woman who, for most of her life, acquiesces to the value system imposed upon her by a sighted community. By focusing here on the concept of beauty that is impressed upon Molly from her earliest formal education, I examine the extent to which Friel presents us with a politicisation of the process of aesthetic reception that is in keeping with the theoretical evolution described by Florence and Foster. Throughout the play assistance and education are dispensed in particularly unhelpful and unenlightening ways. Molly is the main beneficiary, but is compelled to receiving all she is offered on visual terms. By the time of the writing of the play, the modern critical mindset had become increasingly impatient with the vigilant maintenance by traditionalist aestheticians of observational 'disinterest'. That concept, along with others such as 'universality' and 'ideal' had fallen widely into critical disrepute. Articulations of an idealist aesthetics had come to be identified by certain theorists of marginality as representing a rhetoric of exclusion. Part of Friel's response is to illustrate why aesthetic values have to be experienced rather than formally 'learned'. His play also portrays the dangers inherent in assuming that the compliance with conventional aesthetic values by those marginalized within a society of beholders by their deviation from physical norms somehow signals the satisfaction or relinquishing of their aesthetic needs. Because of its extensive exploration of the

difference between those elements of 'aesthetic knowledge' which Molly learns to replicate without ever actually assimilating, and the joy that is afforded to her through her direct engagement with her surroundings, the account which follows can be regarded as essentially a dialectical mediation between a quite highly politicised aesthetic theory and a traditional pedagogical approach to knowledge.

Written in 1994, Molly Sweeney narrates the story of a woman in her forties who consents to undergo an operation to restore the vision she had lost when she was ten months old. Her experiences are narrated from three different perspectives -- those of her husband Frank, and her ophthalmologist Dr. Rice, as well as her own. Molly's parents -- her father, a judge, and her mother, who spent most of Molly's formative years in and out of a mental institution -- are also on the fringes of the story, though having died some time before the telling of it, neither make a physical appearance on stage. Following Molly's initial monologue, in which she recalls some details of her early relationship with her father, Mr. Rice and Frank in turn present their own preliminary accounts of Molly's experience and volunteer some insight into their relationships with her. The entire play unfolds in this manner, with all three characters remaining onstage while each monologue is being recited. So although Friel deprives us of direct experience of the impact, the play narrates the collision of three different perspectives, three modes of regard, each of which consists of individual sets of standards, priorities, principles of organisation, and scales of merit.

Mr. Rice has relatively recently been a world renowned ophthalmologist -- one of a clique of four who flew together around the world from operation to operation and conference to conference, securing and enhancing their professional reputations. When his wife abandoned him for another member of the set, however, Rice's career went into something of a tailspin. By the time we first encounter him he has started drinking heavily, has removed himself from the glamour which had surrounded his earlier career, and is practising in a regional hospital in Ballybeg. Molly's case presents itself to Rice as a remotely possible means of retrieving the reputation he has relinquished. He is momentarily seized by what he recognizes as "a phantom desire, a fantasy in [his] head", that, having forsaken the charms of renown in Paris, Dallas and Vienna, he had been visited in a remote corner of Donegal by "the chance of a lifetime, the one-in-a-thousand

opportunity that can rescue a career" and "restore a reputation". His excitement at the prospect of replicating the achievements and standards of his earlier self is evident when he speculates that

> . . . if that opportunity were being offered to me and if after all these years I could pull myself together and measure up to it, and if, oh my God if by some miracle pull it off perhaps . . .[3]

Frank also derives a certain amount of gratification from his own interventions in his relationship with Molly. Rather than embracing his wife he embraces the challenge she represents as the latest in a series of philanthropic and madcap assignments which has until now included the keeping of Iranian goats on an island off the Mayo coast, charity work in Nigeria, and the enduring of three Norwegian winters in an attempt to bring attention to the plight of the world's whale population. Mr. Rice's operations are initially successful. Shortly afterwards, however, Molly begins to experience a range of difficulties which she had not encountered in her blind world, and feels hopelessly ill-equipped to surmount them. Unable to accomplish what she had done with ease in blindness, Molly soon loses her job as a massage therapist in a local health club. At the close of the play she is experiencing a condition known as 'blindsight', and seems destined to spend the remainder of her days in the mental institution which her mother had attended before her, her residence there constituting one among many manifestations of the trope of repetition which pervades the play on a variety of levels.

In addition to considering the specifically literary merits of Friel's achievement, this chapter situates certain aspects of Molly's experience within a discussion of a particular classroom politics and of the relation of critical objectivity to aesthetic appraisal. I start out here by briefly considering the conflict between influence and intertextuality and the nature of the insight that is generated by the play's exemplification of the tension between the two. If On Baile's Strand resorts to blindness, as I have suggested, as a veil through which to trace the workings of resemblance, Molly Sweeney traces, through the cover of blindness, the manifold workings of influence, while also seeming at times to want to have the workings of influence traced through it. In tracing

these influences, and comparing them to the influences which Molly is subjected to throughout the play, I am taking my cue from Christopher Murray's investigation into Friel's sources[4]. Friel's portrayal of the function of the engram, or 'memory trace', through which all newly acquired information is filtered, represents some of the limits to the circulation of aesthetic experience by illustrating the static non-negotiability of the terms in which beauty presents itself to the individual aesthetic agent. The engram here assumes all of the material significance that was attributed to visual memory in Chapter Three. Among the chief functions performed by the engram in the play is to introduce an element of discontinuity which distinguishes the phenomenon of influence from that of intertextuality. Engrams also are the material signifiers of the difference which is central to the politicised account of aesthetic education which occupies the central portion of this chapter. The attempts of Molly's father to transmit a sense of beauty to her through the discursive channels of traditional pedagogy, and the nature of the success he seems to meet with form the basis of a suggested post-colonial reading of the play.

The greater, or more fundamental tragedy, as I see it, lies not in the futility of Molly's later attempts to replicate her pre-operative aesthetic sensibility, but the initial success she met with in her verbally mediated attempts to masquerade as a devotee of visual beauty. When I come to describe Molly's only direct, unmediated experience, I discuss at some length the question of whether or not such sensory indulgence can justifiably be termed aesthetic when unaccompanied by a strong sense of critical appreciation. Throughout the chapter I try to illustrate that Friel puts language on trial to such an extent that the considerable achievements of his play seem to be won almost in spite of itself. This is the source of the rich complexity of Molly Sweeney. Its undermining of the power of language, for example, is achieved through a masterful employment of words. As unlikely as it may seem for a dramatic celebration of the various orders of awareness that are available to the blind, its treatment of beauty is removed from the type of disparaging emphasis on the limitations of the 'wisdom' of the senses that often accompanies positive portrayals of sightlessness and other forms of sensory deprivation. Some of the play's primary insights come from the most unlikely of sources and seem to go largely unappreciated by those whose need to embrace them is most pressing. Its championing of sensory engagement is offered in a way that is

absorbed primarily cerebrally. The effect is to make us wary of the wordsmith bearing gifts as much as it is to make us appreciate both the beauty of words. At the base of Friel's concern for the limits of language, however, is an impressive responsiveness to the potential for the development of a differential aesthetic.

4.1. Intertextuality, palimpsest, and the art of being available.

We can learn quite a lot about Molly's experience by contrasting the direction of the intentionality and the nature of the agency which exists between her and those who are attempting to exercise some form of leverage in the process of her acquisition of knowledge, and that which exists between Friel and his own sources of influence. In their study of the differences and connections between influence and intertextuality, Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein observe that part of the "honorific force" of influence is that "its action occurs merely as a by-product, an exercise of strength without really trying".[5] Michael Baxandall, describing the "curse" represented by influence within art theory on account of its "wrong-headed grammatical prejudice" in relation to identifying the agent and subject, claims that the study of influence:

> seems to reverse the active/passive relation which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account. If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than Y did something to X. But in the consideration of good pictures and painters the second is always the more lively reality.[6]

The relevance of this pattern for the aesthetics of blindness portrayed by Friel is that while his description of the process of writing the play corroborates Baxandall's observation, the intentionality behind the influencing of Molly's sense of beauty throughout the greater part of the play reverses the process of agency he describes. A great amount of effort is required by Molly's father, husband, and ophthalmologist in order to exert the type of influence that they do on Molly. The discrepancy between the

sense of gratification they derive from the process, and its eventual undoing of their 'subject' will be considered here as a symptom of a politically motivated priming.

Describing Friel's process of 'building upon' some of the texts which influenced Molly Sweeney, Christopher Murray claims that " . . . in making intertextuality the key to his dramatic style and palimpsest his compositional mode, Friel challenges the critic to redefine originality."[7] The initial entries in the diary that Friel was keeping while working on the play reflect a period of idleness - a conscious readiness to be influenced while "looking for something to fill the gap left by the completion of Wonderful Tennessee"[8] Friel is actually on the lookout for something to adapt or translate rather than a tabula rasa from which to create. The winter of 1992/93 is spent "Reading fitfully and indiscriminately"(p153), and is characterized by "a sense of emptiness". Within the context of this project, one might expect The Well of the Saints to have exerted an important influence over the writing of Molly Sweeney, and over the development of its informing ideas. The two plays are, not surprisingly, often critically associated with one another. Though the two plays share the theme of the impracticability for the blind of the gift of vision, however, Synge's treatment of blindness does not seem to have been an immediately significant influence. It is interesting that though the Introduction to Playboy gets a mention in Friel's 'Sporadic Diary'(p.161), his depiction of the plight of Martin and Mary Doul is not alluded to. Synge's play does present itself as an interesting point of reference throughout this consideration of some of the issues arising directly from Friel's depiction of blindness, though it is largely on the differences between the two plays rather than their similarities that I shall be focusing.

The influences which Friel does allude to in his 'Sporadic Diary' are very illuminating, and a grouping of them into different categories helps to structure an examination of Friel's depiction of an aesthetics of blindness. It is true to say, in fact, that the Molly Sweeney extracts from the diary reflect, in microcosm, the range of concerns that this project is occupied with. The diary attests to Friel's interest in philosophical and medical approaches to blindness as well as the operations which his own personal eye trouble required him to undergo, together with a concern for the difficulty of balancing these concerns with a creative exploration of a human experience. The "fitful reading" which occupied Friel during winter 92/93 included Dostoievsky, Turgenev, Akhmatova,

Pasternak, Jung, Wallace Stevens, Eliot, Freud, and others. Friel portrays himself as something of a literary mendicant, "(s)niffing around--more focussed than sniffing -- the blind sight idea", while remaining painfully aware that "too much sniffing can induce addiction; a point of no return; a commitment to a journey that hasn't earned -- doesn't inspire -- belief"(pp.155/6). We shall see presently that the criticism of a show of unearned belief is exactly what should have made its way into Molly's report card at the end of the term of early education she receives from her father. A lot of the trouble that was to visit her later, I will argue, is a direct consequence of its failure to do so. Friel's diary records that the "first stirrings"(p.155) of "the blind-play" suggested themselves on July 15 1993 -- less than a year after an initial consultation with an eye specialist in Letterkenny resulted in the diagnosis of incipient cataracts and "perhaps glaucoma". It is at this stage also that Friel orders from his agent several books and papers on the subject of blindness and the restoration of vision. Among the material that Friel reads "closely" as part of his research for the play are treatments of blindness by Valvo and Strampelli, Berkeley, Locke, Von Senden, and Sacks. The information garnered from each of these sources makes its way directly or indirectly into the play. This incorporative process, as I see it, engages in a certain correspondence with the way in which an aesthetic sensibility is attributed to Molly in the course of the play.

It is obvious from reading the diary that among the most pressing of problems encountered by Friel in the course of his writing of the play was that of how to achieve a delicate fusion of the range of human emotions which accompany the restoration of vision and the type of philosophical speculation and medical expertise that he encountered through his research. He initially describes the dramatic project that he has in mind as "A medical story that is also offered as a love/spiritual story?"(p.156). Shortly after receiving the books from his agent he admits to reading through them with "diminishing relish", and to a temptation to "toss them aside and confront the play directly"(p.157). Less than a week later the conflict between medical knowledge and human emotion has become even more heightened:

> weary of reading about prostheses, nystagmus, visual and tactile
> experience, etc. Back to fundamentals:

a person is restored to sight
the experience is enormously difficult
the new world is a disappointment-the old world was better
the person goes into a decline and dies (p.157)

By November 8, after a period away from the play, we see Friel promising himself that "If and when I go back to the blind play I must approach it more easily, more openly, not scientifically. Allow it to flow easily through me . . ."(p.158). An anxiety enters his thoughts about the fact that an unsubtle incorporation of learned information will be detrimental to the flow of his play, the seeming naturalness of his vision. By the twenty-seventh of the same month it is obvious that the intrusion of the medical component into its portrayal of human emotions is still a source of disquiet for the playwright:

> The play keeps getting snagged in complex medical explanations. The various eye books keep demanding attention. But the play is about people and the medical condition of one of those people mustn't be allowed to dominate. (p.158)

Less than six weeks before the completion of the play, the problem is still persisting:

> Difficulty: to balance the material in such a way that the medical element is essential but always subservient to the human. This means that the medical-technical processes and languages have to be so thoroughly absorbed that all that is left is the watermark, the coloration. (p.163)

The relationship between learnable and verbally repeatable information, and a more emotional or intuitive knowledge is central, as we shall see, to the development of the characters of Molly and Frank. That it also proves to be more formally problematic in relation to the structure and 'flow' of the play is further evidenced by Friel's acknowledgment a month before the completion of the play, that

> Part of the difficulty now is to keep firm control of the flow of 'facts' and 'information' on that whole rich period between Bandages Off and Despair -- all that delight, all that terror for all of them -- to reveal the complete range of emotional transition. (p.164)

Friel's indebtedness to Oliver Sacks, the question of how to incorporate the information he gathered from Sacks's case study 'To See and Not See', was clearly a source of anxiety for him. Sacks's study, which records the experiences of a fifty year old man named Virgil as he has the sight he lost in early childhood restored, was first published in The New Yorker on May 10, 1993 -- a month before Friel felt the "first stirrings" of his "blind-play". Of the external influences mentioned above, it is the nature of Friel's appropriation of 'To See and Not See' which is of most relevance here. While Friel's theme, his portrayal of certain problematic aspects of the acquisition of knowledge, is indirectly derived from the philosophical writings of Locke, Berkeley, and Diderot, his plot, excepting some significant divergences which we shall consider later, is clearly derived from Sacks's rendering of Virgil's experience.

Apart from sharing a basic plotline with Sacks's case history, Friel's play contains many details, expressions, and terms which are taken directly from 'To See and Not See', some of which Sacks has in turn taken from other sources. Both Molly and Virgil, for example, are happily employed as massage therapists while blind, and, ill-equipped to perform this function in their respective postoperative conditions, both lose their jobs shortly after the restoration of their vision. The nature of the psychological decline presented by Friel, and the range of difficulties encountered by Molly in the course of her postoperative inauguration into the visual world, bear an unmistakable resemblance to the corresponding aspects of Virgil's experience. In his first monologue, for example, Mr. Rice recollects Frank's contention that "She has nothing to lose, has she? What has she to lose? -- Nothing"(MS, p.17)(The assertion is later repeated (p.28), though Rice has come to know better by the eve of the surgery, p.39) In Sacks's case history, Virgil's fiancée Amy insists that "there is nothing to lose".[9] She also decides that this is reason enough for Virgil to undergo surgery. Sacks describes Virgil's condition as "agnosic" because of the fact that "His retina and optic nerve were active, transmitting impulses, but his brain

could make no sense of them".[10] In what amounts to one of his series of misinterpretations, misquotations, and discontinuations, Frank recalls in his first monologue that Mr. Rice had described the condition as "agnostic" (MS, p.22). The "visual engrams" which Sacks alludes to also make an appearance in the farcical science lesson to which Frank earnestly treats the audience (MS, pp.19-22; Sacks, p121).

The accusation that the blind person has merely 'guessed' when they manage to identify or locate something is another thing the case history and the play have in common, although it happens to Virgil after his operation, and to Molly some years before hers (MS, p.14; Sacks, p.130). The expression "learning to see" is an obvious feature of both pieces (MS, p.22; Sacks, p.113), while the quotation from Diderot with which Friel prefaces his play is also adopted by Sacks (p.134). The phrase "a renaissance of personality" is perhaps one of the more conspicuous of Friel's borrowings. Sacks, for his part, attributes the expression to Alberto Valvo, and says that it describes exactly what Amy wanted for Virgil.[11] As part of what can only be interpreted as an in-joke, a self-conscious reflection on the series of borrowings which pervade the play, the expression is used there by "the clever Jean Wallace", who, with her husband, is co-authoring a book about Molly's case. Jean Wallace is an actual academic referred to by Sacks.[12] The phenomenon of blindsight is also the central concern of Sacks's study, although it is clear from Friel's diary that he had been contemplating it before the arrival of the material from his agent. The situations of the protagonists at the conclusions of their respective stories also display a certain similarity. Virgil, we are told, " . . .found himself between two worlds, at home in neither", while Molly explains that " . . . my borderline country is where I live now"(MS, p.67; Sacks, p.144). The issue of authorial rights raised by these glaring similarities has been discussed by Christopher Murray in an essay on the relation of Molly Sweeney to its sources. The issue of rights is also, I will argue, central to the play's internal development of an aesthetics of blindness.

Murray discusses this interrelationship in the context of Foucault's treatment of the question of the transgression of authorial rights in the essay 'What is an Author?' Friel's appropriation of Sacks is described by Murray in terms of the relationship between knowledge and understanding. He observes that as the mouthpiece for the type of expertise provided by Sacks, Frank is continuing a tradition to which Dodds in The

Freedom of the City, and Hugh and Yolland from Translations have contributed through their respective borrowings from Oscar Lewis and George Steiner. These figures serve as mediators in their respective plays, providing, usually quite crudely, the information that the audience need before they can arrive at a full comprehension of the significance of what they are seeing. Or, as Murray describes this aspect of Friel's methodology:

> His practice, then, is to take over such statements from other authors as he finds useful or necessary for his dramatic purposes. If he needs a certain kind of language he borrows it. Footnotes do not belong in a stage script. It seems to be part of the way Friel writes to incorporate other texts silently.[13]

While Freedom of the City and Translations are instances of appropriation in which the knowledge respectively seems to be, and most definitely is not ironized, Molly Sweeney provides examples of both scenarios. Although Rice's miserable condition betrays, to a certain extent, the limits of the uses to which his knowledge can be applied (he lost his wife primarily because he became blind to her beauty), the skill that he has learned enables him to make a profoundly meaningful contribution to society. Frank's relaying of knowledge, on the other hand, is comically reductive, and is often performed by means of the type of bizarre analogy that to the genuine expert seems to be characteristic of the self-taught. Frank's function within the play as a "parody of the expert" is seen, correctly, I think, by Murray as contributing to a destabilization of knowledge, although, as I shall try to illustrate later, it is a destabilization which the play as a whole falls some way short of achieving.

The extent to which intertextuality pervades the play, and the intricacy of the web of the appropriation of the yielded spoils is reflected in the direct and indirect references to Sacks, Valvo, Locke, Molyneux, Berkeley, and others, which are a recurring feature. By the end of Murray's essay, his earlier reflection on the palimpsestic quality of the play has been neatly reduced to the observation that Friel in his writing is "increasing rather than originating."[14] One way of looking at Molly Sweeney is as a palimpsestic presentation of a palimpsestic approach to both aesthetics and expertise. Friel's revisionary handling of his 'sources' does, as Murray suggests, prompt a questioning of

the traditional concept of artistic originality. The creative nature of his appropriation becomes obvious when considered in relation to the way in which information is acquired and circulated by the narrators of his play. In this context it becomes equally important to clarify that Friel is increasing rather than merely replicating.

4.2. Full marks, empty data - perception, mediation, and the acquisition of knowledge.

The distinction made in Chapter One between a blind person's skill in feats of orientation and his/her capacity for genuine aesthetic appraisal is highly relevant to Friel's depiction of Molly's early education. It is in the play's opening monologue that Molly describes the type of tuition to which her father subjects her as a young girl. When he is teaching her how to gauge her own location within their garden he actually encourages her to avail of the senses she is in direct possession of. When she guesses, for example, that she is beside a stream he rejoins: "Stream? Do you hear a stream? I don't. Try again"(MS, p.13). When she guesses that they are underneath the lime tree he perseveres with the same tactic: "I smell no lime tree. Sorry, try again." When it comes to the aesthetic portion of her education, however, the terms in which the lesson is related are strictly ocular. This aspect of her education comprises what seems to be a misguided indoctrination into the formal domain of aesthetic appreciation. The very confines of the walled garden within which Molly is tutored seem indicative of the fact that her native or intuitive sensibilities are circumscribed or imprisoned within the principles and dimensions of an alien aesthetic. Within these walls Molly is bound to the corrective and compensatory designs of another who instinctively attributes aesthetic frustrations to her condition and thereby creates them. Her father's methodology entails rewarding Molly with soft words of high praise for the memorizing and repetition of his descriptions of the visual features of the garden. His intention is to make her a witness to all of the beauty he describes. He tells her, for example, that

> . . . at the bottom of the pedestal there is a circle of petunias. There are about twenty of them all huddled together in one bed. They are -- what? -- seven

inches tall. Some of them are blue-and-white, and some of them are pink, and a few have big, red, cheeky faces. (MS, p.14)

It is in the immediate aftermath of this tuition that the following beauty-test ensues:

'Now Molly. Tell me what you saw.'
'Petunias.'
'How many petunias did you see?'
'Twenty.'
'Colour?'
'Blue-and-white and pink and red.'
'Good. And what shape is their bed?'
'It's a circle.'
'Splendid. Passed with flying colours. You are a clever lady.' (MS, p.14)

Although Molly is encouraged to touch and smell the flowers, when it is their beauty that is in question, all that she derives through these sensory channels is subordinated to or translated into the terms of her teacher's visual perspective. The ritual of naming, counting, remembering and repeating transfers from the petunias to the herb bed, from there to the rose bed, and on to the shrubs and trees. The production of "excellent testimony" (MS, p.15), which is taken to constitute success in the beauty-test, is reflective of the type of blindness which is at the heart of language. It also undermines the type of pedagogy which rewards learning by rote and replicating the opinions and appraisals of the teacher, thus actively discouraging the pupil's exercise of initiative and discernment. Because of the proximity of Molly's avowals of aesthetic discernment to the 'original' of which they are copies, however, the audience receives them as one receives the tedium of a twice told tale. A certain amount of intelligent application permits Molly to simulate the language and expressions which are characteristic of a connoisseur of visual manifestations of natural beauty. Her father is immensely gratified by his apparently successful moulding of a fellow-devotee of garden colours, and Molly is rewarded with praise for her sterile and servile compliance with and appropriation of an aesthetic which

does not involve her own aesthetic, emotive, or creative being. The features of the garden which Molly is instructed to relate to through verbal memory are presented to her as the components of beauty. "I know you can't see them", Mr. Sweeney informs her about the nemophila, "but they have beautiful blue eyes. Just like you." (MS, p.14) It is a problem with the education of children in general, which is compounded in the instance where the sighted attempt to 'teach' the blind about visual beauty, but invariably succeed only in teaching them blindness. Although the lesson revolves around visual terms of reference, it is highly relevant that while Molly puts on a show of compliance with the designs of her teacher, what she can really be said to procure from the lesson is appreciated through another sense: "And to have got it right for him and to hear the delight in his voice gave me such pleasure" (MS, p.14).

The trouble with Mr. Sweeney's attempt to convey to Molly a sense of the beauty of the nemophila, for example, stems from the fact that its beauty is something that is embodied in the flower itself. The significance of this fact becomes apparent when we contrast it with the process through which Frank acquires his knowledge about everything from Aristotle to goat rearing. All of his information has been transmitted textually. It is expressed rather than embodied, and so his education does not entail the attempt to put into language that which resists linguistic mediation. From his very first contribution- "One of the most fascinating discoveries I made when I was in the cheese business-well, perhaps not fascinating, but interesting, definitely interesting . . ." (MS, p.18), he seems crazed and dizzy with knowledge that he needs to share. Taking the type of liberties with knowledge and tradition which only the self-taught have not learned to make reservations about, Frank tends to interpret certain texts by applying them to disparate episodes in his own experience. This entails bringing the theories in directions never imagined by their originators. The process yields some very amusing theoretical mutations. In his opening monologue, for example, he explains the process Molly would have to go through in order to 'learn to see' if her sight ever magically returned in terms of the difficulties he encountered milking Iranian goats on the island of Inis Beag. And rather than stop at the connection between the fact that Molly "wouldn't know a flower from a football", and the fact that his goats "lived in a kind of perpetual jet-lag"(MS, p.19), Frank continues his naively speculative recasting of knowledge until he arrives at a discussion of the

exchange between William Molyneux, John Locke, and George Berkeley regarding experiments designed to solve epistemological problems concerning the origins of knowledge: "And interestingly, interestingly", he irrepressibly enthuses, "this very same problem was discussed three hundred years ago . . ."(MS, p.21), as though the ophthalmologists, the goats, and the philosophers were somehow as seamlessly fused as the sea and sky in one of Conrad's horizons, by a network of logical connections.

In the course of other circuitous explanations of the problems awaiting Molly in the sighted world, Frank treats us to a description of a television program he has recently seen about an Austrian psychiatrist (Brilliant man), gives us an account of the etymology of the word 'Abyssinia', and of a 'fascinating' week he spent in the library after his first meeting with Molly. The channels through which he processes his information certainly amuse Molly and Mr. Rice. The parodied expertise which yields terms such as 'agnostic' and 'tactical engrams', (although the latter is dubiously attributed to him by Molly) make him a subject of ridicule. The last we hear of him is through his attempted forging, in a twenty seven page study, of interconnections between the prospects of African bees thriving in County Leitrim, and the "fascinating stuff" that was taught by "a man called Aristotle"(MS, p.66). The accompaniment of this letter by the ridiculously unhelpful gesture of a money order for two pounds seems to complete the deconstruction of Frank as a credible witness, aide, and mouthpiece for germane knowledge. The very incongruity of what he regards as theoretical bedfellows plays a crucial role, however, in relieving what at times threatens to become a static tone. The nature of the difference between the types of knowledge that Molly and Frank are trying to acquire, and the different limits to the meaningful circulation of the knowledge in question, both receive a lot of attention throughout the core of this chapter.

Friel does not need to dwell upon the nature of the process by which Dr. Rice has acquired his expertise. It is obviously the result of a concerted effort, in a controlled clinical environment. It necessitated the same application of memory that we have seen Mr. Sweeney trying to foster in Molly. In his case, however, the memorisation is more fittingly applied. Like Frank, what Rice has learned can all be compressed within the covers of a textbook. While Frank is eccentrically self-taught, however, Rice has presumably been educated by experts in his field. While Frank is a sham-expert, Dr. Rice

is the real thing. As the play develops, however, Friel seems to take the unusual step of granting Rice practical omniscience, including extensive knowledge of the nature of Molly's emotional condition, by virtue of the scientific knowledge which informs his surgical expertise. When Molly tries to explain to him how much her swim meant to her, Rice replies "I know what you mean" and Molly admits to thinking that "he did know" (MS, pp.24-25). The lack of bewilderment on his face when he encounters Molly as a medical case is perhaps to be expected, but not the maintenance of the same knowledgeable expression when he is contemplating the personal turmoil she is passing through. His expression of empathy seems, as Molly is describing it, to be presented as another feat of education. Friel delays elaborating on the way in which this wisdom was earned, this empathy developed, until well into the second Act, when Rice, upon describing the phenomenon of blindsight, is revisited by an episode involving the departure of his ex-wife Maria:

> I remember in Cleveland once Bloomstein and Maria and I were in a restaurant and when Maria left the table Bloomstein said to me,
> 'Beautiful lady. You do know that?'
> 'I know,' I said.
> 'Do you really?'
> I said of course I did.
> 'That's not how you behave,' he said. 'You behave like a man with blindsight.' (MS, pp.56-57)

The understanding that exists between the ophthalmologist and his patient, we come to learn, has nothing to do with scholarly achievement. It is the only juncture in the play when the physical condition of blindness is approached metaphorically, and there is a sense that Dr. Rice's wisdom and expertise are presented as successfully bridging the chasm which exists between the figural and the material. The question of whether or not Friel acknowledges the depth of insight he is attributing to Dr. Rice here serves to heighten the significance within the play of the question of the limits of the circulation of various types of knowledge.

The conflict between intuitive and educated forms of knowledge and appreciation is clearly one which the playwright bequeaths to his narrators. When contrasted with the insight Friel's 'Sporadic Diary' gives us into the extent of creative revision at the centre of the play's intertextuality, Molly's performance in her 'beauty test' seems a vacuous demonstration of a capacity for servile replication. Molly's 'inheritance' of a foreign aesthetic can only be earned by the studious memorising of information about visual beauty. From an early age she is taught, essentially, to disavow her blindness and rewarded for the simulation of a sighted aesthetic. Because Molly is not encouraged to tap into her own sensory resources she is in danger of becoming a stranger to her own aesthetic. Molly is 'taught' blindness rather than beauty. She is taught that she is impoverished when she has an abundance of riches at her disposal. Friel's treatment of a differential aesthetic illustrates, as we have seen Synge's do, that in ascertaining the beauty or ugliness of a certain entity, the only relevant criteria are the dictates of one's own constitution. Popular standards need sometimes to be ignored, though the gesture may well be popularly interpreted as the casting aside of all standards. Mr. Sweeney assumes that an aesthetic sensibility, like an heirloom, can be inherited. Molly's experience, however, illustrates that not all values or properties can become learned acquisitions. We obviously cannot accumulate virtue, for example, by means of a vicarious relationship to the good deeds of another, while most of us know somebody who manages to develop quite a paunch without ever seeming to trouble to stock his own cupboard. The question at the heart of this reading of Molly Sweeney is whether the capacity to arrive at aesthetic appraisal is, like virtue, unique to the individual agent, and so non-transferrable, or, more like the forms of nourishment one might find inside a cupboard, conducive to a more casual circulation.[15]

4.3. Education, nomenclature, and difference - A glance behind a suspiciously excellent testimony.

In the course of his treatise on the education of the blind, T.R. Armitage, himself a blind man, gives the following account of a visit to a London boarding school which two blind girls were attending:

> The teacher was giving a lesson in writing; the sentence was written out on the blackboard; the children, at word of command, took out their slates, and spat on them and rubbed out any former writing; then they began to copy the sentence. The two little blind girls up to this point had done precisely the same as their sighted companions; and now commenced to scribble away with their slate pencils, just like the others, but with this difference, that being blind they only covered their slates with unmeaning scratches. Of course they wasted the whole time spent on the lesson.[16]

The experience was one of many which led Dr. Armitage to the somewhat inevitable conclusion that

> A good education is of extreme importance to the blind, as by its aid many will succeed in life who without it would have been helpless, unhappy, and a burden to their friends or society; consequently the elementary processes by which this education is to be brought about deserve the most careful investigation.[17]

Molly Sweeney issues, in its own way, a call for such an investigation. The difference between Molly's experience and that of the two girls cited by Armitage, however, is that the ineptitude of the tuition to which Molly is subjected is not as immediately detectable. The lesson which Armitage describes was not an unsalvageable waste because it brought attention to the particular needs of the blind girls. Unlike these girls, who naturally have not mastered the art of textual transcription, Molly enjoys a detrimental ability to use words correctly despite her inability to attach their accepted meanings to some of them. Because she is able to repeat perfectly the judgements of those around her who can see, and so to express herself sensibly even in the domain of visually orientated aesthetic appraisal, the fundamental shortcomings of her educator's methodology, and the language through which it is conveyed, are characterized by a dangerously subtle, easily overlookable profundity.

In his critical response to the play F.C. McGrath suggests that Friel himself encourages us to read it as "a conflict between two different worlds, each with its own vocabulary and syntax, its own principles of organisation, selection and orientation, its own biases, reference points, and master narratives."[18] The source of a great deal of Molly's trouble, however, as I see it, is the fact that the same vocabulary can be resorted to in order to communicate effectively across the different divisions alluded to here by McGrath. Though Molly's genuine aesthetic experience is based around principles of organisation which do not coincide with the ones around which the aesthetic experience of her father, for example, is constructed, she has no trouble, as we have seen, communicating a fabricated sense of appreciation in order to please him. This aspect of the influence exerted upon Molly by her father can, I feel, be profitably considered in relation to the most celebrated of all blind pupil-teacher relationships-that which existed between Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy, the woman whose "lifework" entailed, according to Keller herself, the development of all aspects of Helen's character.[19] In a way that is comparable with Mr. Sweeney's communication of the beauty of his garden to Molly, Helen's "guide to the treasures of light and beauty"(p154), whose vocation was as "a devotee of loveliness"(p.62), endeavoured to "impart the picturesque in everything." Because the "love of beauty" was one of the "chief Factors" in Sullivan Macy's work, the aesthetic portion of Helen's education was strongly emphasized.

In her introduction to Helen's account of her teacher, Nella Braddy Henney refers to the "fragmentation in public opinion" which occurred in relation to the nature and extent of Sullivan Macy's influence over Keller: "One segment pushed the teacher aside and called Helen a miracle", while "Another gave the whole credit to the teacher and called Helen an automaton."(p.9). Up until Sullivan Macy's death in 1936, Henney recalls, ". . . a question remained as to how much of what was called Helen Keller was in reality Anne Sullivan." Under Sullivan Macy's tuition, Keller depicts herself as having progressed from a state where " . . . there was no beauty, no symmetry, no proportion", where "it was all want, undirected want", to one where she is very much alive to the world's splendour.(p.37) There often seems something uncanny about her new-found alertness, however. After Sullivan Macy became ill one time, for example, Keller claimed to be struck by how handsome her doctor was (p.89). On a drive to Plymouth she notes

that " . . . violets were everywhere in pools of blue." (p.174) She notes at another stage that the woman who looked after a house she was renting in Brittany "had a sensitive face and was most picturesque in her Breton costume" (p.185), and how "the brilliant lights of Paris" greeted herself and her friends on their arrival there. On a trip to Nippon she elaborates on "the colourful obis of the young Japanese girls", and on the "indescribable loveliness of cherry trees in bloom." (p.208). At various other stages in her memoirs she describes "adorable ruby-eyed white rabbits" (p.40); the sea's "mingled glory of soft hues and tremendous shadows" (p.193); and compares the face of a friend to a "smiling red apple" (p.197).

One of Sullivan Macy's avowed aims-"to erase the blank in the child's life" (p.41) -- suggests itself as a further connection to the approach to Molly adopted by the people who surround her. Molly's teacher, husband, and ophthalmologist want to replace what they regard as a void in her life either by words or by the actual restoration of her vision. Both Molly and Keller are primed in a way that enables them to behave as though they were sighted. The tuition to which they are both subjected feeds off the hunger for 'normality' which either they feel, or others feel on their behalf, and so they are rewarded for feats of memory which help them essentially to disavow their blindness. As Keller tells it, her teacher's goal was nothing short of "perfection", a longing for which, on her pupil's behalf, she could never manage to curb (p.55). In Molly's case the assumption at the base of the other characters' approach to her is of the supremacy of the visual. Her sighted entourage take command of her perspective and steer it towards 'normality', as though it were somehow unnatural for Molly to harbour desires and values that do not coincide with their own.

Sullivan Macy is described affectionately by Keller as "soaring on the fiery wings of the dream" that her pupil might be "capable of attaining normality to more than a small degree" (p.48). Regarded in this context, Keller's observation that her teacher "climbed by dream stairways to beauty" (p.48) falls some way short of the compliment it was intended to be, and cuts straight to the root of the problem of the aesthetic education of the blind. The dream in question can clearly be sourced in the will and imagination of the teacher rather than the pupil upon whom it is inflicted. "She could not", Keller recalls, "simplify herself, or restrain her ambition (I prefer to call it love of perfection) or

circumscribe her dream-nurtured plans for me" (p.75). In Molly's case the dream which dictates the course of her experience can be sourced in the imagination of a husband whose fancy drifts easily from one novelty-charged challenge to the next, and the scheming mind of an ophthalmologist who is tying to restore a lagging career. The suggestion that the dream of the teacher does not reckon on the physical or psychological capacities of the pupil is something that the stories of Helen Keller and Molly Sweeney have in common. "There is nothing I have lived through on earth", Keller reflects, "sadder than to have lagged so far behind her desire as teacher and artist in one" (p.56). A similar subjugation of self-interest to the desire of others is manifest in Molly's questioning of her own motivation just before the bandages are removed after her first eye operation:

> As for myself, if I had any hope, I suppose it was that neither Frank nor Mr. Rice would be too disappointed because it had all become so important for them. (MS, p.41)

Keller herself seems unaware of the extent of self-betrayal involved in the concessions she is prompted to make in order to replicate the descriptions by others of their experiences of beauty:

> It is a rapture for me to contemplate how her ideas . . . wrought for my mind "a boat of bronze and crystal" out of poetry that would speed me beyond the prison bars of sense. (p.59)

Keller is also speeding away from the domain of purely aesthetic response, however convincingly her avowals might deny the fact. Sullivan Macy instructed Keller to "observe, observe, observe, just as you do my voice, and imitate . . ." (p.60) The implementation of such methodology can hardly be said to have constituted a corrective to that aspect of Keller's creativity which led her in 1892 to unconsciously plagiarize Margaret Canby's 'The Frost King'. It hadn't occurred to Keller that the story had come from anywhere but "out of [her] own head" (p.67) until the publication of the story

brought her inadvertent misdemeanour to public attention. This episode illustrates the relevance of James Kincaid's suggestion in an article in The New Yorker of January 20, 1997 (pp 93-97) that "Even educators may be learning how not just not to punish, but to employ plagiarism, or something very like it", and his subsequent observation that "Copying, or imitating, they say, is vital to gaining initial entry into a discourse." Although Keller seems at times to acknowledge the importance of regarding herself and her teacher as "separate personalities", she also refers to Sullivan Macy as "the life of my life" (p.161) and was prone to dubious boasts, such as that "I was proud when her clear phrases, like arrows, shot from my bow to the goal (p170), or that "Teacher put a new touch into all I wrote and spoke." (pp.169-170)

Keller's undermining of the methodology of her teacher is completely inadvertent. Friel's portrayal of the process of the acquisition of knowledge, on the other hand, deliberately undermines an educational system which operates according to the logic that we can get things right only by repeating them, and so gives the pupils the answers so that they can return them verbatim in response. Such methodology served in classical times for the teaching of rhetoric and the discipline of homiletics -- quotation as persuasion. But it is a poor model for the fostering of aesthetic sensibility. William James, in a book which Sullivan Macy consulted frequently, makes a distinction between "teaching to remember" and "teaching to understand."[20] It is the former approach, illustrated by the experiences of Molly and Helen Keller, which leads to the tendency towards misappropriation. Mr. Sweeney acts as though blindness were somehow to be regarded as an extenuating circumstance in relation to the charge of such an offence. Friel is deliberately unsubtle in his staging of the purloining of a foreign aesthetic. Plagiarism is by its nature a clandestine activity -- a piece of work is taken in stealth and passed off as one's own, or for one's own personal profit. Friel, however, through the proximity of Mr. Sweeney's descriptions of his beautiful garden to Molly's replication of his every word, is bringing attention to and thereby undermining this aspect of the educational process. Friel compounds the conspicuous nature of Molly's acquisition of a visual aesthetic, by having Frank explain at length, and in his own unique way, the policing function of engrams. Part of the significance of this function is that because of it the blind cannot explain the similarity of their learned appraisals to those of the sighted by appeal

to the inevitable coincidences between their respective experiences. Descriptions which include adjectives which refer exclusively to visual aspects of an object serve as labels to signify that the appreciation has not originated in their own experience or consciousness. Molly's description of the petunias in her garden as "blue-and-white and pink and red" (MS, p.14), for example, is a blatant giveaway.

Molly's familial obligation is to sustain her father's aesthetic by memorizing and repeating it. If there is a freedom achieved through her education it is the secondary freedom which is reflected in her capacity to reflect on the lack of discontinuity with alien principles of beauty which characterizes her every aesthetically orientated avowal. She seems to realize that she is subordinating her own interests in her eagerness to please those around her. Because of her 'excellent testimony', those around her may not, in the spirit of a recent advertising campaign, be able to believe that it's not real beauty. But Molly knows it isn't. As we follow the development of Molly's early monologues, it seems that she desperately needs to perform some form of transgression or miscarriage of the aesthetic principles she has 'inherited'. Though it would see her labelled as a slow learner, and her indulgence as a misdemeanour, she desperately needs to shed her aesthetic of its accursed continuity with that of her father by somehow forcing a margin of divergence between them. The fatally contrived alignment between her father's aesthetic and her aesthetically sounding avowals needs to be disrupted.

There is a lot of emphasis throughout the play on Molly's "testimony". When she manages to repeat her father's descriptions of the visual features of the garden she receives praise for her "excellent testimony" (MS, p.15). The concern with testimony survives the termination of her formal education, however. After her operation she is subjected to a seemingly endless series of tests. When Molly doesn't initially respond when asked what she sees, Rice prompts her: "I'm holding my hand before your eyes, Molly, can you see it?" Rice wants desperately to hear the 'right', affirmative word, and so when Molly eventually supplies it after he has practically put it into her mouth, he responds in a fatherly way, bringing the theme of repetition which pervades the play onto another level, "Splendid . . . Absolutely splendid. You are a clever lady" (MS, p.42). The same ordeal is repeated as she is asked to identify colours and fruit, and is rewarded for each 'success' with equally patronising praise. When asked what colour a piece of paper

is she responds tentatively "Is it . . . yellow?" Though an element of guesswork seems to remain behind Molly's corroboration, at least in this instance the aesthetic quality in question is one which conceivably lies within the spectrum of her experience. It is difficult to determine whether it is actually a feat of language or a feat of perception that Rice is celebrating when he responds: "Yes! So you know some colours! Excellent! Really excellent!" (MS, p.44) That a 'right' word is like gold-dust, and therefore to be provoked by any means possible, is further illustrated by Molly's recollection of a highly amusing exchange between herself and Frank in the aftermath of the operation:

> '. . . Now what's this?'
> 'It's a pear.'
> 'You're guessing.'
> 'Let me touch it.'
> 'Not allowed. You already have your tactical engrams. We've got to build up a repertory of visual engrams to connect with them.'
> And I'd say, 'For God's sake stop showing off your posh new words, Frank. It's a banana.'
> 'Sorry. Try again.'
> 'It's a peach. Right?'
> 'Splendid!' he'd say in Mr. Rice's accent. 'It certainly is a peach. Now, what's this?' (MS, p.49)

Both Molly and Frank are busily engaged in the task of learning off "posh new words" for the sake of the empty show of knowledge that a repetition of them facilitates. The expression "tactical engrams" is a brilliantly subtle and comic illustration of this. By the time the expression "tactile engrams" makes its way to Frank via the circuitous route from Sacks through Friel, Rice, and Molly, neurological science has been reduced to a clumsily played game of 'Chinese Whispers'. The problem illustrated here by the examples of Friel, Molly, Frank, and Helen Keller, is actually discussed by Diderot in his Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those who Can See. The problem arises from the misleading consequences of the ability of the blind to engage in dialogue in a way which

does not betray the figurative and subjective nature of their language. In the cases of Molly's description of flowers, and Keller's reminiscences about a visual beauty which she never actually saw, the fact that their language is not even remotely referential is masked by their impressive verbal memories.

William R. Paulsen suggests that a detailed analysis of the aspects of blindness discussed in Diderot's Letter should begin with an examination of the "problems of figures, and linguistic or semiotic questions in general."[21] These features are latent in the speech of the blind man of Puiseaux who features in the Letter. This man speaks of mirrors and other objects that he has no direct experience of. By using certain terms, most notably visual ones, exactly as he has heard them conventionally applied, rather than in the terms suggested by his own sensorial experience, the man manages unfailingly to have sensible sounding conversations which revolve around them. In the case of the blind man from Puiseaux, Paulsen explains,

> this difference in internal language seems to disappear in the common tongue of external language, but Diderot recognizes the gap between knowledge and discourse, the figurative and sometimes deceptive character of what the blind man says so well.[22]

Diderot singles out aesthetic judgements, and in particular the expression "cela est beau", as extreme examples of such conventional verbal repetition. Such empty declarations are far from being exclusive to the blind, but permeate the discourse of practically every member of society:

> The blind speaker merely pushes to the limit a deceptive possibility already present in language, namely, that its users may speak about that of which they know nothing, while a facile illusion of communication is maintained by the inductive assumption that everybody understands and speaks in the same way.[23]

Complying with conventional modes of discourse, in other words, helps to maintain an illusion of reference which masks the element of blindness which exists at the heart of certain verbal exchanges. Friel seems to have heeded Diderot in this regard, by investing Frank's monologues with arguably more blindness than Molly's. While Molly is quite conscious of, and frank about the lie she is living, Frank earnestly volunteers intricately detailed accounts of phenomena of which he has only a tenuous and superficial grasp. It is a feature of all of our discourses that we sometimes use words which do not refer to anything we have learned through our senses, but whose learning required the burning of a considerable quantity of midnight oil. Paulsen describes the blindness which is central to our habitual modes of discourse in a manner which recalls what Sullivan Macy was attempting to exploit in her avowed aspirations for her tuition of Helen Keller:

> Sensual denomination provides some terms in the network of language; the others must be filled in by the use of language's properties as a system, through combination, comparison, and associations in discourse. In the case of the blind man, the spaces in the field of language to be filled in are far more numerous.[24]

While it may be true that the blind rely to an unusually high degree on abstraction and figure when constructing their discourse, their use of language, as illustrated by the similarities between the nature of the discourses of Molly and Frank, serves adequately as a metaphor for language use in general. The discourses of Molly and Frank are both characterized by a certain reductiveness, unwittingly testifying to the validity of Paulsen's claim that language "involves as much blindness as sight."[25] F.C. McGrath describes Friel's play, accurately, I think, as "another major articulation of language, illusion, and their ability to constitute the reality of the experience we inhabit."[26] Beauty, perhaps more than any other entity, betrays the limits of this ability.

In discussing the importance assumed within the play by the memorizing and repetition of words, Richard Pine observes that "the essence of memory, as of ritual, is naming things, creating spaces within which recognition, acknowledgement takes place."[27] That the recognition alluded to here by Pine is often superficial is suggested by

McGrath's contention that both Molly Sweeney and Faith Healer "explore the relations of language, narrative, and illusion to the formation of individual identity", and that they also demonstrate "how radically different needs or conditions produce narratives that structure experience in radically different ways."[28] What McGrath is describing here sounds like an apology for the type of differential aesthetic that this entire project is investigating. Blindness undoubtedly qualifies as such an identity-forming condition, and although a clever use of language can go a long way towards concealing its implications for the structuring of experience, even language is ultimately abandoned by this capacity in the domain of aesthetic experience.

Pierre Villey addresses what he sees as the problem presented by Helen Keller's apparent assumption that her mastery of visual language constitutes an experience of visual reality. Villey is disappointed at the level of self-betrayal which is implicit in Keller's tendency to use language to refer to what she has heard of other people's experience rather than her own. "Wordiness, unreal emotion, and, in the worst sense of the term, literature, occupy", according to Villey, "a disconcerting place in her writings."[29] Villey, who was also blind, does not try to conceal his exasperation at the abundance of visual and auditory impressions recorded in the autobiographical writings of the blind and deaf Keller. He takes Keller to task on this score,

> not only because pages of this kind, which perplex readers anxious to get at the inner thoughts of Helen Keller, prove to us that she does not distinguish between sentiments suggested to her by words, and sentiments inspired by sensations, and that, consequently, her testimony with regard to aesthetic emotions cannot be accepted without being verified.[30]

Villey suggests that "literary vanity" may account for some of Keller's elaborate descriptions of phenomena of which she clearly has had no experience. He considers, however, that "a weak point of this wonderful education of a fine intelligence" may well be a more profound cause. Words, for Keller, rather than being "the sign of sensation", are, at least according to Villey, "literally the substitute for sensation", having "taken the place of the absent, and unknown sensation."[31] He admits that there are advantages to

Keller's impressive, and "strangely exact" verbal memory, but warns of the risk which accompanies such advantage:

> Helen Keller did not allow her mind the time necessary for an individual who had only the sense of touch at her command, to obtain all the direct impressions that she might have had for these words that she all too easily assimilated.[32]

The "wordiness" which is a characteristic of so much of Keller's literary output, and especially her 'aesthetic testimony' is a result of what Villey regards as a facile appropriation of learned descriptions. Entire phrases which she had either read in Braille, or had written onto her hand, resurfaced quite often in her written work and conversation, although Keller had no suspicion of the degree of appropriation involved in her appraisals. The nature of her education seriously weakened her ability to distinguish between her own intuitive impressions and the opinions and descriptions that, having read, she stored quite perfectly in her memory. At the age of twenty two, some ten years after the plagiarism case had been levelled against her, she had still to admit that:

> Even now I can never find the boundary line between my own ideas and those I have drawn from books. What I have read becomes the very substance and, if I may so express it, the contexture of my mind.[33]

Keller's reading, rather than her direct experience, was what inspired a large part of her descriptions of beauty. The 'aesthetic sensibility' is described by Villey as a largely "psittacistic" one, where

> words and emotions are used without troubling about the sensations themselves, giving the idea of the existence of sensations which do not exist. They are, as it were, working with nothing behind them.[34]

This would also be an accurate description of Molly's youthful appreciation of the beauty of her father's garden. The emptiness, or indirect referentiality of such descriptions detracts hugely, in Villey's eyes (and it is difficult to argue with him on this point) from the quality of Keller's much celebrated capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Words, as the experiences of Molly Sweeney and Helen Keller suggest, are much prized, but easily misused tools in the education of the blind. Part of the counsel Keller received from her teacher was that "The game of words is the only game you can play on equal terms with the best of them" (p.125). And when Sullivan Macy, shortly before her death, says to Keller "There may be a wall between you and them, but hammer it down, stone by stone, even if you are broken by the effort" (p.196), it is obvious, regardless of what one may think about the prudence or possibility of levelling this "wall" completely, that words are regarded by both of them as the main tool which Keller has at her disposal in her attempt to achieve this task. Friel draws our attention to the dangers inherent in the fact that such feats can be comfortably achieved on a verbal level.

Molly Sweeney emphasises the extent to which aesthetic enjoyment is an individual experience. It illustrates that the subjective component of aesthetic appraisal can only very reductively be translated into a sign system conducive to universal understanding. McGrath is correct, I feel, in his assertion that for Friel "social contracts are grounded on fictions"-- it is a point that can be made with equal validity in relation to The Well of the Saints -- but one's relation to an object or experience of beauty is not answerable to the terms of a social contract, and thrives on this freedom.[35] The contention that fictions constitute the only type of reality that is available to us holds when society and inter-personal relationships are the only factors to be taken into account. Friel's transcending of these factors in Molly Sweeney in order to focus on the 'inner life' of Molly herself, plays a major part in his portrayal of an aesthetics of blindness. Richard Kearney has written about the extent of Friel's subscription to the preoccupation with "the transfiguring power of the word" which Kearney sees as a salient feature of the Irish dramatic movement.[36] Writing in 1983, Kearney describes the then contemporary endeavours by dramatists to "challenge and unseat the primacy of verbal theatre in Ireland", citing the work of Tom MacIntyre, Roger Doyle, Olwen Fouere, and David McKenna, among others, as being at the forefront of this challenge. Thanks largely to the

radical exploits of these pioneers, Irish theatre no longer seemed content to merely 'tell a story', and seemed finally to be freeing itself from its "bondage to the word."[37] Kearney suggests that this discontent with the Irish 'theatre of the word' stemmed from the belief that

> the Irish fascination with language is an impediment to a purely dramatic expression, creating distance and self reflection where there should be "the immediate, physical presence of actors performing in front of an audience"[38]

He makes a case for Friel's approach by suggesting that the type of ending which he sees as typical of a Friel play might be considered as "symptoms of a crisis of faith in the power of words", and that his plays in general might be regarded as

> trojan horses in the citadel of this tradition, contesting its constraints of storytelling from within and pointing to the possibility of more immediate, non-verbal modes of expression.[39]

What seems to be contested in Molly Sweeney is the assumption that words can communicate certain qualities and experiences which actually largely resist verbal mediation. There is more to the development of an aesthetic sensibility, Friel seems to be suggesting, than such trappings as the bluff of nomenclature.

4.4. Midnight in the garden of appeal and aversion - the aesthetic (mis)education of the blind by the sighted.

In his efforts to guide Molly's appreciation, her father is attempting to set the terms and limits of aesthetic relevance. His description and appraisal of his garden is offered as though there were a universal validity inherent in his own aesthetic judgements to which his daughter, if she only knew better, would intuitively give her assent. He resolves, therefore, that the 'deficiency' in her delicacy of taste can be corrected through appropriately guided development. The type of refinement of intuitive responses that

education usually performs is taken to a radical extreme by Mr. Sweeney, as ridiculous limits are set on what count as legitimate responses to inherently value-laden questions. And so the answer to the question 'what is beautiful?' becomes 'whatever is approved of by those who share the tastes of the master'. The beauty of his garden is just something that Molly will have to take her father's word for. Having argued that descriptions of beauty are usually evaluative, and that those evaluative terms correspond to the relational properties of the objects in question (i.e.-their capacity to elicit personal responses that are themselves reflective of taste), Alan Goldman asks "how is aesthetic education any more than the imposition of the taste of the teacher on the students?"[40] A similar neglect of the differential within the aesthetic realm can be traced back to Le Bruyere's seventeenth century claim:

> There is a point of perfection in art, as of excellence and maturity of nature. He who is sensible of it and loves it has perfect taste; he who is not sensible of it and loves this or that else on either side of it has faulty taste.[41]

La Bruyere's maxim, or something like it, would seem to have been adopted as a kernel of Molly's aesthetic education. Her father, as well as Frank and Mr. Rice, have devised a master-plan in order to render Molly alive to such perfect beauty. In the guide by James which Sullivan Macy was fond of consulting, for example, there are quite definite guidelines as to how best to instil into one's students the tastes and opinions one would wish them to have. James informs his teachers that

> Every acquired reaction is, as a rule, either a complication grafted on a native reaction, or a substitute for a native reaction which the same object originally intended to provoke.
> The teacher's art consists in bringing about the substitution or complication, and success in the art presupposes a sympathetic acquaintance with the receptive tendencies natively there.[42]

Although the methodology employed by Mr. Sweeney is admittedly a very crude version of the strategy suggested here by James, it is informed by what I see as the same colonising imperative. James urges his teachers to keep in mind that "(e)ach of us is in fact what he is almost exclusively by virtue of his imitativeness", and encourages them to exploit this "impulse to emulate what you see another doing, in order not to appear inferior."[43] For reasons outlined earlier, while imitation may suffice for the circulation of a knowledge whose native medium is inherently propositional, a personal aesthetic sensibility cannot be arrived at mimetically. The connection between colonization and pedagogy is further highlighted when James issues the imperative

> Respect always the original reactions, even when you are seeking to overcome their connection with certain objects, and to supplant them with others that you wish to make the rule.[44]

To "break up bad associations, or wrong ones, to build others in, to guide associative tendencies into the most fruitful channels", is presented by James as the educator's principal task.[45] The discrepancy between aesthetic tastes in Molly Sweeney is actually of little philosophical interest. It is easily attributable to a corresponding discrepancy in physical and sensory endowment. The truth of the matter is that natural beauty is complex enough to afford conflicting responses without invalidating either. The interest which the discrepancy arouses is more political than philosophical. Molly is not only urged to shed her personal skin in order to bring her taste into line with that of those around her and to interact in the manner of a generic aesthetic agent with her environment -- she has a new skin engrafted onto her existing one. The education she receives, which excludes all reference to anything personally unique to her own experience, can be interpreted as being partly politically motivated. Alan Goldman suggests that in the domain of formal aesthetics, for example, "(i)ndoctrinating students into sharing the values of the status quo or of the teacher may be beneficial to those who already share those values."[46] It generates, for instance, the production of further art which contains the same values:

> If successful, this perpetuates the type of taste taught, so that performers, producers, and artists will continue to cater to it. It also generates more overt forms of public support for art, education being a slightly subtler form.[47]

The type of indiscriminate regurgitation of traditional values encouraged by such forms of education, however, will struggle to justify itself when confronted with individuals who cannot relate to such values. Goldman recognizes, for example, that such "groundless perpetuation of the status quo is just what critics of aesthetic education typically charge." Such objectivist and traditionalist defences, he argues, "play into the hands" of critics rather than countering their objections.

The aesthetic education of the blind by the sighted can result, as Molly's experience suggests, in an extreme instance of the common scenario whereby one's personal response to a beautiful object does not quite tally with one's 'educated' assessment of the aesthetic features of the same object. This is the phenomenon that can make us laugh at inappropriate moments in the theatre, or, more embarrassingly, at inopportune 'real life' moments. In our mundane, workaday perception, because our personal investment in what we perceive through our senses is not so great, we rarely experience such inner antagonism. As a result of long-instilled habits, we tend to respond automatically to our everyday encounters. It is not so in the aesthetic domain. Or at least it ought not be. Personal response is integral to the aesthetic encounter. In the 'aesthetic' experience that Molly is treated to by her father, however, the distinction disappears. Molly obediently assumes the role of automaton and is praised for feats of verbal replication. She is not, in other words, permitted to feel, know, or sense for herself, to exercise any form of discernment or initiative. In Chapter Two I suggested that Synge's depiction of blindness was heavily influenced by his musicianship. One cannot help but wonder about the extent to which Friel's treatment of all the impediments to aesthetic education has been influenced by his experience as a school teacher. The degree of ineffability associated with aesthetic experience; the potentially alienating effect of the formal analysis of one's aesthetic experiences; the considerable element of doubt pertaining to the question of whether there are infallible principles to guide 'the great family of man' in its aesthetic appraisals; the question of whether objectivity actually is the predominant characteristic

of the aesthetic experience, are all issues which challenge the wisdom of traditional pedagogical methodology. The only principle that we can state with any degree of certainty in relation to the aesthetic education of the blind after witnessing Molly Sweeney's tragic experience, is that the student must be encouraged to remain truthful to him/herself regardless of whatever pressures are exerted on them from different quarters to charm their entry into the aesthetic domain by mimicking the prevailing consensus in relation to what is and what is not beautiful. Friel insists that a ghosted appraisal simply will not do.

The incompatibility between Molly's natural aesthetic and the one with which she is quite forcefully presented is established through quite a particular and sophisticated symbolism. Frank's first contribution to the play is, as we have seen, his circuitous and meandering explanation of the functioning of the engram. An indelible imprint in the genes of his Iranian goats meant that their time on Inis Beag was spent in "a kind of perpetual jet-lag". In an indirect reference to Sacks, Frank tells us of a "brilliant article" he once read in an American magazine (MS, p.20) in which the phenomenon of the engram was explained. After explaining that a friend may become a stranger for thirty years but when the sight of him connects with the memory trace in the perceiver's brain there is immediate recognition, Frank relates the function of the engram specifically to Molly's case. Rice, Frank informs us, had warned them of the immensity of the task entailed in "learning to see" after a life of blindness:

> The way he explained it was this. She knew dozens of flowers; not to see; not by sight. She knew them only if she could touch them and smell them because those tactile engrams were implanted in her brain since she was a child. But if she weren't allowed to touch, to smell, she wouldn't know one flower from another; she wouldn't know a flower from a football. How could she? (MS, pp.20-21)

From here our guide jumps to Berkeley's conclusion that the tactile and visual worlds are not remotely connected, and that "any connection between the two could be established only by living, only by experience, only by learning the connection"(MS, p.21). Finally,

after parading the yield of his own week of frenzied research into the field of vision, Frank refers us back to Mr. Rice's account of Molly's dilemma:

> . . . most of us are born with all five senses; and with all the information they give us, we build up a sight world from the day we are born -- a world of objects and ideas and meanings. We aren't given that world, he said. We make it ourselves -- through our experience, by our memory, by making categories, by interconnections. Now Molly had only ten months of sight and what she had seen in that time was probably forgotten. So, if her sight were restored, everything would have to be learned anew: she would have to learn to see. She would have to build up a whole repertory of visual engrams and then, then she would have to establish connections between these new imprints and the tactile engrams she already possessed. Put it another way: she would have to create a whole new world of her own. (MS, pp.21-22)

In his attempted aesthetic priming of his daughter, Mr. Sweeney didn't allow for the extent to which the discrepancy between the visual terms through which the lessons were conducted, and the non-visual orientation of Molly's entire being, would problematize the process of her education. In the aftermath of her operation it is the incompatibility between Molly's new visual world and her lifetime's accumulation of tactile engrams which proves the chief impediment to her tidy assimilation of visual knowledge. The result is that visual detail does not 'dovetail' harmoniously into the set of ideas which Molly has acquired in blindness. Visual impressions disorient her as she experiences the sudden redundancy of her old familiar ways. The intimate knowledge of a world which had afforded her a great deal of comfort now only serves to disconcert. In Chapter Three we considered the extent to which very real limitations of visual memory serve to outline the boundaries for the aesthetic sensibility Yeats attributes to the Blind Man of On Baile's Strand. Engrams fulfil a similar function in Molly Sweeney, with the crucial distinction that Friel is supremely conscious of the material implications of these limitations. His research into the material realities of the condition of blindness appear to dictate Friel's treatment in the play of the educational and political aspects of the

differential experience. Friel challenges the type of collective principles and naïve egalitarian ideals that would not ever suspect that Molly might not be in a position to accept her father's 'heirloom aesthetic' and the gift of vision secured for her by the efforts of Frank and Mr. Rice. The play stresses the type of perils risked through the application of the universalising tendencies of humanism within the realm of aesthetic education.

There are times, Molly Sweeney illustrates, when a certain beauty, regardless of how popularly acknowledged, will prove not to be universally infectious. The engrams of which Frank speaks so wonderfully unauthoritatively perform a policing function which checks the contagion of visual beauty, and raises certain doubts in relation to the feasibility of the mimetic circulation of aesthetic appreciation. Words may be employed to suggest that beauty sustains universal verification, and that particular aesthetic judgements suffuse everybody's capacity for discernment in an identical way. By utilising the material function of the engram as a means of exposing certain exhibitions of knowledge as being only word deep, Friel's mastery of language turns on itself, warns of the epistemological hoodwink it frequently performs, and protests against its own reductiveness. The politics behind her lapse into this condition appears to be as central to Friel's concern as the contemplation of the various philosophical debates specifically alluded to in the course of the play. Molly's ordeal cannot be related exclusively in sensorial terms. Several complicating political factors are intricately interwoven through Friel's portrayal of her predicament. While she is still very young, Molly's father, as we have seen, coaxes an easy submission from her to value system he indoctrinates her into, although she actually knows it to be foreign to her experience. Such teasing from her tongue of words which have no reason to exist in her vocabulary seems reflective of the lack of regard within traditional aesthetic discourse for the array of possible differences between aesthetic subjects. The bias informing such failure to discriminate is as offensive as the most blatant instance of the more usual form of prejudice which entails explicit partiality towards a certain class or group. The question of whether her different sensorial make-up determines Molly's eligibility or otherwise as an inheritor of her father's aesthetic, is handled by Friel in a way which inverts the terms in which instances of misappropriation are usually discussed. Rather than being accused of illegitimately

purloining a stake in aesthetic property, Molly has an aesthetic which does not belong to her, which she has no real right to and less desire for, placed in her pocket. While the identity of a subject - its gender, wealth, or able-bodiedness - for example, conventionally play a major role in determining the legitimacy of different forms of appropriation, in Molly's case her identity was not considered at all. She was indiscriminately granted an aesthetic which proves to be fatally unsuited to her. The lesson that Molly desperately needs to learn, and it is one that she manages to teach herself as she matures, is that her marginalisation need not prevent her from making beauty her own.

Perhaps the most important feature of Molly's experience to consider in relation to the treatment in the play of her difference is the excellent state of her health before the intervention of Frank and Rice. Her experience has some obvious parallels with that of the badgers on the edge of Lough Anna which Frank and his friend Billy Hughes take it upon themselves to rescue from the impending flooding of the lake. They spend two and a half hours digging the badgers out of their sett, then throw fishing nets over them, so that they can remove them by wheelbarrow further up the mountain where they try to "force them" into an old, abandoned sett. Naturally the "half blind" creatures "went wild" once released from the nets, and tried immediately to return to the old sett which Frank and Billy had destroyed by their digging. In response the two friends "flung [themselves] on the heather and laughed until [their] sides hurt"(MS, p.61). Molly is subjected to similar treatment by similarly well-intentioned deliverers. When Mr. Rice, recalling the last visit he paid to Molly, refers to her "wayward hair contained in a net"(MS, p.64), the correspondence between the two experiences is unmistakable. The badgers and the blind woman are both victims, both get caught up in the same friendly fire.

Like the badgers, and like Sacks's patient, Virgil, Molly had been coping much more than adequately when left to her own devices. Rice's first impression of her acknowledges as much:

> I liked her, I liked her calm and her independence; the confident way she shook my hand and found a seat for herself with her white cane. And when she spoke of her disability, there was no self pity, no hint of resignation . . .(MS, p.16).

She had been living a full life with the lack of sense of having been deprived that is characteristic of so many of the congenitally blind. Forty-one, married, employed as a massage therapist in a local health club, providing an income that her unemployed husband cannot supply -- Molly hardly seems to be the one in need of assistance. "I knew my own world", she recalls, "I didn't think of it as a deprived world. Disadvantaged in some ways; of course it was. But at that stage I never thought of it as deprived"(MS, p.24). The sense of deprivation, of course, is to come after the intervention of husband and ophthalmologist. In her pre-operative condition Molly actually feels privileged in some ways because she does not have eyesight to compete with and qualify the impressions derived through the other senses. She seems more than content with all that is naturally at her disposal. "It is this peace and stillness", as Richard Pine observes, "which the colonists -- husband and doctor -- come to disrupt, with their intention of restoring Molly's eyesight -- a condition she has never known and does not wish to enjoy, in order to restore themselves."[48] The "colonists" also deprive Molly of a site of beauty from which she derived a great deal of pleasure while blind.

4.5. Attending to the differential – the enlisting of one's own unearthed reserves.

Molly cannot develop or satisfy an appetite for experience that can genuinely said to be her own without the complete undoing or escaping of the influence of her various benefactors. While recounting the barrage of inquisitions she was perennially subjected to as a blind person, the following account flows freely from her direct and crucially unchaperoned experience:

> And how could I have told those other doctors how much pleasure my world offered me? From my work, from the radio, from walking, from music, from cycling. But especially from swimming. Oh I can't tell you the joy I got from swimming. I used to think -- and I know this sounds silly -- but I really did believe I got more pleasure, more delight, from swimming than sighted people can ever get. Just offering yourself to the experience -- every pore

> open and eager for that world of pure sensation, of sensation alone -- sensation that could not have been enhanced by sight -- experience that existed only by touch and feel; and moving swiftly and rhythmically through that enfolding world; and the sense of such assurance, such liberation, such concordance with it . . . Oh I can't tell you the joy swimming gave me. I used to think that the other people in the pool with me, the sighted people, that in some way their pleasure was actually diminished because they could see, because seeing in some way qualified the sensation; and that if they only knew how full, how total my pleasure was, I used to tell myself that they must, they really must envy me. (MS, p.24)

A world opens itself to Molly and she is enraptured. For several reasons it is difficult to determine conclusively whether or not it is appropriate to discuss this world and this rapture in purely aesthetic terms. Much of the remainder of this chapter occupies itself with accounting for the resistance of this question to easy resolution.

The stark contrast between this account of Molly's intuitive experience and the aesthetic which her father endeavours to engraft onto her sensibility is central to my reading of the play. The differences between the two scenarios revolve around the immediacy of Molly's exposure to and engagement with her environment, which in both cases constitutes the 'aesthetic object' in her experience. Describing her swim, Molly can talk of "offering" herself to the experience, and of the "total pleasure" and "liberation" which is born of an eagerness for and a "concordance with" the world of sensation, because this experience, unlike her vicarious appreciation of the colourful garden, involves a direct and embodied participation. The particular nature of the relationship between meaning, knowledge, and understanding in purely sensory experience, removes the significance of Molly's movement through water from both the regard for verbal memory instilled into her from an early age by her father, and Frank's reverence for propositional knowledge. More crucially, for this reading of the play, the resistance of Molly's aesthetic experience to explicit verbal transmission greatly problematizes the nature of aesthetic education.

In an essay on 'Education and Aesthetic Meaning', Louis Arnaud Reid, comparing aesthetics (Reid focuses on the aesthetic aspects of art, but most of his argument seem equally applicable to non-formal, or natural manifestations of beauty) to science, philosophy, and history, suggests that there is "more knowledge" in the former

> because it is knowledge in which the whole embodied person participates by being as well as knowing. It is a knowledge in which embodied imaginative being is an essential part of the knowing.[49]

Molly's swim is characterised by the type of engagement with her surroundings which aesthetic theorists, guided by their traditional insistence on the maintenance of a critical, observational and contemplative distance, have tended to overlook. The dramatic portrayal of the aesthetic experiences of the blind which feature throughout these three literary chapters, together with the autobiographical accounts which are collected in Chapter Five, suggest that the adoption of such a contemplative perspective is not always an appropriate or feasible manner of aesthetic appreciation. Whether or not the distinction between when it is and is not appropriate corresponds to the distinction between when the aesthetic object in question is a formal work of art, or an instance of a more naturally occurring beauty, is an interesting one. Since all of the aesthetic experiences depicted in these plays are instances of the latter, however, the question is not one that we can address at any length here. Arnold Berleant, it is, however, worth mentioning, has suggested that we

> reserve the disinterested contemplation of a discrete object for art, and develop a different aesthetic for natural appreciation, one that acknowledges the experience of continuity, assimilation, and engagement that nature encourages.[50]

Berleant seems to be volunteering an insight which is very similar to the one I see as informing Friel's play -- that there is something fundamentally wrong with the idea that a competent aesthetic observer is one who will assent to the attribution of a high

aesthetic value to certain ideal sites of beauty -- when he acknowledges that we are "beginning to discover that the history of the modern arts is more a history of perception than a history of objects", and insists further that perception is not "just a visual act, but a somatic engagement in the aesthetic field."[51] The sense of "liberation" of which Molly speaks so passionately seems to be due largely to the complete closure of the distance between herself and nature which her father's tuition had forced open. That Molly's intimate engagement with the element that affords her such joy is not transgressing any immutable aesthetic criteria is suggested by Berleant's observation that "the perceived sense of continuity with our human being with the dynamic forms and processes of the natural world is a general factor in the appreciation of nature."[52] The traditional treasuring of contemplative distance is further undermined by Berleant through his distinction between "looking at" the environment and "looking in" it, or perceiving the environment "from within". When we adopt the latter perspective, the environment is transformed into an element in which we live as participants rather than as observers. This distinction can be applied very aptly to Molly's experience of swimming, and also, though perhaps not quite to the same extent, to the experiences of Martin and Mary Doul of the non-visual aspects of nature's 'bloom'. Although proponents of traditional 'objectivist' aesthetics would doubtlessly disregard such participation and proximity as de-aestheticizing, Berleant insists very convincingly, that it is "inescapably aesthetic". The "aesthetic mark" of such experiences, he argues,

> is not disinterested contemplation but total engagement, a sensory immersion in the natural world that reaches the still uncommon experience of unity. Joined with acute perceptual consciousness and enhanced by the felt understanding of assimilated knowledge, such occasions can become clear peaks in a cloudy world, high points in a life dulled by habit and defensive disregard.[53]

Friel's portrayal of this aspect of Molly's experience constitutes another instance of his employing of words as "trojan horses" within a highly literary dramatic tradition. For accompanying the liberation which comes with this escape from the formalistic

requirement of distance, and the shift of emphasis from the aesthetic object to the subject, is the 'problem' (it is such from the pedagogue's perspective) of the degree of ineffability which often accompanies such experience. Molly's enthusiasm for the experience of swimming arises, presumably, from her conviction that it is a meaningful experience. Yet when she attempts to articulate the meaning of the direct, imaginative, and perceptual participation of her embodied self in the beauty afforded by the experience, she tells us about her joy because she "can't tell" the joy. 'About' is a hugely significant word in aesthetics. Molly's words do not usher her to within closer proximity to the joy she experienced than an adjoining territory which is occupied by certain isolated components of the experience and of some of the emotions that are coupled with it. The limitations of language that Friel is drawing attention to here do not invalidate the discipline of aesthetics any more than an inescapable element of conjecture invalidates the discipline of metaphysical theory. In an attempt to explain why we must be content with "limited descriptions" of aesthetic experience, Ruth Lorand, an aesthetic theorist who features in the next chapter, observes:

> Explanations and justifications of aesthetic experience, no matter how detailed and knowledgeable, remain partial and incomplete; the paradox and its enigmatic effect are capable of being alleviated but never removed.... Philosophical analysis ... gains its strength not only from solving problems, but also from highlighting difficulties and drawing the limits of philosophical understanding.[54]

An alternative reading would not regard Molly's experience of swimming as being characterised by ineffability at all. It is true that the passage in question reads like a beautiful and elaborately detailed account -- but prefaced by a deceptively humbling assertion that the entity in question defies description. There seems something in it of the ploy of the poet who declares that the ways of his love are uncountable, only to proceed immediately to exhaustively enumerate them. There is more to it than this, however. It does not appear to me that in this instance Friel is endeavouring merely to employ a standard rhetorical trope. On the contrary, by indicating the presence of a domain where

language does not exercise dominion, he is implicating himself in the very crisis of faith in the power of words which, as Kearney has suggested, was partly instigated by his seemingly unqualified confidence in them[55].

The ineffability that I regard Friel as acknowledging, if not championing, may stem partly from the problematic nature of communication between the language of four senses and that of five. These communicative problems are compounded, however, by the very real extent to which the meaning of an aesthetic experience can lie beyond the boundaries of what is sayable. Molly "cannot tell" the joy afforded her by swimming because the meaning of the experience, as opposed to the nature of some of its affiliated consequences, has no fully satisfactory discursive referent. The same concern is a recurring feature throughout a series of letters exchanged between Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan which will feature quite heavily in Chapter Six. In one of the later letters Magee tries to convince the sceptical Milligan, who is blind, of the impossibility of describing Moeran's 'Symphony in G minor' to a group of music lovers who had never actually heard it, sufficiently well to enable them to say that they know the piece. "Now there is no number of propositions, however great," Magee insists:

> that I could voice to such people that would put them in the position, in which I happen to be, of knowing the symphony. I could tell them all sorts of things about it: not just things extraneous to the work, like when it was composed, but things intrinsic to it, such as what instruments it was scored for, how many movements there are, how each one is structured and how long it lasts, what the key relationships within the work are, and so forth. What I could not do is tell them the symphony.[56]

At the end of an hour's lecture about the qualities of the piece, these music lovers are still, Magee would have us believe, obliged to respond in the negative when asked whether they know the symphony which has not been transmitted to them. What Magee knows, and his audience do not, is simply the symphony. The application of a similar logic would imply that the only way for us to come close to sharing in Molly's swim would be to have splashed around in the pool alongside her at the time.

The tuition which Molly received from her father fell as short as it did of being genuinely aesthetically insightful, partly because her father made the mistake of presuming that what in fact was not conducive to discursive projection -- the beauty of the flowers -- could be rendered as propositionally as the information yielded to Frank by the various periodicals he busied himself consulting. By acknowledging the resistance of her experience to satisfactory verbal mediation, Molly at least suggests that her father's tuition has not been entirely wasteful. She has learned from him about the folly of searching for words to convey the literal meaning of aesthetic experience - of trying, that is, to articulate the untellable. The theme is taken up again by Friel in Performances, in relation to the art which Magee resorts to in order to illustrate the limitations of linguistic mediation. It is significant that while the musical element of Molly Sweeney extends only as far as the characteristically indirect reference to the titles of songs sung by some of the peripheral characters, Performances actually incorporates the live recital of pieces by Janaček. Speaking from beyond the grave to a woman who is writing a Ph.D. thesis on the emotional significance of the composer's later work, Janaček declares "Thank God my first language was music", a form which he describes as "a unique vocabulary of sound created by feeling itself." The problem of the communication and circulation of aesthetic emotion which is so central to the 'blind-play' is treated in Performances exclusively in relation to musical expression. "The people who huckster in words", Janaček boastfully contends, "merely report on feeling. We speak feeling."[57] While entertaining a guest one evening, the composer Sibelius played a recording of one of his own pieces. When the music ended the guest asked "Yes. But what does it mean?" The response of the composer was to rise from his seat, cross the room, and replace the needle at the start of the record.[58]

Louis Arnaud Reid has endeavoured to explain the peculiarity of aesthetic meaning by way of a distinction between 'embodied' and 'expressed' meaning, which throws some light on the untellable joy which is a feature of Molly's experience in the water. In the aesthetic domain, Reid claims, "expression is absorbed into and transformed in emergent embodiment."[59] Reid's problem with expression, very similar to Diderot's, is that "it seduces us into some form of reductionism". For Molly to attempt to explain, or even to ask, what her experience was expressive of would, according to Reid's argument,

be inappropriate. She can only access the meaning through the experience. Or, as Reid expresses it, "(t)hat which we are attending to embodies its own unique meaning, is meaning embodied, which in the end cannot be said in words . . ."[60] Molly herself, her movement, swift and rhythmical through the water, is an integral component in the personal embodiment of the total experience. The type of knowledge which Frank accumulates is innately discursive. Frantically scanning scientific and philosophical (and D.I.Y) journals, in which words are an invaluable commodity because they are the medium of exchange of information, he removes himself from any knowledge which is not of this form. Thus Frank is able to relate to us, for example, that the word 'engram' is derived from "the Greek word meaning something that is etched, inscribed on something"(MS, p.20), and, aptly enough, that "when the mind is confronted by a situation of overwhelming intensity . . . to protect itself from overload, . . . it switches off and focuses on some trivial detail associated with the experience"(MS, p.26). "Science", Reid points out, "has to make propositions to be itself", while the type of knowledge which is relevant to aesthetics "intrinsically contains no talking", and is "in an important sense ineffable."[61] Again, bearing further similarities to Diderot's consideration of the particularities of aesthetic language, Reid is troubled by the fact that while language is, by virtue of the nature of its communication, general, "no aesthetic fact as such is merely an instance of a generalization."[62]

4.6. Do sanctionings of subjectivity lead to trivialisations of the aesthetic?

Friel's play resembles The Well of the Saints in many ways. At certain junctures both plays appear to invite assumptions of misgivings in relation to the credulous senses by attributing a greater amount of understanding to the blind than to those who enjoy clarity of sensory vision. Such interpretations cannot, however, account in any simple way for the insistence on direct perception which is a feuture of the treatment by both playwrights of what we might call aesthetic understanding. The apparent undermining of the truth value of what is derived through the sense of vision, is epitomized, for example, in Molly Sweeney by Dr. Rice's response to being told that he ought to be able to see why his wife was leaving him for a colleague of his:

> . . . All I could think of was: He's confusing seeing with understanding. Come on, Bloomstein. What's the matter with you? Seeing isn't understanding. (MS, p.33)

The centrality to the play of the Molyneux Problem and the discussions of it by Locke and Berkeley are very significant in this regard. These thinkers were pioneers of sorts of the modern approach to matters of taste. The eighteenth-century approach began gradually to favour approaching the concept of taste through the analysis of the particular mental and attitudinal constitution of the individual as well as the particular nature of the experiential modes the individual aesthetic agent had at his/her disposal. This represented something of a leap from the traditional schools of thought which had associated taste with the idea of a 'good education', and advocated the consultation of celebrated models and aesthetic principles rather than regarding aesthetic sensitivity as a mental capacity which is characterised by a high degree of variability. In an essay on the growing impatience of the age with traditional demands for purely objective approaches to knowledge, Peter Kivy remarks that the Enlightenment did not look upon feeling and reason as necessarily incompatible, and that the goal at which 'good criticism' of the time was directed was "to mingle some light of the understanding with the feelings of sentiment."[63] In another treatment of the eighteenth-century conception of taste, Eva Schaper describes what she terms "Enlightened common sense" in relation to matters of taste as "wanting to have it both ways: to believe that there are some general principles, though admitting regretfully the startling variety of tastes."[64] In Molly Sweeney Friel critiques the way in which the objective considerations insisted on by certain educators set the limits for what may and may not be regarded as a legitimate aesthetic response. When Friel approaches the question of beauty, he starts, like Synge, with the democratic demand that the aesthetic subject should have immediate sensory access to the sensory object in question. As his play develops he extends this appeal to a radically subjective perspective which continues Enlightenment liberties in relation to the constitutive role allocated within aesthetic experience to personal associations to an extreme that the most

radical of eighteenth-century free thinkers would not have been willing to grant or condone.

Friel seems to be suggesting in his play that an aesthetic is not something that can be nurtured by teaching a person to say the right thing, but that on the contrary, an aesthetic is a complex of a variety of relevant factors. The factor of physical endowment receives particular attention in the play. Bernard Heyl, in his work on relativist aesthetics, makes the point that

> In stating or discussing his critical position . . . the relativist realizes that his conditions neither can nor should have general validity, but that they hold for those who are similar to him in certain basic ways . . . The evaluations [of taste] of any one critical group, in short, do not hold for a differently constituted group.[65]

Even this description of the nature of aesthetic response in terms of certain groupings is too reductive to correspond to Friel's representation of the experience of beauty. The contrast between the 'garden-scene' and the 'water-scene' can be construed, as I read it, as an investment or token of faith in the capacity of the subjective individual for the role of arbiter in aesthetic experience. Nick McAdoo remarks that the divisions which are created by the question of whether greater value is brought to aesthetic education by the maintenance of critical objectivity or by the nurturing of a "fullness of personal response", usually centre around the question of how far, "if at all", the subject's "powers of imagination, aspect-perception, and emotional susceptibility" are granted a "constitutive", rather than merely "reproductive" role in the creation of what he terms a "fully fledged aesthetic object."[66] Friel's play seems in its own way to be stressing the need for a more progressive type of classroom than Mr. Sweeney's garden. The obvious problem posed by such a radically subjective approach to aesthetic education is that, as McAdoo expresses it, in totally subsuming "aesthetic judgement" under judgement of taste, proponents of such theory "cut the educational ground from under their own feet."[67] Again, one can only conjecture about the extent to which Friel's own experience in the

classroom inform his depiction of the various ways in which knowledge is acquired throughout the play.

The emphasis on the differential aspect of aesthetic experience is not confined to Molly's early tuition. Molly, like Martin and Mary Doul, develops a concern for her appearance in the immediate aftermath of her operation. Her first words to Frank when he visits are "How do I look?" (MS, p.43), and in the course of the same visit she asks "Do you think I look pretty, Frank?" and is thankful to be regarded as beautiful. One post-operative evening, while walking home, Molly stops in a florist to buy an anniversary present for her friends Tony and Betty. She chooses a bunch of nemophila -- the flowers which her father had liked to compare her to: "I know you can't see them but they have beautiful blue eyes. Just like you. You're my nemophila" (MS, p.14). Now that Molly can see them, however, her current appraisal of the flowers does not accord with the one that had been forced upon her in blindness:

> And when I took them home and held them up to my face and looked closely at them, they weren't nearly as pretty as buttercups. Weren't pretty at all. Couldn't give that as a present next door. (MS, p.55)

Carol Anne Upton interprets this passage as depicting a realisation which prompts the diminishing of any confidence Molly might have had in her own appearance and which also heralds the collapse of her faith in the concept of beauty in general, together with "all she had previously been led to believe about the visual world."[68] This interpretation seems to ignore both the distinction so central to the play, between beauty and what we are told about it, and the play's mapping of the strict correspondence between aesthetic appraisal and perspective. Molly's aversion to the flowers does undermine what she has been told of them, but reveals to her that what is beautiful to one person may seem less than lovely to another. Her eventual ability to make this distinction -- she obviously attributes an element of beauty to the largely unloved buttercup, for example -- and the sense of liberation which accompanies the introduction of an element of discernment into her aesthetic appraisal, represents the type of progress that might actually merit a golden star.

One might expect that a play which insists that there is more to aesthetic education than mere formulaic rule following and celebrates the incorrigibility of genuinely intuitive aesthetic response, might offer more in the way of direct sensation. We are given no insight, for example, into the nature of Molly's personal response to the flowers whose beauty she describes so accurately. But in examining the play as the last in the series considered here, we must be careful not to criticize Friel for not being Synge. It seems to me that the most profound insight achieved by the play comes in the form of its suggestion, through its radically subjective approach to knowledge, that it is impossible to be blind to beauty. Behind Frank's spurious re-hashing of the terms of the 'Molyneux Problem', and the contributions of Locke and Berkeley to it, lies the serious, Berkeleyan contention that the universe of beauty does not exist independently of perception. Molly's over-celebrated aesthetic testimony suggests that the visual aspect of a site of beauty simply does not exist for a blind person. The blind person therefore cannot reasonably be said to be ignorant of it. If, as the result of a sensory disability, one is not in a position to possibly identify a site of beauty through touch, sight, smell, taste, or hearing, the aspect of beauty which corresponds to the impaired modality is not a feature of the environment of that particular subject. The insight yielded by the various ordeals suffered by Molly, Martin and Mary Doul, and the many blind autobiographers who feature throughout Chapter Six, is that the absence or disappearance of visual beauty does not by any means signal the elimination of aesthetic experience. Sites of beauty can generally be experienced in more than one way. It is perhaps the crowning anomaly in a play replete with such strangely affecting inconsistencies, that though it reads very beautifully, its championing of sensory engagement presents us with so little of anything in the way of spectacle, or even reference to tactile or the olfactory forms of beauty. Molly's account of her swim, however, is arguably all the more dramatic for the general sensory neglect that surrounds it.

This most profound insight into the significance of blindness within the aesthetic domain comes from the most unlikely of sources. Mr. Sweeney's revelation is, quite fittingly, presented through his daughter's recollection of it:

> And sometimes, just before we'd go into that huge, echoing house, sometimes he'd hug me to him and press his mouth against my ear and whisper with fierce urgency, 'I promise you, my darling, you aren't missing a lot; not a lot at all. Trust me.' (MS, p.15)

It is an insight which is repeated in Mr. Rice's relating of Frank's contention that

> . . . if there is a chance, any chance, that she might be able to see, we must take it, mustn't we? How can we not take it? She has nothing to lose, has she? What has she to lose? -- Nothing! Nothing! (MS, p.17)

The insight inadvertently offered by the two least credible of the play's characters seems to me to be that when tallying our experience we cannot simply enter the gaining and losing and regaining of vision on opposing sides of a margin that separates our profits from our losses as though part of a conventionally commutative arrangement. The extent to which reality fluctuates with experience is an observation that none of the characters actually seem capable of comprehending. Mr. Rice, for all of his sagacity, is also blind to it. This is illustrated by his admission on the eve of the operation that "I suddenly knew that that courageous woman had everything, everything to lose"(MS, p.39). Molly's strange sense of contentment at the close of the play may well be born, however, of her musing over the answer that experience gradually offers her to her earlier question about the nature of deprivation:

> But how can they know what they are taking away from me? How do they know what they are offering me? They don't. They can't. And have I anything to gain? Anything? (MS, p.31).

Having considered the question of whether Molly's experience of swimming, her attempted description of it notwithstanding, can actually be said to be ineffable, it remains to clarify why it appears to me that it can accurately be described as aesthetic. I have discussed Molly's swim in relation to the theories of Berleant, Reid, and Goldman

in an attempt to underline its aesthetic properties. The type of subjectivity I have described as characterising the experience however, is often regarded as 'contaminating' or trivialising the aesthetic.

The authority with which engrams are invested in the play serves to dictate the terms in which the concepts of triviality and meaningfulness are juxtaposed in the experiences of the narrators. Compared, for example, with the obvious vitality of Molly's experience of swimming, her contrived appreciation of the beauty of her father's garden, which essentially entails the acceptance of beauty on faith, seems relatively meaningless. The whole question of the triviality of aesthetic experience in itself is one which seems to be consciously addressed in the play. Its running juxtaposition of discursive knowledge and aesthetic experience raises questions about the relation of authority to both of these entities. The pleasure Molly derives from unqualified sensory immersion is open to cynical accusations of naivety. A detached observer of the crowded swimming pool might claim, for example, to see what the water was 'really like', and attempt to convince Molly that her amazement and joy were misplaced.

Ronald Hepburn offers an account of 'aesthetic seriousness' which, when considered in relation to the play, prompts a certain challenging of my assumptions of the aesthetic significance of Molly's experience in the water. He argues that all kinds of beautiful form can be either lazily and clumsily perceived, or perceived with undivided and sincere interest. We must, Hepburn urges, acknowledge the presence of "a duality in much aesthetic experience of nature, a sensuous component and a thought component."[69] More often than not, as Hepburn sees it, there is an element of thought present in aesthetic appreciation and this thought element "cannot reasonably be held . . . to fight with the aesthetic character of an experience."[70] Molly's revelling in "that world of pure sensation" (MS, p.24) while swimming, and her avowed thankfulness for the absence of the type of remoter charm that thought might supply, when considered in relation to Hepburn's description of the dual nature of the aesthetic experience, begs questions about the aesthetic significance of the joy afforded to Molly by her rhythmical movement through the water. The response provoked by the play as a dramatic work is not compromised by its addressing of self-reflective, philosophical and psychological questions. These questions constitute an integral and organic part of the provocative

nature of the play's dramatic effect. This complexity seems to tacitly query whether the flight from thought which is one of the main components behind Molly's exhilaration in the pool actually diminishes the meaningfulness of her experience. The achievement of the play, that is to say, disputes what appears to be one of its central appeals.

With this alleged duality of thought and perception in aesthetic experience come two obvious ways in which the aesthetic can be trivialised. In terms of the reflective component of the experience of beauty, Hepburn makes it clear that 'seriousness' and 'depth' in aesthetic experience (Hepburn is writing primarily about the aesthetics of nature) cannot be correlated in any simple way with intensity or fullness of thought content. "Some thoughts", he continues, "might not enrich but neutralize the experience, or at least fight and fail to fuse with its perceptual content. Or they might trivialize."[71] Reflection is not necessarily a valuable component in aesthetic experience. Trivialization of aesthetic experience can occur at either end of the scale which extends from the exclusively sensorial to exclusively reflective responses. There is a definite sense in which Frank's meddling in the histories of epistemological conjecture and neurological research is more trivial than both Molly's description of her aesthetic experience, and Mr. Rice's genuine expertise in his chosen field. Carol Anne Upton has observed the trivialising function served by Frank in the play:

> Quite apart from that menace felt by the expert confronted with the self taught, the juxtaposition with Mr. Rice exposes the dangerous superficiality of Frank's knowledge about blindness, acquired chiefly through a frantic week in the library prior to his first date with Molly.[72]

Upton refers also to the vast amounts of "useless trivia" which Frank has accumulated while embarking on his "voyages of self improvement", and observes that "for all his dabblings into science and philosophy, he lacks a certain insight into the soul."[73]

When Hepburn outlines a tendency amongst humans to resort to images from the natural world in efforts to understand themselves, he seems to be defending something very much akin to the aesthetics of engagement outlined here earlier, against those aestheticians who insist on the maintenance of an observational distance. As part of an

argument that seems to justify Molly's attributing of great relevance to a site of beauty whose 'stroke-work' will never be allocated any gallery space, Hepburn remarks:

> There is a deepening of seriousness when I realize that I am myself one with, part of, the nature over-against me. So, I want to say, an aesthetic appreciation of nature, if serious, is necessarily a self exploration also; for the energies, regularities, contingencies of nature are the energies, principles and contingencies that sustain my own embodied life and my own awareness.[74]

Molly's reflection on the "joy" she derives from "just offering [herself] to the experience" of swimming, and of the feeling of liberation which accompanies her sense of "concordance with" the "enfolding world" she is gliding through, seems consistent with Hepburn's observation. The fact that Molly's only rumination on her experience is on the spoiling quality of engrafted reflective qualifications may be consistent with the general paradoxical drift of a 'language play' which seems designed to undermine our faith in the power of words, but it also seriously and thoughtfully challenges conventional observations on the duality of the composition of aesthetic experience.

It would appear that Friel's main approach to the aesthetic in the play is to defend it as a matter of individual perspective, and to illustrate that such a defence does not belittle the importance of the aesthetic domain, but rather depicts our aesthetic sensibilities as the innermost, least mutable, most stable, vital and profound of our faculties. These qualities exist, however, not on a universal level, but on a desperately individual one. Ronald Hepburn suggests that it is reasonable to "include among trivializing factors blind unawareness of that potential variability."[75] Hepburn seems to be sharing with us the understanding that Molly's 'colonizers', for all of their knowledge, prove to be blind to, when he observes that:

> Our aesthetic experience of nature is thoroughly dependent on scale and individual viewpoint. To fail to realize how deeply would surely trivialize. Coming to realize, and to think-in to one's aesthetic experience the fact of that perspectivity is certainly a factor in the maturing of this experience. But

> what is highly contestable is the implicit claim that one perspective, one view, one set of resultant perceived qualities takes precedence over another, and so can discredit or undermine another – or even all the others: that one of them has, in an aesthetic context, greater authority than another.[76]

4.7. The pervasiveness of a repetition compulsion.

The theme of repetition infiltrates the play on a number of levels. All of the aspects of the play considered here are filtered through the irregularly patterned weave of their narration. There is an obvious sense in which the objective of replication is a socially constructed imposition, but an arguably more profound, internally compelled manifestation of the aspiration is also at work throughout the play. The play itself, to start at the outermost circle, is arguably, like Molly's feigned visual aesthetic, an exercise in retelling. Friel 'puts his own spin' on the episodes initially recorded by Oliver Sacks. Frank retells what he has learned in the library and from Mr. Rice. Mr. Rice in turn endeavours to repeat the glories and triumphs of his earlier career. Molly tries to return to the joy she had known in her initial blindness. Frank, who, throughout the play displays traces of a resemblance to Molly's father, is, by the end of the play, planning to revisit some of his earlier salvation missions. By this stage also, Molly is beginning to repeat the experience of her mother. Every monologue in the play involves the repetition from another perspective, of an episode which featured in the one which immediately preceded it, with all three characters also admitting that they have been motivated by their own "phantom desire", by the different 'fantasies' that lodged itself fleetingly in each of their heads. When Rice tells us that his life "no longer . . . cohered" (MS, p.47) after his wife left him for his colleague, he is describing an ailment which all three narrators suffer acutely from. In Molly's case, the incoherence of her fantasy with the environment which is adapted primarily to the needs and desires of a stable, sighted biological type, is perhaps most obvious. We have been concentrating thus far primarily on the external obstacles to coherence, and all of the external influence and pressure Molly has been subjected to so that she might 'refine' or revise her habits, tastes, and fantasies by

replicating those of her colonizers. By the end of the play, however, an acutely felt internal incoherence proves to play an equally, if not more significant role in her undoing.

Molly Sweeney has met with an amount of criticism in relation to what has been regarded as its anti-dramatic substance. It represents, it has been ventured, storytelling of a high order, but drama of a lower one. The theme of repetition is definitely one which seems more conducive to, or at any rate is treated more often in, the novelistic form which can more easily convey a sense of the historical passage of time. During the autumn of 1937, for example, the American novelist Thomas Wolfe was at a dinner party with some of the intellectuals in Sherwood Anderson's circle. Wolfe was recounting to one of those present, Elle Winter, the ordeal he had suffered on a recent trip home to Ashville, Carolina, when Winter promptly responded "But don't you know you can't go home again?"[77] The few words seemed to Wolfe to epitomize the core of the experience of adulthood, and he secured Winter's permission to use them in the title of the extremely lengthy novel he was working on at the time. The theme, which Friel addresses, for example in a story like 'Among the Ruins', is also I believe, the central lesson of Molly Sweeney.

Mary Doul's declaration in Act Three of The Well of the Saints, that "the blackness wasn't so black" in her initial spell of blindness, prompted a brief consideration in Chapter Two of the relation between repetition and identity. The relation is even more fundamental to Friel's play. As mentioned in my introduction, the depictions of blindness by Synge, Yeats, and Friel seem to invite interpretation as a series of monochromes. In The Well of the Saints and Molly Sweeney, in which the characters return to a form of blindness after a brief reprieve, the blindness of the characters before the respective restorations of vision can be compared with the blindness to which they are ultimately returned. The different stages within the development of blindness represent components of a series within a series. The impression that emerges is of the layers of difference congealed underneath a superficial monochromicity. Molly's journey is not a circular movement which begins and ends in the same state, although she endeavours for a while to steer this trajectory. Before the operation she expresses her reservations. She knows that what she was feeling was "the dread of exile, of being sent away. It was the

desolation of homesickness" (MS, p.31). Reflecting on the assurances she had been given to the effect that she had "nothing to lose", she admits to having felt strangely uneasy:

> . . . maybe it was because I was afraid that if things turned out as Frank and Mr. Rice hoped, I was afraid that I would never again know these people as I knew them now, with my own special knowledge of each of them, the distinctive sense each of them exuded for me; and knowing them differently, experiencing them differently, I wondered -- I wondered would I ever be as close to them as I am now.(MS, p.31)

Molly is afraid that sight would impede her return to, or repetition of, her current state of happy well-being. It is not only her pre-operative vacillation that is informed by this 'repetition compulsion' -- the desire she harboured of what the operation might achieve also revolved around the possibility of return. While waiting for the bandages to be removed from her eyes she explains:

> For God's sake of course I wanted to see. But that wasn't an expectation, not even a mad hope. If there was a phantom desire, a fantasy in my head, it was this. That perhaps by some means I might be offered a brief excursion to this land of vision; not to live there -- just to visit. And during my stay to devour it again and again with greedy, ravenous eyes. To gorge on all those luminous sights and wonderful spectacles until I knew every detail intimately and utterly -- every ocean, every leaf, every star, every tiny flower. And then, oh yes, then to return home to my own world with all that rare understanding within me forever. (MS, p.41)

Molly's desire to repeat the health, joy, and comfort she had enjoyed before the operation corresponds in a certain way with Rice's desire to replicate the feats of his early career. At his first meeting with Molly and Frank he is initially struck by the obvious sense in which Frank had adopted Molly as his latest cause. That he too suffers from a 'repetition compulsion' is indicated, however when he continues:

> And the second, the much less worthy thought I had was this. No, not a thought; a phantom desire, a fantasy in my head; absurd, bizarre, because I knew only the barest outlines of her case, hadn't even examined her yet; the thought, the bizarre thought that perhaps -- up here in Donegal -- not in Paris or Dallas or Vienna or Milan -- but perhaps up here in remote Ballybeg was I about to be given -- what is the vulgar parlance? -- the chance of a lifetime, the one-in-a-thousand opportunity that can rescue a career -- no, no, transform a career -- dare I say it, restore a reputation? (MS, p.18)

Rice accepts that there is something hopelessly fantastic about his dreams of resurrection -- and he does not quite manage to achieve it. Molly's spell of vision does prove to be fleeting, a somewhat temporary state of variation between monochromes, although not in the way she had imagined. The process by which she re-arrives at blindness is not a process of repetition or reduction, but one of becoming. The second chances of Rice and Molly are conditioned by the experiences they have both had since relinquishing their initial chances. The interplay between intertextuality and influence is what lends a heightened significance to Murray's likening of the play to a palimpsest on the strength of its creative rendering of Sacks. In his essay on the monochrome David Batchelor makes the point that in the case of the palimpsest, "repetition is the generator not of identity but, perhaps, of endless differences."[78] Friel has worked over groundwork that had been accomplished by Sacks, Valvo, and others. The condition of blindsight which visits Molly at the end of the play is a monochrome of sorts, which crudely conceals the already 're-exoticized' experiences of her excursion into vision of which we are told:

> Every colour dazzled. Every light blazed. Every shape an apparition, a spectre that appeared suddenly from nowhere and challenged you. And all that movement -- nothing ever still -- everything in motion all the time; and every movement unexpected, somehow threatening. Even the sudden sparrows in the garden, they seemed aggressive, dangerous.

> So that after a time the mind could absorb no more sensation. Just one more colour -- light -- movement -- ghostly shape -- and suddenly the head imploded and the hands shook and the heart melted with panic. (MS, p.50)

It is not surprising that after such an extraordinary experience Molly cannot 'go home again', that blindness, if it returns, will never be the same place again.

The period in which Molly is left dazzled and dizzy by so much new colour, light, and movement is described by von Senden as a period of "oversensitization", and is often followed by a temptation or desire to relinquish the newly restored vision and return to blindness. In the course of his research for the play, Friel came across a paper with case studies written by Alberto Valvo, on the problems encountered during visual rehabilitation which accompany the restoration of sight after long term blindness. The patients described by Valvo had all had their sight restored by being provided with osteoodontokeratoprotheses in adulthood using a technique developed by Benedetto Strampelli. They had all also dealt capably with their environments while blind, and Valvo's study presents evidence of the anxieties which accompanied the radical change in their established habits of perception and behaviour. He refers to similar studies by von Senden and Richard Gregory which also illustrate cases of fatal depression in the aftermath of sight restoration after long term blindness. Heinrich Schiller, in his Forward to Valvo's study, explains the phenomenon whereby great depression can succeed the exhilaration that accompanies the sudden acquisition of a new mode of perception. He observes that "(t)hese emotions not only make the new newer, the beautiful more beautiful; they also make the painful overwhelmingly painful."[79] Problems already overcome as a blind person have to be re-surmounted as a re-blinded person, and a crippling sense of missed opportunities often dominates a patient's mood. This is the price of the palimpsest. Surgical intervention is presented by Valvo as "but the first stage in a long process going far beyond physiological changes in the eye."[80] The shift from tactile to visual perception is only part of "a completely new personality configuration" which must be adapted to a radically altered lifestyle. What Valvo regarded as perhaps the most striking of his overall findings was the regularity with which patients who

recovered their sight suffered from depression and tended to regress to the behavioural characteristics of their formerly blind selves:

> The congenitally blind person especially, has to face the prospect of a difficult struggle before reaching a stage at which his vision permits him to understand the world around him. For a period of time varying with each patient, these people experience a confusing proliferation of perceptions, and they must learn to see as a child learns to walk. Moreover, personalities and character armors built up as blind persons have to be shed, and they often find it difficult to change their ways of living. As one of our patients put it "I had to die as a blind person to be reborn as a seeing person."[81]

Molly, like many in her position, is reluctant to perform the required death.[82] A common tendency among the patients studied by Valvo, for example, is to attempt to return to their previous conditions, if only by the temporary mechanism of closing their eyes.

The play illustrates that there is something seriously amiss at the heart of the craze for repetition in all of its multifarious manifestations. It is a malady which was diagnosed by that master-chronicler of human ailments, Marcel Proust. Beckett describes Proust's fascination with how people and their desires change with the passing of time in a way that can serve to contextualise the temporal scale of the progress related throughout Friel's play. We owe a lot of our 'deformities' to the impressions left on us by yesterday, a day which we in turn 'deform'. We are no longer what we were before what Beckett calls "the calamity of yesterday" -- we are more weary, for one thing, and so yesterday's aspirations can only be dishearteningly harboured in that day's residue -- today. This is why Rice's desperate hopes to re-attain the glories won by his younger incarnation, and Molly's pressing need to return from her visit to the sighted world to resume her old blind existence were never likely to meet with a great deal of success. They have both been transformed as people by the working of circumstance and the passing of time. "We are disappointed", Beckett observes,

> at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died -- and perhaps many times -- on the way. For subject B to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A is as illogical as to expect one's hunger to be dissipated by the spectacle of Uncle eating his dinner.[83]

Valvo's patient, we recall, had to "die" as a blind person in order to be "reborn" as a seeing person. The world is not simply comprised of individuals, but of persons, each of whose lives constitute the experiences of "a succession of individuals." The interaction of these people with the world involves the devising of "countless treaties" between "the countless subjects that constitute the individual, and their countless correlative objects."[84] The pact between subject and object, individual and environment, must be continually renewed, adapted to the fluctuating needs of the changing subject. As Eva Schaper points out in her discussion of aesthetic theories which openly acknowledge the variability of aesthetic response, a subject's aesthetic faculty is seen according to them as "a function of the changing individual or historical make-up", and so these theories identify as aesthetic factors "only that which is correlative to its changing directions."[85] Yesterday's covenant between individual and world stopped being binding at midnight.

After the meddling intervention of her well-intentioned family and friends, Molly finds, when she eventually returns to a form of blindness, that the pact that she had initially negotiated with the dark is out of date. Like the Proustian narrator, Friel appears to be struck, as much as anything, by the absurdity of "our idea of Paradise with the retention of personality"[86] Part of Molly's trouble is that her wish for the immortality of her blind personality fatally survives her transition into vision. It is the persistence of memory, the cherishing of the intuitive desires that preceded the ones planted in her head by the self-gratifying colonizers who take it upon themselves to 'cure' her, which leaves her desperately trying to proceed along the terms dictated by what has become a long-waived pact. Molly, in her blindsight, does not resemble Molly in her original blindness any more than Rice's 'triumph' with Molly's case resembles his earlier successes. Monochromes produced at either side of the splash caused by an intervening release of

colour owe no more to the laws of resemblance than do different conventionally pictorial moments. The 'pure' pigment of a monochrome, as Batchelor points out, "always covers an irregular, ruptured, or otherwise compromised surface."[87] However much we try to produce identical works, the results are always different. The disparity between the worlds resided in by Molly and Rice by the end of the play, and the havens they have been trying to return to is testimony to what Batchelor identifies as "the asymmetry between repetition and identicality."[88] Molly Sweeney represents, among so many other things, the refinement of the insight arrived at by a character in the short story 'Among the Ruins' through the realization that:

> The past did have meaning, it was neither reality nor dreams, neither today's patchy oaks nor the great woods of his boyhood. It was simply continuance, life repeating itself and surviving.[89]

Molly is finally granted some relief from the 'repetition compulsion' at the end of the play. The peace which eventually descends on her is the product of her relinquishing of the pursuit as a consciously self-allocated project, of the wish to repeat the confident joy of her earlier condition after her foray into the visual world. Mr. Rice seems to be aware of this as he describes her condition during "the last few months" of their acquaintance:

> She had moved away from us all. She wasn't in her old blind world -- she was exiled from that. And the sighted world, which she had never found hospitable, wasn't available to her anymore.
> My sense was that she was trying to compose another life that was neither sighted nor unsighted, somewhere she hoped was beyond disappointment; somewhere, she hoped, without expectation. (MS, p.59)

Expectation, we cannot help but feel, has had a highly influential role to play in Molly's experience. Her eventual abandoning of it coincides with the visitation of some sort of peace of mind. Molly's attempted composition of a new life, as Rice puts it, corresponds

to Mary and Martin Doul's journey towards a place they have never been in before. The 'novelty' of both regions means that present experience there cannot be under the hold of memory of past experiences. Molly feels, if not quite "at home", at least "at ease" in the "borderline country" she finds herself occupying, and "it seems to be all right." Richard Pine's description of Molly's condition at the end of the play acknowledges the relevance of the 'newness', of her experience, although his is a more equivocal welcoming of it:

> A frightening plunge into a world of madness alternating with despair, which we can only guess at: to have made that 'brief excursion' and to have encountered total failure, to have retreated not into the previous world, but into a new world of denial, of blindsight, is something unknowable.[90]

At the very end of his case study Sacks' subject, Virgil, who, like Molly, had found himself "between two worlds, at home in neither", ceased trying to escape his torment once he became convinced of the impossibility of his task. "But then, paradoxically", Sacks recounts,

> A release was given, in the form of a second and now final blindness -- a blindness he received as a gift. Now, at last, Virgil is allowed not to see, allowed to escape from the glaring, confusing world of sight and space, and to return to his own true being, the intimate, concentrated world of the other senses that has been his home for almost fifty years.[91]

Like Friel at the very outset of his undertaking of his "blind-play", Molly, at the close of it is just "being available" for the gift of such deliverance, although one senses that a "return" like Virgil's is not on the cards, that the cycle of repetition that pervades the play has spun irreversibly to a stop.

Repetition, though it pervades the play on a number of levels, is portrayed primarily as a response to the problem of motion, particularly of temporal motion and the transitions of self-development. It represents the endeavours of a human agent adrift in the flux of time, to restore a sense of the unification of self in existence. Molly, Frank and

Mr. Rice spend much of their time trying to resume old ways after a series of disruptions. Because Molly Sweeney is essentially a 'memory play', however, the three narrators are in complete possession of knowledge of how their stories develop. They are able to achieve the goal of omniscience which being in 'real time' usually puts dramatically out of our reach. The dramatic vulnerability to shock, and the unforeseeable breakdown of habit into the unrehearsed chaos of our everyday lives serve to humble any pretensions we might have towards such awareness. Because of the recollective nature of the play's entire discourse, the narrators are conspicuously well positioned to clearly decipher the contextual significance of the episodes they are relating. They bestow an easy unity on the ordeals and passages of lives directly experienced as fragmentation.

The removal of the narrators from the anxieties of temporal experience, when it is exactly the ordeal of personal transition that they describe, epitomizes the way in which Friel's play seems somehow at a remove from its own achievements. Molly Sweeney, as I have tried to illustrate, constitutes a highly poetical challenge to the dominion of language. And while the play champions the importance of direct sensory engagement, it treats us to little in the way of significant sensory variation. It suggests, or so I have argued, that it is nonsense to suggest that anybody is blind to beauty, on the radically subjective grounds that if one cannot see it, touch it, smell it or taste it, it does not exist. The appeal is addressed, somewhat audaciously, to our rationality as much as to our senses. It is, as Christopher Murray has astutely pointed out, an "indirect play"[92]. Memory is the fool-proof mechanism for the reintegration of fragmented experience. To the extent, however, that memory turns from the world and its impressions as directly experienced through the senses, it delivers itself from all we associate with dramatic tension -- even engrams do not seem to restrict the movement of the mind in memory. As though distrustful of the fragility of the hold of the present, dramatic moment on reality, Friel has his narrators present us with their manageable mental replicas of the world, with the consequent perspicacity arguably offering itself as Friel's ideal corrective of the blindness he is depicting. Richard Pine says about the play that Friel has never "written with such lucidity; never have his voices spoken so clearly."[93] At times it almost feels as though the voices are speaking far too clearly, and that the price to pay for their unfailing clarity is dramatic irony, tension -- in short -- blindness. Although the device of using

three narrators dissipates the omniscience of any one of them to a certain extent, retrospect is constantly threatening to become too much knowledge. But it yields some captivating poetry.

Pine has also defended Friel's theatre as "a place of intellectual excitement" which "creates a different kind of dramatic effect". He likens this effect to that of the short story on the grounds that "it is made manifest through divination rather than exhibition."[94] It is true that Friel insists that the audience experience Molly's world in the sequential manner which is a feature of the perspective of blindness. The blind do not experience space as we do. They experience the world in predominantly temporal terms. Friel would have read in 'To See and Not See' that the blind "build their worlds from sequences of impressions . . . and are not capable, as sighted people are, of a simultaneous visual impression, the making of an instantaneous visual scene."[95] This is a play, after all, about a woman for whom, as even Frank understands " . . . the very idea of appearance, of how things look, can't have much meaning . . ." (MS, p.38), and for whom, as we will discover in the next chapter, people are largely associated with their voices. When Frank explains the difficulties Molly encounters in assimilating her newly acquired visual information in terms of "those tactile engrams" which "were implanted in her brain since she was a child" (MS, p.20), and proceeds immediately to give an account of Berkeley's assertion that the relation between the tactile and visual worlds can only be learned through experience, the space seems to be created perfectly for the type of collaborative synaesthesia we discussed in relation to The Well of the Saints. But Friel, seemingly content with having established the theoretical feasibility of such a collaborative effort, stops short of exploiting the space so cleverly won. His audience, like his leading lady whose "covert achievements" they are contemplating, experience events, as Pine puts it, "behind the eyelids".[96]

Molly Sweeney investigates, in a highly self-conscious way, the significance of a differential nook within the sweeping expanse of the traditional, universal aesthetic domain. It can be interpreted as the product of a time in which theorists and artists alike busied themselves with justifications of their apportioning to a differential aesthetic a legitimacy which Synge had quite audaciously presupposed some ninety years previously.

[1] See Penny Florence and Nicola Foster, eds., Differential Aesthetics. Art practices, philosophy and feminist understandings (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) p. 9. For further examination of this development within recent aesthetic theory see also Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, eds., Thinking Art. Beyond Traditional Aesthetics (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1991), especially Christine Battersby's essay 'Situating the Aesthetic: A Feminist Defence', pp. 31-44, Gisela Ecker, ed., Feminist Aesthetics (London: The Women's Press, 1985) and Rita Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989).

[2] Differential Aesthetics pp. 2-3.

[3] Brian Friel, Molly Sweeney (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: The Gallery Press, 1994) p. 18. All further references to the play will be cited within the text.

[4] Christopher Murray, 'Brian Friel's Molly Sweeney and its Sources: A Postmodern Case History', Études Irlandaises, 23, 2 (1998), 81-98.

[5] Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, eds., Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History (London: University of Winsconsin Press, 1991) p. 7. For further explorations of the same relationship see Roland François Lack, 'Intertextuality or influence: Kristeva, Bloom and the Poésies of Isidore Ducasse' in Michael Worton and Judith Still, eds., Intertextuality. Theories and Practices (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) pp. 130-142.

[6] Michael Baxandall, Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures (London: Yale University Press, 1985) pp. 58-59.

[7] Études Irlandaises, 23, 2 (1998), 83.

[8] Christopher Murray, ed., Brian Friel. Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) p. 153. [Page numbers of all further references to this source are given in the text.]

[9] Oliver Sacks, An Anthropologist on Mars (London: Picador, 1995) p. 107.

[10] Ibid., p. 108, p. 110.

[11] Ibid., p. 137.

[12] Ibid., p. 103.

[13] Études Irlandaises, 23, 2 (1998), 91.

[14] Ibid., 93.

[15] Laura Rosenthal, in Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England (London: Cornell University Press, 1996) asks a similar question (p17), in relation to Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition, 1759, which I came across after I had formulated my own.

[16] T.R. Armitage M.D. The Education and Employment of the Blind – What it Has Been, Is and Ought to Be (London: Harrison and Sons/Pall Mall, 1886, 2nd Edtn.) pp. 50-51.

[17] Ibid., Preface.

[18] F.C. McGrath, Brian Friel's (Post) Colonial Drama. Language, Illusion, and Politics (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999) p. 254.

[19] Helen Keller, Teacher. Anne Sullivan Macy. A Tribute by the Foster Child of her Mind (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1956) p. 36. [Page numbers of all further references to this source are given in the main text.]

[20] William James, Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals (London: Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 85. For a reference to Sullivan Macy's fondness for the book, see Teacher, p. 162.

[21] William R. Paulsen, Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987) p. 47.

[22] Ibid., p. 47.

[23] Ibid., p. 48.

[24] Ibid., p. 49.

[25] Ibid., p. 49.

[26] Brian Friel's (Post) Colonial Drama p. 249.

[27] Richard Pine, The Diviner. The Art of Brian Friel (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1999) p. 293.

[28] Brian Friel's (Post) Colonial Drama, p. 250.

[29] Pierre Villey, The World of the Blind: A Psychological Study (London: Duckworth, 1930) p. 313.

[30] Ibid., p. 314.

[31] Ibid., p. 315.

[32] Ibid., p. 315.

[33] Quoted in The World of the Blind p316.

[34] Ibid., p. 317.

[35] F.C. McGrath, 'Brian Friel and the Irish Art of Lying', William Kirwin, ed., Brian Friel. A Casebook (London: Garland, 1997) p. 6.

[36] Richard Kearney, 'Language Play: Brian Friel and Ireland's Verbal Theatre', Studies. An Irish Quarterly Review, Vol. LXXII (1983), 21.

[37] Ibid., p. 22 – the expression is attributed to Roger Doyle.

[38] Ibid., p. 20.

[39] Ibid., p. 52.

[40] Alan H. Goldman, 'The Education of Taste' British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.30, No.2, (1990), 108.

[41] Quoted from La Bruyere's Caracteres (1687) by Eva Schaper in 'Symposium: About Taste (1)', British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.6, No.1, (1966), 60.

[42] Talks to Teachers, p. 33.

[43] Ibid., pp. 38-9.

[44] Ibid., p. 45.

[45] Ibid., p. 57.

[46] British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.30, No.2,(1990), 108.

[47] Ibid., 112.

[48] The Diviner p. 289. Certain aspects of Molly's experience invite, as Pine seems to indicate here, a post-colonial reading of the play. Mr. Sweeney, in particular, has selected Molly as his protégé. The educational 'privilege' he is 'allowing' her, for example, is comparable to the one 'granted' by European colonizers to a native African elite as the process is described by Sartre in his preface to Franz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth. The Europeans, as Sartre depicts it,

picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red hot iron, with the principles of western culture; they stuffed their mouths full of high sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in their mother country they were sent home, white-washed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers. They only echoed. (Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, (London: Penguin Books, 1963) p. 7.

Mr. Sweeney's encouraging of Molly to use adjectives that do not correspond to her own aesthetic experience might also be interpreted in terms of Friel's description of his own experience of writing in the English language. In an interview with the Sunday Independent of October 5, 1980 (p. 11), for example, Friel explains his concern for " ... the whole problem that the writers in this country experience: having to handle a language that is not native to him." "The assumption", he goes on to observe, "is that we speak the same language as England. And we don't." The Irish writer needs to address what Friel regards as "the problem of writing in the language of another country."

[49] Louis Arnaud Reid, 'Education and Aesthetic Meaning', British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.9 (1969), 279.

[50] Arnold Berleant, 'The Aesthetics of Art and Nature', Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds., Landscape, natural beauty and the arts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 235.

[51] Ibid., p. 233.

[52] Ibid., p. 240.

[53] Ibid., p. 237.

[54] Ruth Lorand, Aesthetic Order. A Philosophy of Order, Beauty and Art (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 5.

[55] It is interesting to compare this aspect of Molly's experience of swimming with the account Michael gives of his memory of the summer of 1936 at the end of Dancing at Lughnasa:

When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement – as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary … (Brian Friel, Dancing at Lughnasa (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) p. 71)

[56] Bryan Magee, and Martin Milligan, Sight Unseen (London: Phoenix, 1998 – first published by Oxford University Press as On Blindness, 1995) p. 155.

[57] Brian Friel, Performances (Oldcastle: Gallery Books, 20003) p. 31.

[58] The incident is recounted by Magee, Sight Unseen p. 153.

[59] British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol.9 (1969), 273.

[60] Ibid., 273.

[61] Ibid., 277.

[62] Ibid., 278.

[63] Peter Kivy, 'Hume's Standard of Taste. Breaking the Circle' British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.7, No.1 (1967), 59.

[64] British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.6, No.1 (1966), 56.

[65] Quoted by Eva Shaper from Bernard C. Heyl's New Bearings in Esthetics and Art Criticism (1943), British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.6, No.1 (1966), 56.

[66] Nick McAdoo, 'Aesthetic Education and the Antinomy of Taste', British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.27, No.4 (1987), 309.

[67] Ibid., 310.

[68] Carol Anne Upton, 'Visions of the Sightless in Friel's Molly Sweeney and Synge's The Well of the Saints', Modern Drama Vol. XL, No. 3 (1997), 354.

[69] Ronald Hepburn, 'Trivial and serious in the aesthetic appreciation of nature', Kemal and Gaskell, eds., Landscape, natural beauty and the arts p. 66.

[70] Ibid., p. 67.

[71] Ibid., p. 69.

[72] Modern Drama Vol. XL, No.3 (1997), 349.

[73] Ibid., 349.

[74] Landscape, natural beauty, and the arts p. 69.

[75] Ibid., p. 69.

[76] Ibid., p. 78.

[77] The episode is recounted in David Herbert Donald's Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe, (London: Bloomsbury, 1987) p. 434.

[78] David Batchelor, 'In bed with the monochrome', Peter Osborne, ed., From an Aesthetic Point of View. Philosophy, Art and the Senses (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000) p. 159.

[79] Alberto Valvo M.D., Sight Restoration After Long Term Blindness: The Problems and Behaviour Patterns of Visual Rehabitilitation (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1971) p. II.

[80] Ibid., p. 3.

[81] Ibid., p. 4.

[82] For examples of reactions to the restoration of vision which are comparable to Molly's, see Sight Restoration After Long Term Blindness, pp. 8-16.

[83] Samuel Beckett, Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit (London: John Calder, 1999, 1st publ. 1965) pp. 13-14.

[84] Ibid., p. 19.

[85] British Journal of Aesthetics Vol.6, No.1 (1996), 62.

[86] Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit p. 26.

[87] From an Aesthetic Point of View p. 160.

[88] Ibid., p. 160.

[89] Brian Friel, Collected Stories (Dublin: Gallery Books, 1979) p. 106.

[90] The Diviner p. 296.

[91] An Anthropologist on Mars p. 144.

[92] Brian Friel, Brian Friel: Plays. 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) introduction, p. xxi.

[93] The Diviner p. 288.

[94] Ibid., p. 301.

[95] An Anthropologist on Mars pp. 117-8.

[96] The Diviner p. 301.

Chapter Five:

Blindness, Beauty, and the Psychology of Perception.

At several junctures throughout the assessment of these plays the debate has threatened to spill over into a number of related disciplines, as certain non-literary considerations competed for our attention with concerns for the strictly dramatic significance of various aspects of the respective portrayals. A number of these diversions related to various psychological aspects of the aesthetic experience of blindness. In Chapter One, for example, I emphasised the distinction between the type of effort entailed in genuine aesthetic appreciation and what is involved in feats of identification or orientation. In Chapter Two I considered the synaesthetic quality of Martin and Mary Doul's experience of their environment. The effect of a set of dramatic sensory discontinuities on the aesthetic sensibilities of those who undergo a transfer from blindness to sightedness or vice versa was discussed in relation to each of the plays. And in Chapter Four I assessed the effect of Molly Sweeney's education on her prospects of cultivating an aesthetic sensibility that is truly reflective of her own experience. This relatively brief chapter serves as a connective between the plays discussed in the preceding chapters and the autobiographies considered in the next. It isolates some of these general psychological considerations and illustrates how they have been discussed by psychologists in particular relation to the blind. It appears to me that the psychology of perception can be usefully surveyed as a bridge between the imaginative dramatisation of the experience of blindness and the testimony of the actually blind.

I begin here by supplementing the allusions in Chapter Two to synaesthetic perception with a slightly more detailed description of the process. I briefly draw attention to its different linguistic manifestations, and then, enlisting the assistance of Morton Heller and Lawrence Marks, survey the reservations that might be held about its contribution to an aesthetics of blindness. One such reservation – that only certain senses are capable of truly aesthetic experience - has been explored in some detail by G. Révész. I examine his observations in relation to the emphasis in haptic perception on geometrical systems and compliance with preconceived shapes and designs. Because of the rigid

nature of haptically-based appraisals, and what he sees as the crudeness of haptic reception of the subtleties of aesthetic form, Révész claims that the blind "cannot force their way" into the aesthetic domain. When reviewing these objections I also briefly revisit some of the ground covered in Chapter Four in relation to the question of whether the testimony of the blind which communicates their appreciation of visual beauty might be informed by certain forms of non-aesthetic knowledge.

I then assess the claim by Thomas Carroll that the blind can successfully "restore" the pleasure they derived from looking. I question the confidence he professes in the smooth "continuity" of pleasure in the aftermath of the loss of vision, and examine his justification of this claim with the observation that the pleasure the sighted derive from looking at objects is rarely due solely to their visual characteristics. The theories of Pierre Villey, Thomas Cutsforth and Alan Eaton which relate to the concept of an aesthetics of blindness are then considered in order to illustrate that we have more reason for optimism in this regard than Révész would have us believe. I will consider, for example, the suggestion that when the intellectual and emotional aspects of the aesthetic experience are emphasised it becomes clear that the loss of a single sense will not seriously restrict one's sensitivity to beauty. The heightened attention to the materials of beauty in blindness is also considered, together with a claim for the promotion of touch from the category of "lower" senses on the basis that it allows, as vision does, of a spectrum of gradations, ranging from the utilitarian to the highly aesthetic. These aspects of the psychology of perception are not by any means exhaustively detailed. They are considered only to the extent that they relate to different aspects of this project. As though fixed on a swivel, this short chapter constantly turns back to the plays and anticipates the testimony of the blind considered in the next chapter.

5.1. Rechanneling beauty – the unity of the senses.

E.M von Hornbostel's declaration that "[I]t matters little through which sense I realize that in the dark I have blundered into a pig-sty,"[1] can be interpreted as alluding to a theory regarding the unity of the senses which can be traced back as far as Democritus's contention that all senses are modes of touch, and to Aristotle's conception of a 'sensus

communis' – a common sense that harnesses the functions of the individual ones.[2] These theories and their contemporary equivalents are suggestive of the possibility that what the sighted perceive through their eyes may not be entirely inaccessible to the blind, and so are of particular relevance to Synge's portrayal of a non-visual aesthetic which was assessed in Chapter Two. Central to an understanding of these theories of inter-sensory correspondence is a familiarity with the phenomenon known as synaesthesia, alluded to in the chapter on The Well of the Saints, and defined by Rivlin and Gravelle as "the crossing over from one sensory system to another, so that sounds are seen, smells heard, feelings perceived visually, and so forth."[3] In a playwright's portrayal of blindness the process of synaesthesia can operate on two levels: it may be evident in the evocation of emotion and experience through the sound of words, and through the protagonists' communications of their own personal experience of various interrelations and correspondences among the senses. "It could be said", Rivlin and Gravelle suggest, "that all poetry reflects a synaesthetic experience in which the sounds of the words cross over from the auditory to the visual system and evoke visual images."[4] Because this investigation into blindness is being approached from a largely literary perspective, it is worthwhile, I believe, to consider the extent to which these sensory and perceptual phenomena have infiltrated language.

In his The Unity of the Senses, Lawrence Marks argues that

> To the extent that language reflects or at least parallels thought, and to the extent that sensory correspondences color thinking, interrelations among the senses that appear in perception will also find their way into speech and writing.[5]

These perceptual phenomena that entail a degree of what the psychologists term 'inter-sensory equivalence', are paralleled in language by the metaphorical juxtaposition of words describing sensations which are conventionally assumed to be peculiar to certain individual modalities. Marks distinguishes between two components of this linguistic manifestation -- 'sound symbolism', and 'synesthetic metaphor'. The nature of the distinction is evident in Marks's observation that "not only does speech, as sound,

embody supra sensory qualities, but language, as formal representation, makes it possible to communicate equivalence."[6] The extent of the satisfaction afforded by inter-sensory correspondence is masterfully suggested by the nature of the justification by Martin and Mary Doul of their relinquishing of the opportunity to have their sight restored a second time by the play's miracle-working Saint. The sounds of night, the sweetness in the air, and the smell of growth experienced by Synge's blind couple serve as a very interesting backdrop to the aesthetic experiences recorded by the likes of W.W. Fenn, John Hull, Andrew Potok, Stephen Kuusisto, and others discussed in the next chapter. The obvious similarity, for example, between Martin Doul's description of the beauty of his surroundings and W.W. Fenn's "sketching" of the beauty of his, represents possibly the clearest illustration of the reasoning behind my decision to mount the personal accounts of blindness against imaginative depictions of the experience.

Morton Heller's research into the phenomenon of interrelations among the senses convinced him that too much emphasis is placed within his academic discipline on the modality of vision. "For too many researchers", Heller maintains, "the appropriate model for describing contact with the environment is visual and involves a description of an individual sitting in front of a television screen or a computer monitor."[7] Heller's research into sensory modality of touch was largely prompted by the realisation that "most of us do not merely look at the world. Few of us are just visual observers."[8] Throughout his study Heller points to the fact that the question of what he terms "intermodal equivalence", the doctrine which claims that different senses are capable of providing equivalent information about particular entities, is of immediate interest to a variety of issues involving blindness. In the course of Lawrence Marks's discussion of the notion of a mutual assistance among the senses that occurs in perception he remarks that "resemblances between one sense modality and another are profound and important aspects of our interactions with the world."[9] Marks unassumingly suggests that his theory of a unity among the senses amounts to the contention that "the senses have a lot in common."[10]

When Marks tells us that "every sense modality is not an island", that "there are correspondences between dimensions of auditory and visual experience"[11] and that different senses can provide information about the same objects and events, he is

explaining a theory which, while it does not seem likely to arouse too much controversy, is, by his own admission, "one that is incorrect if pressed too far."[12] Certain elements of the theory appear to suggest that to venture with it into the aesthetic realm would be to press too far. Marks's emphasis here on the inter-sensory transfer of information, together with his assurance that "the senses assist one another in demonstrating the very existence of objects" serves here only to return us to the gulf described in Chapter One as separating feats of identification from aesthetic appraisal.[13] Heller alerts us to the same possibility when he asks, near the outset of his inquiry, "whether it is possible to obtain equally precise spatial information via vision, touch, and the other senses", and whether "touch and vision can provide identical spatial information."[14] He then proceeds to give a detailed account of James Gibson's research into the question, and the evidence it yielded to suggest that such transfer of information can take place. Gibson's experiments are not recounted here. The emphasis of his research is on the basic identification of objects and the transfer of information, and so appears to further distance the type of inter-sensory transference he is investigating from the aesthetic realm.

All of the plays considered in the literary section of this thesis issue their own individual challenge to the ability of informed testimony to do justice to beauty by capturing its uniqueness. The distinction between "discursive" and "experiential knowledge" will be considered in the next chapter as a means of differentiating aesthetic from other kinds of experience. Marks introduces another reason to doubt the applicability of inter-modal transfer to an aesthetics of blindness when he concludes that "tactile information and visual information about the shape or figure of an object are not always completely equivalent, certainly not identical", and speculates that part of the reason for this may reside in "a basic, inherent inferiority of haptic touch as compared to vision in its capacity to process information."[15] This alleged inferiority of touch has obvious implications for an aesthetics of blindness. The belief that touch is not as receptive as the 'distance senses' of vision and hearing is quite widely held, although perhaps today not as explicitly as at earlier junctures in the history of aesthetics. I turn now to examine in detail some of the reasoning behind this assumption.

5.2. Beauty and the 'lower' sense of touch.

In his Psychology and Art of the Blind, G. Révész, who limits his study of the blind to a consideration of what they derive from haptic perception ("the impression conveyed by the tactile and kinematic sense")[16], argues that the appreciation of form is a predominantly visual function, and that the aesthetic significance of the world of forms is "brought home in full consciousness only to the sighted."[17] The signs found in museums, cautioning visitors against the touching of the artefacts do not, he argues, in any way infringe upon their aesthetic experience. "The blind", Révész would have us believe, "are unable to force their way into the realm of Aesthetics."[18] The monopoly of the sighted, in terms of both aesthetic creativity and enjoyment, is repeatedly emphasised throughout his study. Among the most notable observations made in the study are that "the aestheticians who trace [the] aesthetic pleasure [in plastic works] back to a haptic or kinaesthetic element make a great mistake", that "aesthetic attitude and aesthetic experience are . . . a field to which a person working haptically has no access or only a restricted one", and that "all the principles of form creation, all the forms of aesthetic contemplation, all the criteria of aesthetic appreciation are based on visual perception."[19]

One of Révész's chief reservations about the capacity of the blind for the nurturing of an aesthetic awareness through the sense of touch is the inevitable emphasis within haptic appreciation on the accuracy of the artist's execution. The quality of a work of art is assessed by the blind person in terms of the extent of diversion of the object under consideration from the 'norms' of beauty, the criteria for which are established by his or her aesthetic tuition. The sighted person also approaches the aesthetic object with an ideal of beauty in his or her mind, but when the reality does not coincide with the ideal, the sighted person can exercise a degree of improvisation unavailable to the blind, and hastily revise the terms for the satisfaction of his aesthetic demands. The rigid form of evaluation thus enforced on the blind is not conducive to an appreciation of the subtle, intricate and unconventional features of artistic expression. The 'norms' of the blind exemplify an imperative which impedes the freedom of the blind person's relation to beauty. Principles of Greek sculpture, for example, were regularly applied in the aesthetic education of the blind at the time when Révész was devising his theory. The emphasis of

these principles on geometry and symmetry constituted the limits of what could be evaluated through haptic perception. This education, as Révész sees it, results in the rejection of a lot of fine art, which, having been conceived according to alternative aesthetic principles do not meet the aesthetic demands of the educated blind person. Much of the vitality of the art of today, for example, arguably stems from the impulse of the modern artist towards the disruption of continuity of line and pattern, the avoidance of hackneyed expression, and the departure from preconceived shapes and plans.[20] The characteristic feature of much contemporary art, in other words, is its undermining or 'spoiling' of the type of the surface coherence that, according to Révész, exhausts the spectrum of haptic perception.

The very nature of the process by which an object is surveyed haptically is a primary impediment to the arrival at a strictly aesthetic appraisal of it. The person examining an object through the sense of touch is "confined to ascertaining the proportions and the spatial arrangement of the haptically perceived parts, to recognising the structural organisation of the whole, and to making clear the schematic form."[21] In addition to admiring the different elements or components of a work of art, the sighted beholder also regards the delicacy of their fusion. The interaction of acoustic, visual and tactile functions emphasise the integrative nature of a work of art which is a quality which, according to Révész, does not exist for the blind, for whom the different components of the piece doggedly refuse to relinquish their independence. The blind, it is held, for example, cannot appreciate a piece of sculpture as a whole:

> Their explanations of their appreciations give us the impression that they had looked at the bust through a small aperture, which allowed them to see only a minute part of the whole at a time.[22]

Révész also echoes the concern I related in Chapter One in relation to the distinction between the subtleties of aesthetic appreciation and the seemingly cruder functions of recognition or identification:

> The fundamental condition of any aesthetic view of a work of art is the appreciation of aesthetic values. It is not through knowledge or recognition that we achieve an insight into the aesthetic value of a work, but through the spontaneous experience of the artistically beautiful. The aesthetic experience seems, however, to be entirely incompatible with the basic character of haptic apprehension, with the analytical and constrictive nature of the object.[23]

On the basis of such logic, Révész declares that verdicts on the beauty and ugliness of objects cannot be strictly arrived at within the realm of haptic perception. While restricting his inquiry to the haptic perception of the blind, Révész is aware that for many classical theorists the perception of beauty is facilitated only by what are regarded as the 'higher senses' of sight and hearing. In the exercise of the 'lower senses', the sensory-intellectual experience that characterises the classical notion of the conception of beauty, is impeded by the perception of the sensation itself. In the exercise of sight and hearing, however, we experience an almost exact coincidence of intellectual and sense perception, so that the two are fused to surface in our consciousness of them as a unified aesthetic experience.[24] Crucially, it is not in any way because of their lack of sight that the blind cannot appreciate beauty haptically. The haptic experience of the sighted is equally bereft of anything that Révész would consider aesthetic awareness. Art, from the time of its most primitive manifestations, has, according to Révész, been "tuned to the visible world" and "ruled by the visible image."[25] He examines the work of blind sculptors and deems their work to be the product of an obvious application of theoretical and compositional principles from visual art:

> The emphasis laid by blind sculptors on the geometrical system, the architectural constraint, the limited freedom in the creation of form, the strict dependence on conventional figures, the restrained fantasy, and the voluntarily inhibited modes of expression, provide strong evidence for the intention of the blind to discover the modes of expression of sighted artists and to imitate them.[26]

This accounts for the fact that so many sculptures by blind artists resemble, as Révész sees it, the creations of technically ungifted sighted people. Citing the theories of J.G. Herder and A. Hildebrand, Révész claims that even the few aestheticians who have fought the corner of haptic perception and allocated it a salient position within the domain of aesthetic appreciation, have had to concede the dominant position of vision within the hierarchy of the senses. Although Herder, for instance, had argued that "everything that is form is only recognised by touch, and only surface is recognised through vision", he could not deny the predominantly visual nature of the aesthetic: "Beauty", he admitted, "derives its name from seeing, from appearance, and it is through seeing, through beautiful appearance, that it is most easily recognised and valued."[27] Likewise Hildebrand, depicted by Révész as another celebrant of the importance of touch, declared that "All reality is of importance for the creative arts only insofar as it manifests itself in the visual image."[28]

Révész believes that when observing a blind person's response to a work of art we must "find out by what means the blind reach their aesthetic judgements, and by what factors they are guided."[29] It is important, he contends, to determine whether the blind person's avowed feelings for a work of art are accountable for in aesthetic terms or in terms of some external factor such as the knowledge they have accumulated about the piece in the course of their aesthetic education. Pointing to some of Helen Keller's assertions about her experience of works of art, Révész is convinced that her reactions were not determined by aesthetic experience. Talking of the medallion of Homer, for instance, that hung low enough on her wall for her to be able to touch it, for example, Keller reflects

> How well I know each line in that majestic brow -- tracks of life and bitter evidence of struggle and sorrow; those sightless eyes seeking, even in the cold plaster, for the light and the blue skies of his beloved Hellas, but seeking in vain; that beautiful mouth, firm and true and tender. It is the face of a poet, and of a man acquainted with sorrow. Ah, how well I understand his deprivation -- the permanent night in which he dwelt.[30]

This observation about Keller's aesthetic testimony seems to me to be perfectly justified. The same argument was considered in Chapter Four in relation to Molly Sweeney's acquisition of aesthetic 'knowledge'. What is more difficult to justify, it seems to me, is Révész's decision to approach the issue of an aesthetics of blindness exclusively in relation to the haptic perception of works of art. The autobiographies considered in the next chapter illustrate the inadequacy of such delimitations.

5.3. Some psychological features of an aesthetics of blindness.

> Now, all the beauty that they once experienced through the sense of sight, all the pleasure that burned and pained at the sight of true beauty, is cut off. To stand now in the presence of a delicately or majestically beautiful object, to know that it is there in front of one, and yet to be unable to contemplate it, is a different pain, a pain without pleasure but with only terrible frustration. And to stand by impotently while someone ineptly tries to describe something beautiful, tries to capture and communicate it in stupid words – here can be a source of sorrow indeed.[31]

This is Reverend Thomas Carroll's assessment of the significance of the sense of loss involved in the discontinuation of the sense of sight. The insight volunteered by Synge and Friel is that this sense of loss can be tempered and even completely eliminated through the discovery of non-visual aspects of the sites of beauty that initially seem to be irretrievably lost. Yeats's characteristic iconography, which Chapter Three describes as underlying much of his show of protest against the tyranny of daylight, prevents him from conceiving of beauty in exclusively non-visual terms. His instinctive response to the loss of the sense of vision is more often than not to resort to the consolations of the intellect. It was Carroll's experience, however, that not every blind person was inconsolable over the aesthetic aspect of the sense of loss associated with their condition. "Some people cannot 'die' to visual beauty", Carroll claims, "for they have never been alive to it."[32] For those blind who had been particularly sensitive to visual beauty, its loss often constitutes the harshest and most lamentable consequence of blindness. Carroll,

however, is quite optimistic about the capacity of the blind person for the restoration of their sensitivity to the pleasure afforded by beauty.

On the grounds that the pleasure of looking at things is derived from the presence of these things rather than their strictly visual qualities, Carroll expresses confidence that "[t]he various kinds of pleasure once afforded to the blinded person by looking at things that were 'good to see,' can be almost completely restored."[33] Implicit in Carroll's observation, however, is a certain gradation of the terms in which one appraises what one sees. The idea that something or somebody is "good to see" implies a degree of fondness or personal attachment that is not necessarily concerned with strictly aesthetic qualities, and very often is not. Carroll believes that the capacity for the perception of the truly beautiful is not such a widespread phenomenon. Judging from his work with the blind he estimates that as few as two out of every fifteen people who become blind feel acutely the loss of the ability to perceive beauty. Nevertheless, Carroll is relatively confident that as part of an appropriate rehabilitation scheme steps can be taken to restore this capacity. After direct sight has been disregarded as a means to the perception of beauty, the modes of access which remain open to the blind, according to Carroll, are hearing, and the power of visualisation. Sounds and music can play an important role in the rehabilitation of the blind because, as Carroll observes, "if the capacity to appreciate beauty through the visual sense was there, it is almost certain that the capacity to appreciate beauty through the auditory sense is also there."[34] He regards visualisation as a creative rather than a retrogressive process, on the basis that

> . . . beauty memories can be recalled, and . . . many individually remembered visual images can be combined to bring to the mind new pictures -- pictures of things that the blinded person has never seen before, which are present before him here and now.[35]

Carroll also shares the reservations expressed earlier about the capacity of verbal description to take the place of visual beauty. He writes of

> Inept words, fumbled words, words of sighted people who cannot really 'see' or cannot communicate what they see may, instead of restoring the perception of beauty, arouse all manner of frustration at its loss. And, at best, a long period of adjustment and of learning will be necessary for the person who is going to use any of the means which substitute for sight, and in the process there may be many frustrating and pain-filled experiences.[36]

What Carroll has to say about the restoration of the capacity for the perception of the pleasurable has arguably the most significant bearing on an investigation into an aesthetics of blindness. His observations on the subject can be related to the discussion in Chapter Three of the different levels at which certain discontinuities of experience present problems for the adventitiously blind. There is no reason, Carroll is at pains to emphasise, why the blind should not be able to rediscover the "same pleasure" that they previously derived from looking upon pleasurable things. [37] The task of the rehabilitation centre in this regard is to help the blind to analyse the nature and extent of their loss, and to make it clear to them that the sources of their previous pleasure may serve to instigate the reincarnation of the "same pleasure" as it becomes perceptible through the sensory channels that remain open. Carroll compiles quite an extensive list of reasons why we find things 'good to see'. It is worth looking at a few of his explanations in order to assess the extent of their aesthetic significance. Firstly, Carroll draws attention to the pleasure "man" derives from looking at what he terms the "ownership object", and observes that it is not the "visualness" which he finds pleasing, but the "hisness":

> It is sight that brings all these things to the 'looker,' that gives him the present knowledge of them. But the seeing is not the reason for the pleasure. The reason is the perception; it is the knowledge; it is the fact of ownership.[38]

We also derive pleasure from looking at certain people for whom we feels a great deal of fondness -- what Carroll terms the "affection object". Once again

> . . . it is not the sight that gives pleasure; it is all that the sight means; it is the immediate awareness of the presence of the affection objects. It is the fact of being present to them; it is the obliteration of distance.[39]

The trouble is that vision constitutes the most obvious instance of conferring presence upon an entity. In similar instances, Carroll deems that factors such as "the pleasure of association", the pleasure of knowing rather than of seeing, or wonder at the achievement of the Creator, are often wrongly taken to constitute a set of strictly visual pleasures. Through the development of an ability to recognise presence, with all its attendant pleasures, through non-visual senses, the blind can discover that things can be "good to perceive" without the interjection of sight. A certain amount of training is usually necessary to familiarise the blind with the process of allowing alternative sense activities to assume the role formerly allocated to sight. It is a task, however, which Carroll deems to be eminently achievable.

Pierre Villey, Thomas Cutsforth, and Allen Eaton have discussed the relation of the blind to beauty in arguably greater detail than Carroll. While Eaton is adamant that "the enjoyment of beauty through senses of perception other than sight can be as genuine, as sensitive, as deep as human beings can experience", both Villey and Cutsforth are more equivocal in their endorsements of theories of non-visual approaches to aesthetic appreciation. [40] Keeping in mind Révész's treatise on the indispensability to aesthetic creativity and appreciation of "artistic seeing", and his declaration that "only vision is capable of raising the sensory impressions into the sphere of aesthetic contemplation", it is worthwhile to observe the outlook of these three theorists if only to chart the tentative surfacing of traces of encouragement.[41] A superficial reading of Thomas Cutsforth's The Blind in School and Society would have him grouped with Révész as an unyielding champion of the strictly visual nature of aesthetic perception. At times Cutsforth appears to be quite sceptical about the notion of an aesthetics of blindness. He declares, for instance, that "tactual perception, no matter how well trained, carries with it a meaning of literal realism which does not permit the grasp of ideal meanings." [42] He makes it clear, however, that he is suspicious only of the tendency of sighted people to attribute to the blind mere simulations of sighted reactions to aesthetic stimuli, thus neglecting the

importantly differential nature of their aesthetic. Cutsforth's defence of the aesthetic sensitivity of the blind is largely presented along the lines that "aesthetic growth does not take place so much through the senses of perception as it does through the entire intellectual development. . ."[43] This is an argument that we see presented quite frequently within aesthetic theory and one which would seem to imply that the mere absence of one channel of sensory perception is not such a dramatic impediment to the fostering of aesthetic sensibilities. Hugo Meynell, for example, dedicates a considerable portion of his The Nature of Aesthetic Value to various illustrations of the contention that "aesthetic satisfaction characteristically consists of satisfaction gained from exercise and enlargement of the capacities constitutive of human consciousness."[44]

Allen Eaton is similarly convinced that "the experience of beauty is a response, not to the special sense which perceives it, but to the whole intellectual and emotional being; it is a response of the full personality", that "any one of the senses of perception . . . , through its recognition of a beautiful stimulus, is sufficient to set the whole intellectual and emotional life into vibration and thus bring about aesthetic experience" and that "the total response to the stimulus . . . is not what the perceiving sense registers, but what the brain or the mind makes of this perception."[45] Pierre Villey in his The World of the Blind is, like Cutsforth, rather cautious in his granting of aesthetic awareness to the blind. In a discussion that is confined to a consideration of the formal arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, Villey, though appreciative of the significance of the role played by visual memory in those who become blind at a relatively advanced stage of life, does not submit to the belief that through touch alone the blind can derive aesthetic satisfaction from works of sculpture and architecture. The most he is willing to concede in this regard is that the blind may undergo heightened sensuous experiences, and even that "a commencement of aesthetic pleasure" may be signalled by the satisfaction derived from the plastic arts and architecture through the sense of touch. [46] As "evidence of the germ of aesthetic pleasure", Villey relates an anecdote concerning Marie Heurtin, the deaf-blind girl of Larnay who would spend hours merely touching objects and who, together with several other deaf children, would experience fits of jealous rage if one of their companions happened to be wearing a silken garment.[47] The variety of sensory approaches to aesthetic experience is further hinted at by Villey's assertion that the poets'

accounts of the aesthetic aspects of their experience "depend on the impressions which come to them from all the senses, from the least to the noblest."[48]

We do not have to scan Eaton's Beauty for the Sighted and the Blind so thoroughly to discover reasons for optimism in relation to the subject of our investigation. Eaton argues that a reciprocal enhancement of aesthetic awareness can occur if communication between the sighted and the blind is encouraged. He insists on the necessity of countering the effect of the three obstacles which, as he sees it, have traditionally impeded the placement of emphasis on the role of beauty in the experience of the blind -- namely a general indifference among sighted people to aesthetic values; the commonly held assumption that beauty is of concern only to those with conventionally functioning eyes; and the emphasis on more 'practical' concerns in the vocational training and rehabilitation of the blind. One of the chief differences between the aesthetic experiences of the sighted and the blind is, according to Eaton, related more to the frequency than to the actual quality of such experiences. For a number of reasons the stimulus to aesthetic experience is simply not regularly within reach of the blind. They continuously find themselves at the mercy of the sighted designers and organisers of art exhibitions. The seemingly more profound barriers, such as the inaccessibility of colour, are downplayed by Eaton. Colour is not the only component of artistic vision, but exists alongside other factors such as form, texture, flow of line, and so on. Through their heightened awareness, for example, of "the cold of crystal, the warmth of amber" the blind have privileged access to qualities that will never be seen and so rarely discovered by the sighted because of the rivalry of more immediately obvious visual distractions.[49] Without wanting to patronise the blind by crediting them with impossible powers or measures of sensitivity, Eaton, making an observation that seems highly pertinent to the explanation offered by Molly Sweeney of the nature of the joy afforded to her by swimming, suggests that

> [t]here are instances in which the qualities that a blind person can perceive in an object make it more prized to him than to one who can see. There is the possibility too, that because of his deep interest in, and perhaps affection for, only a few things, those for which he does care will mean more.[50]

Eaton proceeds to draw attention to the contribution of the sense of touch to the progress of mankind "both in acquiring knowledge and in the enjoyment of beauty."[51] To illustrate our general or practical indebtedness to touch Eaton notes that "it was through the liberation of his hands when man first stood erect, that he took his first definite steps toward civilization."[52] He also emphasises the fact that the senses of sight, smell, and hearing are generally much more acute in animals than men, while we excel in touch and can exercise an unrivalled keenness in the appreciation of texture. He counters accusations of the crudeness of touch and of its insensitivity to pleasures as subtle as those which provide no end of visual satisfaction, with a further distinction between two different functions of touch. Touch is useful, as we have seen, for purposes of discovery and identification, but it can also be crucial to our appreciation and enjoyment of aesthetic qualities. The sense of touch allows of as many gradations as the sense of sight. It was a blind friend of Eaton's that pointed out to him that a "keen touch, a utilitarian touch, is not the same as an appreciative touch."[53] Eaton, in turn, points out to the reader that "we whose sense of touch is quite crude should be careful not to place any limits on the tactual perception of any blind person."[54]

The three main qualities which are central to the aesthetic experience of the sighted person, as Eaton describes it -- material, function, and form -- are all knowable through touch. More peripheral features such as proportion, motion, temperature, rhythm, and flow of line are also all available to the blind in different ways. This observation forms the basis of Eaton's argument that "the blind person can have a good and satisfying hold on beauty."[55] He singles out for special attention the blind person's heightened appreciation of the materials of beauty. Because vision can take in material at a glance, eyes do not usually linger for long enough to encourage a sustained contemplation of that particular component of beauty, but will fix and shift their attention elsewhere. In this sense, visual appreciation of the beautiful is not always all that it might be. Of course it is not the aim of this project to further its appeal to the presence of a variety of non-visual aesthetic experiences by merely scoring points off a visually based aesthetic. It is the tendency of non-visual senses to attend to the materials of beauty rather than the eye's tendency to overlook them that is our primary concern. To illustrate the importance of the

contribution made by an appreciation of these materials to an overall aesthetic awareness, Eaton quotes from Santayana:

> There is no effect of form which an effect of material could not enhance, and this effect of material underlying that of form, raises the latter to a higher power and gives the beauty of the subject a certain poignancy, thoroughness and infinity which it otherwise would have lacked. The Parthenon, not in marble, the King's crown not of gold, and the stars not of fire, would be feeble and prosaic things . . .[56]

Eaton is not overly concerned with the task of finding a name for what it is that the blind derive from their sensory explorations of beautiful entities, but makes a very compelling case in his attempt to convince his reader that "it can be an aesthetic experience of high order, comparable to that enjoyed by a sighted person who attains it through another avenue of perception."[57]

Where Eaton's conception of an aesthetics of blindness diverges from the one that is gradually taking shape here, is in his neglect of the distinction, illustrated in Chapter Four, between propositional knowledge and direct engagement with beauty. The distinction, which will be revisited in the next chapter, is challenged by Eaton's observation that "(s)ince a joy ranking high in the life of the individual is the quest for knowledge for its own sake, a sharp line between this quest for knowledge and the quest for beauty can not in reality be drawn."[58] A little later, Eaton speculates that

> If we are conscious of touch as a way to knowledge we are, perhaps without knowing it, on our way to beauty . . . and without knowledge, however gained, our powers of aesthetic experience could be very limited. It is from knowledge that we make our choices, among them are choices of lovely thoughts and things.[59]

I will try to make it clear in the next chapter that some of the discernment which Eaton impressively displays through his distinction between different forms of touch might be

profitably applied to the distinction between different orders of knowledge. The 'swivel' of this chapter has come to rest, however, pointing squarely in the direction of the autobiographies of the blind.

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[1] E.M. von Hombostel, 'The Unity of the Senses', Psyche, 7 (1927) 83-89. Quoted by Lawrence E. Marks, The Unity of the Senses. Interrelations Among the Senses (London: Academic Press, 1978) p. 5.

[2] For an account of the history of this phenomenon see David Summers, The Judgement of Sense. Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp. 78-88.

[3]Robert Rivlin and Karen Gravelle, Deciphering the Senses. The Expanding World of Human Perception (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) p. 187.

[4] Ibid., p. 187.

[5] The Unity of the Senses p. 3.

[6] Ibid., p. 195.

[7] Morton A. Heller, ed., Touch, Representation and Blindness (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 1.

[8] Ibid., p. 1.

[9] The Unity of the Senses p. 8.

[10] Ibid., p. ix.

[11] Ibid., p. 2.

[12] Ibid., p. 5.

[13] Ibid., p. 11.

[14] Touch, Representation and Blindness p. 6.

[15] Ibid., pp. 21-22.

[16] G Révész, Psychology and Art of the Blind (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950) p. v.

[17] Ibid., p. 77.

[18] Ibid., p. 205.

[19] Ibid., p. 206, p. 205.

[20] For an account of this aspect of modern art see Anton Ehernzweig, 'The Hidden Order of Art', The British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 1, (1960-61), 121-133.

[21] Psychology and Art of the Blind p. 201.

[22] Ibid., p. 203.

[23] Ibid., p. 202.

[24] Reverend Thomas Carroll, Blindness. What It Is, What It Does, And How To Live With It (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1961) p. 178.

[25] Psychology and Art of the Blind p. 73.

[26] Ibid., p. 75.

[27] Quoted by Revesz, Psychology and Art of the Blind p. 72.

[28] Ibid., p. 72.

[29] Ibid., p. 166.

[30] Quoted from Helen Keller's The Story of my Life by Révész, Psychology and Art of the Blind p. 166.

[31] Blindness. What It Is, What It Does, And How To Live With It pp. 57-58.

[32] Ibid., p. 57.

[33] Blindness. What It Is, What It Does, And How To Live With It p. 170.

[34] Ibid., p. 180.

[35] Ibid., p. 181.

[36] Ibid., p. 183.

[37] Ibid., p. 170.

[38] Ibid., p. 171.

[39] Ibid., p. 171.

[40] Allen H. Eaton, Beauty For the Sighted and the Blind, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1959) p. xxii.

[41] Ibid., p. 153. (Eaton quotes from Revesz's Psychology and Art of the Blind.)

[42] Thomas Cutsforth, The Blind in School and Society: A Psychological Study, (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1951) (Referred to by Eaton, Beauty for the Sighted and the Blind p. 155.)

[43] Quoted by Eaton, Beauty for the Sighted and the Blind p. 156.

[44] Hugo A. Meynell, The Nature of Aesthetic Value (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986) p. 26.

[45] Ibid., p. 5, p. 7.

[46] Pierre Villey, The World of the Blind. A Psychological Study, trans. Alys Hallard (London: Duckworth, 1930) p. 312.

[47] Ibid., p. 310.

[48] Ibid., p. 309.

[49] Beauty for the Sighted and the Blind p. 10.

[50] Ibid., p. 11.

[51] Ibid., p. 16.

[52] Ibid., p. 17.

[53] Ibid., p. 21.

[54] Ibid., p. 21.

[55] Ibid., p. 25.

[56] Ibid., p. 23.

[57] Ibid., p. 25.

[58] Ibid., p. 20.

[59] Ibid., p. 21.

Chapter Six:

From the birdsong, the bird: The aesthetic experience of the blind.

Throughout his autobiography Robert Hine takes care to distance his experience from some of the mythical implications that blindness has come to be associated with in the popular imagination. He admits, however, that in the application of what he terms "the uses of order", he can see a definite connection between blindness and prophecy:

> The future is best known by those who prepare for it, and those who have order in their soul are best prepared. Order is neither ordained nor exclusive with the blind, but since ordering one's life and work is so much more important when blind, like a secondary sense it becomes emphasized. Perhaps it was only the sharpening of that logic of order that Zeus bestowed on Tiresias.[1]

It is not only prophecy, as Hine is aware, that has traditionally been accounted for in terms of order. Aestheticians have frequently described beauty as a manifestation of a certain ordering principle. In Plato's 'Philebus', for example, Socrates assures Protarchus that ". . . measure and commensurability emerge always as what constitute fineness and excellence."[2] In his 'Metaphysics', Aristotle claims that the "chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree"[3]. In Berkeley's Alciphron, having been asked by Euphranus whether "all mankind" are "agreed in the notion of a beauteous face?", Alciphron replies with a question of his own: "But with regard to other things is there no steady principle of beauty? Is there upon earth a human mind without the idea of order, harmony and proportion?"[4]A little later in the Dialogue, we are informed that "Alciphron, after a short pause, said that beauty consisted in a certain symmetry or proportion pleasing to the eye."[5] "Had we no such sense of beauty or harmony", Francis Hutcheson claims, "houses, gardens, dress, equipage, might have been recommended to us as convenient, fruitful, warm, easy, but never beautiful"[6]In more recent times, Munroe Beardsley has

maintained that "What distinguishes beautiful things from ordinary things is a high degree of some kind of order."[7] Harold Osborne has tried to explain the kind of order which distinguishes works of art and instances of naturally occurring beauty from other objects. He suggests that " . . . our aesthetic proclivities stem from an appetite for immediately apprehensible Order whose allure parallels that which drives scientists to seek rational Order throughout the universe."[8]

This long-considered relationship between beauty and a certain order is something that Robert Hine is well aware of. His thoughts turn quite quickly from prophesy to beauty: "If the blind are so susceptible to order", he reasons, "and since order is fundamental to beauty (proportion, balance, grace), then one would expect that the blind have a special appreciation of the beautiful." This does not tally with Hine's personal encounters with beauty, however. Having experienced extended periods of blindness and vision, Hine is in a position to declare that:

> . . . my limited experience does not point that way. Sight seems so much more helpful. In the first place, as I learned with proportions and distances, sight makes it easier to know and appreciate the nonutilitarian, and at least in the extent to which beauty is nonutilitarian, sight becomes an instrument of beauty. True, in the blind years I certainly experienced beauty – in music, in bird songs, in the wind, in holding lovely shapes and forms. Now, however, to the sound of the wind is added the movement of tall grasses and white clouds; to the music the instrument; to the birdsong, the bird. How often in blindness the imagination simply translated the emotions of sound or touch into color or form or movement. Then vision was demanding its due. Sight must hold a priority among the senses in the realm of the beautiful.[9]

H. Garland Minton appears to testify to the same hierarchy of the senses within the aesthetic realm. It seems, for example, as though he has replaced his aesthetic sensibility

with something else entirely when he describes the type of solace he derives from non-visual aspects of his newly blind experience:

> This inescapable slowing down of my life has made it possible for me to rediscover something I knew as a child. Now, as then, I can stand and stare with my inner eye and that is a privilege not possessed by many in this city. It is partial compensation for some of the visual pleasures I have lost. Of course I miss the splendour of the sunset, the blueness of the sky, the provocation in an attractive woman's figure, the soaring flight of a bird, a child's wide-eyed look of wonder and the smile on a pretty face. Though I miss them, in some strange way I see better now than I ever saw when I could see. Having learned to accept blindness and the perpetual challenge of living with it, at times I catch a glimpse at one of the secrets of life that was hidden from me before. In learning how to accept blindness and to accommodate myself to its limitations I have rediscovered my own identity.[10]

In this chapter I try to discover what exactly it is that seems to have eluded Hine throughout his blind years and to identify what available means he might have resorted to in order to prevent its escape. At another stage of Minton's autobiography he remarks that "the person who can see instinctively uses visual standards when he tries to assess the situation of the blind person." Mindful of his further observation that "that is where the danger lies", I largely defer here to the experience of the blind while doing my best to keep out of the way.[11]

I start out by describing the role played by order and organisation in the lives of the blind and illustrating their psychological reaction to situations of chaos and disorder.. What emerges is an understanding of the extent to which the utilization of "prior knowledge" of people, events and places permits the blind to impose a great amount of control over their lives. I discuss the importance of memorized order in the many cases where sight is feigned, the importance to the blind of descriptions by the sighted of the interrelations between the components of different ordered wholes, and the important role

played by the process of naming in the maintenance of this order. I also consider the experience of the blind of the 'cost' of such order, in terms of their creativity and spontaneity. Several of the blind people considered here, for example, have written of the curtailment of their sense of personal freedom that accompanied the compelled synchronising of their agendas with the availability of various types of assistance. The compensatory benefits of this order, I will suggest, are primarily non-aesthetic. The significance of the type of knowledge yielded by the impulse of the blind towards various forms of categorisation has been debated by Martin Milligan and Bryan Magee. I look here at the consequences of some of their observations for the formulation of an aesthetics of blindness. This section of the chapter culminates in a consideration of the accessibility to the blind of 'aesthetic order' as it has been discussed by theorists such as Harold Osborne, Anton Ehrenzweig, J.M.E. McTaggart, Ruth Lorand, and others.

Focusing specifically on two of the most celebrated sites of visual beauty -- the human face and the joy afforded by travel - I illustrate various ways in which beauty does elude the blind while they are still operating in accordance with the sighted criteria which they are often understandably slow to relinquish. Once they start to extricate their sensibilities from the hold of visual memory, their autobiographies suggest, the blind begin to discover an equally impressive non-visual beauty. The central section of the chapter looks at various descriptions of the onset of blindness. Practically all of the autobiographies consulted here describe the comprehensive reorganisation which has to be implemented in the aftermath of the onset of blindness. The complete restructuring of experience which blindness entails is presented as the basis for the emergence of an aesthetics of blindness. Such radical restructuring is almost invariably accompanied by a great deal of pain, and often an acute sense of loss. The nature and extent of this pain differs from person to person, and often seems related to the degree of blindness experienced and the duration of the process of loss. Some of the cases, most notably that of Kuusisto, suggest that the condition of partial or fractional vision is itself to a certain extent innately aesthetic. I will argue that while the extent to which this is the case depends largely on the psychological disposition of each individual, certain aspects of the condition seem highly conducive to the type of 'psychical distancing' which has historically been regarded as a salient characteristic of the aesthetic experience. In the last

section of the chapter I concentrate on the descriptions of certain blind people of their encounters with beauty. Concentrating primarily on the experiences of John Hull, I illustrate that these encounters usually entail an intimate engagement with one's environment rather than the distanced appraisal of a beautiful object. I do not explicitly connect the themes of the plays addressed in the literary section of this project to the experiences described throughout this chapter. All of the themes are covered here, however. The autobiographies tell of the non-visual appreciation of sites of beauty largely associated with the eye, and the consequences of fabrication that are so central to The Well of the Saints. The limitations of visual memory and the implications for the sense of identity of the non-congenitally blind discussed in relation to the Blind Man of On Baile's Strand also receive a lot of attention. And the question of the communicability of an awareness of beauty considered in Chapter Four is also at the centre of much of the experience and theory assessed here.

All of the autobiographies of the blind I have come across in the course of my research have been enlightening in different ways. I limit my attention here, however, to those autobiographies which detail the experience of beauty in blindness.[12] Some preliminary introductions are probably in order before we get under way, as most of the names referred to here will probably be unfamiliar. Robert Hine, whose experience has already been referred to, is (or at least was at the time of writing his autobiography) a Professor of History in California who has written books on the American West. In his autobiography, Second Sight, he tells of how he lost his sight completely at fifty and then, fifteen years later was returned through surgery to partial vision. Andrew Potok is a New England Polish painter who lost his sight slowly through retinitis pigmentosa and who, when his devastation subsided, learned to rechannel his creativity through other senses. As an artist who loses his sight, Potok describes in detail experiences which were familiar to others such as James Thurber and W.W. Fenn, who have also influenced this chapter. Karl Bjarnhoff was born in 1898 in the small town of Vejle in Denmark. He lost his sight at a relatively young age and went on to become one of his country's most celebrated violin-cellists and radio presenters, as well as a respected writer and editor. Stephen Kuusisto has been fractionally sighted since a post-natal operation caused irreparable damage to his retinas. Like Bjarnhoff, however, Kuusisto grew up pretending

that he could see. In addition to working for a guide dog school in America, his literary work has been published in the 'Antioch Review', the 'Paris Review', and 'Harper's Magazine'. H. Garland Minton lost his sight suddenly while waiting for a train in Waterloo Station, in February 1966. Like the others, he wrote his autobiography in order to render certain misunderstood aspects of his condition understandable. Georgina Kleege is a blind writer who, like Minton, retains a highly visual sensibility. Her Sight Unseen is a critical description of the relation of blindness to modern culture. Though she does not elaborate on the specifics of her own biographical details, she has been blind since a very young age. John Hull was born in Australia but moved to England to study theology at Cambridge University. After a lifetime of troubled vision, he finally lost his sight completely in 1983, and went on to work as a lecturer in Birmingham. Martin Milligan lost his sight at eighteen months and had no memory of vision. Until shortly before his death he had been Head of Department in Philosophy at the University of Leeds. The correspondence he developed with Bryan Magee addressed many of the aspects of blindness that concern us here.

6.1. Order, disorder and the blind.

Yeats, as we have seen, was never overly concerned with presenting a realistic depiction of blindness. It could well be that the most 'accurate' aspect of his various references to blindness is when he has the Blind Beggar count his thousand and nine steps, however erroneously, at the start of The Cat and the Moon. Indicative of a high degree of order, the habit of step-counting features in many of the autobiographies considered here. It was not really until after an operation had restored Robert Hine to partial vision that he began to reflect on the many levels at which order assumes a hugely significant role in the everyday existence of the blind. Walking through the corridors of his university as a newly re-visualized man, he is struck by the sort of habits that survived the transition back into vision:

> A hard habit to break is counting steps. This comes so naturally for the blind that it goes without saying. It's just plain efficient to know how

> many steps from the door to the garage to the gate, from the office to the men's room, and it means survival to know how many steps to the descending stairs. But I still do it, and when my mind is not otherwise occupied, I find myself counting steps wherever I go.[13]

Such step-counting is a feature of what Kuusisto calls "the places learned by rote".[14] It is something which Kuusisto finds himself doing regularly. "On the stairs", he tells us at one point,

> I feel for the edge of the top step with my toes, and I count the number of steps. In fact I carry in memory every set of stairs. "Ten, eleven, twelve," heel and toe. This offers a kind of provisional peace, counting and storing every step ... In a dozen steps I know I will arrive at an enormous tree root that has broken through the concrete. This morning, hurrying with an overstuffed briefcase, I will not forget this gothic tree with its buttresses and occult energies. Adjusting my speed, I anticipate its coming in exactly seven steps. ... But while thinking of the tree as a cathedral, I've forgotten a step! The magnet of imagination is dangerous. I'm falling now, and for a moment it feels as though the act of falling will last forever.[15]

Because of his reliance on order, Hine came to look upon his profession as a historian as a kind of "retreat". Among the files in his office he could "ignore" his blindness, because it was an environment he was familiar with and which was ordered according to a system which nobody else dared to interfere with. His office was the only environment which allowed Hine to satisfy his need to "live intensely".[16]

Many of the autobiographers who feature here emphasise the extent of their indebtedness to the strict maintenance of various types of order in blindness. John Hull, for example, recounts an experience he had one Christmas when his study was

temporarily converted into sleeping space to accommodate visiting relatives. The entire house, ". . . from top to bottom, was littered with unfamiliar objects, children's toys all over the floor, suitcases and relatives to be bumped into . .". The experience, Hull continues,

> makes me feel that I am in an environment which is slipping out of control. I start to feel that it is swimming around me, that the unpredictable is confusing me at every step. It makes me feel the inflexibility of the blind, or I should say the inflexible kind of life which is imposed upon people by blindness. Familiarity, predictability, the same objects, the same people, the same routes, the same movements of the head in order to locate this or that: take these away and the blind person is transported back into the infantile state where one simply does not know how to handle the world, how to enter into it and to control it, how to exist in a relationship to that world, where the hard-won balance between trust and fear threatens to be upset, and one is overwhelmed by the thought that the world to which one seeks to be related is unrelatable to, because either it is unreal or unavailable.[17]

According to Hull, the blind are then left with the choice of establishing "some kind of inner control" within one's body and "introspective consciousness", or of devising a certain order within some sort of individualised environment. This need for private order prompts Hull to rethink the phenomenon of blindness in terms of "territorial rights"[18]. Andrew Potok, echoing Hine's experience of "the need to live intensely", speaks of cravings for ". . . movement, a leap, a risk".[19] Minton tells of a similar episode, when a documentary crew invaded his home in order to record his thoughts on the politics of disability and rehabilitation. To comply with the producer's requirements, all of Minton's furniture had to be rearranged, and his floor became a minefield of cable and equipment which he did not even dare try to navigate.[20]

Certain experiences recounted in the autobiographies serve to support the popular adage that a liar needs a good memory. It is evidenced, for example, by Karl Bjarnhof's anecdote about his visit to the eye specialist while he was still trying to conceal the weakness of his eyes from those around him. Employing the same tactics that had brought him 'success' in the project of imitating sightedness in the classroom, the young Bjarnhof, before the optometrist entered his office, was afforded an opportunity to steal a glimpse of the eye chart 'close up' and to memorise it. He was thus able to 'read' the chart "all the way from the big B at the top to the tiny z at the bottom", prompting the specialist to enquire "What the hell's supposed to be wrong with him? . . He's got eyes like a hawk!"[21]

Stephen Kuusisto also involved himself in the charade of maintaining the appearance of a fully sighted person as his eyes rapidly weakened, pretending to see clearly when in fact he was "seeing by approximation".[22] He also confesses that

> (i)t is the unfamiliar or the unexpected that can catch me . . . blind I'm a fatted failure; posing as a sighted person I'm on a terrible high-wire.[23]

Some twenty-four years earlier H. Garland Minton used the same analogy to describe the wary walking of the newly blind. While attending a mobility training course in Torquay he writes:

> I manage fairly well but, if mine had been a more meek and submissive nature, I might well be no more mobile than a sack of coals. I am glad that I took chances when I tried to acquire some degree of mobility before I came here. When I made myself walk on the high wire, first in hospital, then in the village, and finally, through the streets of London, I found out for myself that the problem of mobility can only be solved when fear is under control. To be free of fear, it is necessary to understand first exactly what there is to fear.[24]

Kuusisto's practical indebtedness to the sense of order instilled in him by blindness is evident in his description of the impression of sightedness he tried to simulate while briefly living in Finland as a boy with his parents:

> Such acting requires a capacious memory; in the gauzy nets of pastel colors where I lived, every inch of terrain had to be acutely remembered. In the heart of every blooming and buzzing confusion I found a signpost, something to guide me back along my untutored path. Twenty one years later, when I returned to Helsinki with my own Fulbright grant, I found the door of our old apartment building by following the dropped breadcrumbs of that blind child's choreography.[25]

On a bird-watching expedition with a friend, Kuusisto is at pains to convey the impression that he is suitably impressed. In an exercise of memorization rather than perception, he corroborates the opinions of his friend by repeating and emphasising his appraisals and descriptions:

> I agree with everything Jim sees, adding my own intensifiers and adjectives. I don't want to tell him I can't see the damned things, fearing it will make him self-conscious, for then our outing will become an exercise in description. He'll have to tell me what they look like. And I will have to appreciate them all the more. By pretending to see, I'm sparing us an ordeal. Sure I'm faking it with the binoculars, gloating over imaginary bluejays, but I'm alone with my own imagination, listening casually to an enthusiastic friend, my blindness locked away for the time.[26]

Putting himself back in the mindset of the young boy who studiously disguised the blindness he was "taught to disavow", Kuusisto remarks "(i)n the meantime I'm a tired

kid. It's preposterous to live as though you can see. Looking back, I can scarcely imagine the energy it took."[27]Some time later Kuusisto finds himself imagining

> the dead Pharaoh Tutankhamen moving out into eternity, still wearing his mortal, embalmed, and altogether blue skin. He's learning how to see in a different way, a protognostic visioning that doesn't require light. I wonder if he has to memorize the stars along the way.[28]

"Step, lie", is how Kuusisto wonderfully summarizes his progress during this period.[29] The upshot of his extended deception is that he gets to mid-life having accumulated only a pitiful array of genuine blind skills. Hine also partook in the masquerade of trying to conceal his blindness from the world. "When you can continue to work, teach and write as I was doing," he asks, "why should you admit to yourself that you are blind?":

> Through all my blind years I continued to wear eyeglasses though they had no effect whatever, and Shirley [his wife] had to tell me when they got impossibly smudged. I would not go gently into that night, but with a cracked, pinned hip, bruises, an uncontrollable fear of falling down another flight of stairs, and still wearing ridiculously impotent eyeglasses.[30]

Kuusisto also, as part of the obligatory disguise, wore what he calls "hopeless spectacles on my nose."[31] The pain and the bruises finally prompted Hine to surrender sensibly, and procure a white cane.

Robert Hine, as we have seen, also appreciates the practical significance of order for the blind. He observes that a blind person's apartment is "a minicosm" of the blind world, which "imposes a necessary orderliness on chaos". Items not left in their accustomed space are stripped not only of their use value, but also of their practical existence. "On the wrong table," he confides to us at one stage, "the ash tray may as well be on Mars."[32] Hine was fortunate enough to have been naturally of an orderly disposition:

> At least one constraint of blindness actually suited me. I loved order. ... Nothing pleased me more in childhood than, about the age of twelve, being given my own room where I could have things in their place and know where everything was at any time. I liked to parse sentences. I loved to outline. I still make lists and check them off. I am a compulsive recapper of ballpoint pens.[33]

Hine admits that much of the threat felt by the free-spirited blind person was "minimal" in his case because he happened to be "weird enough to enjoy being organised", and so the new world did not "impinge" to an unbearable extent on his desires. "If I could conquer blindness by organization", he recalls resolving, "I would do it, step by step. The process itself was victory."[34]

The ritual of naming things, which was looked at earlier in relation to Molly Sweeney, assumes a special significance in Hine's autobiography:

> Names were vitally important to me when blind. If a conversant was not gracious enough to tell me his or her name and I was not clever enough to identify the voice, I got so I would simply ask. I needed to know that name. It was a raft in a slippery sea. If I already knew the person, the name filled in the past; if I did not, it was the base to build on.[35]

Hull sees their respective attitudes to the process of 'naming' as one of the factors that most clearly distinguishes the blind from the sighted, both in terms of inter-personal relationships and in terms of their general epistemology. It is central to their accumulating of conceptual knowledge:

> Sighted people get to know each other by recognizing each other's appearance, and all the things the new acquaintance has said and done are associated with that image of what he or she looks like. The

> appearance, the look of the person, is that around which all of the other items cluster. The name of the person is one additional item of information, but the appearance is that central core around which everything gathers. ... For me knowing someone hangs upon knowing the name. ... Around the name I would build up the story of that person. The name is the verbal clue around which that particular story hangs.[36]

Hine also emphasises the implications of this practical indebtedness to order, for the potential of the blind for creativity. He tells of a blind friend of his, Judith Zaragoza, who, blinded in her teens, misses most the spontaneity that eyesight affords, the ability, for example, to take off for the beach on a whim. "The orderliness of blind life cautions against" or "says no to", acting on such spur of the moment decisions.[37] This is how Hine describes his own experience of the same restriction:

> I felt something disquieting about my ordered life. The advantage that organisation provided for me housed its dark side -- the brooding uneasiness that the requisite order breeds habit and that habit blocks creativity. One could survive blindness, adapt very well, but never again be a free, creative spirit. There was the rub; this was the worry.[38]

"There were times", Hine recalls,

> when I thought the greatest burden was the realisation that I could carry very little through without the help of other, sighted people. I was bound to my Braille watch, to the arrival of readers and drivers, to the unacceptability of taking an extra half hour because if I did someone would be kept waiting. No matter how hard I might try to be free, to write my own books, to deliver my own lectures, to provide for my own family, my daily life was the flip side of individualism. Blindness demands dependence and cooperation, like the buttons on

> the back of a Shaker shirt, sewn there, deliberately unreachable, to teach the brotherhood of mankind.[39]

Hine's frustration with the inescapable dependency which was a feature of his experience of blindness seems similar to Minton's distress at having to share even some of his most intimate experiences with a guide or companion of some sort:

> Every letter I receive, every document, every printed word is meaningless to me until I have shared it with at least one other person. To the person who happens to be at hand to help me I have to reveal some of my most intimate thoughts and many private affairs. ... I am not embarrassed about my blindness but the inescapable exposure of self that comes with it. I must come to terms with this by looking at the young social worker as merely the eyes with which I see and the hand with which I write.[40]

Kuusisto was tormented by the same demeaning reliance on others. "Roaming in needy tandem with others who can see", as he expresses it, "is no substitute for a room of one's own." When his friend Shepard goes to Colorado to make musical instruments and play in bars, Kuusisto contemplates tallying along as his sidekick. He thinks of the famous duo of Leadbelly and Blind Lemon Jefferson, and evokes an image that takes us back to Yeats's Fool and Blind Man:

> Maybe I can be Blind Lemon, follow Shepard to Boulder. But then there's the dependence thing. Who could live like Blind Lemon and follow someone around, wait on strange streets for Leadbelly to return with a sausage and a jar of whiskey?[41]

"It's awful", Hull protests, "having to make such demands of people all the time." The alternative, however, as he points out, "seems to be almost complete social marginalisation and passivity."[42]

Another aspect of what he experiences as the passivity of blindness is also a source of frustration for Hull. Unlike the world of vision, the acoustic world stays the same whichever way he turns his head. "New noises", as he puts it, "do not come to my attention as I turn my head around."

> This heightens the sense of passivity. Instead of me having to search things out and uncover fresh portions of my world by my own effort as I fix my gaze here and there, in the acoustic world there is something rather indifferent to my attempts to penetrate it. This is a world which I cannot shut out, which goes on all around me, and which gets on with its own life.[43]

Being able to improvise on the piano became a "special joy" for Hine after the restoration of his sight.[44] Similarly, when Andrew Potok found himself gradually deprived of his chosen means of creative expression, and endeavoured to replace it with what he regarded initially as the clumsy art of writing, he recalls that:

> The struggle with words seemed at times like a full-scale war. Learning to be skilled at blindness or at counselling was like a mock skirmish, compared with trying to push words around. Words felt as heavy as lead, hard as rock, unmoveable, and incapable of nuance or ambiguity. As I laboriously rammed them into place, like the massive blocks of the pyramids, I longed for the playfulness of paint.[45]

This sudden inability to improvise, and to assimilate a lot of new information quickly was also painful for Minton. The necessity of always acquiring prior information before deciding on a course of action is something he clearly suffered rather than enjoyed:

> From now on, every pace I take will be a self conscious act. As a blind man, I have discovered that when I am out on the street I can afford to

> be neither careless nor carefree. Instincts that used to be triggered off by visual stimuli are dormant now.[46]

After explaining why he finds the ordeal of memorising familiar routes degrading, Kuusisto observes that "(t)he unknown is worse, an epic terrain that, in the mind's eye, could prevent a blind person from leaving home."[47] The encroachment of blindness on the lives of older people or those who are "by nature orderly" is a less traumatic experience, Hine suggests, than when a more naturally spontaneous person is visited by the affliction. Hine realised very quickly that " . . . anything not put where it belonged was chaotically lost", and to deduce from this that " . . . organisation, like imagination, would give [him] at least half a chance to compete with the sighted."[48] Hine, Hull and Kuusisto all feel that the encompassing of one's lifestyle within rigid ordering principles entails a relinquishing of a great deal of freedom that the sighted take for granted. It also entails the structuring of one's life to a large extent around the schedules of one's friends. Describing this process, Hine talks of the frustration of having to wait for the world to come to him, of the constant and careful 'meshing' of his schedule with someone else's. "Not long after" the onset of blindness, Hine recalls, "one bids farewell to spontaneity and quits."[49]

It was Hine's experience that the many benefits reaped by his heightened sense of order in blindness did not exert any significant influence over his aesthetic experience. The advantages of order were primarily practical:

> If anything, [blindness] reinforced my sense that truth lay in order and system, in the essential unity at the heart of all things. With the blind, order is not presumed or hypothetical; it is proved and pragmatic.[50]

The ability to concentrate afforded by the freedom from visual distraction is among the chief benefits that Hine experienced in blindness. "When blind", he recalls,

> I had little trouble catching the steps in a colleague's argument; now the window over the same speaker's shoulder frames a billowing

> eucalyptus, and my eyes are so anxious to enjoy it that my mind loses another point in the development.[51]

The improvement of one's concentration levels in blindness is a benefit that is quite widely cited. James Thurber, for example, observes that:

> A blind man benefits by lack of distractions; my one-eighth vision happily obscures sad and ungainly sights, leaving only the vivid and the radiant, some of whom are my friends and neighbours.[52]

It is an observation corroborated by both Booth Tarrington and Pierre Villey when they say respectively:

> I have done more work during the last year than ever before. I have written a novel, short stories, and several essays. Being unable to see is a great aid to concentration.[53]

And:

> The less one is disturbed thus, the less one's inner thoughts are interrupted by outward events, the more time one takes to ripen one's reflections and to weigh the for-and-against of one's deliberations[54]

Naturally freedom from distraction is part of the creation of a set of conditions that are conducive to artistic creation, but in this sense blindness is related to the process of artistic creativity in the same tenuous way as turning off one's radio before one commences is.

There are a lot of popular myths about the sudden enhancement of non-visual senses in blindness. The only sensory advantage Hine experienced in blindness was the development of what he calls a "sense of obstacles", a "gross obstacle vision" or "facial vision" which, like a bat's radar, was of help only in terms of navigation and

orientation.[55] John Hull also describes this phenomenon in some detail. He calls it "echo location" and describes it as an "intense awareness", "a sort of guidance system which comes into operation when absolutely necessary".[56] Similarly, Minton lists as one of the chief benefits of memorizing things in terms of order and pattern, the ability to "get about" with "impunity."[57] Again, the emphasis is on feats of navigation and non-aesthetic advantages of order. Minton, for example, says nothing about an acquired ability to appraise with impunity. The tension between the aesthetic and the pragmatic is something that Kuusisto is profoundly sensitive to. This is evidenced, for example, by his description of the dilemma he finds himself in when a beautiful and highly intelligent woman captures his heart in Helsinki:

> There's a lovely woman who likes me. I desperately need to cry and tell her how much I need help with the words. The curbs.[58]

The relation of the blind to visual beauty is complicated by two major factors -- the non-experiential nature of their familiarity with such beauty, and the necessity of direct experience for its appreciation. These two features of the aesthetic experience of the blind are dealt with in turn in the following two sections.

6.2. Orders of knowledge: experiential and discursive familiarity with beauty.

> I've been informed of the things I miss
> Birds that steadily attempt the air
> Peculiar shades of whiskey in a glass
> Surprising sunlight in a woman's hair[59]

"Once settled down in some favourite spot," Fenn tells us, "I, with my guide, begin to explore, and I demand inexorably to be informed of everything about me ..."[60] Fenn is trying to impress upon us the similarity of his experience as a blind writer to his pre-blindness career as a landscape painter. Enlisting the assistance of a "patient scribe" in this way, Fenn accumulates a "tolerable notion of the sort of country [he] is in." In the

aftermath of the operation which restored Hine's sight, his wife found it hard to lose the habit of describing the different components of pictures to Hine rather than simply handing them to him so that he could look at them himself.[61] The blind man of Kennelly's poem quoted above claims to "deduce what's evil, beautiful, or good". The difference between the deduction of aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities receives a great deal of attention throughout this chapter. This space between the type of appreciation which is informed by a direct perception of one's environment and the type of evaluation of what can be deduced from the description of one's environment by others is addressed at length throughout a series of letters exchanged between Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan. Having suspected for a long time that the insight of a blind man would help him get to the root of certain epistemological questions and to settle some matters of linguistic philosophy, Bryan Magee finally initiated a correspondence with Martin Milligan, who, blind practically from birth, was Head of Department in Philosophy at the University of Leeds at the time. What started as an abstract philosophical exchange between two academics soon turned into a series of quite heated and personal arguments about the interrelationships between language, the senses, and our conceptions of reality. Through a study of the difference made by Milligan's blindness to his formation of knowledge and concepts, the pair try to explore the nature of our relation as human beings to unapprehended dimensions of reality. In this section I isolate the various arguments Milligan presents in an attempt to illustrate his contention that all knowledge is discursive, and Magee's unsuccessful attempts to convince him otherwise. The different arguments are recounted here for the light they shed on the question of the nature of the blind person's awareness of visual beauty. It is, to adopt Magee's parlance, the nature and limits of the apprehension of an unperceived beauty that is being investigated here.

In his first letter Milligan sets out very clearly the lines along which he intends to defend discursive knowledge. He argues that as long as a person is able to speak a common language there is no difficulty in principle or practice in that person coming to know things which were not first delivered to his or her senses. The precise meaning of visual terms such as 'light', 'darkness', and 'blindness' can be exchanged between the sighted and the blind because it is not dependent in any way on all users of the visual terms having visual experience:

> Since 'sight' is a species of the genus 'perception' of which blind people do have some experience, they know the sort of thing that sighted people are talking about, and can come to accept, even themselves to talk sensibly about, a species of the genus with which they are not personally acquainted.[62]

Milligan concludes his argument by instancing the case of a woman blind from infancy, who, being granted the ability to see, is not in a position to say any more about what seeing is like than she could while blind. The blind need only a coherent description of sight to enable them to understand the truth of the proposition that they are blind.

In his reply Magee states firmly that he does not think that blind people can understand visual terms to a "major extent". In an attempt to justify his suspicion to Milligan, he introduces the distinction between 'knowing' and 'knowing about' or knowing 'that'. Throughout the remaining letters Magee refers to this distinction as that between 'experiential' knowledge and 'propositional' or 'conceptual' knowledge. (My reference to it as 'discursive' knowledge simply modifies the sense of knowledge derived through proposition to knowledge derived through discussion). To illustrate the limitations of propositional knowledge Magee makes the following point:

> Every experience is unique to the person, the moment, and the occasion; and every existent entity is also unique; so any attempt to capture either of them in concepts, whether for purposes of storage or communication, compels us to abstract their general features from what is uniquely particular, and limit ourselves to conveying those. And however fine-cut these general features may be, however closely characterized, they must of necessity omit what is uniquely particular, for concepts have to be inter-subjectively understandable if they are to perform their function, and they need therefore to have a certain character of generality.[63]

In an attempt to clarify the distinction for Milligan, Magee transfers the discussion to sensory modalities that Milligan is in possession of by discussing the taste of coffee. He cannot imagine any description of coffee being sufficiently accurate to impart a knowledge of how it actually tastes to a person who has never sampled it:

> You could narrow down its characteristics for him in many ways . . . and at the end of your description he would certainly know a lot of things about coffee. But how it tasted would not be one of them. No matter how many adjectives you piled on, it would always be possible that they might also apply to some other beverage -- indeed, if they could not they would not be the appropriate concepts. . . There is only one way in which he can find out, and that is by tasting coffee. Once he has done that, propositions referring to its taste will acquire specific meaning for him, but only then.[64]

Magee likens a person in possession only of discursive knowledge of coffee to one who devotes all of his time to compiling information about a foreign country without ever actually visiting it. He tells Milligan that in his opinion "the whole phenomenology of visual experience must forever remain a closed book" to him. Drawing attention to the arguments discussed in Chapter Four in relation to the significance of the blind person's testimony, Magee tells Milligan:

> It is itself an important consequence of the fact that the only knowledge you can have of seeing is propositional knowledge that you formulate questions about it in terms of your ability to attach meanings to certain words. I do not think it would occur to a sighted person to do the corresponding thing: automatically he would refer to direct experience.[65]

The discussion becomes most heated when Magee tries to impress on Milligan the idea that there is an element of aesthetic experience which Milligan, with his heavy reliance

on 'knowledge by description' cannot appreciate. "I suppose you are not particularly conscious of missing much," writes Magee, "but you do."[66] Much of this chapter is concerned with an assessment of the importance of the 'much' that Milligan is deemed here to miss, i.e. -- "that part of vision related concepts that does not relate itself" to him, and of the availability to the blind of alternative sources of aesthetic enjoyment.

Magee tells Milligan that by "pitching [his] claims" for what can be inferred from description as high as he does, he is talking "as if the balance between propositional knowledge and experiential knowledge were different from what it is ..."[67] He goes on to suggest that Milligan seems to have inverted this relationship between propositional and experiential knowledge and causes serious offence by assuring Milligan that the propositional knowledge which he must content himself with is "pale, grey, thin, second-hand stuff compared with the knowledge by acquaintance from which it is abstracted."[68] He then tells Milligan:

> ... you vastly overestimate the extent to which you know what seeing is like, and vastly underestimate the difference it makes to a person's experience and his life; and this leads you to believe that propositional knowledge fills more of the available cognitive space in these matters than it does.[69]

"What meaning", Magee asks Milligan towards the end of the same letter,

> can you attach to colour words like 'red', 'blue', and 'yellow'?. . . What idea can you have of what a painting is, and, much more important than that, of what beauty in the visual arts is? For that matter, what conception can you have of natural beauty?[70]

Magee goes on to recount an expedition he had made a short time previously to Kenya, during which he visited Lake Nakuru, whose shore was home to over a million flamingos -- "a bird so beautiful," remarks Magee, "that even [his] impersonal encyclopaedia describes it as beautiful."[71] Magee feels sure that the sight of the lake was so strikingly

beautiful that the memory of it will haunt him forever. He is curious to know what Milligan can 'make' of such an experience.

Milligan's response to the charge that he underestimates the importance of the difference vision makes to experience is twofold. He accuses sighted people of underestimating both non-visual senses and language:

> What [sighted people] don't appreciate is that nature (fortunately) makes available to human beings a great deal of redundant information through more senses than one; and because sight is in modern conditions so much more efficient than the other senses, sighted people have got into the habit of disregarding a lot of the information the other senses provide, or can provide. However, blind people can learn to use this when they put their minds to it. Sighted people also under-estimate the power of language. ... Given all this, I think one would have to be surprised if many *didn't* grossly exaggerate the importance of sight -- and therefore of its absence.[72]

In a later letter Milligan equates Magee's account of experiential knowledge with Bertrand Russell's distinction between the colour he sees and his knowledge of truths about the colour. Russell claimed to know the colour "perfectly and completely" when he saw it, and that any further knowledge is not "even theoretically possible". When Milligan analyses this 'perfect and complete' knowledge, however, he finds it reducible to a rather specious paradox:

> Does it consist of the knowledge that what he is seeing is a colour, or even just colour? No, because that would be knowledge of a truth, as would be even the knowledge simply that he is seeing something. But a 'knowing' which has been isolated from all knowledge of truths is not a knowing of anything but a 'perfectly and completely' empty 'knowing' -- a non-knowing. What we have left of a sensation when we take away all knowledge of truths or false beliefs which may be

> associated with it is not knowledge or illusion of any kind but simply the sensation as the occurrence of an event, as something which is 'had', like measles or birthdays.[73]

Milligan reinforces the same point later in the same letter when he cautions Magee about the importance of remembering that

> intuitions without concepts are blind ; that ' given' on its own is dumb; that uncategorized, unconceptualised sensations and sense impressions tell us nothing; that experience without concepts is non-cognitive, is not knowledge.[74]

At several junctures Milligan's letters read as though he was trying deliberately to exasperate Magee by offending his aesthetic sensibilities. One such juncture is represented by Milligan's downplaying of the significance of the difference between what Magee derived from his African safari and what Milligan experienced vicariously through Magee's recounting of his experience:

> ...your saying that you know that thrill includes the assertion both that you have had that thrill and that you know that you have had that thrill; and, since I know that your testimony on this matter is utterly reliable, I too can know that you have had that thrill, though I can't have the thrill myself. If you exclude the assertion that you know you have had the thrill, in order to make your 'know' non-propositional, then you are using the word in a very out-of-the-ordinary way to say no more than you have had the thrill.
>
> 'But if you have not had the thrill yourself', you might say to me, 'how can you know what it is that I have had?
>
> 'Because you have told me about it', I might reply ... [75]

Believing that "we should demand of anything which is to be granted the status of knowledge that it should be expressible in verbal language", Milligan does not see how the thrill might be lost in communication.[76] Blind people, according to Milligan, continually prove that they know what is meant by 'light' by using the word properly and ensuring that their homes are adequately lit for sighted visitors. The difference between a sighted person's conception of light and that of a blind person, as Milligan understands it, has nothing to do with a difference in the amount or kind of knowledge possessed about light, but only the biographical difference of the process through which that knowledge came to be attained. He responds to Magee's claim that because he has not had direct experience of the visual splendour of Lake Nakuru himself, he has no way of verifying Magee's description of it, by saying that he is perfectly prepared to take Magee at his word. In instances of aesthetic judgement in general he is happy to make inquiries and let a "wide consensus" dictate his faith.[77] Armed with discursive knowledge, the only piece of knowledge which spectators of visual beauty possess that he does not is the knowledge that they have seen the particular site of beauty. Milligan is certain that this piece of knowledge "makes less difference than people might think."[78] Then, however, after making such a bold assertion, he seems to play right into Magee's hands by asserting: "...if experiential knowledge *were* to be non-conceptual, I don't see how it could be exchanged, even among those who have had similar experiences ..."[79] Indeed throughout his letters Milligan seems to be playing into Magee's hands repeatedly. My personal judgement while reading through the letters was that the weakness in Milligan's argument is that he does not recognise the crucial distinction between the orders of knowledge that can be derived through direct experience and description. The similarity between Magee's perspective and my own, however, leads me to suspect that as a sighted person, I may not be ideally placed to arbitrate objectively in relation to this issue.

What Magee seems most vexed by is Milligan's assertion that the blind "can know all the sighted can know." He does not accept the justification Milligan offers for such a claim:

> . . . it doesn't follow that knowing isn't knowing about -- that knowledge by acquaintance is a wholly different thing from

> propositional knowledge. In fact it seems to me that those are right who say that all knowing . . . is knowing about or knowing that ... that all knowledge is propositional knowledge; and that knowledge by acquaintance is just one kind of propositional knowledge.[80]

Magee argues that "the arts" and "our knowledge of the arts" serve to refute such statements.[81] Being "full of truths that philosophy misses", the significance of art will be hidden from one who approaches them in search for a significance that can be mediated discursively. At the base of Magee's argument is the belief that our conceptions of the empirical world must derive from deliverances to our consciousness, and that the only reason that the blind can have the general notion they do of what is described by visual terms is that the referents of these terms have been directly experienced by the sighted. He likens the relation between propositional knowledge and the corresponding aspects of reality, to that which exists between a piece of music and the grooves in a disk that contains a recording of it. In response to Magee's saying to him that he is forever excluded from "the whole phenomenology" of visual experience, Milligan observes that Magee is perfectly capable of imagining that we might well have been granted bodies which were equipped to transmit, receive and interpret radar, television, radio, or X rays. Magee counters that "even the greatest geniuses of all time" would not have been able to conceive of such things before anything remotely like them had been experienced. The only reason why Magee is capable of it is that his generation already harbours a conception of such entities -- they are "already within the realm of human experience".[82] Likewise, Magee can attach meaning to the idea of a building which is a hundred miles high because it can be reduced to the combination of a familiar empirical object with the figure 100, the familiar unit of measurement, and the notion of height, with which we are all well acquainted. The idea of a building a hundred miles high can be analysed "without remainder" into constituent parts of two kinds, both of which we are equipped by our experience to understand. This is not the case however, at least according to Magee, in relation to the conception of sight harboured by the born-blind:

> For them the very core, the heart, of the experience from which the concept is derived is inaccessible in experience. When you talk as you do of constructing the notion of sight out of non-visual concepts it is as if you were to talk of constructing the notion of 'a building a hundred miles high' out of non-architectural and non-computational concepts.[83]

It seems to me that a variation on this argument is applicable to the relation of a progressively blind person to the visual features of a site of beauty he/she has not encountered before. Magee also points to a connection between Schopenhauer's distinction between significance which can be stated and that which can only be presented; the distinction between knowledge which can be put into words and knowledge which can be acquired and not put into words; and Susanne K. Langer's distinction between "discursive symbols" such as language and arithmetical numbers, and "presentational symbols" such as a work of art, which can be exhibited but not stated.[84] Magee relates all of these distinctions to what he has to say about the nature and function of language, and admits that his theory has been heavily influenced by that of Bertrand Russell:

> . . . if everything we could say were fully explicable in terms of other things we could say that the entire system of language would be circular. At no point would it be earthed in anything non-linguistic. Therefore this cannot be the case. It has to be that some elements of what is said are understood not in terms of other things that are said but in terms of something non-linguistic, for if that were not so there would be no point at which language made contact with reality.[85]

When considering the specific identity of the points at which language does "make contact with reality", Magee points to a tradition of thought which has volunteered 'sense data' as an answer to this question. He is inclined to agree, but tells Milligan that the correctness or otherwise of this opinion is of only secondary importance. He observes that "if someone gives an invalid answer" to this question "this does not invalidate the

distinction that has given rise to it", but merely that "one has chosen the wrong candidate for a position that still needs to be filled."[86] Magee, in other words, does not take language to be the self-contained system that Milligan seems to think it is. All that Magee is willing to concede on this issue is that "language has the ability to shorten our journey by helping us on parts of the way, but never by itself can it take us to our destination."[87] He claims that coherent conversation can take place between people whose contrasting experiences have furnished the concepts they use with different connotations only because "the denotations remain the same."[88] Milligan, on the other hand, in the same manner that he had earlier argued that the only knowledge withheld from those who had never sampled coffee is the knowledge that they have sampled coffee, argues now that the only knowledge withheld from those blind from birth about sight is that they have had it. At another stage Milligan argues that conceptual understanding is not the only means at the disposal of the blind to appreciate descriptions of visual beauty. He introduces the notion of "sympathetic understanding". This understanding is "of what goes on in people", and "is present when ... I remember or correctly imagine what other people are experiencing or have experienced, sometimes as a result of words they have encountered."[89] "It should not be thought", Milligan continues,

> that the fact that vision-related words cannot have experiential meaning for us of a kind directly related to the experience of seeing means that we can have no kind of sympathetic understanding of the visual experiences of others, or of the experiential meaning of vision-related words for sighted people.[90]

Such sympathetic understanding can manifest itself in two different ways: either through "the exercise of the imagination", or through "the actual remembering of an identical or closely similar experience of one's own ..."[91] Milligan does not make clear, however, how he is to know when he has "correctly imagined" what the sighted are experiencing in the presence of visual beauty.

Martin Milligan actually died before the pair had addressed all of the issues they had intended to. It seems, however, that they could have argued to eternity without

resolving many of their most fundamental disputes in relation to the nature of knowledge and its capacity for communicating individual experience. I am not in a position to resolve their disputes either. I suggest, however, that a profitable way of approaching their correspondence is as a conflict of orders, one expressible through language, the other only through direct experience. Milligan declares that he is concerned with "the knowledge that is constituted by the putting together of concepts and propositions in a way that corresponds to how things are"[92]. In an earlier letter, after Magee tells Milligan that he is impressed by how far Milligan has got propositional knowledge to carry him "when it is everything [he has] to go on", Magee continues:

> Nevertheless I attach two completely different orders of significance to the two kinds of knowledge. This order is implicit in their logical relationship to each other. The totality of propositional knowledge about the world is dependent for its very possibility, let alone its existence on there being experiential knowledge: empirical concepts have content and significance only insofar as they can be cashed experientially in terms of someone's experience, though not necessarily that of any given concept user.[93]

The specific case of the relation of these divergent orders of significance to aesthetic experience is something that has been addressed by certain aesthetic theorists. An assessment of what these theorists have said helps to clarify the relevance to an inquiry into an aesthetics of blindness of the issues discussed by Magee and Milligan. It also helps to account for some of the paradoxical features of the interrelationship between blindness, order and aesthetic experience.

6.3. Aesthetic Order.

The notion of order is suggestive of a certain lawfulness which the various components of a certain entity exemplify. David Bohm and David Peat suggest that order "extends beyond the confines of a particular theory", and that it "permeates the whole

infrastructure of concepts, ideas and values; and enters the framework in which human thought is understood and actions carried out."[94] Harold Osborne, at the outset of his inquiry into a specifically aesthetic order gives a preliminary definition of it as that "whose presence helps to differentiate works of art from other works and which is presumably also to be found in those natural objects which men call beautiful."[95] Osborne takes as his starting point what J.M.E. McTaggart has to say about order in his The Nature of Existence. There, McTaggart distinguishes between three types of order: causal Order; serial Order; and Order of classification. According to Harold Osborne, though each of these types of order apply to works of art and to things that we consider beautiful, none of them adequately account for the type of aesthetic experience we enjoy when engaging with them. I will briefly discuss the reasons why Osborne feels these varieties of order fall short of explaining why certain entities are deemed beautiful and give an account of Ruth Lorand's arguments to illustrate a similar truth. I suggest that the arguments of Osborne and Lorand for the existence of a specifically aesthetic order can further our understanding of the nature of the impasse arrived at in the debate between Magee and Milligan over the accessibility to the blind of certain features of a visual aesthetic.

Causal Order is that which can be said to exist when "the constituent parts of a whole determine one another in accordance with principles expressible in terms of law-like regularities."[96] The solar system, by virtue of the ordering principle of gravitational attraction that exists amongst the planets and between them and the sun, would fall under this category. Osborne points out that the existence of causal regularities is central to our practical thinking and that because things of beauty are material objects they "obviously come within the ambit of natural causality." Because the same can be said of any material thing, the principles of causal order inherent in a beautiful thing cannot distinguish it from other things or be said to inform its aesthetic character to any considerable extent. Osborne concludes that "We have no comprehensive principles of causal Order for the emergence of aesthetic properties and no apparent prospects of finding any."[97]

The second type of order described by McTaggart is serial Order, which is said to exist when "the parts of a whole can be arranged in series along one or more parameters."[98] This type of order is manifest in time, movement, and musical sound and

is simply described by Osborne as "aesthetically neutral."[99] McTaggart's third order -- that of classification occurs when:

> there is such an arrangement of parts within parts as to fix the place of each part within the whole with reference to other parts, and when each group of parts formed by the arrangement possesses some exclusive common quality other from that which arises from its denotation.[100]

Such order is imposed on their material by art students, literary critics, historians and others. It is the means by which, for example, we separate literary works into their respective genres. Classification can also be imposed in relation to considerations such as subject matter or style. Classificatory systems serve many useful purposes, Osborne concedes freely:

> Without them it would be difficult to achieve a comprehensive overview of our artistic heritage. But all are pragmatic. And none of them impinge on aesthetic character or quality.[101]

Osborne is not satisfied that even a combination of these three varieties of order could account for the beauty of an artefact. Aesthetic properties, he argues, exemplify a particular mode of existence "which is to inhere imbedded in a substratum of natural properties from which they 'emerge' to qualify natural wholes."[102] Beauty cannot be inferred from what we know of the properties exhibited by the constituent parts of an entity together with what we know of the relations, whether causal, sequential or generally classificatory, which pertain between these components. It is not, according to Osborne, exactly the case that aesthetic qualities exist 'outside the law'. It would be truer to say that they are a law onto themselves.

Ruth Lorand tries to arrive at an understanding of all that is being claimed in the expression "beauty is an expression of aesthetic order." She explains beauty in terms of a lawless order which grasps the complexities of beauty without presuming to unriddle it

entirely. She bases her theory around the contention that order manifests itself in two basic types -- discursive and aesthetic. Discursive order, complying with the conventional notions of law and predictability, is dictated by a priori principles; it accounts for what is general and reproducible and regards the particular as a manifestation of the general. Its existence is contingent upon a certain amount of premeditation, and it does not account for any quality that cannot be grasped inferentially. Aesthetic order is a complementary notion which resists the application of a priori principles. What Lorand terms beauty's "lawless order" is heedless of general regulatory principles. It expresses the individual, the unique, and insists upon the sovereignty of the particular. In her Introduction Lorand identifies the type of discontinuity described earlier as a feature of the role played by order in practical and aesthetic elements of the experience of the blind:

> Beauty is paradoxical. The experience of beauty is imbued with a sense of order and necessity -- a beautiful object creates the impression that its elements complement each other and are rightly situated. However, the fact that there are neither constitutive nor stipulative rules that govern beauty appears to stand in contrast to the idea that beauty expresses order.[103]

Adamant that discursive order cannot exhaust all types of order, Lorand argues that it is more accurate to think of beauty in terms of a very particular ordering principle rather than in terms of a complete lack of ordering principle. The two types of order are affiliated to one another but each is irreducible to the other. The principles upon which discursive order is based can be understood prior to and independently of their particular cases. Because discursive order consists of external relations between a set of elements and an ordering principle, under its rule order cannot emerge from within the entity in question. She draws a further comparison between 'constituted' or imposed order and 'discovered' or inherent order. To illustrate the distinction she contrasts moral and legal laws which impose order on a social environment and the discovery of patterns that are "hidden" in a work of art. For example, an antique vase "can only function as its own ordering principle, that is, the principle of its own individual case."[104] In this scenario,

"the set and the ordering principle become one." Only in poorly executed art is there an observable discrepancy between components and ordering principle. (This exception does not affect the experiences of the protagonists of the plays considered in Chapters 2-4. Each of them engage in their own way with an instance of a naturally occurring beauty, and we cannot conceive of "bad nature" in the same way as we can conceive of "bad art".) Another factor that distinguishes discursive from aesthetic order, according to Lorand, is their different levels of "sensitivity to individual difference."[105] Martin Milligan is able, for example to deduce the idea of a building a hundred miles high because the different variables inherent in the concept display a low sensitivity to individual difference. A mile, for example is taken as a unit of measurement because of its universality. A work of art, on the other hand, or a site of natural beauty, both display high sensitivity to individual difference, and so cannot be abstracted for purposes of communication, for example, without disrupting their particular aesthetic order. Because the internal relations amongst elements in an aesthetically ordered set is at once the ordering principle and the set, any modification of these relations affects the principle. This high sensitivity means that an aesthetic order is "ideally a one-member class."[106]

Lorand also distinguishes between ordering principles which are external to the collection of elements, or "set", it unifies, and those which are internal to their set. Being "external" means that the principle is "independent" of the sets it orders, and therefore "can be understood and contemplated apart from any particular case." Lorand likens the "external" principle to a pattern which can be imprinted on a variety of different materials. "Internal" principles, by contrast serve only as their own template and serve as archetypes only at a level that disregards their particular aesthetic qualities. Being "internal", as Lorand puts it, implies that the principle "cannot be detached from the particular set in which it is found", and cannot be "separately contemplated as an abstract, independent formula."[107] The interrelationships between the components of an internally ordered set constitute their own individual ordering principle. The first "species" of order, Lorand terms "discursive order", the second is "aesthetic order". She emphasises the necessity of direct experience to an appreciation of aesthetic order. Western philosophy, true to its characteristic love of distance, has traditionally approached the question of order exclusively in relation to external ordering principles. The enigma of aesthetic

order, because not an exemplification of the result of some "preconceived plan" has eluded the comprehension of most theorists of order. "A plan is, by definition, 'preconceived'", Lorand observes, "or else it is not a plan.":

> As such, it always precedes its actualisation and is "external" to its actualisation; it is capable of existing apart from any actualisation. Order, from this perspective, is determined by principles (the "plan") that exist *prior* to any of their instances and independent of them.[108]

Examples of discursive order include moral principles, natural laws, state laws, logical and mathematical principles, archetypes of all sorts, recipes, and other such general, reproducible configurations. If beauty were explicable in terms of discursive order, the task of the aesthetician would merely be one of inferential decoding -- to reveal the ordering principles and formulate a set of stipulations which, if studiously followed, would issue in both perfectly aesthetic appreciation and the unfailing creation of beauty. Lorand is at pains to emphasise, however, that this "conventional concept" does not exhaust all possible forms of order. The absence of a priori principles does not necessarily imply disorder. Certain forms of order are not "generated in accordance with a priori principles."[109]

Aesthetic order displays a tendency towards what Lorand terms "low predictability", "low redundancy", and "high informative value", while discursive order displays the opposite tendencies.[110] The predictability of an order is derived either from its deducibility from a part of the set it orders, or from the familiarity of the set to the perceiver. High deducibility is an expression of low aesthetic value. Elements of an aesthetic order are redundant if they can be deduced from regarding other elements, or if they are already known.[111] Informative value reflects the degree of novelty of the information conveyed by the ordered elements. It is expressive of non-predictability and low redundancy. Discursive order is not applicable to sets of elements which express a high degree of novelty. It is only relevant when we can attain knowledge of the principles before we encounter the set itself. Discursive order, in other words, can only define the

unknown by relating it to elements and principles that are already known. This process cannot capture the uniqueness of the beautiful artefact in question:

> Being external to the set, the discursive principle carries a priori information. The prior knowledge of the principle supplies information of the set before the set is actually experienced. Thus, the higher degree of conformity to the principle, the lower its informative value.[112]

Magee's exasperation by Milligan's insistence that he could know all Magee did about the beauty of a million flamingos on the shore of Lake Nakuru can, I think, be at least partly accounted for in the terms Lorand uses to express the importance of directly encountering aesthetically ordered sets:

> The need to experience the actual set involves a need for information that cannot be supplied by the a priori principle. For example, knowledge of the actual degree of coherence with the principle cannot precede the experience of the set; this knowledge is not supplied by the principle alone. If I want to know whether an object is highly or poorly ordered, I have to inspect the object itself.[113]

When Robert Hine discloses a connection between prophecy and order he is exemplifying what Lorand has in mind when she discusses the "predictive aspect" of discursive order. Hine, as we have seen, holds that the future is best known by those who prepare for it, and that those with "order in their souls" are the best prepared. This type of prediction, or readying oneself for the future, is discussed by Lorand as part of a whole range of deductive reasoning, rather than a mysterious ability to tell the future. "Knowledge of the future", she claims, "if it is not deduced from an analysis of the past (the given elements), has nothing to do with discursive orders."[114] Lorand thus identifies the same sense as Hine did in which prediction does not entail anticipating the unforeseen or new, as much as it concerns itself with deductively "extrapolating from the old."

Beauty cannot be fully apprehended before it has been experienced because there are no principles which determine a priori the beauty of an object.

Martin Milligan's confidence in the fact that all knowledge is propositional or conceptual would appear to be informed by an under-discriminatory faith in the fact that principles which constitute discursive order can be reviewed and fully comprehended independently of their particular manifestations. He does not reckon, that is to say, on the distinction between aesthetic and other types of order. Harold Osborne makes the claim that the order by virtue of which things of beauty are differentiated from other things "will be a kind of Order which is directly apprehended rather than intellectually inferred."[115] What Lorand terms 'aesthetic order', Osborne refers to as 'Emergent Order'. Osborne points out that all collective wholes possess properties which do not belong to their parts in isolation. He calls these "field properties". Properties which are not reducible to or "logically entailed" in the properties exhibited by the consituent parts in isolation together with their particular relationships are termed "Emergent field properties". The entities which manifest them are termed "Emergent Wholes". Nothing in the behaviour of sodium and chlorine in isolation from one another, for example, helps to account for the particular salty taste which is produced when they are combined. Within formal aesthetics the paradigm case of such a whole is a melody. A piece of music has aesthetic and expressive properties which are not expressed by any of its notes in isolation. We have already seen that Martin Milligan had to reduce natural wholes, which lay beyond the reach of his interpretative capacities, into their individual components in order to gain a 'knowledge' or understanding of them. This process of decomposition is a feature of the acquisition of discursive rather than experiential knowledge. It is a central component of the distinction between aesthetic and discursive order. This distinction polices the interplay between aesthetic order and experiential knowledge.

Osborne emphasises the importance in this context of the fact that

> ... once an artistic whole has emerged its aesthetic properties are reflected back upon its contained parts and the elements of its parts in such fashion that so long as they are elements of just this whole they

> display aesthetic characteristics which they do not manifest in isolation or as elements of any other whole.[116]

Magee's argument that the experiences of light and coffee cannot be captured by any ordered sequence of linguistic constructs that precede the sampling of either entity is related to Osborne's to the effect that discursive order cannot by itself provide grounds for the explanation of beauty. In isolation, the constitutive components of the concept of a hundred mile high building, or of a postcard scene of Lake Nakuru will be, if not aesthetically neutral, definitely expressive of aesthetic qualities that differ from those expressed when they are unified in an ordered whole. The distinction between generality and individuality is also central to Osborne's theory. "By isolating the parts of an aesthetic whole", Osborne summarises,

> you change their nature into something different. They can only be fully themselves, only exist in their full being, as parts of the organic unity of which they are in fact parts.[117]

Like Lorand, Osborne describes this type of aesthetic or emergent order as an "inner Order" which, unlike the type of ordering principles that are imposed from outside, cannot be reduced to causal regularities.

Anton Ehrenzweig offers a slightly different account of aesthetic order which can also help us come to an understanding of Milligan and Magee's agreement to disagree over the vexed question of the accessibility of visual beauty to the blind. Discussing instances of formal artistic expression, Ehrenzweig claims that the key to aesthetic order lies in the artist's tendency towards "breaking the pernicious rule of narrowly focused preconceived design"[118] Unlike Lorand and Osborne, Ehrenzweig discusses the type of purposeless, half-conscious "focus" that is conducive to a sensitive reception of aesthetic order, and the nature of the discipline involved in the artistic achievement of such order. Aesthetic order, according to Ehrenzweig, defeats rational comprehension and so will evoke anxiety in a certain type of rigid mindset which insists on interpretative strategies which invariably filter experience through a network of consciously devised regularising

patterns and schemes. Ehrenzweig points out that Impressionism, for example, arose from "an irresistible desire to break up the narrow focus of surface vision, to disrupt continuity of line and surface in an apparent chaos of free brush work."[119] The type of order which allows the blind travel as far as they do with deductions from the experience of others cannot legislate for the creative impulse towards frustrating traditional demands that art should display a considerable degree of rational coherence. When Ehrenzweig observes that an artist's initial idea is often realised through a series of "constant disruptions and modifications that break the hold of preconceived design and cliché", and advocates the importance to artistic creativity of "unpremeditated accident", he is further distancing rational from aesthetic order. Though his theory is illustrated through examples from the arts of painting and music, it is suggestive of further reasons why the blind cannot appreciate instances of aesthetic order through the type of deductive reasoning that serves them so well in other spheres of communication.

6.4. The progressively blind and the residue of visual criteria.

One possible model for the emergence of a non-visual aesthetic in the case of the non-congenitally blind is provided by the nineteenth century landscape painter and drawing-master W.W. Fenn. At the age of thirty-five Fenn lost the sight in one eye, and that of the other shortly afterwards. He was initially at a loss as to how to employ himself in such a way as to make "the remembrance of all that had been a dear delight", rather than, as seemed inevitable in the first days of darkness, "a heavy grief."[120] On the advice of his closest friends he relinquished the brush and, as Andrew Potok was to do some hundred years later, took up the pen. Fenn found that going blind was a much more trying experience than the condition itself, when it finally installed itself completely. He found that writing was "strangely akin" to painting, and the new pastime was what he needed to complete the "rebound" which his "naturally buoyant and elastic nature" craved. "My mind", as he puts it in the autobiographical sketch which serves as a preface to his imaginative stories, "thrown back upon itself by the dark veil that intervened, only required something to feed upon" in order to fill the creative void that the cessation of his painting created.[121] Before seven years of blindness had elapsed he claims to have quite

forgotten that he was blind at all. At the time of the publication of his book he claims that the "sum total" of his happiness was as great as it had ever been.

Fenn found that his "artist-spirit" found its "legitimate vent" in writing. His "faculty for locality", always vital, was strengthened in blindness. Reincarnated as a writer, he found himself "upon [his] own old ground." The landscape painter, as he puts it, "with modifications, lives again". Despite the similarity of his circumstances to those of Andrew Potok, Fenn is perhaps a truer antecedent of Martin Doul. It is worth, I think, quoting Fenn at length on the beauties he found in nature as a blind man in order to emphasise the similarity: "...there is little that I want", he observes,

> ...whilst I can sit beneath towering trees and shrubs, listening to the 'long breeze' streaming through them and across the neighbouring cornfields, with the lark and the rest of the song-bird choir singing high above my head and all around, or whilst I can lie prone upon a grassy slope near the cliff edge, with 'the murmuring surge' below breaking in musical ripples upon the beach. Then, as the wind freshens, I can hear its pulses beat upon the rocks, whilst the ozone-laden air with its delicious odours blows the salt spray across my face. Indeed, what lover of the country will not tell me that he often voluntarily shuts his eyes the better to take in all the charms of its varied, innumerable, and mysterious minglings of silence, sound, and smell?
>
> The songs of the birds, the lowing of kine, the plash of waters, the music of the winds, the gentle rustling of the corn, the distant church-bells, the long sweeping 'whish' of the scythe and flap of the flail ..., -- all can be taken in without the aid of eyes, and all surely go far to make up the charm of rural life.
>
> And then the smells! How delicious and perplexing they are! The fragrance of the heathers on the mountainside, the fresh smell of the seaweed as one trudges along the beach when the tide is low, and -- if one happens to be in a down-and-sea country at harvest time -- that

> unequalled odour of the ocean breeze, as it comes to you impregnated with the scent of ripe corn, clover, and wild-thyme-besprinkled turf...[122]

Fenn presents us with two volumes, comprising some fifty-three sketches. All are informed by an aesthetic that while still highly visual, is also largely informed by his non-visual senses. The development of Fenn's "artist-spirit" in blindness can, I think, be most dramatically illustrated through a juxtaposition of the sketches 'London Landscape', and 'The Roar of London', both of which appear in the first volume of his work. The first of these vignettes amounts to a description of the different ways in which the city of London presents itself as an ideal subject for a landscape painter. He provides a detailed list of spectacular prospects and assures us that:

> no one who goes through the world with his eyes open, and is on the look-out for beauty, be it where it may, and is sensitive to the charms of form, light and shade, and colour, can traverse the mighty Babylon without constantly being struck by its landscape-like capabilities.[123]

'The Roar of London', on the other hand, represents a celebration of "the thousand component parts of this Babylonic din." The narrator is acutely sensitive to noise, and is able to identify the different component parts of "that conglomeration of sound poetically known as the murmur arising from the busy haunts of men." Until the visit of a nervous fever makes noise the "bugbear and bête noire" of his existence, the "hum of the big city" is the narrator's passion. " ... so alive have I become to the different degrees and qualities of noises,"

> that I am perpetually speculating on and dissecting every species of sound of which the general shindy in the streets is made up. I have come to know exactly the hours on certain days in the week, and seasons of the year, that I may expect particular noises, and, in bed or at work, involuntarily my mind wanders into this confounded hubbub;

> I have an inclination to look at my watch and feel impatient if certain street-cries do not happen at their proper time.[124]

He tells us that "sunshine, clouds, rain, mud, snow, or wind were comparatively as nothing to me, so long as there was plenty of traffic ..." The "mercury of [his] constitution" rose and fell in accordance with the density of the throng which gave vitality to his being. Dreadfully depressed when in the countryside, he became "forcibly convinced that noise was essential to [his] comfort." He found that whenever in an unguarded moment he accepted an invitation to visit an acquaintance in the countryside, the absence of the city din, which he came to regard as one of the great necessities of his life, was always "irksome" to him: "Down went the mercury. I was conscious of a want." In the countryside he always suffered for want of sleep, while at home in his noisy street he "no sooner put [his] head on the pillow than brother Morpheus embraced [him] ..."[125]

This rather hurried account of the progress made by Fenn's urge to creativity in blindness overlooks the many challenges and tribulations that are involved in the transition. The autobiographies considered here all testify to the fact that the type of progress made by Fenn is anything but easy. The emergence of a non-visual aesthetic can only occur after a radical reorganisation of the blind person's entire world. The lingering impulse to filter the new sensorium through the standards of the old must be gradually repelled. This process, or so my reading would suggest, is never free of a certain amount of pain and bereavement. I have looked to the autobiographies to discover how different blind people respond to the necessity of relinquishing some of their most cherished sites of visual beauty. For practical purposes I have had to be very selective, and have chosen to concentrate on the visual beauty of the human face and the particular joy afforded by travel.

> Let me mourn, -- aye, sorrow-wrung,
> Faded Face,
> Sorrow-wrung![126]

The image of a human face is central to the sighted conception of beauty. As we have seen, for example, when Berkeley comes to discuss "the notion of beauty" in Alciphron, he introduces the notion through the contemplation of "a beauteous face". Yet if we scan the autobiographies of the blind we will discover that they document the gradual or sudden closing of a door on the possibility of such contemplation. The experiences recorded in the autobiographies exemplify in different ways the process described by Oliver Sacks whereby:

> the memories and images of people's faces, one's own face too, no longer updated by actually seeing, become first fossilized, then faint, then disappear altogether.[127]

John Hull divides his friends into two groups. The people he knew before his blindness have faces, while the friends he acquired while blind remain captioned "blanks" in the portrait gallery. He knew the first group by their faces, and asked "How can I ever really feel that I knew the second lot?"[128] "As time went by", he recalls,

> the proportion of people with no faces increased. Whole rooms are now bare, and the portraits which remain are covered with dust. Is it possible that some day I will come to visit the gallery and find the door locked, with a notice which says 'This exhibition is permanently closed'? ... It distressed me considerably when I realized that I was beginning to forget what Marilyn [his wife] and Imogen [his daughter] looked like. I had wanted to defy blindness. I had sworn to myself that I would always carry their faces hidden in my heart, even if everything else in the gallery was stolen.... Some people tell me that this is a happy situation. I will always remember Marilyn as being young. She need never be troubled by the thought that I will see her getting older. I am not so sure about this, since I find if hard to believe that ignorance can ever be better than knowledge.[129]

His experience of going temporarily blind on several occasions leads Hull to suspect that the mental images he forms from the voices of the people he meets while blind are probably inaccurate. When he realises that his blindness is irreversible it strikes him that he will "never have the opportunity of correcting" these mental images by discovering the truth for himself. When Hull was seventeen he lost the sight in his left eye. He remembers staring fixatedly at his left shoulder thinking that he would never look directly at it again, without the assistance of a mirror. The experience prompted a grave assessment:

> To lose one's shoulder is one thing, but to lose one's own face poses a new problem. I find that I am trying to recall old photographs of myself, just to remember what I look like. I discover with a shock that I cannot remember. Must I become a blank on the wall of my own gallery?[130]

The gradual disappearance of the face has profound implications for Hull's sense of identity. "To what extent", he asks,

> is the loss of the image of the face connected with the loss of the image of the self? Is this one of the reasons why I often feel I am a mere spirit, a ghost, a memory? Other people have become disembodied voices, speaking out of nowhere, going into nowhere. Am I not like this too, now that I have lost my body?[131]

Hine asks a very similar question in the course of his description of his experience:

> Think of how much we esteem or deride ourselves because of the way we perceive our own features. When no reflection reveals that face, our very existence is threatened.[132]

Hull's son Thomas was born just after his final eye operation. Hull recalls being able to make out only the broad outlines of his face. All of the finer details were lost. With the disappearance of the face a certain element of the anticipation which he used to know to be part of a new acquaintance is diminished. "To say that this removes the possibility of facile first impressions is itself facile", Hull contends:

> The first impressions which the blind person does receive of a new acquaintance, of the voice, the touch of a hand, and so on, may be equally misleading, and if one followed the strange logic which tells us it is better to be without any information which might mislead us, we could conclude that we would be better off with no information at all. ... Although spared misleading visual impressions [the blind person] is having to make do with fewer facts.[133]

At quite an early stage in his journal, Hull confesses:

> Not only do I not know or care what you look like (although I still have a few qualms and doubts in the case of women), I am beginning to lose the category itself. I am finding it more and more difficult to realize that people look like anything, or to put any meaning into the idea that they have an appearance.[134]

He admits to still being influenced in his relationship with certain women by the way their visual appearance is described by his colleagues. He is also frustrated by the "double irrationality" inherent in this prejudice. What would normally be simply regarded as a superficial consideration is identified by Hull as " ... a deplorable lack of independence on my part to be so affected by a criterion which can be of no significance to me." Although aware that he must learn to "judge" women by a "different means", he cannot fully resist the application of visual criteria in such appraisals.[135] In the case of people that he knew before his blindness, Hull finds that his allocating of a face to the

voice is actually detrimental to his relationship with these people. He was made very much aware of this on a visit back to his birthplace in Australia:

> I was most anxious about the people I was to meet. I knew that it would undoubtedly cause pain to people I knew and loved so much when they met me as a blind person. I felt worried and rather frightened at the thought that I would have to reconstitute my knowledge of them on the basis of sight and touch ... All of my visual memories of those loved faces were now at best an irrelevance and at worst an actual obstruction to my entering into a real and contemporary relationship with them.[136]

At another stage Hull recounts how the human face becomes "the place from which the voice comes."[137] He also recalls not being able to remember whether he had actually been in the presence of a colleague while he had been in conversation with him, or whether they had spoken on the telephone.[138] As the faces he knew are replaced by voices, he observes that "the disappearance of the face is only the most poignant example of the dematerialization of the whole body."[139] The sense of fixity which characterizes the mental images he harbours of the people he knew before the onset of blindness often convinces him that he has not "travelled on" in his relationships, though the knowledge that so much time has passed logically conflicts with this emotion.[140] He talks of feeling a compulsion to hide his own face from the public, and wonders whether the intended reciprocation of unavailability is "a primitive desire to find some kind of equality?"[141] He speculates dispiritedly about the " longing to exist in the lover's sight, the desire to be perceived by him" which he projects onto his wife[142]. Even the act of smiling becomes a conscious effort for Hull. "It must be because there is no reinforcement", he reasons:

> There is no returning smile. I am no longer dazzled by a brilliant smile. I no longer find that the face of a stranger breaks into sudden beauty and friendliness. I never seem to get anything for my efforts. Most smiling is responsive. You smile spontaneously when you

> receive a smile. For me, it is like sending off dead letters. Have they been received or acknowledged? Was I even smiling in the right direction?[143]

In the initial stages of his blindness Minton struggles to come to terms with the fact that "to all intents and purposes gestures and facial expressions no longer exist."[144] Milligan describes the process by which people and objects become "atmosphere thickening occupants of space."[145] Robert Hine, looking back through his journal after the restoration of his sight, sees 'faces' as its unifying theme. Although blindness promptly terminated his perception of faces, the human face quickly resumed its old significance upon Hine's re-entry into the visual world. "Second sight" comes to be regarded as a renascence, a rejuvenation of a sense of beauty that had been languishing, a restoration of the senses to their natural hierarchy. While blind, Hine developed a tactile relationship with only a few of his most intimate friends and family members. Of those occasional instances when he was invited to touch another person, he rarely allowed himself the liberty of touching their faces. He explains his reluctance to avail of such opportunities in very understandable terms: " 'I'm scared I'll knock off a false eyelash or stick my finger up a nose. It's just not something I really want to do.' The faces I knew were voices."[146] Hine's relation to his wife's face throughout his blindness represents a rather lonely exception to this 'law of dissolution'. It is evident, however, that he is not free from some of the anxieties that plague Hull when, in a passage that takes us back to the anxieties and hopes of Martin and Mary Doul, he recalls:

> Shirley's face, though, never seemed distant or frustrating. Our lives were too intertwined. I was sure I knew what she looked like; her face was fixed in my mind, and I held to that securely. I realised we were aging. It would have been good to have been able to watch us age together. It is important with one you love so much to hold a reciprocal relation of seeing and being seen, wanting to be seen by, as well as to see the one you love. And if you cannot see yourself in the way your love is seeing you, a helpless, incomplete feeling intrudes.[147]

Karl Bjarnhof presents the most poignant instance of this phenomenon that I have come across. Bjarnhof was raised as an only child in modest circumstances because his elder sister had been sent away to live elsewhere before he was born. Though they couldn't afford it, his parents decided to decorate their home with a lavish display of lights for what they knew would be their son's last Christmas with sight. They also arranged for the boy's long-estranged sister to spend that Christmas with them. Bjarnhof remembers thinking, when he came in one night to discover the scene that his parents had worked so hard to create: "This should be remembered. ... This should be remembered for a thousand years."[148]

The pastime of travel has always been connected in one way or another to the aesthetic experience. The perennially thriving tourism industry testifies to the fact. Throughout much of artistic expression, from the development of picturesque aesthetics by Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, William Gilpin, and others, to the walking excursions embarked on by the Romantic poets, to the travel writing of today, travel has traditionally been presented as a source of aesthetic gratification and inspiration.[149] There is a long history of artists 'going out and getting under the stars' in order to accumulate, in their minds eyes, a number of scenes that would be conducive to later reproduction on canvas or paper. The blind appear generally to regard travel in a rather different light however. Trepidation, rather than inspiration, seems to be the general response to the pastime. Oliver Sacks talks of how, in the phenomenology of the blind,

> ... the very concepts of 'place', 'space', 'here', 'there', 'presence', 'appearance' become, by degrees, with the advance into blindness, completely emptied of meaning.[150]

Concerns about the disorderliness of the unfamiliar are, for example, again uppermost in Kuusisto's reservations when invited by his university friend T.J., in whom he has not confided about the poor state of his eyesight, to accompany him on a trip to Athens:

> I can't tell him how afraid the idea of travelling makes me. I know the campus. I know the sidewalks. Everything else is the great jungle of night, the unfamiliar has vines and teeth. My blind-passing-for-sighted universe is very small, as small as a simple town square.[151]

Kuusisto, whose passion is literature, wants desperately to share the experience of travelling with his friends, but knows that his terrible secret represents a huge impediment. "How can I go anywhere?", he asks himself. "How in the hell can I go to Athens when I can't even read a fucking book?" Trying to rinse the tears of frustration from his face, he admits to himself "I can barely find the faucet. How will I go anywhere?"[152] Though Kuusisto eventually finds Athens a "brilliant treasury", he proves something of an exception in this regard.[153] Hull has similar reservations about a proposed visit to Melbourne. Although soon after he arrived his friends and family there helped him to establish new patterns which soon offered him a sense of familiarity, before the trip Hull tells us:

> I ... felt disturbed at the thought of being deprived of my routine for so many weeks. I would have to learn my way round so many new houses and buildings, make myself familiar with new household utensils, and learn the names of so many new people. I was afraid that in this situation I would become even more marginalized, even more passive than I always am these days.[154]

From the comparative perspective afforded to him by "second sight", Robert Hine observes that

> Travel already takes on a new prospect. Looking back, I wonder whether trips were really worth the trouble. I know, even the blind collect new data, meet new people (i.e. hear new voices), and can tell a few new voices when they get back. But if the blind collect data, it has little to do with what their sighted peers collect. The vividness of

> nature and the convolutions of architecture are not easy to capture without sight. Every new hotel room is not taken in with the sweep of an eye, but must await an impatient tapping and groping.[155]

To these reservations we can add those of Andrew Potok, who, having spent periods of his life living in France, Italy, Spain, and Greece, returned with weakened eyesight to the familiarity of the Vermont roads, the regularity of the New England seasons, his only trip of note after this being one to London, in crazed pursuit of a phantom cure. In his autobiography To Catch an Angel, Robert Russell recalls how, until discovering the joy afforded by a tandem bicycle, he thought travel boring – "I never could get any sense of the country through which I was passing."[156]

"Looking back on the past few months", John Hull observes in his journal:

> when I have been travelling to Canada and Australia, I do not have a very clear sense of having visited either place. It is true that here the people with whom I spoke had Canadian accents and there Australian, but that might happen in my own office in Birmingham. In my memory, I have a file of photographs of the Melbourne skyline, but I have not returned with this file updated.[157]

The fact that Hull primarily remembers the various comments that were made by his fellow travellers prompts him to ask in what sense these visits can be said to have added to his experience. He talks of the "renewed sense of loss" which accompanies the return to a place which holds dear visual memories for him.[158] Hine contrasts this type of travel with the "unrecycled experience" of visiting places after his operation which he had only known before through non-visual senses.[159] When Hull finds himself in a new place he does not "bother very much" about what it might look like. He simply "write[s] it off as unavailable" and concentrates on the parts that actually register on his senses.[160] Another anecdote recorded in Hull's journal tells of a time when his wife Marilyn asked him how he had spent the day -- Hull could remember having had a conversation with some colleagues, but could not recall where the conversation had taken place. He knew he had

"been somewhere", but he could not put the conversations he had into any kind of localised context. "There was no background", he observes, "no features against which to identify the place."[161] When he realises that he had been in Newman College, he feels that this knowledge leaves him only marginally wiser. He remembers pacing up and down corridors and sitting in a place he was told was called 'the principal's office', but all of this, he points out, "could have been anywhere."[162] "So it is", he remarks, that

> when I look back on all of the places I have visited over the past four years, my experience has not been enriched in any way commensurate with the effort involved in getting there. I have learned a great deal about those places, most of which I could have learned here but would not have bothered. ... There is a certain immediacy about talking with people in their own city, in that the anecdotes are fresher, and you overhear their current conversations. But what to me are Houston, Ottawa, Melbourne?[163]

When he finds himself in London in search of a cure for his blindness, Potok observes that "being nearly blind there was like being nearly blind anywhere."[164] The 'cue-words' of names, rather than visual landmarks, become associated with places. As with his relationships with other people, the process of naming assumes a fundamental importance in Hull's connection with different places. He claims to have no means, for example, of comparing the beauty of this autumn's fall of leaves to that of last year's. He describes travel as the making of his way through the "trackless waste" of a "featureless world", and says that the result, especially for the recently blinded, is "a strange feeling that one has stopped accumulating experiences."[165] The acoustic world is a world of "nothing but action." When traffic pauses, boats come to rest, ducks stop quacking, these parts of the world disappear. The world of 'still-life' that Hull cherished before the onset of blindness is now irretrievably lost to him:

> The world of being, the silent, still world where things simply are, that does not exist. The rockery, the pavilion, the skyline of high-rise flats, the flagpoles over the cricket ground, none of this is really there.[166]

James Thurber's deteriorating eyesight also became something of a curb on his wanderlust, although he retained an ability to see the humorous side of it:

> The mistaken exits and entrances of my thirties have moved me several times to some thought of spending the rest of my days wandering aimlessly around the South Seas, like a character out of Conrad, silent and inscrutable. But the necessity for frequent visits to my oculist and dentist has prevented this. You can't be running back from Singapore every few months to get your lenses changed and still retain the proper mood for wandering.[167]

His thick horn-rimmed glasses made him even more conspicuous on his travels than his thick Ohio accent, making him an even more obvious target for bead salesmen and native women with postcards. Of a trip to the West Indies which he embarked on laden with a traveller's dreams, he remarks; "Nor did any girl, looking at all like Tondelaya in 'White Cargo', come forward and offer to go to pieces with me. They tried to sell me baskets."[168] Offering a slightly different perspective than Hull and Hine on the effect of blindness of the desire to travel, Thurber concludes that blindness is one of a few factors which make it "impossible to be inscrutable", and "a wanderer who isn't inscrutable may as well be back at the Broad and High Streets in Columbus sitting in the Baltimore Dairy Lunch."[169]

It is not only the conception of place that is radically upset in the case of the adventitiously blind. Hull points out that the experience of getting from place to place changes a great deal also. The type of pleasure derived by the sighted from going for a walk celebrated by William Hazlitt, for example, is no longer available to the blind.[170] "The problem of walking for the blind person", according to Hull's experience,

> is that he has no world of potential reach, but only a zone of actual reach, made up by the feeling of his feet on the ground. He does not know if a bend in the road is in sight, or if there is a range of hills ahead. The blind person thus lacks an incentive to form a purposeful action which would turn something grasped potentially into something realized actually.[171]

The pleasures of smell, the sounds of nature, the feel of the wind in one's face still exist but, as Hull expresses it, "all this could be experienced stationary."[172] Hull does indicate that walking can be a source of particular aesthetic pleasures for the blind, however, when he qualifies this observation with the afterthought:

> Only if the route is punctuated by various textures of the pavement, the smell of a bakery or the sounds of a street musician, is there a feeling of having crossed an area, drawn near to things and gone past them.[173]

The concept of admiration becomes something of a preoccupation for Hull, which brings to mind Van Gogh's urging of his brother Theo to "Admire as much as you can. Most people don't admire enough."[174] At an early stage of his autobiography, while still measuring his achievements and abilities by sighted standards, he admits:

> I feel as if I have become nothing, unable to act as a father, impotent, unable to survey, to admire, or to exercise jurisdiction or discrimination. I have a strange feeling of being dead.[175]

With time however, he came to realise that there is a big difference between admiring and actually being seen to admire. He knows that in instances of general appeals to sites of beauty he is not "recruitable" by sighted people. According to the terms in which sighted people regard entertainment, he is not "entertainable" either. He is painfully aware that it is not possible for him to "draw into the general admiration" of what is designed to impress a sighted community. It is something he learns to become

philosophical about. Although often visited by a "stabbing reminder" of his marginality within the aesthetic domain, he is able to say:

> No doubt, people who value me regret that they cannot recruit me to admire the things they admire. Still, facts must be faced. Since I am not recruitable, it seems pointless to draw attention to it in this way, with lamentations and expostulations of grief.[176]

Building upon such a stoical attitude, Hull gradually becomes positively attuned to what in Chapter Four I described as a "differential aesthetic", which sees him admiring the same sites of beauty as the sighted through different means, and admiring aspects of things which the sighted tend to overlook. While attending a wedding in a picturesque village church, for example, though he felt "flooded with joy" because of the sound of the church bells, many of the other guests expressed their sorrow that he could not appreciate the beauty of the surroundings.[177]

6.5. The pains of adaptation.

One of the most enduring of all the images within the various autobiographies referred to here, is that of Andrew Potok, the artist, in the throes of losing his eyesight, trying desperately to remember citrus fruit. He practised 'videation' – the visualisation and conceptualisation of unseen things, and the account he gives of his instructor highlights dramatically the degree to which visuality is treasured as the main aesthetic currency:

> "Remember color," Cristofanetti would urge. "Actively, deliberately recall it. Do mental callisthenics to bring back the bright blue sky, a bowl of lemons, limes and oranges. Otherwise" he warned, "you'll lose it forever."[178]

Potok, whose vision was once the very centre of his creativity and livelihood, talks of how, on the path towards complete blindness, his surviving traces of eyesight only obstructed the new sense of order which was struggling to establish itself:

> My little bit of sight caused endless misunderstandings and confusions, but tattered and frayed as it was, it, plus memories of a marvellously visual life, was my cherished link to the sighted world.[179]

The slowness of the artist to relinquish that order which was characteristic of his artistic output for the sake of the one which was taking over now that his sight was in a developed state of regression, is evident through his contribution to the discussions in which he partook in St. Paul's Rehabilitation Center. These discussions, between fifteen people in various stages of blindness, were often about the question of "whether it was preferable to lose one's bit of remaining vision and be finished with adjustments and hope," or "to nurture what remained, use it as efficiently as possible, and thank God for it". Although his autobiography as a whole describes a gradual shifting of this particular perspective, in the early days of encroaching blindness, to Potok "it seemed unspeakable to consider total blindness preferable to even the slightest amount of sight".[180]

John Hull's experience appears to challenge the wisdom of Cristofanetti's championing of videation. Two interconnected metaphors run through Hull's story -- those of the journey and the tunnel. At the outset of Hull's irreversible journey into what he calls "deep blindness", the opening of the tunnel in which he is travelling is perceivable over his shoulder because of the still incandescent embers of the sacked visual world he is departing from. As he advances towards the pitch darkness at the end of the tunnel the light behind him is always receding. He eventually gets to a point, as we have seen, where he can no longer summon what had been his most cherished memories, and slowly loses the entire concept of visuality. Once this "bend in the tunnel" has been navigated Hull finds himself in "deep blindness". His arrival is immensely liberating. It relieves him of the sense of loss, of absence and of mourning that had been burdening him on his journey and impeding a flight into an aesthetics of blindness. He

acknowledges the fact that "... there is something purging about blindness. One must re-create one's life or be destroyed.":

> Blindness is like a huge vacuum cleaner which comes down upon your life, sucking almost everything away. Your past memories, your interests, your perception of time and how you will spend it, place itself, even the world, everything is sucked out. Your consciousness is evacuated, and you are left to reconstruct it, including a new sense of time, a new realization of the body in space and so on. In that situation, there is likely to be a drastic revision of priorities.[181]

By his journey's end it occurs to Hull that one way of regarding blindness is as a deceptively packaged "gift", although he is unsure whether he can submit to the theory himself. It is certainly not a gift he would inflict on anyone else. Hull does not resurface with a perfectly satisfactory non-visual aesthetic after he 'touches the rock' at the bottom of an ocean of despair. For a long time he would retire to bed as a "worn out ghost", only, because still dreaming visually, to wake up each morning to suffer the ordeal of going blind all over again. He painfully learns to overcome the disconcerting feeling that he is "dissolving", and "no longer concentrated in a particular location" before he discovers that his entire body can serve as an organ of perception in blindness.[182] Variations of these aspects of Hull's journey into deep blindness feature in most of the other autobiographies considered throughout this chapter. Hine, for example, likens his initial attempts at reorientation to "spreading tendrils of adaptation working their way through new earth."[183] This purging and re-prioritising of the aesthetic receptivity of the blind is not always approached with much initial enthusiasm. Several of the autobiographies, however, attest to the gradually exerted creative influence that accompanies the restructuring imperative. In the early days of his blindness, Minton tells himself:

> Now that I am face to face with the unknown that I feared so much I am ready to come to terms with it. I must find a way to build a new life

> on the wreckage of the old, though God alone knows how I will do it.[184]

The remainder of his autobiography describes the way in which Minton achieves this reconstruction once he has been "initiated into the mystery" of blindness. He manages to reorientate himself surprisingly quickly. After only the first weeks of rehabilitation he observes:

> I am learning how to relate myself to my surroundings by what I remember, by what I feel with my fingers, what I feel beneath my feet, what I hear with my ears and what I touch with my stick. Collectively, these have become a substitute for sight, a poor one but the only one I have.[185]

With time the crude substitute is refined to an amazing degree, although he admits to moments of weakness when he cannot help "crying for the moon."[186]

In spite of the troubled joy Kuusisto's fractional vision affords him, he asks himself:

> Why should it take so long for me to like the blind self? I resist it, admit it, then resist again, as though blindness were a fetish, a perverse weakness, a thing I could overcome with the force of will power.[187]

Fenn refers to his acclimatising to and prospering in non-visual conditions as his "rebound". His experience is proof that such adaptation need not involve the entire relinquishing of one's visual self. He remembers pictures vividly and interprets paintings with his fingers in blindness. On his replacement of brush with pen he simply says: "here I am upon my old ground, as it were, and the landscape painter, with modifications, lives again." His decision to start writing is depicted as heralding the return of "old painting times." Persevering with the analogy, he declares that "[t]he figure I cut is not very unlike that of the labouring landscape-painter marching off to his subjects in the open", and is at

pains to illustrate that what "pleased and interested" him in his seeing days interests him still.[188] Minton also manages to preserve a certain amount of his visual standards in blindness. When things present themselves directly to his sense of touch, for example, he uses his fingers to "identify what falls within their reach and so begin[s] to draw a diagram on the blackboard of [his] mind."[189]

Georgina Kleege's experience of blindness is as visually charged as Fenn's. Even in blindness she regards herself as "intensely visual". She partly attributes her preference for art galleries and movie theatres over concert halls to the fact that her parents were both visual artists:

> I grew up surrounded by their art and an awareness that vision involves more than merely aiming the eyes at a particular object. Viewing a painting requires conscious mental effort, an understanding of the choices the artist made, a knowledge of the aesthetic traditions and conventions that the artist works within or against, a familiarity with the methods of applying and fixing pigments.[190]

The only way in which Kleege can account for the intense pleasure that she derives from the visual world, is through an entertaining of the possibility that her brain is "still sighted", despite the fact that her eyes are blind. In keeping with her partiality to all things visual, Kleege believes herself to be capable of harbouring a definite and detailed conception of what it is to be sighted:

> The language I speak, the literature I read, the art I value, the history I learned in school, the architecture I inhabit, the appliances and conveyances I employ, were all created by and for sighted people.[191]

She also observes that while she finds it very easy to imagine what it is to be sighted, it was not until she had written her autobiography that she discovered what it is to be blind.

The Planet of the Blind documents Kuusisto's growing into blindness. When he finally becomes relatively reconciled with the implications of his condition he decides to

visit an institution called Guiding Eyes, which would later employ him. He gradually learns to transform himself from a blind man mimicking sight through painstakingly ordered reserves of memory, into a man who is prepared to arrange his world to accommodate the condition he can no longer believably disown:

> At Guiding Eyes . . . Room numbers are raised and three dimensional and very large. Braille is on everything, from the candy machines to the exercise machines. Telephone numbers are printed in Braille and in large print. Walking around, I begin to understand that guesswork is overrated. The memorized phone number, the entire shopping list, these are my specialities. I begin sensing that I can put some of this behind me.[192]

In the immediate aftermath of the loss of vision, it is common for visual memory to be called into service in order to supplement unfamiliar and yet untrustworthy modes of perception. Bjarnhof, for example, recalls a moment when

> . . . the sun came out and shone on the branches, where there was snow too. Some of it I could see and the rest of it I probably only remembered. But I wasn't quite sure how much I was seeing and how much remembering.[193]

Andrew Potok refers, in a similar vein, to the presence in his studio of a reproduction of Matisse's The Painter's Family, which "but for memory, would be a fuzzy morsel of quilting."[194] As his story unfolds, however, Potok gradually stops treasuring visual memory so unreservedly and so defining himself and his world by his eyes. Some of these blind people identify specific turning points in the process of their adaptation when they learned to stop regarding their experience in visual terms.

One such 'turning point' is described in Ordinary Daylight, for example, when Potok is visiting London in search of a cure for his blindness. He recalls from there his

habit of stealing down to a meadow behind his house in Vermont in order to secretly "indulge in fantasies of sight". "It was like masturbating", Potok recognises,

> . . . obliterating reality, entering the magic of the sighted world. I would fall into a delicious space, as if gently rocked and lapped by waves. My eyelids, as I remembered from childhood, would become domes of soothing orange sunlight. Images of my former life would race across that sunbaked screen. I would feel giddy and light as I ran surefooted down carpeted stairs, over bumpy fields, as I drove my blue motorcycle along the Mediterranean in and out of the shadows of the eucalyptus trees, as I skied the lovely Vermont slopes, spraying a shower of snow as I turned and twisted. . . [195]

As they were happening, Potok regarded these experiences as something of a rebirth. As each particular sequence of visual memories exhausted itself, however, Potok was led invariably to the realisation, often accompanied by actual physical discomfort, that there was something unhealthy about the laboured inducing of such reverie:

> Just then, my eyes would always begin to hurt. Under my lids, the light would brighten to lemon yellow, then become splotched with white hot phosphemes. Sharp lances of hay would begin to hurt my back and elbows, bugs would crawl inside my socks. I would open my eyes slowly and see the blazing, painful bombardment of white unfiltered light, alive with pulsating fragments of the grey hills, the tops of trees, the stalks of weeds towering over me. I would lie there and weep. . . [196]

Memory continually abandons Potok to the hopelessness of irreplaceable loss, until its allure becomes progressively less potent and he finds himself in a position where he is able to say

> I was bored with the pathos of my story. I didn't really want to make anyone weep. I wanted to make an artificial order out of the chaos of my experience. As I stared blindly into the Marimekko fabric Charlotte had tacked over the glary windows, I thought I could forsee the day when I would be in touch with the uniqueness of my vision and temperament. In this organising process, the process of writing, I began to make ever more sense of my experience, . . . The more I wrote, the less I had to continue to define myself by my eyes.[197]

The reinvention seems complete at his story's end, as Potok recognises that

> . . . the only thing that could replace the creative activity in the center of my life would be another creative activity. The exhilaration and satisfaction I had once found in the mix of paint and canvas, hand and eye – in ordinary daylight – I am now beginning to find in words.[198]

Similarly, when Minton is visited by traces of vision in the middle of his reorientation course he tells us: "I don't like this happening just when I have begun to get accustomed to living in a world that is devoid of images." Unable to live comfortably with the uncertainty of a vision that threatens to partially return, he visits a consultant in the hope that "he will be able to remove the sword of Damocles that hangs over [him]."[199] Hull devotes a substantial portion of his story to the assessment of the role played by visual memory throughout his journey into 'deep blindness'. We have already seen that he came to regard the intrusion of visual memory as an impediment to the forging of a contemporary relationship with his world. He admits that as a recently blinded man he was filled with the uncanny suspicion that he had stopped accumulating experiences. A mark of Hull's progress is his development of an ability to differentiate between visual memory and what he terms "body memory". Body memory is a recollection of how something felt. The memories of the blind person, Hull informs us, "focus on what his body experienced, or underwent", a process which Hull distinguishes from visual memory on the grounds that "your body does not feel what your eye sees."[200]

The unhappy fate of visual memory becomes clear when Hull describes his memories of Melbourne revisited as ". . . the different textures of this seat belt and that car upholstery."[201] He has to start getting to know places again, in the knowledge that he is knowing them now as "part of a different world."[202] Having turned this corner, he comes to an acute realisation of the remoteness of his visual history, and he begins to establish the grounds for his new aesthetic.

Hull finds it hard to conceive of having made progress in his relationships with the people he can remember visually. He regards this phenomenon as an instance of cognitive dissonance -- a problem which stems from a person's awareness of the fact that they are holding two contradictory opinions or beliefs. On the one hand Hull believes that he knows what his friend looks like. Through the mediation provided by the visual image stored in his memory Hull relates on a visual level to the person he is talking to. But, at the same time, as he puts it himself:

> I know that between that visual memory which mediates between us and my actual present life there is a deep, black river of time, flooding the banks of my consciousness, growing ever wider and stronger, carrying us apart. Your image is there on the far side, always receding and now totally inaccessible.[203]

There is a great deal of pain involved in the attempt to reconcile the belief, on one hand, that blindness has changed nothing, with the belief that everything has been radically changed. The conflict is epitomised by his relationship with his wife. With time, however, Hull learns that this discomfort can be eased in various ways:

> I may try to turn my back upon your image as it glows brightly on the far side of the floor. Now I can try to reconstruct my relationship to you on a completely new basis, on this side, where we are now.

Alternatively, Hull may attempt to

> ... linger in the past, to indulge in the contemplation of your remembered image, and to have it always before me, so that always speaking with you I am deliberately conversing through that loved image.[204]

The choice confronting Hull here is essentially that between abolishing the past or living in it. He presents us with some very moving accounts of how the problem of cognitive dissonance affects his relationship with his wife and children, the places he travels to, and his own sense of self-identity. Until he learns to eliminate the influence of visual standards and memories on his contemporary existence, he admits to feeling as though the knowledge which does have mocks the knowledge which he does not. The resultant anxiety becomes so acute that at times he becomes tempted by the idea of a wholesale relinquishing of knowledge.

The elimination of cognitive dissonance is the crucial first step towards the discovery of a new aesthetic, but he feels that it cannot be eliminated until he has dispensed entirely with his visual history and devised alternatives to visual recognition. It is a lesson that Potok learned also, though not until after he had submitted to some five hundred bee stings on the back of his neck in a desperate attempt to 'cure' himself. He admits that his search for a cure set back his process of adaptation by some years because he was frequently debilitated by deceptive signs of improvement in the state of his vision. On his return from London, reconciled to the permanence of his condition, he recalls deciding to seek a "new life, no longer concerned with eyes or cures" on the remnants of "aborted starts", liberated from hope, but also "free of remorse."[205]

6.6. Psychical distance and 'foggy vision'.

Only ten per cent of all those pronounced legally blind have absolutely no trace of vision. Although it may seem facile to suggest that a state of impaired vision might be innately aesthetic, several of the autobiographies, however, do devote quite an amount of effort to describing the strange and distorted beauty of the world when partially seen. The gradual

loss of Andrew Potok's vision, for example, had a dramatic effect on the style of his painting. In the early stages of his blindness, he tells us:

> I began to lose detail in my painting, unaware now of the texture of brushstrokes. Lines began to separate into segments, like dying, curling worms. When color -- other than the brightest primaries -- lost its individual character, I had lost the vocabulary of paint.[206]

By the time his blindness was in its more developed stages, Potok was forced to forget about the "visually demanding interiors" which he had previously regarded as his "territory", and to settle for the "grosser forms" of "large wooden assemblages painted with pots of commercial pigments."[207] Though he subsequently dismantled his studio and gave away all of his materials, by the end of his autobiography Potok is beginning to embark on some collaborative art with his wife. This is a process explored by ophthalmologist Patrick Trevor Roper. In his The World Through Blunted Sight, Roper investigates, among other things, the possibility of charting the relationship that develops between creative expression and various stages of failing eyesight, through to complete blindness. Could it be possible, he asks, that Impressionism was the product of a generation of myopic artists? Could Gordon Craig's advocating of the supremacy of colour and form over the distracting influence of detail be related to his myopia? Might his colour-blindness explain Constable's predilection for autumnal hues? Might their distorted sight be accountable for the elongationary tendencies exhibited in the portraiture of Modigliani and El Greco? How strict is the correspondence between absence of fine detail and hypermetropia?[208]

Many of the autobiographies appear to trace a connection between the gradual loss of vision and a heightening of an aesthetic attitude towards everyday perception. Robert Hine's description of his "clouded fuzz of a world"[209]and Stephen Kuusisto's of the "mad purple twilight where I live", are suggestive of another way in which blindness might be conducive to aesthetic appreciation.[210] Kuusisto, in particular, adopts an attitude towards his sensorium which makes his entire autobiography seem an extended exemplification of the concept of "psychical distance" introduced to aesthetic theory by

Edward Bullough. Bullough illustrates his theory through the analogy to the phenomenon of 'a fog at sea'. Because of the "fears of invisible dangers", the "strain of watching and listening for distant and unlocalised signals", and "that special, expectant, tacit anxiety and nervousness" which are all inherent in the "dreaded terror" of a fog at sea, it is a source of "acute unpleasantness" for holiday-makers and experienced sea-farers alike. Despite these considerations, however, Bullough points out that, provided we put the phenomenon "out of gear" with our practical self, a fog at sea can be a "source of intense relish and enjoyment":

> Abstract from the experience of the sea fog, for the moment, its danger . . . direct the attention to the features 'objectively' constituting the phenomenon – the veil surrounding you with an opaqueness of the transparent milk, blurring the outlines of things and distorting their shapes into weird grotesqueness; . . . note the curious creamy smoothness of the water, hypocritically denying as it were any suggestion of danger; and above all, the strange solitude and remoteness of the world, as it can be found only on the highest mountaintops, and the experience may acquire, in its uncanny mingling of repose and terror, a flavour of such concentrated poignancy and delight as to contrast sharply with the blind and distempered anxiety of its other aspects.[211]

If the "blind anxiety" of the experience can be overcome – a process which is likened by Bullough to "the passing ray of a brighter light" – the aesthetics of blindness begins to reveal itself. From cover to cover, Kuusisto's Planet of the Blind, is replete with experiences comparable to the one instanced here by Bullough. When we open to the prologue, for example, we find a description of New York's Grand Central Station. It is rush hour. Kuusisto and his guide-dog are lost in a crowd of busy commuters, aware of the menace of pickpockets and knife-artists, unable to find their train or the information kiosk. But "just now", Kuusisto observes, "it doesn't matter." "None of the turmoil or

anxiety of being lost will reach us because moving is holy, the very motion is a breeze from Jerusalem." He continues:

> . . . the great terminal is supremely lovely in its swaying hemlock darknesses and sudden pools of rose-colored electric light. We don't know where we are, and although the world is dangerous, it's also haunting in its beauty. Even to a lost man with a speck of something like seeing, this minute here, just standing, taking in the air as a living circus, this is what tears of joy are for.[212]

'Foggy vision' is a feature too of Karl Bjarnhof's The Stars Grow Pale. One day, for example, while on his way to a fjord, the young Bjarnhof was "overtaken by the fog" which seemed to begin somewhere far away and steal nearer, it seemed to come out of his own eyes. He adds that "the fog didn't go when I came indoors." Bjarnhof however didn't notice the aesthetic qualities that Bullough associates with fog. He prefers total darkness because when a shaft of light appears it can be seen clearly. In bed that night, with the door closed and the lights off, he recalls, "the darkness went nice and black."[213] Robert Hine experienced something more akin to the vision described by Kuusisto. Taking stock of his visual field just before undergoing an operation to remove a cateract, Hine tells us:

> I saw a field of pure, intense blue, a wild, bright, electric blue, in which white lights vibrated like dancing electrons. Sometimes they would intersect with lines and arcs of light. They were Matisse and Klee and Albers, transformed into kinetic art, alive and magnified into a kaleidoscope revolving around a profound, pulsing indigo. It was how I imagine the LSD experience.[214]

Immediately after another eye operation he describes:

> . . . the floating areas of cloud that normally move across in imagination were no longer white or grey but were alternating colors – reds or blues, greens or yellows, or mixed. ... As I close my eyes, I also keep noticing animation. Little figures hop around like Keystone Cops, wildly gesticulating with their arms, their heads and faces contorting, as they cavort through the fields of color.[215]

James Thurber had a pet name for his -- they were his "holy visitations", an agitated "flux of colors very similar to some of the paintings of Braque."[216]

Fenn also experienced something similar:

> A dense impenetrable fog, light by day and dark by night: the intensest thickest sea or London fog alternately; a fog in which I am being gradually wrapped closer and closer, and which literally does not allow me to see my hand before me, -- is the best simile I can find for the atmosphere in which I live ...[217]

The only advantage over "total obscurity" which Fenn sees in this condition, however, is one of orientation -- it helps in "getting a knowledge of one's immediate surroundings."[218] In the early days of his blindness Minton recalls:

> I didn't expect to see much but I thought it would be more than this faint, orange gleam, like a distant view of headlamps, seen through a thick, heavy fog on a dark November night.[219]

Describing the plight of one of his fellow attendees of a rehabilitation school for the blind, Minton observes that for five years a "mist" has been "creeping up slowly on him like a quiet cat, silent and unseen", and that now he sees everything through "a thick fog"[220]. All of these people relate to this 'fog' in different way. Minton makes the point that to compare one disability with another is both "invidious and irrelevant". It is not the nature or the magnitude of the disability which determine how much of an impediment it

will be. "The determining factor is one's attitude towards it which depends on the psychology of the individual."[221] What differentiates Kuusisto's relation to this foggy vision from that of the others considered here is that he insists on travelling through his hazy and menacing riot of form and colour at breakneck speed. The resultant exhilaration is a consequence of the fact that the achievement of 'psychical distance' is for him not a conscious effort, but a natural state.

Kuusisto refers to "the vastness of the gold fog that is my seeing"[222]. He talks of staring at the world through "smeared and broken window panes."[223] The early morning sunlight is compared at different stages to stained glass[224]and to 'rays of undersea light.'[225]Jackson Pollock is never far from Kuusisto's mind, feeling, as he does, that he is living inside his 'Blue Poles'. Bullough's fog is replaced at one time by "a private, rising field of silver threads, teeming greens, roses and smoke"[226], and at another by "a blue that I've never found in the outer world."[227] We are told at one stage that Kuusisto is "knee-deep in private fireflies, the ones inside [his] eyes.[228] He hints at the key to this aesthetic through his quotation of Frost:

> Heaven gives its glimpses only to those
> Not in a position to look too close[229]

"What's wrong with a life of color and light", Kuusisto asks, "inferences pouring through my skin like dream-water?"[230] It is Kuusisto's experience that "as things visual are in doubt, they grow in unconventional beauty."[231] Exploring a ruined temple in Delos with some friends, he describes his movement: "I move knee-deep in shoals of milk, but I have no fear."[232] The 'high-wire' aspect of this aesthetic, its enviable readiness for the unforeseeable, is illustrated by a passage that is terrifying even to read:

> How do you ride a bicycle when you can't see? You hold your head like a stiff flower and tilt toward the light. You think not at all about your chances -- the sheer physicality of gutters and pavements. One submits to Holy Rule and spins ahead. . . Picture this: A darkness rises. Is it a tree or a shadow? A shadow or a truck? The thrill of the high

> wire is the greatest wonder of the brain. There is, at the centre of our skulls, a terrible glittering, a requiem light. I lower my face to the cold handlebars and decide it's a shadow, a hole in sunlight, and pedal straight through.[233]

This is the fearlessness of the 'high-wire aesthetic'. Inference, as we saw earlier when discussing the theories of Lorand and Osborne, is conventionally disregarded as a means to aesthetic appreciation. In Kuusisto's case, however, the inferences felt on his skin, and his risking of life and limb on their strength, are the key components of his psychically distanced, aesthetic attitude. The Planet of the Blind is full of such incidents. He progresses, for example, from the bicycle to his parents' power-boat. By the end of the book the reader who is in any way excitable by nature is sure to be reduced to a nervous wreck. In the way that one experiences a vicariously induced hangover after reading Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, or Sillitoe's Saturday Night. Sunday Morning, one is visited by a disconcertingly realistic and severe attack of vertigo while reading certain passages from Kuusisto's autobiography. Kuusisto is very aware of the aesthetic quality of the Jackson Pollock landscape that is his reality:

> The sensorium of the blind who possess some marginal vision is by turns magical and disturbing. There is nothing in front of you, nothing behind. How lovely and terrible this is! It's a mad, holy vision, the repeated appearance and disappearance of the physical world.[234]

6.7. An aesthetics of blindness:

Many of the blind people whose stories have been considered here emphasise the connection between their achievement of a non-visual aesthetic and the cessation of their thirsting after remembered visual joys. One factor that seems to unite their experiences is the disappearance of the beautiful object. At one stage Hull describes the trying charade of the unveiling of loved objects at Christmas time with his children. The experience prompts the reflection that "(i)n many ways the blind person lives in a world which is

strangely devoid of objects."[235] Kuusisto also remarks that "the blind are not hungry for objects."[236] All of the blind people who have featured here gradually became attuned to non-visual aspects of their surroundings, even in cases like those of Fenn, Kleege and Minton, where various degrees of a visual approach to beauty managed to be maintained. Andrew Potok, for example notes that the Vermont seasons, which have always determined "the variety of [his] sensual pleasure and activity" hold a "different significance" for him now that "their visual lushness has disintegrated into hazy fragments of gray."[237] He is now impressed by the fragrances and sounds, the varieties of texture underfoot in different type of weather. He admits that it took years for blindness to become just blindness, for him to lose the consciously harboured desire for sight, and the tantalizing feeling that he was, as he puts it like "a diabetic in a pastry shop."[238] By the end of his story counselling and writing have displaced painting as his chosen channels of expression. He learns to distinguish between the sounds of hot and cold running water, while Kuusisto learns to listen "like the ornithologist who unwraps bird bones from tissue paper."[239] For Hine touch and sound become "commandingly important".[240] It is John Hull, however, who is perhaps most explicit about the type of transformation undergone by his sense of beauty, and the nature of his aesthetic sensibility in blindness.

While reading these autobiographies I started to try to map a series of correspondences between some of the aesthetic experiences described in them and some of the sites of beauty described in the plays discussed earlier. I now find myself associating Fenn's appreciation of the non-visual splendours of London with the experience of Martin and Mary Doul. I cannot help regarding Yeats's attributing awareness of Aoife's beauty to his Blind Man in terms of the disappearance of the face as described by the blind. In what remains of this chapter I want to draw attention to the aesthetic nature of John Hull's engagement with his environment. His aesthetic approach towards the elements betray certain similarities, it seems to me, with Molly Sweeney's attitude towards swimming. Hull talks, for example, of being "lost in the beauty" of the rain which he sees as having "a way of bringing out the contours of everything" by throwing "a coloured blanket over previously invisible things." The steadily falling rain bestows to the blind person, used to a highly localised and fragmented world, a more

expansive "continuity of acoustic experience."[241] After doing his best to describe the various rhythms and sounds of the rain as it hits hundreds of different surfaces simultaneously, Hull remarks, as we have seen Molly Sweeney do, on the inability of words to do justice to the experience:

> The whole scene is much more differentiated than I have been able to describe, because everywhere are little breaks in the patterns, obstructions, projections, where some slight interruption or difference of texture or of echo gives an individual detail or dimension to the scene. Over the whole thing, like light falling upon a landscape is the gentle background patter gathered up into one continuous murmur of rain.[242]

With words Hull can convey a sense of the general pattern of the rainfall. He can even indicate that there exist intermittent irregularities in the pattern. But words cannot capture the unique (dis)order, or 'aesthetic order' that makes such an impression on him. After making this observation, Hull, again like Molly Sweeney, proceeds to give an impressively detailed account of his experience:

> Usually, when I open my front door, there are various broken sounds spread across a nothingness. I know that when I take the next step I will encounter the path, and to the right my shoe will encounter the lawn. As I walk down the path, my head will be brushed by fronds of the overhanging shrub on the left and I will then come to the steps, the front gate, the footpath, the culvert and the road. I know all these things are there but I know them from memory. They give no immediate evidence of their presence, I know them in the form of prediction. They will be what I will be experiencing in the next few seconds. The rain presents the fullness of an entire situation all at once, not merely remembered, not in anticipation, but actually and

> now. The rain gives a sense of perspective and of the actual relationships of one part of the world to another.[243]

If rain were to fall inside a room, Hull speculates, instead of his world being limited to the chair he is sitting on, or the length of his stick, he would for once have an actual sense of being in a room. Of his experience of rain he says:

> This is an experience of great beauty. I feel the world, which is veiled until I touch it, has suddenly disclosed itself to me, the gift of the world. I am no longer isolated, preoccupied with my thoughts, concentrating upon what I must do next. Instead of having to worry about where my body will be and what it will meet, I am presented with a totality of a world which speaks to me.[244]

When Hull endeavours to account for the heightened awareness of beauty provoked within him by the rain, he stresses the role played by the physical engagement of his body with the elements. As in Molly Sweeney's swim, the type of physical, observational distancing we associate with traditional accounts of the aesthetic experience has been replaced by a sense of intimacy. Both aesthetic experiences are informed by an unqualified fusion of body and world. "Have I grasped", he asks,

> why it is so beautiful? When what there is to know is in itself varied, intricate and harmonious, then the knowledge of that reality shares the same characteristics. I am filled internally with a sense of variety, intricacy, and harmony. The knowledge itself is beautiful, because the knowledge creates in me a mirror of what there is to know. As I listen to the rain, I am the image of the rain, and I am one with it.[245]

Hull's experience of the wind has similar aesthetic features. Lingering one day at a point on his route home which catches the wind, he lets a "beautiful, warm, scented breeze" play over his face and through his clothes. He turns his head this way and that in

order to catch the "perfumed richness" of its different currents and fragrances. The "delightful" experience prompts him to make certain comparisons with the sighted experience of the wind:

> Can the wind mean as much to sighted people? It is invisible, so they gain nothing over the blind. Of course, the blind lose the sight of the world being blown along by the wind, the hurrying clouds and the trees swaying. On the other hand, the wind has a special beauty for the blind. For the sighted, to whom the world is mainly visual, an invisible phenomenon like the wind is only observed incidentally, it is one of many things which one notices in passing. It is mainly visual cues like the sight of the washing blowing about on the line that give rise to the thought that it is a windy day. The wind itself, as felt by the body, is only one of the ways which sighted people experience a windy day.[246]

Crucially, Hull makes the distinction that the blind person "enters the windiness of the day at first hand", while sighted people "work at long range." Occasionally, the element of premonition that accompanies the sense that a storm is brewing invests the experience with a particular element of distance, but one which always eventually converges on the body:

> Sometimes a blind person experiences a wind which is all the more exciting because it is known at long range. I hear the distant tossing of trees across the park; it comes like a wave rolling across a beach. Now it breaks upon my body like a squall, a gust, like a fist. This is very exciting because of the anticipation, and the wonderful feeling of having the knowledge in your body of what is going on.[247]

Hull finds that the aesthetic dimensions of the world of sound are expanded in blindness. The tangible world "sets up as many points of reality as can be touched by [his] body", and is therefore usually restricted to one point at a time. Although, as we

have seen earlier, the world of sound can only reveal itself to him through action, when this revelation occurs Hull is deeply impressed by "the many different aspects of reality, the range and depth of the contact points between [himself] and something created by sound."[248] The awareness is brought home to him as he shelters from another Birmingham shower. Pressing his forehead to the window pane, he concentrates intensely and discerns a multiple of different components at work on his sense of hearing simultaneously. He first notices differences in location: some sounds are coming from the left of the window, some from the right, which he can trace past opposite corners of the house. Some of the sounds come from the wall above the window, and from the roof, while below him the rain is falling on the shrubbery and the fence that encircles it. Next he notices differences of speed: the sound of a slow steady drip is offset against a "more rapid cascade", both come from beyond the closer pitter patter of raindrops against the window. The rhythm of these raindrops vary in turn as the power of the rainfall ebbs and flows and certain dominant patterns are overtaken by others. He also notices differences of intensity: certain surfaces are exposed to the full force of the rain, while more sheltered surfaces release a more muffled sound. Pools of water that overflow from various blocked pipes contribute an irregular splashing sound to the symphony. He is sensitive also to differences of pitch as raindrops collide with metal, concrete and glass. In the circling wind the rain at different stages "swishes", "gurgles" and "pelts". There are differences in volume also as layer after layer of sound recedes into the distance of the nearby trees. It all builds into what Hull describes as "a complex pattern." "The more intensely I listened", he tells us, "the more I found I could discriminate, building block upon block of sound, noticing regularities and irregularities, filling dimension upon dimension."[249]

Hull finds that his whole body has started to function as an organ of perception. The great sense of concordance that he feels between his body and the rain prompts him to consider the much debated contention that "the blind live in their bodies rather than in the world":

> I am aware of my body just as I am aware of the rain. My body is similarly made up of many patterns, many different regularities and

> irregularities, extended in space from down there to up here. These dimensions and details reveal themselves more and more as I concentrate my attention upon them. Nothing corresponds visually to this realization. Instead of having an image of my body, as being in what we call the 'human form', I apprehend it now as these arrangements of sensitivities, a conscious space comparable to the patterns of the falling rain. The patterns of water envelop me in myriads of spots of awareness, and my own body is presented to me in the same way. There is a central area, of which I am barely conscious, and which seems to come and go. At the extremities, sensations fade into unconsciousness. My body and the rain intermingle, and become one audio-tactile, three-dimensional universe, within which and throughout the whole of which lies my awareness. [250]

These almost Wordsworthian attestations of awareness represent the happier, reverse-side of Hine's observation that the blind "are imprisoned in their bodies; the body for them is almost synonymous with their environment."[251] Hull distinguishes the type of "awareness" which is born of such harmonious fusion of body and surroundings with "the single-track line of consecutive speech which makes up [his] thoughts." The line of thought expressed in speech is "not extended in space at all", Hull tells us, but "comes towards me like carriages in a goods train, one after the other, coming out of the darkness, passing under the floodlight of knowledge, and receding into memory."[252] Having already bridged the distance which has traditionally been regarded as rightfully separating a site of beauty from its ideal aesthetic observer, with this final distinction Hull appears also to 'have the measure' of the gulf that distances memorizers of testimony from champions of experiential knowledge and aesthetic order.

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[1] Robert V. Hine, Second Sight (London: University of California Press, 1993) p. 180.

[2] Plato, 'Philebus', Complete Works, ed., John. M. Cooper, transl. Dorothea Frede, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1997) 46e, p. 454.

[3] Aristotle, 'Metaphysica', The Works of Aristotle, Vol., V111, ed., and transl., W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928) X111.3, 1078b, 1-6.

[4] George Berkeley, Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher in Focus, ed., David Berman (London: Routledge, 1993) III, 8, p. 65.

[5] Ibid., p. 66.

[6] Francis Hutcheson, An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design, ed., Peter Kivy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) p. 38.

[7] Munroe Beardsley, 'Order and disorder in art', in P. Kuntz, ed., The Concept of Order (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968) p. 192.

[8] Harold Osborne, 'Aesthetic and Other Forms of Order', British Journal of Aesthetics Vol. 22, No. 1 (1982), 3, 14.

[9] Second Sight p. 180.

[10] H. Garland Minton, Blind Man's Buff (London: Paul Elek, 1974) p. 75.

[11] Ibid., p. 73.

[12] I will not, for example, be considering Michael Ansell, Soldier On (London: P. Davies, 1973). Ansell gives a remarkably stoical account of an incident of war blindness, the subsequent loss of two wives to cancer and a car crash, and of his overcoming of these misfortunes in order to carve out a very successful career as a showjumper and equestrian trainer. He says little, however, about the transformation undergone by his aesthetic experience. Whatley While, Blindness Came to Me (Surrey: Denholm House, 1970) does not feature here for similar reasons.

[13] Second Sight, p. 164.

[14] Stephen Kuusisto, Planet of the Blind (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) p. 63.

[15] Ibid., pp. 134-135.

[16] Second Sight p. 57. Hine attributes this expression to the disabled psychiatrist Arnold Beisser.

[17] John Hull, Touching the Rock. An Experience of Blindness (London: Arrow, 1991, 1st publ. 1990) p. 40.

[18] Ibid., p. 40.

[19] Andrew Potok, Ordinary Daylight. Portrait of an Artist Going Blind (New York: Holt, Rineheart and Winston, 1980) p. 3.

[20] Blind Man's Buff p. 126.

[21] Karl Bjarnhoff, The Stars Grow Pale (Middlesex: Penguin, 1960, 1st publ. 1956) p. 63. This tendency to conceal one's blindness appears to be very common in the initial stages of the condition. My grandfather's blindness was only detected when, unknown to him, my mother observed him groping his way to mass, navigating by gateposts and pillars, as she was coming home from work one afternoon. My doctor informs me that his mother in law managed to

keep the poor state of her vision from her family until it was noticed one day that her sheet music was placed upside-down on the piano stand.

[22] Planet of the Blind p. 21.

[23] Ibid., p. 42.

[24] Blind Man's Buff p. 90.

[25] Planet of the Blind p. 11.

[26] Ibid., p. 75.

[27] Ibid., p. 7, p. 43.

[28] Ibid., p. 135.

[29] Ibid., p. 125.

[30] Second Sight p. 62.

[31] Planet of the Blind p. 103.

[32] Second Sight p. 80. Hine is actually referring here to a scene from the film 'Butterflies are Free' which portrays the experience of a blind man who decides to live in San Francisco for a couple of months.

[33] Ibid., p. 93.

[34] Ibid., pp. 95-96.

[35] Ibid., p. 164.

[36] Touching the Rock p. 73.

[37] Ibid., p. 95.

[38] Ibid., p. 94.

[39] Ibid., pp. 188-189.

[40] Blind Man's Buff p. 35.

[41] Planet of the Blind p. 93.

[42] Touching the Rock p. 75.

[43] Ibid., pp. 63-64.

[44] Second Sight p. 115.

[45] Ordinary Daylight pp. 253-254.

[46] Blind Man's Buff p. 55.

[47] Planet of the Blind p. 63.

[48] Second Sight p. 95.

[49] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[50] Ibid., p. 43.

[51] Ibid., p. 183.

[52] Patrick Trevor-Roper, The World Through Blunted Sight (London: Souvenir Press, 1997, 1st publ., Thames and Hudson, 1970) p. 162.

[53] Ibid., p. 162.

[54] Pierre Villey, The World of the Blind. A Psychological Study, trans., Alys Hallard (London: Duckworth, 1930. Quoted by Trevor-Roper, The World Through Blunted Sight p. 162.

[55] Second Sight p. 184.

[56] Touching the Rock p. 20.

[57] Blind Man's Buff p. 41.

[58] Planet of the Blind p. 126.

[59] Brendan Kennelly, A Time For Voices. Selected Poems 1960-1990 (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1990) pp. 16-17. ('The Blind Man')

[60] W.W. Fenn, Half-Hours of Blind Man's Holiday. Or summer and winter sketches in black and white Vol. 1 (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1878) p. 11.

[61] Second Sight p. 123.

[62] Sight Unseen p. 14.

[63] Ibid., pp. 28-29.

[64] Ibid., p. 29.

[65] Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[66] Ibid., p. 35.

[67] Ibid., p. 32.

[68] Ibid., p. 32.

[69] Ibid., p. 34.

[70] Ibid., p. 37.

[71] Ibid., pp. 37-38.

[72] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

[73] Ibid., p. 83.

[74] Ibid., p. 93.

[75] Ibid., p. 85.

[76] Ibid., p. 94.

[77] Ibid., p. 100.

[78] Ibid., p. 102.

[79] Ibid., p. 103. In a later letter Magee tells him that he is "right" on this issue, that "knowledge by experience" cannot be satisfactorily exchanged. Ibid., p. 163

[80] Ibid., p. 80.

[81] Ibid., p. 156.

[82] Ibid., pp. 129-130.

[83] Ibid., p. 133.

[84] Ibid., p. 153.

[85] Ibid., pp. 149-150.

[86] Ibid., p. 150.

[87] Ibid., p. 162.

[88] Ibid., p. 123.

[89] Ibid., p. 107.

[90] Ibid., p. 110.

[91] Ibid., p. 111.

[92] Ibid., p. 92.

[93] Ibid., p. 31.

[94] David Bohm and David F. Peat, Science, Order and Creativity (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989) pp. 104-105.

[95] Harold Osborne, 'Aesthetic And Other Forms of Order', British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1982), 3.

[96] Ibid., 3. This is Osborne's reformulation of McTaggart's definition. For a synopsis of McTaggart's theory, see J.M.E. McTaggart, The Nature of Existence, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921) ch. XXI, pp. 167-174.

[97] British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 22, No. 1, (1982), 5

[98] Ibid., 5.

[99] Ibid., 10.

[100] Ibid., 10.

[101] Ibid., 11.

[102] Ibid., 4.

[103] Ruth Lorand, Aesthetic Order. A Philosophy of Order, Beauty and Art (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 1.

[104] Ibid., p. 13.

[105] Ibid., p. 26.

[106] Ibid., p. 113.

[107] Ibid., p. 47.

[108] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[109] Ibid., p. 49.

[110] Ibid., pp. 107-111.

[111] Lorand's treatment of familiarity seems to me a little unclear. She does not account, for example, for the pleasure that can be derived from re-reading a story, novel, or play, when the element of suspense has been eliminated and we are free to concentrate on what we might call 'the poetry.'

[112] Ibid., p. 59.

[113] Ibid., p. 59.

[114] Ibid., p. 59.

[115] British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1982), 11.

[116] Ibid., 13.

[117] Ibid., 14.

[118] Anton Ehrenzweig, 'The Hidden Order of Art', British Journal of aesthetics, Vol. 1 (1960-61), 124.

[119] Ibid., p. 127.

[120] Half-Hours of Blind Man's Holiday p. 2.

[121] Ibid., p. 5.

[122] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[123] Ibid., p. 191.

[124] Ibid., p. 129.

[125] Ibid., p. 127.

[126] Thomas Hardy, The Complete Poems, ed., James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976) p. 448.

[127] Touching the Rock Foreward, p. V.

[128] Touching the Rock p. 14.

[129] Ibid., p. 14.

[130] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[131] Ibid., p. 19.

[132] Second Sight p. 50.

[133] Touching the Rock p. 16.

[134] Ibid., p. 18.

[135] Ibid., p. 17.

[136] Ibid., p. 87.

[137] Ibid., p. 17.

[138] Ibid., p. 130.

[139] Ibid., p. 42.

[140] Ibid., p. 107.

[141] Ibid., p. 42.

[142] Ibid., p. 46.

[143] Ibid., p. 26.

[144] Blind Man's Buff p. 24.

[145] Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan, Sight Unseen (London: Phoenix, 1998, 1st publ., Oxford University Press, 1995, as On Blindness) p. 72.

[146] Second Sight p. 172. The beginning of this quotation is presented as an unclarified reference to Wagner. Hine puts the opening sentence in parentheses, indicating that he is quoting the composer directly.

[147] Ibid., p. 51.

[148] The Stars Grow Pale p. 183. The subject of one of Alberto Valvo's case studies, when he experiences partial vision after a lifetime of blindness, also admits that the human face is not as aesthetically gratifying as he had been led to believe it would be. "As for the facial characteristics of people", he reports, "I cannot say whether a person is beautiful or ugly, nor what expression he has. I see only the coarse details of the face: eyes, mouth, nose." Alberto Valvo, Sight Restoration After Long Term Blindness: The Problems and Behaviour Patterns of Visual Rehabilitation (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1971) p. 12.

[149] For a brief survey of the various theorists who contributed to the celebrating of an asthetic of the picturesque see Andrew Ballantyne, 'Genealogy of the Picturesque', British Journal of Aesthetics Volume 32, Number 4, October 1992, 320-329.

[150] Touching the Rock Foreward p. V.

[151] Planet of the Blind p. 77.

[152] Ibid., pp. 77-78.

[153] Ibid., p. 82.

[154] Touching the Rock p. 87.

[155] Second Sight p. 141.

[156] Quoted by Hine, Second Sight p. 141.

[157] Touching the Rock pp. 101-102.

[158] Ibid., p. 86.

[159] Second Sight p. 140.

[160] Touching the Rock p. 147.

[161] Ibid., p. 132.

[162] Ibid., pp. 132-133.

[163] Ibid., p. 102.

[164] Ordinary Daylight p. 87.

[165] Touching the Rock p. 103.

[166] Ibid., p. 63.

[167] James Thurber, My Life and Hard Times (London: Prion Books, 2000, 1st publ. 1933) p. 112.

[168] Ibid., p. 112.

[169] Ibid., p. 112.

[170] Rosalind Vallance and John Hampden, eds., William Hazlitt. Essays (London: The Folio Society, 1964) See especially 'On Going a Journey', pp. 70-81, and 'Why Distant Objects Please', pp. 121-132.

[171] Touching the Rock p. 136.

[172] Ibid., p. 137.

[173] Ibid., p. 137.

[174] Vincent Van Gogh, The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh , ed., Ronald de Leeuw, trans., Arnold Pomerans (London: Penguin, 1996) p. 6.

[175] Touching the Rock p. 47.

[176] Ibid., pp. 147-148.

[177] Ibid., p. 146.

[178] Ordinary Daylight p. 145.

[179] Ibid., p. 18.

[180] Ibid., p. 18.

[181] Touching the Rock p. 135.

[182] Ibid., p. 48.

[183] Second Sight p. 26.

[184] Blind Man's Buff p. 16.

[185] Ibid., p. 55.

[186] Ibid., p. 77.

[187] Planet of the Blind p. 142.

[188] Half-Hours of Blind Man's Holiday pp. 7-23.

[189] Blind Man's Buff p. 54.

[190] Georgina Kleege, Sight Unseen (London: Yale University Press, 1999) p. 2.

[191] Ibid., p. 3. Hine mentions that Jacques Lusseyran is an other example of a blind man whose aesthetic sensibility is informed to a very high degree by a maintained visual awareness. Second Sight p. xiv, p. 175.

[192] Second Sight p. 161.

[193] The Stars Grow Pale p. 254.

[194] Ordinary Daylight p., 6.

[195] Ibid., p. 101.

[196] Ibid., pp. 101-102.

[197] Ibid., p. 270.

[198] Ibid., p. 287.

[199] Blind Man's Buff p. 61, p. 64.

[200] Touching the Rock p. 104.

[201] Ibid., p. 104.

[202] Ibid., p. 105.

[203] Ibid., p. 108.

[204] Ibid., p. 108.

[205] Ordinary Daylight p. 259.

[206] Ibid., p. 29.

[207] Ibid., p. 31.

[208] Patrick Trevor-Roper, The World Through Blunted Sight (London: Souvenir, 1997, 1st publ., Thames and Hudson, 1970) pp. 17-63.

[209] Second Sight pp. 155-156.

[210] Planet of the Blind p. 66.

[211] George Dickie, 'Psychical Distance: In a Fog at Sea', British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 13 (1973), 19. Dickie is quoting from Edward Bullough's Aesthetics (1954).

[212] Planet of the Blind pp. 1-2.

[213] The Stars Grow Pale p. 99.

[214] Second Sight p. 100.

[215] Ibid., p. 120.

[216] Ibid., p. 120.

[217] Half-Hours of Blind Man's Holiday p. 8.

[218] Ibid., p. 8.

[219] Blind Man's Buff p. 13.

[220] Ibid., p. 27.

[221] Ibid., p. 28.

[222] Ibid., p. 37.

[223] Planet of the Blind p. 5.

[224] Ibid., p. 7.

[225] Ibid., p.

[226] Ibid., p. 7.

[227] Ibid., p. 27.

[228] Ibid., p. 40.

[229] Ibid., p16.

[230] Ibid., p. 41.

[231] Ibid., p. 68.

[232] Ibid., p. 87.

[233] Ibid., p. 8. Ved Mehta was also fond of the thrill afforded by transporting himself by bicycle in blindness. See Hine's Second Sight p. xv, p. 85.

[234] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[235] Touching the Rock pp. 151-152.

[236] Planet of the Blind p. 180.

[237] Ordinary Daylight p. 17.

[238] Ibid., p. 46.

[239] Ordinary Daylight p. 47, Planet of the Blind p. 18.

[240] Second Sight p. 172.

[241] Touching the Rock p. 22.

[242] Ibid., p. 23.

[243] Ibid., p. 23.

[244] Ibid., p. 23.

[245] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

[246] Ibid., p. 81.

[247] Ibid., p. 82.

[248] Ibid., p. 61.

[249] Ibid., p. 99.

[250] Ibid., p. 100.

[251] Second Sight p. 136.

[252] Ibid., p. 100.

Conclusion.

The overlapping of interests throughout these chapters is such that it is considerably easier to set the context for further reflection on the achievements of this project than to actually distill the essence of those achievements in a few pages. I started by describing how the concern with vision is not restricted to perceptual experience, but encompasses also metaphysically laden metaphors and socio-cultural standards of beauty. Positioned after such preliminary demarcation of conceptual boundaries and an exploration of the experiences of the actually blind, the greater part of this project was taken up with a study of literary portrayals of the experience of blindness. Emphasis on the importance of Synge's musical background, of Yeats's raptness in the visual arts, and Friel's preoccupation with the limitations of language is not in itself likely to break much new ground in the critical assessment of these three literary figures. By using their plays as a medium through which to bring some recent developments in the field of aesthetics and various discourses on the experience of marginality into meaningful relation to one another, however, I feel that I have suggested ways in which existing evaluations of the accomplishments of these three authors might be enlarged upon. By bringing attention to the diversity of aesthetic subjects and the boundless array of conditions which can be conducive to the aesthetic experience, I have tried to present an alternative to the approach to aesthetics which simply seeks to identify what is essential to the experience of beauty, within an already formulated definition of the relations between a site of beauty and its ideal observer.

A useful way of recapitulating my general approach to the plays is to outline how they were considered in relation to one another for the collection of ecphrastic set pieces they present. The term ecphrasis derives from the Greek *ekphradzein* -- literally meaning "to speak out, tell, or describe fully." It is used today in its narrow sense to refer to the literary, usually highly rhetorical, description of a work of art, but in Hellenistic times was also used to recount a particularly vivid description of any kind, including natural scenes as well as works of art.[1] The effect of Cuchulain's painterly description of Aoife, in the high queen's absence, is akin to that achieved by the process of basing a painting

on a preserved description of an actual but lost object from antiquity. The plays are full of descriptions of things actually or purportedly seen by certain characters for the sake of blind characters, or an unsighted audience. These descriptions are accompanied by those offered by the blind of aspects of their sensory experience from which the rest of the cast and the audience are excluded: Martin and Mary Doul are constantly fed misleading descriptions of their own beauty, they describe a warmness in the air and a chorus of sounds to which the audience do not have access; the description of the absent Aoife, whom nobody in the theatre but Cuchulain, his son and the Blind Man have seen, was extensively dealt with in my study of On Baile's Strand; Molly Sweeney takes the beauty of flowers on trust, and even presents descriptions of certain sites of beauty which she herself only knows through description.

At these junctures in the different plays the playwrights' fascination with language and the conventions of their chosen medium becomes most complexly intertwined with their respective explorations of a perceptual experience. In each case words mediate between the subject and the absent image. In the case of Yeats, the mediation is aimed directly at the mind's eye of the subject, while in The Well of the Saints descriptions of beauty are more often directed at non-visual senses. Friel, on the other hand, seems content to register the presence of beauty on our conceptual understanding. In the different plays language is trying to attain the condition of image, sound, and, in the case of Molly Sweeney, simply of language. The prevalence of fabrication throughout the plays -- the lies the villagers tell to Martin and Mary Doul, for example, or Molly Sweeney's feigning of an awareness of the strictly visual qualities of her surroundings, raise questions about the partiality of such ecphrastic description. The difference between the description of absent beauty in the plays and actual instances of ecphrasis in Renaissance art, for example, is that in the case of the plays there tends to be at least one party – not always the audience, however -- who is capable of ratifying the description. What assumed most importance in my treatment of this aspect of the plays, therefore, was the study of the linguistic devices and sensory capacities the respective playwrights resorted to in order to render or suggest the presence of the invisible entities in question.

A common feature of the concern for experiences of beauty which connects the different chapters is an emphasis on the alleged universality of aesthetic jugements rather

than the aesthetic object. Rather than considering the historical investigation into the properties an object must possess in order to facilitate aesthetic reflection, I have been taking issue with the traditional fascination with the conditions under which the verdict that an object is beautiful could justifiably claim the assent of all aesthetic beholders. The belief that disinterested pleasure ensures impartiality and the universal validity of judgements of taste is undermined when these traditional aesthetic assumptions are taken up by theorists who address the experience of those who are excluded from mainstream aesthetic convention. Belief in a transhistorical, universal aesthetic experience assumes that human beings each have the same faculties for understanding the world. This assumption leads in turn to the traditional belief in an ideal unanimity of appraisal among disinterested, "properly disposed" aesthetic evaluators.

The compulsive bias towards the systemization and homogenization of diverse sites, ideas and experiences of beauty serves well the didactic strategies of figures like Mr. Sweeney, as it does the museum curator and the art history professor. Such predetermined regulatory approaches to the aesthetic, however, can only result in a misleading and detrimental sense of aesthetic and intellectual accord, when actually the spectrum of human aesthetic experiences is in wonderful and edifying disarray. Many of the heavily prompted affirmations of Molly Sweeney and Helen Keller are designed to present an appearance of 'normality' in relation to their perceptual capacities. Steered by their respective mentors, Molly and Helen do manage to deliver appreciative avowals of prevailing standards of beauty, but the colours they find themselves saluting do not register themselves in any meaningful way on their awareness. It becomes clear that such overlooking of difference on the part of their tutors can only cultivate disingenuous forms of aestheticising. My hope is that studies such as this one can serve to expose such myths of universally applicable aesthetic criteria and help to identify methodologies for exploring the fascinating and instructive variances between the interractions of different people with their natural, social and cultural environments.

One of the most problematic aspects of the writing of this thesis was the difficulty in finding ways to align three radically divergent dramatic renderings of blindness. It seems to me that the differences between the plays are foundational to many of the insights achieved throughout these six chapters. The variety of possible approaches by

sighted authors to blindness is indicative of the corresponding interdependence of different levels of interpretation. Part of the achievement of this study is to suggest that no aesthetic concept is universal and that it is much more useful to think in terms of the plurality of aesthetic perspectives. These six chapters suggest in different ways that rather than being thought of in disinterested terms as an ideologically neutral discipline, aesthetics should be contemplated with a view towards such contingencies as the physical, social and political factors which dictate the very notion of aesthetics which prevails at any time and in any culture. Politicizing this insight, the denial of "lower" pleasures, or of pleasures derived through the "lower" senses, for example, can be interpreted as the affirmation of the social superiority of those who are in a position to be disinterested. The differences between the three plays considered illustrate, however, that such arguments only carry so far by themselves.

In 1997 Mitchell and Snyder edited a collection of cultural studies of disability which they preface with the argument that because depictions of disability by the non-disabled are suffused by the basic features of society's dismissive attitude towards disability, the resulting portrayals are inherently exploitative. The impression that emerges of the history of such portrayals is one of a hegemonic, conspiratorially inspired "metaphorical opportunism". Throughout this alleged history of politically motivated representation a collective of non-disabled artists connive to arrange their portrayals in a way that subtly fortifies their conviction that their own perspective is the ideal one.[2] At certain junctures throughout this project, most notably in Chapter Four's analysis of the significance of the differential, I indicated some of the ways in which aesthetics can be politicized. This process can be described in very broad terms: aesthetic discourse has traditionally been dominated by males, capitalists, imperialists and other dominant classes; the political supremacy of these groups has imposed aesthetic criteria that uphold their dominant group interest; in this way aesthetic discourse becomes inescapably involved in the exercise of power. My interpretation of Molly Sweeney, for example, emphasizes Friel's awareness of the political aspects of the circulation of aesthetic awareness and the forming of consensus in matters pertaining to the judgment of beauty. If imaginative portrayals of disability all attained their significance in the same manipulative way described by Mitchell and Snyder, however, characters who deviate

from the ideals championed by politically dominant groups would be portrayed as deficient in relation to the capacity for aesthetic appraisal. The plays considered throughout the central chapters of this thesis illustrate the reductiveness of such indiscriminate condemnation. It is important, in assessing the nature of the achievement of this project, that some account be given of the unique way in which political and aesthetic considerations have overlapped throughout its extended comparison of representations and experiences of an aesthetics of blindness.

It is not difficult to imagine how Yeats's treatment of blindness might be deconstructed according to the type of socio-political criteria with which Mitchell and Snyder approach artistic representations of disability. It is significant in this regard that while Blind Man is a component of the play's subtle and indirect intimation of a sense of beauty, Yeats's decides against elaborating on the way in which beauty presents itself to Blind Man in his current condition.The Blind Man of On Baile's Strand, in other words, is not completely overlooked when Aoife's beauty is evoked. But his blindness is. Her beauty still registers itself on Blind Man's awareness through the discontinued sense of vision. It is only by virtue of a retrogressively parasitical relationship with the sense he is no longer in possession of that Blind Man does not find himself excluded from the aesthetic domain entirely. According to a certain reading of the play, Blind Man's tenuous relation to beauty may actually seem designed to nourish and gratify the type of perspective that equates beauty with visual appearance. The emphasis on visual memory in the play's brief evocation of beauty arguably exhibits the 'aesthetic redundancy' of the perceptual modalities that actually are available to Blind Man, establishing the superiority of vision in the process. The portrayal appears to bear a twofold implication: beauty cannot occupy the operational perceptual range of the blind; blindness represents a fractured space which the aesthetically sensitive agent must not inhabit.

In Chapter Three I dealt quite comprehensively with the significance assumed by absence in the play. Yeats's recurring fascination with blindness appears to indicate that its conceptualization of its own absence is a defining component of Yeats's visual aesthetic. In Yeats's case blindness appears to be conceived as a component of an irreducibly binary configuration, and owes what significance it is granted to its contrast with its omnipresent escort, vision. It is not, in other words, blindness, but this closely

knit blindness/vision complex that seems to engage Yeats's imagination. At times one suspects that there was something therapeutic, something gratifying to his own iconographic instinct, about Yeats's relatively frequent contemplation of blindness. In the course of advancing the concern of the disability theorist into the domain of postmodernity, Corker and Shakespeare depict what a deconstruction of an imaginative rendering of disability would entail:

> A Derridean perspective on disability would argue that though they are antagonistic, 'normativism' needs 'disability' for its own definition: a person without an impairment can define him/herself as 'normal' only in opposition to what s/he is not -- a person with an impairment. Disability is not excluded from 'normativism'; it is integral to its very assertion. Moreover, when 'normativism' is privileged, 'disability' becomes a derivative, *cultural* arrangement that imposes the taken-for-granted *natural* status of the 'normal'.[3]

Corker and Shakespeare also point to the aptness of Derrida's claim that our attempts to break free of the grasp of such binary logic serve only to consolidate its very foundation. Such a reading of Yeats's reinscribing of the 'sick' or 'excluded' role of the blind character might very conceivably be interpreted as inviting an assessment of its relevance to the larger political question of the implication of aesthetic discourse and practice in the exercise of power.

The difficulties I met with while trying to align On Baile's Strand with the plays by Synge and Friel is indicative of the problems underlying a direct incorporation of these plays into the same politicized reading. Neither Molly Sweeney or Mary and Martin Doul are highly metaphorized. They do not function primarily as indicators of something other than themselves and they are certainly not portrayed as being at a disadvantage in relation to the task of appreciating beauty. A comparison of The Well of the Saints and Molly Sweeney with On Baile's Strand serves to illustrate how alarmist it is to uniformly accuse the history of representation of disability by non-disabled artists of self-flattering metaphorical opportunism. Defying the gloom of such politicized forms of interpretation,

Anita Silvers makes the point that the frequency with which we actually encounter positive artistic portrayals of disability can be very instructive. It is worth reviewing Silvers's argument for what we can learn in turn from the way blindness resists the terms of her proposal in relation to representations of disability in general.

In order to illustrate her point that "disability studies is too much obsessed with existing socio-political relations and too little inspired by the potential for aestheticizing", Silvers describes what she sees as "the paradoxical aesthetics of disability."[4] The "paradox" that Silvers refers to is the fact that while in social situations non disabled people tend to refrain from interacting with, and even acknowledging, the presence of disabled people, a large number of artists are fascinated by disability and their portrayals are often a source of great pleasure and admiration among the non-disabled. This phenomenon prompts Silvers to wonder about how we might account for the enthusiasm and enchantment elicited by artistic imitations of people whose actual presence is so frequently ignored. She suggests that the paradox can be explained in terms of the discrepancy between the orders of significance attributed to normality in the imagination's dominion and in reality:

> For the idea of the normal holds so much less sway in art than in ordinary life. While everyday practical discourse is disturbed by anomaly, aesthetic discourse revels in the shock of the new. Understanding this capacity of aesthetic discourse can lead us to an aesthetic that makes disability powerful.[5]

In art, novelty is more highly regarded than 'normalcy', the exceptional is received with more fervor than the typical. This point of departure between art and life problematizes the process of "reading deterministically" from society, which is dismissive towards disability, to art, which very often embraces disability in a much more considered way. The inability of exclusively political forms of interpretation to account satisfactorily for the complexity of the dynamic between the normative and the differential highlights the need for another order of analysis.

Such analysis must be able to account for the fact that while "normalcy appears to be a regulative ideal affecting our social responses to other people's corporeal

configurations", the same ideal has little purchase where aesthetic reactions to those same bodies are concerned.[6] How is it, Silvers tries to discover, that anomalies fascinate in art but can be considered horrific when encountered in real life? Her strategy in trying to answer the question entails first discovering what it is that an artist does to "configurational anomaly" to attract such keen reception within the art-world, and then investigating whether the artist's ploy might be appropriately applied to our response to disability in everyday life. An obvious factor in our reaction to anomalous art is the knowledge that it is art. Silvers points to a very significant discrepancy between the rigidity of the "prescriptiveness" with which individuals are expected to conform with precedents and the excitement with which radically new forms of identity are embraced within the art-world. Innovative art "calls into question the prescriptive authority of the historical contingencies that shape our expectations", and in the process prompts a revisioning of our conception of 'normalcy'.[7] Being "interpretative" rather than "coercive", art's history does not repudiate new forms in the way that human history does. Silvers is hopeful that a consciousness of this difference night gradually result in a gradual trend towards an increased social acceptance of difference. The modeling of our social response towards difference on our aesthetic response might, she feels, result in an increasingly "inclusive perceptual order" which embraces the type of difference that we are now too ready to shun.

"What theorizing of human beauty", Silvers asks,

> would facilitate our perceiving disabled people as enlivening, rather than depreciating, the human collective in a manner similar to that which permits us to see novel configurations as invigorating art? Understanding how art empowers its own unexpected products suggests how impairment can also be powerful. The philosophy of art makes available a variety of applicable proposals for bringing novelty and precedent into contiguity for this purpose. Applying any of these requires recognizing that (some) novel people advance how we understand humanity as (some) novel objects expand how we understand art.[8]

Silvers suggests that the significance of disability can be "revitalized" if we reconfigure our understanding of beauty into a form that cannot be accommodated by an exclusively socio-political approach to it, and awaken the discipline of postmodern disability studies, in the process, to the potential of aestheticizing.

This seems to me to be a very promising approach to disability, but certain aspects of the experience of blindness would appear to problematize its application to that particular 'sensorial anomaly'. The reception elicited by blindness, for one thing, has to be distinguished from social attitudes to disability in general. Commentators such as Richard Stayton French, Hector Chevigny and Michael Monbeck have noted that the attention received by the blind seems disproportionate in relation to the numbers of people actually living with the condition.[9] There exist many more prevalent and disturbing handicaps, it is often contended, which are served by fewer agencies and evoke less sympathy. Martin Whiteman and Irving Faber Lukoff, for example, make the point in relation to the kind of response that blind people are capable of generating, that though a lot of physical handicaps share common characteristics, it is notoriously difficult to tell what a particular person's attitude to blindness will be from what one knows about that particular person's reaction to other physical handicaps.[10] Chevigny, in his My Eyes Have A Cold Nose, suggests that the actual restrictions imposed on the blind are not sufficiently severe to warrant the amount of concern they evoke among the sighted public:

> Toward the blind the world presents a face it turns to no other group on earth. Everyone else must struggle for his survival. The blind, however, need not want. Society, profoundly convinced of the utter helplessness of the man who has lost his sight, stands ever ready to help him.[11]

Approaching the same phenomenon from a slightly different perspective, Morton A. Bertin brings to our attention a survey of attitudes towards blindness in which blind participants point to a large number of physical conditions which they deem to be more disabling than blindness.[12] It appears to me that the reason behind such disproportionate show of concern is the fact that the sighted tend automatically to aestheticize blindness.

When blindness is mentioned to a sighted person that person's thoughts often turn immediately to the beauty that would be lost to the condition. As is usually the case in matters pertaining to blindness, we can trace the origins of this tendency to Ancient Greece. We learn from Eleftheria A. Bernidaki Aldous, for example, that blindness "has been consistently viewed as the utmost punishment for crimes committed against divine as well as against social law ..."[13] Chevigny and Braverman remind us that "it was held to deprive man of enjoyment in living even as it preserved his life."[14] In her Ph.D. thesis on 'The Blind Man in Greek Legend and Literature', Marie Hildegarde Mahoney, after instancing various cases of the infliction of blindness as a punishment by the deity for various mortal transgressions and illicit trespasses, considers the question of why blindness was so commonly deemed the appropriate punishment for a wide variety of misdemeanors. In certain cases it is arguable that the punishment 'fitted' the crime -- in those cases of people who were resting when they should have been watchful, or saw something that was not intended for their eyes – the most obvious reason for blindness as punishment is that it was considered the "worst possible punishment."[15] In his The Meaning of Blindness Michael Monbeck attempts to discover exactly what it is about blindness that gives it "this dominating influence, this great capacity for gripping men's minds." He suggests that one of the factors behind the preoccupation among the sighted with the 'calamitous' implications of blindness is the fact that "sighted people commonly overestimate the importance of sight."[16] The same phenomenon is a recurring theme throughout the letters exchanged between Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan. While Magee is keen to discuss Milligan's understanding of beauty, such as the type Magee encountered on an African Safari, for example, Milligan is adamant that he is made aware that he lacks a sense primarily through discovering frequently that other people can do practical things which he cannot, rather than through any sense of aesthetic deficiency.[17]

The question of whether this automatic contemplation by the sighted of blindness in aesthetic terms is the positive influence Silvers appears to expect it to be, remains open to question. The plays considered earlier appear to indicate that a large problem is presented by the fact that the sighted aestheticize blindness on their own terms, according to sighted criteria. This accounts for a lot of the 'friendly fire' syndrome I described in Chapter Four. A character like Frank Sweeney illustrates the dangers of aestheticizing

blindness in this way. In my own case I started out with a very visually centred conception of the aesthetic implications of blindness but it lessened at certain junctures as I progressed with my research. I suspect that this process was a factor in my rather harsh treatment of Yeats. He seems a perfect exemplification of the component of my own sensibility that I have been doing my best to overcome. I am aware, however, that for all of my attributing of culpability for friendly fire to figures like Frank and Mr. Sweeney, I am equally implicated myself. My study of these plays, together with my own experience of writing this thesis, and the reaction I typically meet with when I describe its terms of this project to other sighted people has led me to realize just how tremendously difficult it is for a sighted person to resist aestheticizing blindness on visual terms. This fact became the leading criterion by which I evaluated the three plays. Yeats fails spectacularly in relation to this particular challenge, largely because it doesn't seem to have occurred to him to accept it. Throughout most of his play Friel appears to sidestep this particular audition by establishing the hypothetical possibility of alternatives to visual modes of aestheticization. His portrayal of Molly's swim, however, seems, to my unblind standpoint, to constitute a commendable attempt at non-visual aestheticization. The rendering of beauty in non-visual forms seems to come so naturally to Synge's musical sensibility that commending his achievement feels strangely like rewarding a cheat, or a contestant who started out with an unfair advantage over his rivals.

It seems to me that certain qualified parallels can be drawn between the experience of the newly blind and the endeavour of the sighted dramatist to aestheticize blindness. The immense experiential differences between sight and blindness are central to both experiences. The nature of the (dis)continuity which persists between perceptions before and after the onset of blindness is highly significant in its upsetting of the Wordsworthian notion of the cumulative experience whereby the adult is informed in a certain way by the child that he or she used to be. Many of the autobiographies describe an initial reluctance to set new aesthetic precedents in blindness and an instinctive cherishing of what is often later recognised as an incapacitating overspill from their sighted days with which they can no longer meaningfully engage. This feature of the perspective of some of the adventitiously blind makes demands on visual memory that are similar to the ones Yeats imposes on his Blind Man. The experiences recounted in

Chapter Six, and the different approaches to blindness contrasted throughout the literary section of this study, illustrate in different ways the importance, in a changing environment, of thinking and acting 'de novo', rather than clinging onto keepsakes, mementoes and other relics of an abandoned aesthetic.[18] In terms of the emergence of a new aesthetic, many of the autobiographies illustrate that the hold of the past on the present often proves to be a malign one. We have seen that it is often the experience of blind people that the emergence of a new aesthetic coincides with the displacement of this conservative tendency to resort to the treasures stored in visual memory by a more future-orientated outlook. This process often prompts the realisation that such discontinuity with an aesthetic legacy, however cherished, does not signal anything like the termination of fresh aesthetic receptivity. While Synge is extraordinarily alive to this phenomenon, it seems to me that Yeats's visual appetite stifled his realisation of the potential for a completely non-visual aesthetic.

While remembered visual beauty such as that harboured by Yeats's Blind Man of Aoife, for example, may acquire a certain poignance or charm in the aftermath of the onset of blindness, the very real limits of the human memory are such that the charm they hold is very likely to perish if the visual memories are isolated from present sensory and practical experience. The autobiographers considered in Chapter Six can generally be said to fall into two groups. Some of them learn, in the course of their practical rehabilitation, to recognise the impediment represented by the application of visual standards and values to their present experience. Others learn to creatively distil visual memory through their still impressive range of actual perceptual capacities. They celebrate their visual past as a living antiquity without attempting to protectively preserve it in isolation from contemporary sensory experience. Experience teaches this latter group that human memory will not be able to indefinitely recall features of entities which no longer play any practical role in their everyday life. As portraits in the gallery of their memory are reduced to blanks they realise that such mummification is neither the healthiest nor the most inspiring way of extracting value or pleasure from a visual heritage.

Aestheticizing blindness in visual terms serves a purpose in clarifying certain dimensions of what that condition means to the sighted. If the sighted are truly to

encourage a more inclusive society, however, they must surely try to understand and truly appreciate what it is they are embracing. While Silvers is correct in her analysis of the limitations of approaching representations of disability in exclusively socio-political terms, a visually conducted aestheticization of blindness may only further consolodate the authority of legitimating, visually biased meta-narratives that dictate the terms upon which the blind are taken to be excluded from the aesthetic domain of the sighted. A balance clearly needs to be arrived at between socio-political and aesthetic methods of rectification. It seems to me that this balance can be most effectively achieved through interdisciplinary projects such as this one. A distinction also has to be made between those forms of apparent hostility towards the eye which are accompanied by explorations of specifically non-visual forms of aesthetic appreciation, and those instances of the hyperbolic disparagement of the eye which, like Barthes' description of the world of wrestling, appear at times to merely represent an elitist condemnation of the pleasures afforded by mass culture. My description of the 'ascetic aesthetic' of the Saint from Synge's play, for example, might have been equally well positioned in Chapter Three. Although I contrasted it with the positive rendering of an aesthetic informed by Martin Doul's impressive reserves of acoustic receptivity, the Saint's ascetic perspective is arguably more pertinent, in certain ways, to Yeats's sporadically avowed belief that the artist should be above the appetite of the eye and the delight of the spectacle.

In the course of writing this thesis I contemplated bringing my research in directions which are not represented its final incarnation. Although I could not manage to incorporate these tributary investigations, it is worth signaling what they are, in order to suggest where future research might go as a result of my exploration. I have described, for example, how aesthetic discussions have traditionally been carefully isolated from other areas of philosophical, social and political interest. This removal of aesthetics from wider interests has played a pivotal role in the maintenance of its claim to disembodied universality and disinterest. Discourses of marginality have started to recognize that when the actual embededness of aesthetic concerns in a network of interested issues is exposed, the exclusionary normative assumptions of aesthetic theory become obvious. The disability theorist and the aesthetician have both set about unearthing these connections in recent times. This project could be extended into an investigation of the most practical

means through which theorists from these fields might further pool their efforts to establish exactly what the sighted might learn from the type of aesthetic concerns outlined throughout this project.

The association of beauty with vision is very much a western phenomenon. This investigation into an aesthetics of blindness might also be extended into an exploration of the type of non-visual sites of vision which are cherished by other cultures. Such an exploration would put the limitations of inflexibly ocularcentric ideals of beauty into an even wider context. David Howes has edited a collection of essays by anthropologists who describe the various ways in which culture is both modelled by the senses and and is itself a direct manifestation of the emphasis placed within it on particular modalities of perception. Among Howes' primary objectives is to assess the influence exercised on forms of social organisation by the hierarchical arrangements of the senses within a given culture. He is also eager to gauge the effect of the prioritising of particular senses on an individual's conception of self, and of his/her relation to the world, as considered from social, emotional and intellectual perspectives. Each of the collected essays represents an attempt to generate an awareness of the restrictions implicit in our general dependence on visibility for our aesthetic experiences of the world. The collection in its entirety suggests various cultural models of non-visual aesthetic appreciation which put the aesthetic experiences described throughout this project in an interesting perspective. It is also suggestive of ways in which we in the west might liberate ourselves from the hegemony which vision has traditionally exercised over our aesthetic principles.

In an essay that was written collaboratively by Howes and Constance Classen, for example, we are told about cultures in which the experience of beauty entails the exercising of a variety of senses. For the Shipibo-Conibo of Eastern Peru, for instance, the term 'quiquin', which actually means both 'aesthetic' and 'appropriate', is used to denote an aesthetic experience which can involve auditory, olfactory, or visual sensations.[19] In many of the cultures described by Howes and Classen art is "used rather than viewed", and manifests a dynamic conception of beauty as opposed to our more static ideal. Howes and Classen select Navajo sand paintings, and the photographs taken of them by visiting tourists, to illustrate how inappropriate our fascination with the visual can be. When the tourist arrives home and develops his photographs, he actually has in

his possession a depiction of sand paintings from a perspective which is completely alien to to the Navajo themselves. The Navajo do not "view" paintings. They situate themselves within them. In this way, "...while outside observers see the sand paintings as visual objects, for thr Navajo their tactile dimension is, in fact, more important."[20] In another of the collected essays Ian Ritchie illustrates the impact on the cultural aesthetic of what he terms the "gustatory bias to Hausa thought."[21] The distanced, disinterested perspective so privileged within western aesthetic contemplation holds little sway within the aesthetics described throughout Howes' collection of essays. The participation and engagement which Howes details might be interestingly compared, for example, with the elements of Molly Sweeney's swim and the intimate relationship of Martin and Mary Doul to their environment.

Howes' anthropological research represents yet another aspect of the overlapping differential concerns of the aesthetician and the disability theorist in the postmodern world. In my introduction and opening chapter I briefly described how the increasing openness of contemporary art to perspectives which deviate from the historically dominant visual aesthetic manifests itself in an overt hostility to the legacy of foundational aesthetic theory which reduces the experience to certain essential components. The postmodern complaint is that the museum and the corresponding "museumizing imagination" "fixes the art object independently of its original site and turns it into a sight."[22] Herwitz describes the conventional aesthetic process through which an object is regarded independently of its "enmeshment in the stream of life" and redefined through its "artificial placement in the visual space and narrative arrangement." He also relates a characteristic postmodern criticism of how eighteenth century aesthetic discourses

> helped to legitimate the transposition of art from specific cultural context to museum, and the sedimentation of the museumizing gaze, a gaze now believed to be "aesthetic" because it is abstracted from particular interests, desires, beliefs, and forms of cultural life.[23]

Martin Jay describes how the same distrust of distanced perspectives began to infiltrate critical and cultural theory throughout the latter part of the last century. Many of the critics he considers are critical of the ocularcentric viewpoint, and the eye in general, "for its supposed disincarnated coldness, which they contrast to the more proximate pleasures provided by other sense organs."[24]

Steven Feld's essay in Howes' volume offers a particularly relevant bearing on the anthropological significance of this aspect of the postmodern aesthetic. Feld explains how percussion of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea is one of their primary forms of communication. These drums frequently find their way into western museums where the acoustic patterns so vital to the Kaluli are eagerly reduced to their visual source.[25] The drum in a glass case in a museum becomes an object of visual admiration. We celebrate the robustness of its form, the intricacy of its carving, and the glittering cheerfulness of its colour patterns in a scrupulously maintained silence, expulsion from the museum being the inevitable consequence of its ever being sounded. Daniel Herwitz suggests another connection between the type of aesthetic experience described throughout this study and the postmodern dismantling of earlier aesthetic principles when he describes how aesthetic theorists have begun to stress the diversity of art objects, the "contextual nature of artistic construction and definition", together with the general "role of art in the stream of life"[26] It is through a common concern for the type of difference addressed by Howes, and through the common suspicion of historically unqueried universalizing metanarratives that the fields of cultural anthropology, postmodernist aesthetics and disability studies are beginning to find common ground.

This study of the interelationships between drama, aesthetics, and personal experience also supports a more isolated investigation into the different levels at which the concept of distance is relevant to each of these areas. I have suggested that the application of aesthetic theory to the field of disability studies prompts an immediate rethinking of historically persistent assumptions of the necessarily universal standards of aesthetic appraisal. Of these allegedly universal criteria, the concept of aesthetic distance, considered under a variety of guises, has been paramount throughout these chapters. Distance, in the psychical sense of the term, is an important aspect of the experience of the audience attending these plays. Distance, or its conspicuous absence, is an important

factor in the relation of the blind to the sites of beauty they encounter. The distance between these imaginative dramatic representations and the actual experience of blindness has also been a recurring concern, as has the question of the distance between the respective playwrights and the condition they are exploring.

Edward Bullough's warnings about the dangers of under-distancing are pertinent in relation to the sense of engagement which is a feature of many of the aesthetic experiences described throughout these chapters. The sensuous joy afforded by Molly's swim, and the ambiguity of the distinction between Martin Doul's aesthetic sensibility and his tendency towards crudely disguised lechery arguably bring both characters dangerously near the limits of what we might term 'aesthetic propriety'. The same approach to aesthetics that announces that only a select few passengers will, in Bullough's famous example, appreciate the beauty of the fog in the presence of imminent danger it represents, will claim that when the material existence of the body is a conspicuous factor in the experience of beauty, it takes an acute aesthetic sensitivity to respond appropriately. Yeats's depiction is exceptional in this respect also. As though testing the limits of 'aesthetic propriety' from an opposing aspect, his play is representative of the dangers of over-distancing. "An excess of Distance", Bullough cautions, "produces the impression of improbability, artificiality, emptiness or absurdity."[27] The abstract and metaphorical nature of Yeats's Blind Man makes it appear as though Yeats is trying to present us with an allegorical 'Every(blind)man play', rather than describe any particular features of the experience of a blind individual. Friel's extensive research into the experience of the condition he portrays, by contrast, makes it appear as though he is exploring ways to close the distance between representation and reality.

The role of psychical distance in aesthetic experience has a wider significance in the broader context of the interdisciplinary scope of this study. The attaining of psychical distance involves a shifting of attention from one aspect of what is before one -- its practical significance -- to another aspect -- its aesthetic value. The general lack of emphasis on formally prescribed art objects in the aesthetics of blindness that has been emerging throughout this study helps to put the notion of psychical distance in a new light. The 'daredevil aesthetics' of Kuusisto is an obvious case in point. He repeatedly

finds himself in perilous situations and is invariably struck more forcibly by their aesthetic features than the danger they represent. Inherent in the aesthetic experience of cycling through a motorway intersection, for example, is the (very real) possibility that it might have been experienced from a more practical perspective. Such non-aesthetic possibility is central to the adoption of psychical distance. It helps to account for what one feels as the 'unlikeliness' of Kuusisto's deriving of aesthetic pleasure from life-threatening situations. Though Bullough's thesis does seem pertinent to the aesthetic experience of the blind, the infrequency with which formal artworks are a component of their aesthetic experience asks certain questions of the relevance of the phenomenon to the more formal aesthetic experience of the sighted.

The aesthetic component of the experience of art does not appear to be a matter of choice in any obvious way. When one visits a gallery, for example, one is escaping into a world which is presented in a patently aesthetic way. The aspect of choice is taken away from the subject. One does not have to distance oneself from the practical side of things because the act of distancing is incorporated in the artist's expression and the choice of formal location. Two different aspects of the object are not competing for the observer's attention, except to the extent that an artwork can be said to afford different aesthetic interpretations. The formal qualities of an artwork immediately contribute a distancing effect. Their formal design isolates them from the contingencies and uncertainties of our actual experience. It is often the distance between a work of art and reality that is responsible for the production of an aesthetically satisfying effect. We enjoy the contemplation of artefacts and performances that are, and yet are not, like 'the real thing'. The distanced perspective of the aesthetic beholder is largely responsible for this aspect of the peculiar aspect of the charm of the aesthetic experience. Lack of distance is often held to preclude aesthetic experience. John Hull's experience of the seemingly unceasing English rain, Martin and Mary Doul's vaguely synaesthetic immersion in the auditory and olfactory panorama of their surroundings, and Molly Sweeney's exhilaration while swimming prove exceptions to the 'distancing' rule. This aspect of the obvious connections between the aesthetic experience of the blind and the aesthetics of nature rather than art might be explored in many interesting ways. An investigation into

instances of the appreciation by the blind of works of art, for example, would have to be conducted along very different lines of enquiry to those followed throughout this one.

Finally, a particular aspect of the relationship between the aesthetics outlined throughout these chapters and the type of anti-ocular theory they were initially contrasted with deserves a more considered treatment than I have allocated it. Recent anti-ocular theory is often implicated in the disparagement of Cartesian perspectivalism and taken to contribute to a general postmodern suspicion towards the modern project of Enlightenment. In Chapter Four I hinted that Friel's approach to beauty appears to be at odds with the general distrust of sensory perception which is a feature of many investigations into blindness, without exploring the contradiction in any great detail. Both Molly Sweeney and The Well of the Saints appear to confine aesthetic relevance to whatever makes itself known to the senses of an individual. They both suggest that beauty taken on faith rather than through direct experience does not constitute aesthetic awareness in any meaningful sense of the term. The particular connections between rationality and sensory credulity, and between proponents of non-visual aesthetic awareness and the various forms of increasingly prevalent anti-Enlightenment and anti-ocular theory needs to be investigated at greater length.

Studies such as this one illustrate the need to take stock of the exclusionary nature of our universalizing principles and to reimagine the aesthetic. Of all of the directions I could imagine this project assuming in the future, the direction I am most anxious to explore is its actual relevance to the experience of the blind. I want to discover exactly how, if at all, a study like this one might be placed at the service of organisations which deal with the blind. The critical feedback that is of most interest to me is that which only the blind could possibly provide. It is my hope that this project might command a comprehensive corrective appendix. It awaits the involvement of the blind for completion. I am very interested to know, for example, what blind people would make of my untried verdict that Synge's portrayal is more reflective of their experience than Yeats's. If my attempts to yield the platform to the blind at the culmination of my project actually serves only to compound the voicelessness of their marginalized position within the aesthetic realm, I would like to discover whether there is a way that I could begin to repair the damage I have inflicted and to redress the problematic nature of embracing

differentiality in a more productive way. I can imagine being told that there is far too much emphasis throughout these chapters on aesthetic receptivity, and not nearly enough on creativity. I am very conscious of this failing, and would like to encourage the blind to channel their criticism of my inevitable ocularcentrism in a creative way that exploits the enviable spectrum of aesthetic resources that, not being distanced from them by vision, they have at their disposal.

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[1] For a more detailed account of ecphrasis, see John Hollander, 'Ecphrasis', Michael Kelly, ed., Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, Volume 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 86-89.

[2] D. Mitchell, and S. Snyder, eds., The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1997) p. 17.

[3] Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare, eds., Disability/Postmodernity. Embodying disability theory (London: Continuum, 2002) p. 7.

[4] Anita Silvers, 'The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Disability, Ideology, and the Aesthetic', Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare, eds., Disability/Postmodernity. Embodying disability theory (London: Continuum, 2002) p. 242, p. 229.

[5] Ibid., p. 230.

[6] Ibid., p. 238.

[7] Ibid., p. 239.

[8] Ibid., p. 241.

[9] Richard Stayton French, From Homer to Helen Keller (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1932), Hector Chevigny, My Eyes Have a Cold Nose (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press 1946) p. 81., Michael Monbeck, The Meaning of Blindness (London: Indiana University Press, 1973) p. 2.

[10] Referred to by Monbeck, The Meaning of Blindness, p. 2.

[11] My Eyes Have A Cold Nose, p. 77.

[12] Morton A. Bertin, 'A Comparison of Attitudes Toward Blindness', International Journal for the Education of the Blind, 9, 1-4 (1959), p. 3.

[13] Eleftheria A. Bernidaki Aldous, Blindness in a Culture of Light: Especially the Case of Oedipus at Colonus of Sophocles (New York: Peter Lang, 1990) p. 57.

[14] Hector Chevigny and Sydell Braverman, The Adjustment of the Blind (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1950) pp. 64-65.

[15] Marie Hildegarde Mahoney, 'The Blind Man in Greek Legend and Literature', diss., Fordham University, New York, 1940, p. 119.

[16] The Meaning of Blindness, p. 111.

[17] Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan, Sight Unseen, 1st publ. by Oxford University Press as On Blindness, 1995 (London: Phoenix, 1998) p. 9.

[18] David Lowenthal makes a similar point in The Past is a Foreign Country (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 43, p. 70.

[19] David Howes and Constance Classen, 'Sounding Sensory Profiles', David Howes, ed., The Varieties of Sensory Experience. A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses (London: University of Toronto Press, 1991) p. 264.

[20] Ibid., p. 265.

[21] Ian Ritchie, 'Fusion of the Faculties: A Study of the Language of the Senses in Hausaland', David Howes, ed., The Varieties of Sensory Experience, p. 197.

[22] Daniel Herwitz, 'Postmodernism and the Classical Concepts of Aesthetics', Michael Kelly, ed., Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, Volume 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 62.

[23] Daniel Herwitz, 'Postmodernism and the Classical Concepts of Aesthetics', Michael Kelly, ed., Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, Volume 4, p. 62.

[24] Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (London: University of California Press, 1994) p. 590.

[25] Stephen Feld, 'Sound as a Symbolic System: The Kaluli Drum', David Howes, ed., The Varieties of Sensory Experience. A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses, p. 79.

[26] Ibid., p. 62.

[27] Edward Bullough, 'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and Aesthetic Principle',British Journal of Psychology, vol. V (1912), p. 94.

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