Studies in Ontology in Twentieth Century Literature

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By

Doris Enright-Clark Shoukri

Edited by Leslie Croxford
and Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado

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FOR MY HUSBAND
In Loving Memory
AND FOR MY SONS,
KAMAL AND KARIM
With Much Love

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is twofold: first to enable me to call attention, in literary works written in the twentieth century, to a focus upon man's 'being-in-this-world' with its concomitant recourse to autobiographical fiction; secondly to provide for former students and colleagues, at their repeated requests, a work in which my essays and lectures on this subject, written throughout the years, might be brought together. Six of these essays have already been published in journals and the others were presented as lectures throughout my teaching career at the American University in Cairo. My work might best be described as representing ongoing formal and informal discussions and conversations with my colleagues and students.

It might be well to indicate briefly the circumstances which dictated that I undertake these studies in Cairo, so distant in place and mood to where the works discussed were written.

Two years before coming to Cairo, in 1953, I had been granted a Ph.D. in Medieval Studies from Bryn Mawr College. My thesis, directed and supervised in Cambridge University for two years, was to provide a study of the *Liber Aplogeticus*, its sources and its relation to contemporary dramatic literature, and to make available to the student of the medieval English drama the hitherto unpublished text of the earliest academic play extant in English. Its author, Thomas Chandler, while familiar to students of the Wykehamist foundations, or of fifteenth century Oxford, is virtually unknown to literary scholars. Upon completing my degree I accepted a teaching position as Assistant Professor at Adelphi University (then Adelphi College) in New York.

In 1955, I married an Egyptian physician then visiting the USA: Shortly after, I accompanied my husband to Washington and Geneva, before returning to his post in Egypt as Assistant Professor of Gynecology at Ain Shams University in Cairo. There, I found myself immersed in a polyglot society maintaining an unusual balance between intellectual sophistication and conservative tradition.

I was soon invited by the American University in Cairo to accept a position as Chairman of the Humanities Division. Knowing nothing of administration, this was far removed from what my years of study had prepared me to do.

I found the greatest advantage of AUC was that I was able to capitalize on the magnetic pull Cairo had long exerted upon English, American, and European literary figures, and invite some of the most distinguished writers of that period to speak at the University. They included, for example, Robert Lowell, Robert Penn Warren, Marguerite Duras, Angelica Garnett, Quentin Bell, Angus Wilson, Natalie Sarraute, John Cheever, John Updike, John Fowles, Desmond O'Grady and William Styron.

Over the course of the years which followed, owing to my changed circumstances, I abandoned Medieval Studies for Modern Literature, and was able to share the appropriate sections of my writings on ontological concerns with Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Angus Wilson, and John Cheever, each of whom urged me to publish. Germaine Bree, perhaps the best known biographer of modern French literary figures, agreed to give a six week course on the contemporary philosophers, Sartre and Camus, and was the first to recommend for publication my article, 'The Nature of Being in Woolf and Duras,' in *Contemporary Literature*, University of Wisconsin, of which she was then Editor.

As to the teaching, I looked forward to the one course I was to teach. 'Anything modern,' they specified. I chose 'The Novel at the Turn of the Century', which allowed me to read up on a field which I had pursued with guilty pleasure as a respite from my 'real' work on medieval studies.

As an avid reader of novels from an early age, I had accepted the concept of the novel as 'a prose narrative of events experienced by leading characters, heroic in stature, whose personalities provide sufficient causes and analyses of their actions.' The 'story' is what E. M. Forster described as 'a narration of events arranged in their sequence, whose only merit was that of making the reader want to know what happens next.' He described it as 'the lowest and simplest of literary organisms known as novels.' [1]

These were the novels at the height of their development, great works with protagonists who have entered literary history, never to be forgotten, and with stories which commanded the readers' interest and excitement, oft times for over three hundred pages. But at the turn of the (twentieth) century the fictional world had developed as it was bound to do, and was based on wholly different concepts.

The world in which I reveled, and hoped to reveal to my students, was no longer concerned unduly with the psychology of its leading characters, caught up, as with plot, in a cause and effect approach, but instead focused upon the 'being-in-this-world' of its personages, who almost invariably

[1] Forster, E.M., *Aspects of the Novel*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1927, 34.

were autobiographical. As in the morality plays, so much a part of my literary studies, which purported to describe 'the whole state of human existence,' the modern novel concerned itself with man's meaning in his relation to the universal rather than with his place in the cultural world.

The modern novelist concerns himself with the nature of man's existence in this world. He does not so much attempt to 'create' a protagonist as to study himself as a creature of this world through whom he can learn intimately about human existence. Not, Ionesco protested, as a form of solipsism, but with a conviction that Everyman is a universe within and 'everyone's universe is a universal part of the heritage of his ancestors, a very ancient deposit to which all mankind can lay claim.' [2]

It was while reading Gertrude Stein's *Melanctha* that I identified my interest as ontological, a word I had only encountered in philosophy. [3] Stein wrote that in portraying Melanctha she wished to describe her 'being-in-this-world,' not her psychology, nor the sociological conditions that had influenced her. Indeed she studiously avoided reference to the effect upon her of being a black girl in a white society. *Melanctha* is the study of a young girl, unique in her being, impervious to outside influences. As Sunderland points out, 'She was determined to express "the essential being, the final mode of existence in people as a thing in itself."' [4]

Very much in the Whitehead tradition, Stein's belief was that every person is unique and brings to each day and each place her own subjectivity which is what determines the course of her life. In this respect Stein's perception of human existence would, in itself, alienate her as a novelist from writing a traditional novel in which the characters are very much products of the world in which they live. What the reader apprehends as he reads on in *Melanctha* is the being of her person as she encounters life.

Stein said she was interested 'in the human mind, not in human nature.' [5] She agreed with Hugo Munsterberg with whom she was a student at Harvard, that 'simple faith in reason or emotion as bases for writing [was] no longer possible.' [6] The consciousness of her characters was her focus, consciousness as defined by William James, another of her Harvard professors, as 'a passing thought, a momentary section of the

[2] See Chapter 4, Ionesco and Every Man's Being in this World, herein, 85.
[3] Sutherland, Donald, *Gertrude Stein, A Biography of Her Work*, Yale University Press, New Haven , Connecticut, 1951, 4. = *GSBW*. I am reliant upon Sutherland for all discussion of the scientific basis of Stein's beliefs.
[4] *GSBW*, 57.
[5] *GSBW*, 55.
[6] *GSBW*, 4.

stream of consciousness, equivalent to awareness or attention.' [7] He accepted no thought, nor thinker, only thinking. [8]

Stein presents her characters as 'ways of thinking.' [9] Sutherland describes her as 'determined to express the essential being, the final 'mode of existence' in people, as a thing in itself, the entire self being present in every moment in what she called 'a continuous present.' [10]

'Ways of being' she characterized as differences in tempo, in the rhythm of lives. She spoke of the 'rhythm of personality.' The book becomes, as Sutherland describes it, 'a dramatic trajectory of a passion - a duel or a duet' [11] It is a story of two subjectivities who, despite their love for each other, cannot merge their lives. Melanctha is fast, Jeff is slow. The rhythms of their lives, their 'individualities,' according to Stein, were wholly incompatible.

In the years that followed great novels and plays appeared and I read them, those of Gide, Joyce, and Woolf - very different from Stein and from each other, but with a shared interest in a set of ontological questions and considerations. These great novelists were remaking the novel as a genre. It was becoming like poetry, a search for truth. Indeed it became the vehicle for poetic expression throughout the century. I endeavor in the following essays to present an account of some few of the creative efforts of these artists to reflect the literary preoccupations of their times.

[7] *GSBW*, 4.
[8] *GSBW*, 6.
[9] *GSBW*, 6.
[10] *GSBW*, 56-57
[11] *GSBW*, 45.

Nathalie Sarraute Doris Enright-Clark Shoukri

ONTOLOGICAL CONCERNS IN 20TH CENTURY WRITERS: WOOLF, ELIOT, KAFKA, BECKETT, IONESCO, AND DURAS

Thematic concern with the nature of being is a characteristic feature of 20th century literature. There is a shift in emphasis in the writing of this century from an interest in man's psychology and social behavior to a preoccupation with his 'being-living.' One result, or indication, of this concern with ontology has been the appearance of generic man or Everyman once again in the forefront. The characters in the works of Kafka, Beckett, Ionesco, or Duras provide sufficient examples.

Obviously, to focus upon Everyman in the 20th century is to do so 'with a difference.' [1] Unlike his medieval forebear, the modern Everyman is undefined and his being-in-this-world unchartered. There is no angel of the lord to dispel the nostalgia of being for non-being in Beckett, to incarnate the word for Gogo, nor can Klamm do much to show K the way. K and Malone-Malloy, and Ionesco's Berenger, and the maid and salesman in *The Square* are Everyman nonetheless, and the burden of concern throughout the works they inhabit is with what it is 'to be' Everyman in this world.

To point to man's being-in-this-world as a major preoccupation of the writing of this century might seem a work of supererogation; the Existentialist [2] hero of contemporary drama and fiction has been so much discussed, admired and appreciated in literary circles. However, apart from the commentary on specifically existential themes, which abounds, curiously little has been said of the 20th century's broader concern with ontology, its thematic preoccupation with questions of being, not with the *parti pris* [3] presentations of the existential plight.

And yet Everyman in the literature of our century is not always cast as existential hero, a god-without-attribute, with seven days of a life and its

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[1] Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Act 4, Scene 5: 'Oh you must wear your rue with a difference.'
[2] See Glossary: Existentialist.
[3] See Glossary: *parti pris*.

essence to breathe into it. He appears in a climate of less heady excitement to ask: What is being-in-this-world? and Why is it?

When Gertrude Stein ushered in the 20th century, she did not believe that 'existence precedes essence,' [4] nor profess what came later to be the Sartrean faith. And·Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot and Franz Kafka, great masters of our century, and latterly Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Marguerite Duras were not Existentialists, but they were nonetheless concerned throughout their works with ontological issues. I should like here to discuss their broader interest in ontology and to identify recurrent ontological themes throughout their works.

Somewhere 'In or about December, 1910, human character changed' [5] *ipsa dixit*. [6] Virginia Woolf's pronouncement serves to start with. She had been banished by Mr. Bennett from the realm of 'novelists of first-rate importance' because of an inability 'to create characters that are real, true and convincing.' And in her now famous reply, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,' [7] she challenges not only Bennett's critical acumen but raises the question basic to his critical values: 'What' she asks 'is reality? And who are the judges of reality?' [8] Only if these questions are answered, she insists, can we 'make out what we mean when we talk about character in fiction.' [9] And in an essay on 'Modern Fiction' [10] she elaborates her views in open rebellion against the constraint upon the novelist 'to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest,' and characters 'dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour.' 'Is life like this?' she asks, 'Must novels be like this?' And she urges the reader, before responding, to 'examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day' and he will find that 'Life is not a series of gig-lamps

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[4] Sartre, J.-P., *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, Les Éditions Nagel, 7, Paris, 17e, 1970 [1946] = *JPS:E=H* « *L'existence précède l'essence.* » (First spoken in a lecture delivered in 1945. The lecture was delivered on Monday, October 29, 1945, although not published until 1946. 'Existentialism is a Humanism.' trans. Carol Macomber, preface by Arlene Elkaïm-Sartre, ed. John Kulka (New Haven: Yale, 2007), p. vii.)

[5] Woolf, Virginia, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,' *Collected Essays, I* , The Hogarth Press, London, 1966-68, 320 = *VWMB2*.

[6] 'She said so herself.' (Author's own comment, not a quote.) See Glossary: *ipsa dixit*.

[7] *VWMB2*, 319.

[8] *VWMB2*, 325.

[9] *VWMB2*, 319.

[10] Woolf, Virginia, 'Modern Fiction', *Collected Essays, II*, The Hogarth Press, London, 1966-68, 106 = *VWMF*.

symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.'

In a later work published recently online, 'A Sketch of the Past,' [11] she describes certain events in her childhood as moments of being, moments that were evidence of 'some real thing behind appearances,' and states that it is the capacity to grasp reality in such moments which makes a writer. [12] Virginia Woolf may or may not have been right about human character having changed, but she certainly bespoke the artist's approach to character in the literature of this century. Bennett's 'real characters,' the Becky Sharps and Emmas, and Gradgrinds, Maggie Tullivers, and Eleanor Dashwoods of old, with their closely observed psychologies and satisfactorily consistent histories and behavior, were to disappear, as artists like Virginia Woolf, with Faustian excitement, rejected man as object, and sought more and more to surprise reality *in statu* [13] and create a genre capable of bearing 'immaculate' their ineffable vision. They sought to mediate through the word the heretofore unexpressed, perhaps inexpressible, essence of human experience.

It starts with the Impressionists, the change in approach to character, and is at first no more than a change in technique, in perspective, a new way to do more or less the same thing, to present people, the others in their daily rounds. The shift of interest from epistemological to ontological is only gradually perceived by the Impressionists themselves. Professor Mizener in *The Saddest Story* has noted this gradual shift, in relation to the works of Ford Maddox Ford, who wrote an essay on 'Impressionism' and labelled himself, James, Conrad and Crane, 'Impressionist writers.' Ford, he notes, aimed at first 'to fix the reader's attention on the impression rather than the narrator,' in a '*progression d'effet*' [14] and slowly to intensify 'the reader's impressions to a climax of his involvement in the feelings of the narrator.' Eventually however, he shifted interest from how to please the reader and keep his attention, to 'how to represent a person perceiving a set of events.' [15]

The mind of the narrator, in other words, not what he narrates, becomes the focus of interest. And since Ford is himself identified with

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[11] Woolf, Virginia, 'A Sketch of the Past', 5:
http://www.woolfonline.com/timepasses/?q=image/tid/123

[12] Schulkind, Jeanne, ed., *Moments of Being*, The University Press, Sussex, 1976, 72.

[13] 'in (a) state.' See Glossary: *in statu*.

[14] 'progression of effect.' See Glossary: *progression d'effet*.

[15] Mizener, Arthur, *The Saddest Story*, The World Publishing Company, New York, 1971, 255-57.

the narrator, the focus shifts from the other to the self, from the observed behavior of the other, to the mind perceiving that behavior, until ultimately, as Ford writes, 'Impressionism is a frank expression of personality. The Impressionist author is sedulous to avoid letting his personality appear in the course of his book. On the other hand, his whole book, his whole poem is merely as expression of his personality.'

'The nominal subject' is, as Mizener notes, 'only an objective correlative.' Impressionism as thus described is transitional. The author still feels obliged to endow the objective correlative, the nominal subject, with a personality and a·history, to make of him something resembling a traditional character. The protagonist is midway between Becky Sharp and K. He is similar to but more factitious than Stephen Dedalus or Michel of *The lmmoralist*, the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman*. [16] There is some way to go to Beckett's Unnamable divested of all personality and history, but the path was laid.

In like manner, at about the same time Ford was writing, the phenomenologists start out with an interest primarily in methodology and make way eventually for Heidegger's ontological work and Sartre's Existentialism. [17] Just as Virginia Woolf refused to meet Bennett on his own ground but shifted the focus of the question to a consideration of the nature of reality, Husserl, objecting to 19th century Idealism and the psychologism it led to, started out by rejecting not this or that argument but the basic premises upon which the philosophy he had inherited was based. Epistemology, he declared, was 'a needlessly invented complication.' [18] He sought a methodology to examine reality but had first to reaffirm what he felt that reality to be. Hence his pronouncements on the nature of reality which bore fruit in a long progeny of ontological and existential studies long after his methodology was any longer seriously considered.

Professor Knight, [19] in his *Literature Considered as Philosophy*, has very ably sketched the career of Husserl and its relation to the philosophical climate in which it took place. Husserl, he notes, began by attacking both psychologism and science and in doing so felt he was attacking one and the same thing. Both had sprung from the dualism between subject and object which starts with Galileo and Descartes. These men had started the process by which the exterior world divested of all

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[16] Novel of Education. See Glossary: *Bildungsroman*.
[17] See Glossary: Existentialism.
[18] Knight, Everett W., *Literature Considered As Philosophy: The French Example*, Collier Books, New York, 1962, 22 = *LCPFE*.
[19]. *LCPFE*, Chapter I.

qualities except extension gradually became, with Kant, the thing-in-itself unknowable to man's mind.

Descartes, by his distrust of the senses and dependence upon the mind, had opened the way to the subjectivism of the Idealists and to the psychologism of the late 19th century, and Galileo had made of the world of objects a 'vast autonomous realm' awaiting discovery and explanation by men of science. Philosophers no longer asked, as Whitehead remarked, 'What have we experienced' but 'what can we experience?' 'what can we know?' [20] How can we distinguish between appearance and reality? The dualisms between knower and known, between the world as perceived and the world that is, between act and potential were taken for granted in both philosophic and scientific circles.

As Knight points out, [21] the old idea '*Adaequatio rei et intellectus*' [22] disappeared. If, as Kant observed, Nature 'is not a given framework in which man has his place' but a construction of his making dependent upon the modes of his apprehension, then a 'relativism haunts all knowledge' - each man's truth being dependent upon his vision. [23]

In such an intellectual world, history and anthropology flourish and ontology and metaphysics perish. Psychologism prevails; 'all intellectual pursuits, since they involve the mind, are based in the last analysis upon psychology.' [24] Husserl begins therefore by pronouncing against the scientists' assumption that 'nature contains deep within her a principle of order which is to be reached by a constant process of simplification called analysis.' [25] He reversed Descartes' substitution of the mind for the senses as man's way of experiencing the world. The world, he said, is not 'what I think but what I live.' [26] Appearances are reality. Reality is 'the stuff of life.' We encounter the thing-in-itself as we being-live. Truth is not arrived at. Merleau-Ponty adds: 'We need to know what we are looking for otherwise we should not be looking for it.' [27] Consciousness of man's mind, he notes, is not above matter contemplating it to discern what is appearance and what reality. Things are exactly what they appear. The

[20] *LCPFE*, 28.
[21] *LCPFE*, 22.
[22] 'correspondence of thought to thing.' See Glossary: *adaequatio rei et intellectus*
[23] Sokel, Walter H., *The Writer in Extremis*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1959, 9.
[24] *LCPFE*, 32.
[25] *LCPFE*, 40.
[26] *LCPFE*, 39.
[27] *LCPFE*, 33.

question therefore shifts from 'whether the object we know is being' to what is the nature of that being. [28]

Man is not above, but as Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'He is immersed in the world about him as a body is immersed to a liquid.' [29] Consciousness is not above. It is not material. As Sartre said, 'It has no within.' [30] It is an act, an intention, a turning toward. Mind is not separate from the world, contemplating, apart, but the way in which things exist. There is no dualism between the knower and the known. We know the world by living in it and encountering it. We live in a world of particulars. Existence is 'intercourse with the particular.' [31] Abstraction removes us from reality. We know reality, therefore, not through generalization and abstraction but by intuiting its image, by what Whitehead will call prehension, a grasping. We encounter an inexhaustible universe, we bracket off the entirety and grasp the immediate or particular directly. As Sartre later said, 'a lemon is not first yellow, then lemon, the yellowness of the lemon is the lemon.' [32] A brown table is not brown and table, it is brown table. [33] Analysis distorts and distances. Objects are their appearances, not an aggregate of them.

If we pause here for a moment, we might examine the literary implications of this phenomenological approach.

First and most obviously, Husserl's description of eidetic intuition comes very close to Kant's definition of the aesthetic emotion and aesthetic attribute and is, of course, familiar ground to all poets of all times. The poet's approach to reality has always dealt with the particular as encountered and not with the idea as abstracted or thought. The new thing in Husserl is that this poetic methodology is being applied to all perception and learning and not confined to aesthetic or poetic apprehension.

The second implication concerns the placing of the perceiving mind or subject within, not above or beyond, which confers a universality upon the individual and rescues from accusations of solipsism the artist absorbed in his own subjectivity.

Sartre [34] will later make a distinction 'between the individual consciousness in its purity-and psychic qualities,' i.e. 'what is ordinarily

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[28] *LCPFE*, 43.
[29] *LCPFE*, 45.
[30] *LCPFE*, 47.
[31] *LCPFE*, 51.
[32] *LCPFE*, 44.
[33] This example ultimately derives, as far back as one can document, from Aristotle's Metaphysics, e.g. VII, 4, 581, and VII, 12, 640-1.
[34] Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, The Citadel Press, Secaunus, New Jersey, 1977, XI.

thought of as personality.' If, in other words, the individual is conceived as a 'personality' apart and unique, self-absorption is indeed solipsism. But if the individual is 'immersed,' 'a part of,' then subjectivity is concerned with the universe within, with the universal in other words. Ionesco makes this very observation in *The Starting Point*. [35] He speaks of his own plays as 'projections of the universe that lies within' and going on to defend his preoccupations with himself, he adds: 'as the microcosm is to the macrocosm and each one of us is to all the others, it is in the deepest part of myself, of my anguish and of my dreams, it is in my solitude that I have the best chance of rediscovering the universal, the common ground.' And in *Fragments of a Journal*, [36] he writes 'Everyone's universe is universal.'

And dealing with the question of subjectivity, Eliot wrote: [37] 'Someone else may call my view of the world'subjective', a merely personal appendage of 'me.' I, however, cannot call it subjective, because to call it subjective would be to separate me from it; and my experience is inseparable from the conviction that the three things my interlocutor would separate - I, the objective world, and my feelings about it - are an indissoluble whole. It is only in social behavior ... that feelings and things are torn apart.'

Virginia Woolf, in *A Sketch of the Past*, [38] states in non-philosophic language a concept of herself and her being-in-this-world, which could have been written by Husserl or Merleau-Ponty, She describes certain moments of being in her life when she has felt she perceived reality whole and said to herself actually 'that's the whole,' and she attributes to this ability her pleasure in writing:

> Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we - I mean all human beings - are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare,

---

[35] Ionesco, Eugène 'Foreword', *Cahiers des Quatre Saisons*, No. I, Paris, 1955; Idem. *Plays*, translated by Watson, Donald, 1958; reprinted Calder and Boyars, London, 1963 = *EIPJC*.

[36] Ionesco, Eugène, Fragments of a *Journal*, translated by Stewart, Jean, Faber and Faber, London, 1968, 79 = *EIFJ*.

[37] Kenner, Hugh Bradley, *T. S. Eliot*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1962, 50. = *KTSE*.

[38] Woolf, Virginia, 'A Sketch of the Past', in *Moments of Being*, The University Press, Sussex, 1976.72-73.

> there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no god; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock.
>
> This interaction of mine, so instinctive that it seems given to me, not made by me proves that one's life is not confined to one's body and what one says or does. One is living all the time in relation to certain background rods or conceptions. Mine is that there is a pattern hid behind the cotton wool.

Virginia Woolf, here and elsewhere, particularly as we shall see in *The Waves*, expresses a view of man as described by Merleau-Ponty. In *Prospectus* he writes: [39]

> (In) the relationships which obtain between the perceiving organism and its milieu one clearly finds that they are not those of an automatic machine which needs an outside agent to·set off its pre-established mechanisms. And it is equally clear that one does not account for the facts by superimposing a pure, contemplative consciousness on a thing-like body. In the conditions of life - if not in the laboratory - the organism is less sensitive to certain isolated physical and chemical agents than to the constellation which they form and to the whole situation which they define. Behaviors reveal a sort of prospective activity in the organism, as if it were oriented toward the meaning of certain elementary situations, as if it entertained familiar relations with them, as if there were an 'a priori of the organism,' privileged conducts and laws of internal equilibrium which predisposed the organism to certain relations with its milieu.

The placing of the mind within and the insistence upon consciousness as act rendered meaningless the notion or image of mind as a container of impressions, and of the psyche as a vessel of experience. Gertrude Stein professed no interest in the psyche or in human nature, that is, in the characteristics meant to have accrued to man, man's psychology. Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, Ionesco denied all interest in personality.

Even in her private life, Virginia Woolf was to claim over and over again in her letters to have no inner life and to be at a loss to comprehend what was meant by it. Her rejection of psychoanalysis was undoubtedly based upon what she considered its treatment of the psyche as object - to be delved or rummaged about in, rather than, as she conceived herself, as a way of being, a mode of existing within the universe.

Nineteenth century 'creators of characters,' par excellence, saw themselves and hence others, as personalities with motives, psychologies,

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[39] Solomon, Robert C., ed., *Existentialism*, The Modern Library, New York, 1974, 251.

histories that could be well observed from outside, wrapped in cellophane and displayed or wound up and made to act like programmed mechanical toys. These characters persist only in the popular literature of the 20th century. As Kenner notes, [40] the concept of man as a lived body creates at the very turn of the century, even in the characters of dramatic monologues such as Eliot's, a totally new projection of the protagonist as 'a zone of consciousness,' not a personality.

Meanwhile, phenomenology provided the spring-board, as we stated earlier, for a spate of ontological studies. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, starts his ontological enquiry where, he feels, Husserl left off. 'What?' he asks, 'is being and why is it?' He starts with man as encountered, as an entity 'thrown into being' and knowing it darkly as a mode of his being. Like Husserl, he is not interested in behavior or psychology, nor in societal man. He states explicitly that neither anthropology, nor psychology, nor biology 'gives an unequivocal and ontologically adequate answer to the questions about the kind of being which belongs to those entities, which we ourselves are.' [41]

In *Being and Time* he sets out to radicalize the enquiry which Descartes began, by enquiring into primordial ontology. 'With the *cogito ergo sum*,' [42] he notes, [43] 'Descartes had claimed that he was putting philosophy on a new and firm footing. But what he left undetermined when he began in this 'radical' way, was the kind of being which belongs to the *res cogitans*, [44] or - more precisely - the meaning of the being of the 'sum.'' Subsequently Kant too 'altogether neglected the problem of being; and, in connection with this, he failed ... to give a preliminary ontological analytic of the subjectivity of the subject.' [45]

Sartre takes this up later in discussing the pre-reflexive *cogito*.

Heidegger proposed to offer this preliminary ontological analytic and he therefore began his investigation of being by examining the primordial nature of man.

This primordial nature, he declared, was to be found in man's present nature, in what he called *Dasein*, [46] 'the entity which each of us is

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[40] *KTSE*, 36.
[41] Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper and Row, New York: 1962, 75 = *MHBT*.
[42] 'I think therefore I am.' See Glossary: *cogito ergo sum*.
[43] *MHBT*, 46.
[44] 'thinking thing.' See Glossary: *res cogitans*.
[45] *MHBT*, 45.
[46] 'being there.' See Glossary: *Dasein*.

himself.' [47] He proposed to provide an ontology with *Dasein* as its theme. He therefore began his investigations with man as encountered in his everyday 'ordinariness' [48] in this world. This starting point was itself sufficient to align his thinking more with literature than with the abstractions of philosophy.

His impact upon writers can largely be attributed to his analyses of man's being-in-this-world and his descriptions of the anxiety and 'care' which characterize that being. Less obviously, his determined probing for the essence of man's existence also had its counterparts in the writings of his contemporaries. He begins with man in his ordinariness because man, as a mode of his being, has an ordinary understanding of that being. This understanding is constitutive of man's being and therefore primordial. His elaborations on the nature of *Dasein* are nothing if not Beckettian in their grasp of the complexity of the 'being' of man:

> *Dasein* is an entity which does not occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very being, that being is an issue for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of *Dasein*'s being, and this implies that *Dasein*, in its being, has a relationship towards that being - a relationship which itself is one of being. And this means further that there is some way in which *Dasein* understands itself in its being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its being, this being is disclosed to it. Understanding of being is itself a definite characteristic of *Dasein*'s being. *Dasein* is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological. [49]

It is in recognition of this unique plight of man that Beckett's *Unnamable*, a true Heideggerian 'shepherd of being,' [50] sheds such copious tears. Heidegger, less despairingly, concludes that 'the question of man's existence ... gets straightened out,.. through existing.' [51] The pre-ontological understanding of being which characterizes *Dasein* and 'leads along this way' he calls ‚*existentiell*' [52]. And thus 'existentiality' [53] is the state of being for the entity as it exists.

'Existentialism' he reserves for the analysis of the structure of that existence. Man's primordial knowledge does not require that these

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[47] *MHBT*, 27.
[48] See Glossary: ordinariness.
[49] *MHBT*, 32.
[50] See Glossary: shepherd of being.
[51] *MHBT*, 33.
[52] 'existential' See Glossary: *existentiell*; *MHBT*, 33.
[53] See Glossary: existentiality.

structures be transparent. However, to enquire into the nature of being which is opaque to his ordinary understanding is also a mode of man's being. Heidegger's enquiry was therefore, he insisted, 'nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-being which belongs to *Dasein* itself - the pre-ontological understanding of being.' [54] It was an attempt 'to be' as man is meant 'to be.'

With this definition of Existentialism in mind one might well, were it not for the confusion, label all the writers we shall be discussing Existentialists.

Heidegger felt that 'the central problematic of all ontology' was 'rooted in the phenomenon of time.' [55] He made a distinction which he believed to be crucial between the terms 'time' and 'temporality. Time he considered 'the horizon for the understanding of being,' [56] and temporality 'the meaning of the being of that entity which we call *Dasein*.' [57] Temporality is rooted in 'the being of *Dasein*.' [58] He wished to restore to time its autonomy and free it from the misconceptions of it which have sprung from temporality.

Among these misconceptions, he places traditional philosophy's pre-emption of the word temporal to refer to things 'in time' in distinction to 'supra-temporal' or eternal ideas or events. He considered such distinctions misleading in that they fail to take into account that the concepts behind them are themselves the product of man's temporality. Indeed, he goes on to declare that *Dasein* itself determines the very nature of the investigations into being and time.

To be truly radical therefore and to go beyond Descartes, one must examine the 'sum' in terms of what is primordially constitutive of *Dasein*. *Dasein*, like Heisenberg's most powerful instruments, in a sense determines what it sees. It is primordially 'historical' and therefore it 'historizes.' In a passage that offers interesting comparison with Eliot's contentions in *The Four Quartets* and 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' and flies in the face of the most basic tenets of Sartrean Existentialism, he offers a description of *Dasein*'s constitutive characteristic to historize:

> In its being, any *Dasein* is as it already was, and it is 'what' it already was. It is its past, whether explicitly or not. And this is so not only in that its past is, as it were, pushing itself along 'behind' it, and that *Dasein*

[54] *MHBT*, 35.
[55] *MHBT*, 40.
[56] *MHBT*, 39.
[57] *MHBT*, 38.
[58] *MHBT*, 39.

> possesses what is past as a property which is still present-at-hand which sometimes has after-effects upon it: *Dasein* 'is' its past in the way of its own being, which to put it roughly, 'historizes' out of its future on each occasion. Whatever the way of being it may have at the time, and thus with whatever understanding of being it may possess, *Dasein* has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself proximally and, within a certain range, constantly. By this understanding, the possibilities of its being are disclosed and regulated. Its own past - and this always means the past of its 'generation' - is not something which follows along after *Dasein*, but something which already goes ahead of it. [59]

In the light of this, he finds 'tradition' [60] and studies of tradition sometimes more hindrance than help in uncovering man's primordial nature, since as products of that nature they obscure its horizons and hence its being. Eliot's 'half look / Over the shoulder' [61] beyond tradition is what Heidegger was after.

Within a few years of the appearance of *Being and Time*, Whitehead's *Process and Reality* grappled with a similar set of problems, [62] Whitehead like Heidegger being unwilling to rest the case for ontology as either unknowable or irrelevant. Whitehead's work was less heralded in literary circles; it laid no stress upon the existential quest as a mode of man's being. But, it raises the question of identity vis-à-vis process and change and attempts to relate man's being to that of other entities and to the cosmos. In doing so, it aligns itself with the vast contemporary literature in search of man's identity and cosmic role.

As a basis for his work, Whitehead formulated two principles:

1) the ontological principle, 'Apart from things that are actual, there is nothing - nothing either in fact or in 'efficiency'; [63]
2) the principle of process, 'An Actual entity's being is constituted by its becoming.' [64]

With these principles he hoped to escape the ontological mystification of both the Platonic dualism of actualities and essences and the Cartesian one

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[59] *MHBT*, 41.
[60] See Glossary: tradition.
[61] *TSE4Q*, 'The Dry Salvages,' II.
[62] Whitehead, Alfred Lord, *Process and Reality*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1941 = *AWPR*.
[63] *AWPR*, 54.
[64] *AWPR*, 69.