Appendix A

The Concept of Emotion

In attempting to isolate a novelist's treatment of emotion for discussion we are confronted with this difficulty: that 'emotion' is a concept of uncertain application. Obviously, the difficulty must be met if the scope and limits of investigation are to be defined with any exactness; and, as I shall argue, the application established must have some general validity if the investigation is to have any point. This is so in spite of the fact that this is a controversial area of enquiry, and that as a result any conclusions reached may be taken as provisional.

The most obvious way of overcoming the difficulty - recourse to a dictionary - is of little use. The Concise Oxford, for example, defines emotion as: "Agitation of mind, feeling; excited mental state." and this, as it stands, is clearly inadequate. Not all emotion involves agitation or excitement - not if we include loneliness, or reverence, or depression, or boredom, among emotions - nor is it clear what is to count as a 'mental state' or 'feeling': not surprisingly, the definition of 'feeling' - in the only sense which concerns us - turns out to be "emotion".

More technical dictionaries are only slightly more useful. For example, the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology defines emotion as

> "a complex state of the organism, involving bodily changes of a widespread character - in breathing, pulse, gland secretion, etc. - and, on the mental side, a state of excitement or perturbation, marked by strong feeling, and usually an impulse towards a definite form of behaviour. If the emotion is intense there is some disturbance of the intellectual functions... " (1)

This definition at least isolates some of the typical features of emotion - physical reactions, impulses to behaviour - which I shall return to. But the detail of the definition is again unsatisfactory: 'feeling' needs some explanation (and why "strong feeling"?) especially since once again this word turns out to be defined in terms of "emotion" and "affect" (and affect is defined as "feeling or emotion"); the reference to "excitement or perturbation" again needs qualification; and it is far from clear how intense enthusiasm, for instance, or exhilaration, or a more general joie de vivre disturb intellectual functions. More to the point is the fact that the entire description is at least equally appropriate to a state of fever, and perhaps rather more appropriate, since it gives the emphasis of priority to "bodily changes".

The type of definition of emotion given in standard psychological textbooks turns out to be even less satisfactory: our difficulty is not met at all. Robert Plutchik lists twenty-four

1. Revised ed., (Harmondsworth, 1964)

"definitions of emotion" as an appendix to his work on the subject; they range from William James' of 1884 to Plutchik's own of 1962 and encompass a variety of psychological schools.[1] Each of these 'definitions' proves to be an explanation, and an explanation in terms of the psychologist's own preferred theory of psychological phenomena. No attempt is made to meet our first problem (which, on the face of it, should also be theirs): that a principle of demarcation needs to be established before investigation begins. Moreover, 'emotion' is a concept used outside technical discussions; it ought therefore to be possible to establish the role it plays in our thinking about the world without reference to any particular psychological theory. (The psychologist may then argue that our concept is of no use in his further investigations; this step is always open to him.)

At this point it may be objected that the difficulty we are trying to meet is of our own making; that we do not need to analyse the concept in general terms. All we need do, it may be said, is to discuss the specific emotions that novelists mention. Novelists, however, do not always name the emotions that their characters are supposed to be feeling; concerned as they naturally

1. The Emotions: Facts, Theories and a New Model (New York, 1962), pp. 173 - 6

are not simply to report experiences but to convey something of their feel and texture, they often prefer to say 'the time seemed to pass slowly' rather than state explicitly that a character is feeling impatient. And sometimes, again naturally enough, they describe feelings for which we _have_ no name, at least in English (see, for example, the conclusion of Chapter 5 of _The Professor_).[1]

Nor is it possible to deal with emotion in novels simply as a literary convention, a rhetorical function of the novel's verbal structure: fictitious emotion (feelings attributed to imaginary characters) is of exactly the same order, logically, as actual emotion (feelings attributed to historical characters). We may make special demands upon a novelist's treatment of emotion, looking for significant pattern, for instance, as well as psychological insight; but whatever idea we form of emotion in novels (that is, 'characters' emotion' - see Chapter 1) will be parasitic upon our idea of emotion in life.

Where then, in life, is the concept in order? Clearly, 'emotion' is not a primary concept, basic to our thought about the world; rather, in order to identify its application we have to be able to identify the application of two logically (or ontologically) prior concepts: 'experience' and 'consciousness'.

1. pp. 57 - 9

These notions are as hard to analyse satisfactorily as 'emotion'; but they are easy enough to pin down for our limited purposes. Consciousness, here, is the mode of existence we attribute to humans, animals, birds, fishes, and insects; when these lose this consciousness (the primary form) they cease to exist <u>as</u> humans, animals, or whatever (we speak of corpses.) It is a mode of existence we do not attribute to germs or plant life (with the possible exception of sea-anemones) although we think of them as 'living'. Whether we should attribute consciousness to them is, of course, irrelevant; the point to be taken is that to attribute emotion to something we need logically to attribute consciousness. If flowers feel, then they are conscious (in this first sense).[1]

Experience is the activity of consciousness: this is not to say that experience may not be itself passive; it is to make the point that, in our conceptual scheme, experience is consciousness <u>at work</u>, through time. We think of experience, in turn, as having distinct aspects, such as perception (and its different forms), or sensation, or emotion.

It is because 'experience' is a concept that experimental

1. It is important to note that 'consciousness' is not being used here of an entity, but of a mode of existence; and there may be concepts whose application we have to determine before we can identify consciousness (cf. P. F. Strawson: <u>Individuals</u>, (London, 1959), pp. 15-134 (Part I)). Nor are the other senses of the word 'consciousness' (yet) relevant.

psychologists find somehow unhappy that they have difficulties in defining emotion; and it is natural enough that extreme behaviourists, who do not recognize experience as a valid category (in science), should wish to deny the concept of emotion any application.[1]

It is important to note here that it is not only human experience that is in question. The application of 'emotion' may be identified without reference to the kind of complex reflective consciousness that we normally only attribute to humans; there are some emotions which imply reflective consciousness, such as nostalgia, admiration, or humility, but emotion itself does not. When we speak of birds as frightened or dogs as miserable we are not speaking figuratively, or in any way oddly.

What conditions have to be further satisfied, then, for us to attribute emotion to conscious beings? Confronted with this question, and the vast range of what we think of as emotion, we might take the line that "emotions have no essence",[2] or that there is no paradigm case of emotion,[3] but although these formulations remind us usefully that to attribute emotion is to ascribe love as well as surprise, disillusion as well as fear, wonder as well as envy, there may still

1. See, e.g., the articles by E. Duffy and D.O. Hebb in Magda B.Arnold (ed.): The Nature of Emotion, (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 129 - 54

2. C.A. Mace: 'Emotions and the Category of Passivity', Proceedings Aristotelian Soc.,n.s., lxii (1961-2), pp. 135 - 42

3. William P. Alston:'Emotion and Feeling' in Paul Edwards (ed.): Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (New York & London, 1967)

be some common denominator.

This seems to be in their character of 'intentionality' - a notion developed by Brentano and Husserl and invoked by Sartre.[1] 'Intentional' experiences are those which have objects, which involve apprehension of the world. The concepts 'object' and 'the world' may seem vague (and other difficulties involved in their use will soon emerge), but at the moment their vagueness is their strength.

Emotion, then, is a specific manner of apprehending the world (Sartre); to feel emotion is to see things in a certain light.[2] To feel disgust is to find something disgusting; to feel anger is to find something infuriating; and so on. Similarly, when in Villette Lucy Snowe reports

> "I had just extinguished my candle and lain down, when a deep, low, mighty tone swung through the night. At first I knew it not; but it was uttered twelve times, and at the twelfth colossal hum and trembling knell, I said - 'I lie in the shadow of St. Paul's.'" (3)

We can identify this as a description of emotion (and the emotion as awe) even though no specific reference to Lucy Snowe's feelings is made: something (namely the bells of St. Paul's).has been found awe-inspiring.

1. Jean-Paul Sartre: Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions, trans. Philip Mairet, (London, 1962). Its picture of emotion as essentially the 'behaviour of defeat' is seriously wrong; otherwise the best book on the topic. Cf., following Wittgenstein rather than the phenomenologists, Anthony Kenny: Action, Emotion and Will, (London, 1963)

2. Cf. John Benson: 'Emotion and Expression', Philosophical Rev., lxxvi (1967), pp. 335 - 357

3. i, p. 71. (Ch. 5)

This account of emotion is, so far, inadequate. But even at this point it encounters two objections: one to the notion of 'apprehension', the other to the notion of 'objects'.

What is wrong with speaking of apprehension in this context, it may be said, is that it implies 'conscious apprehension': what about the fears we feel when asleep? what about the angry or resentful man who does not recognize his emotion? what about the depressed or excited man who cannot tell why he is feeling that way? The objection can be countered by pointing out that it rests upon the ambiguity of the word 'conscious'; in the sense which we gave the word originally there is nothing odd about sleeping men (or dogs) feeling fear, because both are still conscious in that sense, while unconscious in another. What the sleeping man and dog find frightening is something in their nightmares; it qualifies as fear all the same, just as the relief a man feels at seeing what is in fact a mirage is none the less relief because the oasis he sees does not exist. Again, 'apprehension' need not imply 'awareness of apprehension'; just as I can see something without noticing (or realising) that I have seen it, so I can find something infuriating without noticing (or realising) that I have done so. This accounts both for the depressed man who cannot tell why (he is not aware of what is depressing him, while he knows <u>something</u> is) and the angry man who does not realise his state (he knows what it is that he has found infuriating without being aware

that he has found it so: for example because he is too concerned with dealing with the infuriating person or thing to notice). Besides, knowing that one is undergoing a particular emotion is dependent upon one's having learnt its nature: dogs and babies necessarily experience fury without knowing that that is what is happening.

This account of emotion is thus compatible with the further fact that people who are aware that they are feeling something sometimes identify their emotions incorrectly (mistaking envy, for example, for moral indignation). Awareness of precisely what one is feeling is not a necessary condition of feeling something.

A more fundamental objection is that to the notion of 'object'. It may be said either that there are some emotions which have no object, or that no criteria exist by which we could establish what is to count as an object at all.[1] These two points must be dealt with separately.

In the first instance it is conceded that fear is fear of something, pity is for something, surprise at something, - but how can our account of what we think of as emotion explain the existence of vague depressions, indefinite anxieties, nameless fears, and so on? And can one not say, quite legitimately, 'I feel happy, but I'm not happy about anything in particular'?[2] There are three

1. J.C. Gosling: 'Emotion and Object', Philosophical Rev., lxxiv (1965), pp. 486-503

2. Cf. Roger Trigg: Pain and Emotion, (Oxford, 1970), pp. 5-7

points to be made here. Firstly, it is clear that to speak, as one must, of vague depression, indefinite anxiety, is, ipso facto, to concede that depression is normally at something, anxiety about something: unless it is assumed that these emotions typically have objects the qualification is unnecessary. Secondly, as pointed out above, awareness of the object of one's feeling is not a necessary condition of one's feeling a particular emotion: this means that it is quite possible that if we should discover, or remember, or in some other way realise what the object of our feeling is (or was), depression would become precise, anxiety definite. (Indeed, Gosling, who questions the necessary 'intentionality' of emotion, admits that this process of illumination can occur.) Thirdly, we do not think of our emotional life as constituted entirely of emotions; we take account also of moods, dispositions, attitudes and other liabilities to emotion.[1] (I shall say more about this below.) A mood, for example, such as 'feeling irritable', is not itself an emotion and need have no object; each time the mood crystallises into a particular moment of irritation, however, it crystallizes precisely to the extent that there is something to get irritated about.

The onus, therefore, is on the objector. Until such time as an emotion is instanced that cannot in fact be classified either as

1. Cf. Gilbert Ryle: The Concept of Mind, (London, 1949), pp. 83 - 153. (Ch. 4 - 5)

objectless only to the point that awareness of the object is lacking, or as some form of liability to emotion rather than an emotion in itself (and, in terms of our conceptual scheme, this does seem like asking for a square circle) this first part of his objection must be taken as groundless.

A further point needs to be made. Just as objects need not be in existence at all for them to be objects - it is the unreal oasis I feel relief at, not the real image on my retina; the behaviour of characters in novels I feel indignant about, not (necessarily) the book itself - so they can also be vague. The man who is happy about nothing in particular, for instance, is happy about 'things in general' - and this way of putting it is both logically in order and compatible with ordinary usage. Again, objects can be comprehensive: to feel depressed or horrified at the entire universe and everything that happens in it is, to some people, a familiar experience.

This may seem a way of countering the objection in its second form. It is precisely because anything and everything can be the object of emotion (as it can be of thought), we may say, that it is difficult to suggest individuating facts. 'Objects', however, are not entities of a particular kind: it is a matter, rather, of defining the conditions <u>any</u> entity has to satisfy for it to count as the object of an emotion. For example, my depression may be the result of my having drunk too much the previous evening, but

what depresses me is the pointlessness of my life. What enables us to say that the drunkenness is the cause of my depression, but that the state of my life is its object?

This is one of the most difficult questions we have to answer, since it involves considerations of a particularly general kind. We can begin by saying that to speak of emotions as having objects is to place them with thoughts, perceptions and desires - experiences (activities of consciousness) which we can only identify where we can refer to something beyond, or other than, an experiencing consciousness. An object of emotion, that is, is of the same logical order as an object of desire or perception, and, except insofar as it seems paradoxical to say that we can think about something without being aware of it, of the same order as an object of thought. Within our conceptual scheme, then, the notion of object plays the role of the other half of an experience of which the first half is an experiencing consciousness. 'Hearing' is a concept we cannot grasp unless we grasp the notion 'sound' - 'something to be heard'. Similarly, 'fear' demands 'the frightening' - 'something to be afraid of'. In some cases the 'other half' is a matter of the same consciousness that experiences: the object of one's anger may be one's fear; peace of mind, to the extent that it is a feeling and not a mood, is the apprehension of one's mind as free - free, especially, from disagreeable emotions; similarly the object of

one's though may be one's thinking, and what the well-fed glutton desires is to desire. There is nothing logically peculiar about this: although the experiencing consciousness and the experienced consciousness are not the kind of entity which can be distinguished by any other activity than that of thought, nevertheless they, and their many activities, play distinct roles in our conceptual scheme.

It may be granted then that apprehension of something in a certain light (the kind of light being defined by the kind of emotion) is a necessary condition of emotion. It is possible also to describe the light in which things must be seen for one to be feeling a particular emotion without using the emotion word or a derivative of it; to feel fear is typically to find one's situation dangerous, or to apprehend something as a threat; to feel grateful is to take someone to have been generous to one; and so on.

However, this apprehension does not seem to be a <u>sufficient</u> condition of emotion. No logical error is involved in saying 'I realised I was in a dangerous situation, but I felt no fear', nor in Coleridge's "I see, not feel, how beautiful they are." It is necessary, in other words, not only that one should apprehend things in a certain light, but that one should be <u>affected</u> by the apprehension.

What we mean by 'being affected' is fairly clear: it is the feature of emotion that has received most stress. Typically, it takes the forms mentioned in the dictionary of psychology quoted from: physical reactions, and impulses to behaviour. These are, as we have seen, inadequate on their own to isolate emotion from other features of experience; but seen as complements of apprehension they make up what we think of as covered by the term. To say, for instance, 'I realised I was in a dangerous situation; I broke out in a cold sweat; I felt a strong impulse to run away; but I felt no fear' is simply to show that one has not mastered the concept 'fear'. To undergo the experience described <u>is</u> to feel fear. (Fear can be controlled or disregarded; but the reactions mentioned establish its presence no matter how cool one's subsequent behaviour; and courage of course properly implies that fear has been overcome rather than absent altogether.) Again, it is not possible to say 'I saw them as beautiful; I caught my breath; I could not tear myself away' and still maintain 'I could not feel their beauty' - not without intending to be paradoxical.

It may be objected here that this account is now <u>too</u> full; that it makes no allowance for mild emotions. What physical reactions or impulses to behaviour are present in such states as

slight boredom, mild sympathy, and so on? The answer would seem to be: to the extent that physical reactions and impulses to behaviour are absent from an emotion, to that extent we call it mild (to do so is implicitly to accept our account). Further, the words we use to refer to emotions often cover a range of experience from detached appraisal to overpowering emotion; and appraisal becomes emotional at the point where one is affected. Sympathy, for example, from being simple recognition of others' suffering, becomes an emotional experience when one comes close to tears, feels an impulse to help, and so on. To call sympathy mild is to point out that this particular form of it is near the less affected end of the continuum.

Are there, however, experiences which answer to our account of emotion without our normally thinking of them as such? We can disregard the case in which I drink a glass of something which I find unpleasant and which, unknown to me, is midly poisonous; even though I may shiver and sweat and feel a strong impulse to lie down, what affects me is clearly the poison and not my apprehension of the liquid as unpleasant: here apprehension and affect are distinct reactions to the same physical stimulus, and not complementary parts of a single experience. But what about the case of lethargy? I find everything tiring; my body is heavy; all I want to do is sit and do nothing. Here we have to ask

ourselves about the nature of the apprehension involved, and whether it is in fact the primary element. If the apprehension involves a strong sense of one's own condition as intolerable, or of the uses of the world as weary, flat, stale and unprofitable, and if this either seems to bring on, or intensify, one's bodily heaviness, then clearly we would call this state an emotion. However, we are unlikely to call this state 'lethargy' - rather 'despair' or (in its weakest form) 'boredom'. We normally reserve the word 'lethargy' for the bodily condition itself; and this clearly has no claim to be considered as an emotion in its own right.

These points, and those made in the previous paragraph, can be re-stated in a more decisive way. What we look for when we are uncertain whether to call a certain condition an emotion, as in the cases described, is precisely the elements here taken to be essential: the presence of both apprehension and affect (the state of being affected); and the primacy of apprehension. Is a certain man's admiration for another an emotion? The apprehension of admirable qualities is given: what we look for is signs of affect. If the first man is excited, if he keeps telling other people about the second man's exploits, our problem is solved. Again, is a particular state of nausea that we experience an emotion? If our physical reactions are brought on

by our apprehension of something as unpleasant or disgusting we make up our mind one way; if they seem to be produced directly by the disgusting thing, another.

The necessary primacy of apprehension is an important condition; it is brought out sharply in the facts of self-control. Emotions are (in principle) controllable. In a state of anger, for instance, we may take deep breaths, which stop the heart from beating so fast, or we may refuse to contemplate giving in to our impulse to cause pain in return; but acting on our affect is clearly not as efficient as acting on our apprehension - to see the infuriating person as merely pitiful, for instance, or the infuriating circumstances as a trial of our strength. Again, to increase our remorse it is of little use to try to intensify our discomfort directly; rather we will picture the harm we have done in an ever more lurid light.

In insisting upon the primacy of apprehension it is important to guard against two dangers. One is that of assuming that it is necessarily awareness of the way things seem to us that reveals to us what we are feeling. It would seem to be at least as common for us to realise what emotions we are experiencing as a result of noticing our bodily reactions (our tightly clenched fists, our urge to burst into tears) or even our behaviour (we find that we are doing everything very slowly). In fact, in cases of grief or acute

disappointment, when we are particularly aware of the state of our apprehension, we tend to 'feel nothing' - until this awareness subsides. Since our bodily reactions and behaviour are, in many cases, observable by other people, they are often in as good a position to know what we are feeling as we are. (I develop this point further in Appendix B). And the fact that our emotions frequently make themselves known to us in this way may account for the notorious theory of William James: that 'emotion' is simply our consciousness of bodily change.

The second danger to be guarded against is that of assuming that we distinguish emotions in the light of the different kinds of apprehension involved. As Errol Bedford has pointed out, "Emotion concepts... are not purely psychological."[1] Statements which refer to emotions serve other functions than that of reporting feelings, the most important of which is to make human actions intelligible by drawing attention to the complex circumstances in which they take place. Bedford's point that the terminology of emotion is not a kind of mirror held up to the facts of emotional experience is well taken; but he does not go far enough in enumerating the actual grounds of distinction we employ. This leads him into the opposite error to the one we are guarding against: that of supposing that we never use emotion words to distinguish kinds of feeling.

1. 'Emotions', Proceedings Aristotelian Soc., lvii (1956-7), pp. 281 - 304

As a matter of fact emotion words cannot be grouped in a single system of classification; rather, we distinguish emotions from each other in a variety of ways. For example, we distinguish levels of feeling (fury from irritation), kinds of feeling (elation from depression), kinds of object (despair from disillusion), durations of experience (affection from tenderness), circumstances of arousal (resentment from indignation), kinds of accompanying behaviour (fear from panic); we also use different words according to whether we approve or disapprove of the emotion (contentment versus self-satisfaction). There is no one system of classification because our language in this area has to serve a variety of functions. This in turn explains the fact that new words for emotions come into existence, or are borrowed from other languages, and old words cease to be used. Nor is it surprising that our experience does not always seem to be adequately marked out by common emotional terms.[1]

When we turn now to novels we find that our consort of conditions not only establishes the principle of demaraction we were looking for, but that the usage of novelists when emotions are identified by name clearly reflects our model. On occasion all three elements are combined: the irony of the following passaage from Northanger Abbey in no way mitigates its value as evidence:

1. This is the answer to Mary Warnock: 'The Justification of Emotions', Aristotelian Soc., Supplementary Vol., xxxi (1957), pp. 43 - 58; of. also Benson: 'Emotion and Expression', pp. 335 - 9

> "The progress of Catherine's unhappiness from the events of the evening, was as follows. It appeared first in a general dissatisfaction with every body about her, while she remained in the rooms, which speedily brought on considerable weariness and a violent desire to go home. This, on arriving in Pulteney-street, took the direction of extraordinary hunger, and when that was appeased, changed into an earnest longing to be in bed; such was the extreme point of her distress; for when there she immediately fell into a sound sleep which lasted nine hours, and from which she awoke perfectly revived, in excellent spirits, with fresh hopes and fresh schemes." (1)

Generally speaking, however, one element of the consort is sufficient indication of the feeling ascribed, and sometimes emotions are named; of these elements the novelist's happiest resort is to apprehension: to report how things seem to a character is to give the clearest sense of a particular feeling. This technique can take the relatively straightforward form of referring to the summer day.

> "whose long, bright, noiseless, breezeless, cloudless hours (how many they seemed since sunrise!) had been to her as desolate as if they had gone over her head in the shadowless and trackless wastes of Zahara". (2)

Or the more subtle form of:

> "He had found her agitated and low. - Frank Churchill was a villain. - He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desperate. - She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow." (3)

1. NA, p. 60. (Ch. 9)

2. Sh, ii, p. 111. (Ch. 23)

3. E, p. 433. (Ch. 49)

Here the progress of Mr. Knightley's feelings is described - without any attempt to name them - by reference to his changing apprehension of a person only marginally involved in them: the characterisation, all the same, is as definite as it is amusing.

A final small point. Investigation of a novelist's treatment of emotion will not only concern itself with emotional episodes. As has already been mentioned, we think of people's emotional lives as made up also of moods, attitudes, dispositions, and other forms of liability to emotion. It will be necessary, evidently, to distinguish emotional dispositions from other kinds. Here it is not enough simply to specify that these must be the occasion of emotions. It is part of our notion of generosity, for instance, to assume that generous people will feel pleasure at giving, sadness at being unable to give, and so on. Rather the disposition must either be to feel specific emotions - as irritability is the disposition to feel irritated (specifically) whenever opportunity arises - or it must involve apprehension of the kind we have already isolated. Love, for example, is normally taken to be a disposition (when the word is not being used of an episode): although it entails the love-episode ('feeling loving') it entails other emotions besides. But while not of the same order therefore an irritability, it is also of a different order from generosity: to speak of a man's generosity is not, <u>ipso facto</u>,

to assume that he apprehends anything in the world in a particular light; to speak of a man's love is. While moods are generally of the first sort of liability, attitudes such as resentment or gratitude (where the words are not being used of <u>states</u>), are of the second.