LIGHT & SHADOW –
THE MANY SIDES OF AGNES HELLER’S CONCEPT
OF EMOTIONAL HOUSEHOLDS,
WITH CASE STUDIES DRAWN FROM
TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW
AND THE LITTLE COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the model of emotional households that features in the work of Hungarian-born social theorist and philosopher Agnes Heller, and applies it to literary characters drawn from two Australian novels: Eleanor Dark’s *The Little Company* and M. Barnard Eldershaw’s *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. Applying Heller’s concept of emotional households, I consider characters in each of these novels, and the ways they make the world around them their own, or fail to do so. These fictional characters are chosen for the depth and breadth of their depictions of human endeavours - of the interaction of Self and society, and the complex range of factors typically at work therein.

Heller’s concept of emotional households is the basis of an approach linking emotions to personality, with the accent on the many ways feeling and thinking occur in conjunction with each other within human consciousness. It encompasses topics such as self-understanding and self-talk, the enduring meaning contained in our deep feelings, and the ideas, concepts and values we reach for to express ourselves, including in times of uncertainty and suffering. The task of enquiring into the emotional worlds of fictional characters, as undertaken in the case studies in this thesis, is one that is consistent with Heller’s own work. Heller frequently illustrates and elucidates her ideas about emotions with examples drawn from literature. In her writing on aesthetics, she has endorsed the project of interpreting literary characters in relation to moral, ethical, social, subjective and other imperatives. As readers of what Heller calls the socio-historical novel, we commonly respond to the attributes, experiences and problems of the characters, usually identifying with one or other of them, following the twists and turns of the plot, and imagining and anticipating what might happen next. In this sense, we become ‘captives of the story’.

Although neither *The Little Company* nor *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* is focused exclusively or even mainly on the private lives and emotional dilemmas of the characters, questions about personality and individuality are critical to both works. Both novels feature protagonists who make concrete, in a variety of ways, the experience of living otherwise ordinary lives in extraordinary times. Characters’
emotions, particularly the emotional palette distinctive to each protagonist, also form part of each story. The social milieu in which The Little Company and Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow were written would change utterly in the years after they were published, but at the time of writing, an impetus to effect progressive change in human affairs was not necessarily incompatible with seeing life ‘in the round’, and taking a position on subjectivity that assumed a moral imperative. These are crucial factors making The Little Company and Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, and the fictional universes they open onto, especially well-suited to a reading in light of Heller’s work.
Declaration
This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy degree;

Due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used;

The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words, exclusive of the bibliography.

Ann McCarthy
17 June 2017
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In loving memory of my Dad
John George McCarthy
28 April 1927-5 October 2016
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INTRODUCTION: THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES ...

The tendency of feeling housekeeping is for the person to create a hierarchy of the various (selected or reselected) tasks and to form his hierarchy accordingly. The greatest involvement of feeling is accorded the primary task (including the transfer into action and the responsibility accepted for the feelings) and those subordinated in the hierarchy receive less, or else it will be the quality, intensity or depth of the feelings that will differ.¹

This thesis examines the model of emotional households that features in the work of Hungarian-born social theorist and philosopher Agnes Heller, and applies it to literary characters drawn from two Australian novels: Eleanor Dark’s The Little Company and M. Barnard Eldershaw’s Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow. Heller’s concept of emotional households is the basis of an approach linking emotions to personality, with the accent on the many ways feeling and thinking occur in conjunction with each other within human consciousness. A cornerstone of Heller’s work in this area is that our feelings embody our judgments about ourselves and the world in important ways. Heller’s focus is on understanding feelings and emotions as part of the frame of reference bound up with character and personality, decisive in shaping and reflecting a person’s point of view and habits of mind. Which feelings one acts upon, and which one does not, are matters integral to emotional housekeeping, as are the nature and dynamics of a person’s emotional palette. Heller’s concept of emotional household encompasses topics such as self-understanding and self-talk, the enduring meaning contained in our deep feelings, and the ideas, concepts and values we reach for to express ourselves, including in times of uncertainty and suffering. It speaks to the deepening and cultivating of one’s emotions and sensibilities, as well as realising the possibilities for autonomy in one’s emotional life.

The five characters who form my case studies in this thesis are drawn from 1940s novels, and they take the reader into a time of war and socio-political upheaval. Harry and Ally Munster are a young couple who leave the country for the city, seeking a better life for themselves and their children. Exposed to years of living on slender

¹ Agnes Heller, Theory of Feelings, Second Edition. (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 186. All references to Heller’s A Theory of Feelings are to the second edition, unless otherwise stated.
means and having limited choices, feelings of dissatisfaction are common to Harry and Ally, though the triggers of that emotion, and its personal implications, are very different for each of them. Siblings Gilbert Massey and Marty Ransom wrestle with their discontentment and uncertainty in relation to the war, and its ramifications for democracy and freedom. Gilbert and Marty are writers, and for both of them, grasping political issues inevitably confronts them with their own individual experiences – something that proves transformative for the steady, quietly spoken Gilbert. The fifth character, Knarf, is also a writer, and his latest work provides a window into a society four centuries removed from his own. Knarf’s identification with his subject matter is traced to his encounter with a recovered artwork, and the decisive impact of that encounter upon his mind and imagination.

Applying Heller’s concept of emotional households, I consider in turn each of these characters, and the ways they make the world around them their own, or fail to do so. These fictional characters were chosen for the depth and breadth of their depictions of human endeavours – of the interaction of Self and society, and the complex range of factors typically at work therein. As light is cast on the emotional life of each character, salient issues to do with value hierarchies, reflexivity and individuality also surface. I begin the remainder of this introductory chapter of my thesis with an overview of relevant ideas and concepts from Heller’s work, and then turn to discuss key aspects of the fictional works from which my case studies are drawn.

An Introduction to Agnes Heller’s Concept of Emotional Households

To explain emotions in terms of households and housekeeping, and the relationship between values and objectives, as Heller does, is to engage with their significance in relation to subjectivity and ethics. It is to explore the roles played by feelings and emotions in how social actors think, act and live in their everyday lives. Heller’s concern with the question ‘Good people exist, how are they possible?’ has generated a range of philosophical writing on different topics, including feelings and emotion. A subset of the latter body of work pertains to emotional households and emotional housekeeping.
The ‘emotional household’, as the term is defined and employed by Heller, belongs to the history of modernity. Modernity, for Heller, is in the nature of an unfolding set of possibilities, rather than a unified, unchanging entity or form of consciousness. Characteristically future-oriented, rationalised and scientized, it is shaped in decisive ways by capitalism and democracy, in the context of other forces and logics. As a historical epoch, it is ‘co-constituted along three different axes: cultural imagination, logics or imperatives that give it a certain systematicity, and values’, as John Rundell writes. Heller advances a distinctively ‘dynamic image of modernity’, in relation to both the ‘material life’ fostered by modern conditions, and its ‘culturally articulated form of self-understanding’. Her work unveils the ‘tensions, restlessness and paradoxes’ inherent in modern life, particularly in the contestatory, interpretative relationship established to customs and traditions.

Heller’s theory of modernity, Rundell suggests, may be fruitfully read in conjunction with her critical anthropology. Heller’s ideas about everyday life are vital to that critical anthropology. Heller also considers how non-everyday spheres, particularly art, philosophy and science, ‘decisively penetrate and shape the everyday’. She looks to the horizons of needs and values which social actors orient around and act upon as they make their way in the world, highlighting the exercise of an autonomous, critical reflexive capacity in relation to their experience and existence. Feelings and emotions are shown to play many, vital roles in our judgments and our lives as a whole: as Rundell puts it, for Heller, the human personality encompasses ‘a complex palette of often competing emotional registers, most of which we experience and may articulate from time to time, as gestures and comportments, in words or in

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6 Rundell also foregrounds Heller’s writing on themes of ‘homeliness’, or the ‘ethical location[s]’ where social actors may find homes for themselves in the modern world, given its characteristic dislocations and dissatisfaction. Rundell, ‘Agnes Heller: Modernity, Aesthetics and the Human Condition’, 2.
Questions about emotional housekeeping become central, as we shall see, in the context of a form of self-consciousness that may become the basis of a humane, inclusive individuality, and in relation to a fundamental value of freedom.

Theorising about feelings, for Heller, centres on our involvement as social actors in the world around us, and our involvement in our own lives. Feeling, for Heller, is involvement. This starting point puts the accent on the dynamic exchange between, on the one hand, the social actor, in whose mind and heart specific feelings are in play in any given instance, and, on the other hand, the object or objects of his involvement. As Heller’s philosophical character in *The Ethics of Personality*, Mrs Sophie Meller, observes:

> Emotions, feelings are involvements in something. And they differ from one another at least on the count of the thing(s) a person is involved in. One can be involved in murder or planting trees; is the joy one feels in those two cases the same kind of joy? No person with the minimum common sense (or everyday experience) would answer in the affirmative.  

The self-evident truth identified here by Mrs Meller – that the joy gained from committing murder and the joy at planting trees are incomparable to each other – points to an essential fact concerning the relationship of a person’s emotions to the situations or contexts salient to them. Tree planting and murder diverge as orders of involvement and in terms of the characteristic standpoints and judgments associated with each task. In this instance, and many others in Heller’s work in this area, she teases out the internal differentiation among feelings and emotions. The active, praxis-oriented aspect of human emotions is highlighted in Heller’s description of the emotional household as ‘the structure of emotions, and the way one actually deals with them’. This summarising formulation of what is a distinctly multi-faceted philosophical concept locates emotions within the personality as a whole. As we will

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see, Heller draws out the connection of feelings to will, as well as to consciousness and conscience.

Standing behind these ideas about feelings is Heller’s understanding of emotions as an intrinsic and essential part of human rationality. Heller understands rationality not as logic or order, or as a metaphysical concept or category, but rather in terms of a capacity for meaningful action in the pursuit of a given goal, involving an ability to differentiate among and act upon values and norms. She has written that ‘reason, and rationality (acting according to reason), comprise the attitude of the human-as-a-whole to his or her world-as-a-whole’, and that ‘all mental abilities perform tasks in relation to discrimination’ i.e. telling good from bad, right from wrong, etc.\(^{11}\) Understanding the roles played by our feelings and emotions in the exercise of reason and rationality, for Heller, is necessary to the task of overcoming ‘alienated reason’ through the recognition of ‘all human needs in so far as their satisfaction does not presuppose the use of any human person as mere means’.\(^{12}\) Cultivating our emotional sentiments and sensibilities is seen to be part of fostering and developing our critical faculties and our capacity to discriminate between right and wrong.

As becomes apparent, questions of individual judgment, particularly moral and ethical judgment, and of the importance of a capacity for reflection and self-examination, are central to Heller’s concept of emotional households. Heller’s commitment to a model of reflexive individuality attests to her interest in how people make choices, and how they discern a good feeling (or thought, idea, action or reaction, etc) from a bad one, a true one from a false one. In her phenomenology of feelings in particular, Heller’s focus is the modern social actor making her way in life, in need of sound knowledge on which to base decisions and take action. In order to meet a particular situation, decide on a course of action, or solve a problem, one acts on one’s perception and understanding of what is required (among other things). Both emotion and reason, and the values, attitudes and expectations salient to a person’s habits of mind, are likely to inform the process of decision-making and interpretation.


\(^{12}\) Heller, ‘Everyday Life, Rationality of Reason, Rationality of Intellect’, 211.
Each of us derives meaning from our experience from our own vantage point, with emotion one of many factors which serve as the basis of our judgments.

Thus, the evaluative stances upon which one acts and reacts are shown to be innately interpretative, tied to one’s hermeneutic enquiries as a social actor with distinct perspectives, biases and value preferences. Feelings and emotions involve creation and interpretation, a drawing up and drawing upon of an evaluative stance. In broad terms, emotion – at least some emotion, in some cases – critically informs and colours one’s standpoint in life, helping shape the conceptual ground on which one stands. Emotions also perform a primary expressive role, through the face, tone of voice, gestures etc. Our emotional expressions provide essential clues by which others interpret, or ‘read’, our sentiments, desires, intentions and motives. As well as being necessary for human relationships as a whole, including for friendship and love, such knowledge is essential as a basis on which others may predict our future actions and reactions.

Heller’s work on the relationship of feelings to judgment and evaluation, relates, in turn, to questions about values and value preferences. Her writing about emotional households encompasses an idea of emotional wealth. That emotions may constitute a form of wealth primarily reflects the fact that they embody value – value whose existence, Heller writes, ‘is necessarily connected to all that is social’.  

Heller’s conception of wealth has its roots in Marx’s work, in particular his idea of the person rich in needs. Heller cites Marx: “The rich man is simultaneously one who needs a totality of human manifestations of life and in whom his own realization exists as inner necessity, as need.” The ‘fundamental universal value axiom’ in Marx’s work, Heller writes, was ‘abundance’, involving, on the one hand, ‘the many-sided unfolding of the essential power of the species’ and on the other, ‘the ability of individuals to appropriate the abundance of the species’. The goal outlined by Heller of personal and emotional wealth constitutes an expression of her view that self-creation exists as

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a meaningful possibility for modern social actors. Her chosen value in this respect is ‘the personality that is unified, self-realizing in the tasks presented by the world, and rich in feelings’.\textsuperscript{16} Such a personality exists ‘only as a tendency, as an exception’, yet its importance as a model, an ideal type, remains undiminished by this fact.\textsuperscript{17}

More fundamentally, Heller insists that our theories of emotion and its relationship to reason must look beyond the dichotomous approach that has prevailed in the past. In \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, Heller particularly writes against the dualism between instrumental rationality and emotion which is associated with positivist psychology, and more specifically with ‘its typical twentieth century form, behaviorism’.\textsuperscript{18} Heller challenges the conception of feelings and emotions as a disruptive influence upon the mind, as ‘merely a disturbing element in the activity of instrumental rationalism, or simply an epiphenomenon’.\textsuperscript{19} This challenge is central to her concept of the emotional household. Lucy Ward sees in Heller’s work an on-going project to provide the ‘non-economic and philosophical theory of value that she perceives as implicit yet underdeveloped within Marx’s work’.\textsuperscript{20}

Heller underlines the unique possibilities for choice and autonomy which exist, paradigmatically, among modern subjects, in relation to their emotional lives, as well as in other ways. In this respect, what is at stake is a question of freedom, as well as emotional wealth. As Ward observes, Heller identifies an emancipatory potential implicit in the way our feelings and emotions may contribute to ‘the cultivation of human wholeness and depth, what Marx refers to as wealth that exceeds the limits imposed by the immediacy of nature’.\textsuperscript{21} As modern beings, we may actively and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings} (1979), 4.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings} (1979), 2. Additionally, Heller identifies Freudian psychology as a significant, though not unqualified, influence on her thinking about feelings and the human self-image. Within the terms of Heller’s reading of Freud, in which she accents questions of practical philosophy and judgment, she places particular weight on Freud’s ‘interpretation of the dynamic of the psyche, with the process of repression at its center’. See Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings} (1979), 2, 5, and Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings} (2009), 5.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings} (1979), 3.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Lucy Ward, ‘With and Against Marx: Freedom and Dissatisfaction in the Works of Agnes Heller’ (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2012), 12. Ward’s study has now been published, under the same title, by Lexington Books, 2016.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ward, ‘With and Against Marx’, 104.
\end{itemize}
independently evaluate and ‘select’ one or other feeling in our ‘emotional palette’ – as Ward puts it, we have the potential to consciously shape our own world of feelings.22 This potential for autonomous, or at least quasi-autonomous, emotional housekeeping is closely linked to the relatively undetermined nature of our moral choices as a whole: it presupposes that norms, as a form of social and ethical regulation of human conduct, are no longer the determining force on our lives in the same way they were in traditional societies. Summarising Heller, Ward writes that ‘in modernity the human being’s “emotional household” is no longer identical with following traditionally fixed customs and norms. Instead individuals can evaluate their own “opportunities and inborn qualities”. The modern world of feelings on this reading is therefore one much more open to the possibility for human beings to develop their capacities and talents in a self-chosen and self-conscious way.’23 The potential for self-selection in relation to one’s capacities and emotions is one key application of freedom outlined by Heller in her work on emotions.

As is foreshadowed above, Heller develops her concept of emotional households in conjunction with ideas about a reflexive personality type, what she calls the ‘individual personality’. Reflexive and self-conscious, the individual personality realises the possibilities for emotional wealth, and for individual freedom. She can abandon herself fully to her chosen tasks, and at the same time she knows a factor of distance from her own expressions and actions, and from the values and ‘human manifestations’ of those collective integrations with which she identifies and belongs to. For the ‘particularistic personality’, by contrast, there is total and unquestioned identification with oneself and one’s world. These ideas about different models of personality rest, in turn, on Heller’s work in relation to a categorical existential choice of oneself, one’s qualities, choices circumstances etc – what she calls ‘the leap’. Framing her ideas about the individual personality and the existential choice is the janus-face of modernity: unshackled from the binding force of custom and tradition,

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the modern social actor is thrown into a world which offers little in the way of intrinsic
guides and anchors in life. This tension is expressed in the following passage:

Mere possibilities are empty, yet they can be filled with an infinite
variety of contents. Mere possibility is the potential of personal
autonomy; it is also the potential of a total loss thereof.24

The leap, for Heller, is a choice of oneself that underpins all subsequent choices. A
primary act of responsibility for oneself and one’s existence, it constitutes an aligning
of oneself with freedom that paves the way to an existence which is self-reflexive and resilent.

This brief overview of significant ideas and themes that feature in or are
relevant to Heller’s writing on feelings and emotions demonstrates her intellectual
grounding in the Western philosophical tradition. Heller’s celebration of the rational
subject and her connection of reason to ethics, the presence in her work of a recurring
idea of universal values, and her attention to the individual personality as the
embodiment of a reflexive universality that has emancipatory possibilities are aspects
of her work that resonate with a European philosophical project dating back to the
ancient world. In addition to Marx, other philosophical influences on Heller’s work
include Aristotle, Kant and Wittgenstein – thinkers who form part of my investigation
of Heller’s ideas in this thesis – as well as Leibniz, Hegel and Kierkegaard. Heller
balances the profound possibilities for freedom open to modern men and women with
the substantial limitations to that potential inherent in the structures of our lives. For
Heller, these two sides to the coin of modernity are directly connected to the
contingent nature of our existence as modern subjects.

A second conceptual and historical context salient to Heller’s work on
subjectivity and emotion – one with far-reaching autobiographical significance for
Heller - is the crisis in liberal humanism that was critically connected to the global wars
of the twentieth century, and the suffering and destruction they entailed. A Hungarian
Jew born in 1929, Heller was confronted at a young age with political violence and

24 Agnes Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’. In Can Modernity Survive? (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University
of California Press, 1990), 76.
turmoil. Her philosophy is in important respects a response to her experiences of totalitarianism, specifically the Holocaust and Hungarian Communism. Heller’s father, Pal Heller, died at Auschwitz in 1945, and she and her mother narrowly escaped capture. Heller has connected her lifelong interest in issues regarding ethics and history to early experiences such as these. Like many others, she writes, her life’s work was definitively shaped by the ‘cataclysms of the twentieth century. How could human beings do what they did? How could average men and women become self-possessed mass murderers? What must have happened in Europe in the twentieth century that made Auschwitz and the Gulag possible at all?”

(Related questions, also sparked by the events of the 1930s and 1940s, similarly preoccupied the Australian writers whose novels feature as case studies in this thesis, as I discuss below.) Initially, Heller’s thinking developed as a member of György Lukács’ Budapest School in Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s. A political exile from 1973, as were the other members of the School, Heller and her husband Ferenc Feher left for Melbourne, Australia in 1977. Then in 1986 they moved to New York, where Heller was to live and work for 25 years (Feher died in 1994). From her beginnings in ‘humanised socialism’ to her New Left writing, and her more recent reflexively postmodern turn, Heller’s work affirms the ethical, personal, and political importance of individual contemplation, reflection and debate. The conditions of possibility for this kind of reflection – including, as discussed, variations in the structure of two specific personality types – form a major strand in her philosophy, including her works on the everyday and on feelings.

The work by Heller investigated in this thesis forms one part of her extensive body of material on questions about emotions and the modern subject. This body of work has been written by Heller over a period of approximately fifty years, and inevitably it reflects the shifts and changes that have occurred in her thinking in that time, one important example of which is alluded to above. Examples of that writing

include her critique of the concept of ‘instincts’, which began her philosophical anthropology series, and her writing on shame and guilt, particularly her work entitled *The Power of Shame: A Rational Perspective*. In recent years, she has turned her attention to the philosophical nature and importance of comedy and the comic phenomenon in art and in everyday life, and also to Shakespeare’s plays, exploring questions of ethics and reflexivity among Shakespearean characters. My specific interest in this thesis is in the insights to be found in Heller’s *A Theory of Feelings*, and her essays on the death of the subject and on emotional wealth. The ideas contained therein about the nature and functions of feelings and emotions, the place of emotions within the Self and the personality, and how we might conceptualise the Self and subjectivity, sensitive to the normative frameworks within which our lives evolve while foregrounding a self-reflexive capacity as central to the personality, are not easily to be exhausted. While consideration of other relevant writing by Heller, such as the works and ideas cited and discussed in this introduction, can only enrich the analysis, in the main body of my thesis my focus is Heller’s concepts of emotional households and housekeeping, and the closely related concepts of the Self and the subject.

Within the scholarship regarding Heller’s work (in addition to Ward’s study), her concept of emotional households has most often been broached indirectly in, or otherwise pertains to, discussions of her writing about feelings and emotions, and her philosophical anthropology. Katie Terezakis’s review of Heller’s theory of feelings offers many insights. Terezakis reads Heller’s theory of feelings as a central part of the ‘vibrant theory of personality, history, and ethics’ generated across many of her writings in philosophical modernity. Therein, Heller’s philosophical anthropology ‘becomes a historical reflection on the psychology and conditioning possibilities of the morally good, critically engaged individual’. An important starting point in this work by Heller, Terezakis continues, is her abiding interest in the relationship between feelings

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26 For recent reflections by Heller on the development and changes in her philosophical thought, about feelings as well as other topics, see her work, *A Short History of My Philosophy*, as well as the introduction to *A Theory of Feelings* (2009). See also her works entitled *The Time is Out of Joint: Shakespeare as Philosopher of History* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, c.2002), and *Immortal Comedy: The Comic Phenomenon in Art, Literature and Life* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

and needs, pointing to works of hers such as The Theory of Need in Marx, Dictatorship over Needs and Everyday Life.\textsuperscript{28} For the modern subject as defined by Heller, engaged in adapting to and evaluating ‘social and historical contingencies … success at tempering given instincts and affects and the unremitting education of emotion form the core of the individual’s ability to confront both herself and her times.’ This reference by Terezakis to the tempering and educating of one’s affects and emotions, understood in the context of self-creation and self-furthering, identifies a critical dimension of Heller’s concept of emotional households. Heller understands personality to involve ‘consciousness and self-determination at the very roots of its involvements’, and she advances an essential form of freedom ‘in the ever-situated ability to work on what appears to be given in human nature and to respond critically to given relations of power’. In such observations, Terezakis engages both with the ideas and concepts central to Heller’s model of emotional households, and also the wider body of theoretical, political and ethical commitments salient to that model.

Additionally, Rundell has written extensively on Heller’s engagement with questions to do with value reflexivity, subjectivity and modernity. Rundell records the significance Heller attaches to two particular historical periods, namely the Renaissance, and ‘postmodernity’ (understood in terms of a distinctly self-reflexive perspective upon what it is to be ‘modern’\textsuperscript{29}), as ones through which modernity’s ‘unique characteristics can be reconstructed.’\textsuperscript{30} Writing of Heller’s work entitled Renaissance Man, Rundell observes her interest in the constellation of economic, social and political institutions and arrangements unique to the period, as well as in a ‘new image of humankind – a dynamic one’ that accompanied this context.\textsuperscript{31} Rundell also states that Heller can be seen to foreground the importance of freedom as a constitutive value of modernity, one that is at once primary and paradoxical. Freedom is a founding principle for modern subjects, yet it in fact offers no foundation, as such: as Rundell puts it, ‘if moderns are thrown into this condition of freedom, then this

\textsuperscript{28} Note that Dictatorship Over Needs was co-written with Ferenc Féher and György Márkus.
\textsuperscript{29} For more on Heller’s conception of postmodernity, see, for instance, Rundell, ‘Agnes Heller: Modernity, Aesthetics and the Human Condition’, 4; and Chapter One, ‘Modernity from a Postmodern Perspective: The Philosophical Presuppositions’ of Heller, A Theory of Modernity.
condition is experienced as one without anchors and points of orientation’.\(^{32}\) It is in this light, as Rundell demonstrates, that we may understand Heller’s model of the involved modern subject, and the horizons of needs and values salient to his feelings and emotions.\(^{33}\)

In relation to the reflexive postmodernity articulated in Heller’s recent works, John Grumley has noted her commitment to both Enlightenment values, and also to ‘an irreducible and conflictual plurality of values’ within modern societies.\(^{34}\) Finally, John Burnheim states that Heller’s ‘philosophical psychology of instincts and feelings evinces an awareness that each human being must construct a self that shapes its genetic heritage into appropriate cultural forms.’\(^{35}\) At stake here, Burnheim writes, is an openness on the part of each individual subject to a continuing process of reconstructing and reinterpretng his capacities and needs. The ideas of Heller’s discussed by scholars such as Terezakis, Rundell, Grumley and Burnheim\(^{36}\), to do with self-formation, active engagement with values, and the imperatives borne of living with contingency, are relevant to Heller’s work on emotional households, despite the fact that the term itself does not generally feature explicitly in their analyses.

**Agnes Heller’s Philosophical Anthropology**

It is helpful at this juncture to introduce the model of philosophical anthropology salient to Heller’s concept of emotional households, and to her writing on feelings more generally. Heller’s critical anthropology reflects a conception of the human being as essentially ‘plastic’ in its motivational systems. Human anthropology, in Heller’s view, is characterised by an ontological openness to the world, centred around the

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36 It should be noted that the commentary and criticism on Heller’s work published by each of these scholars is more extensive and diverse than my brief references above indicate. In the case of Rundell, in addition to the works cited above, this also includes his essay on indigenous Australian modernities, in which he draws on Heller’s work, as well as other theorists, including Ferenc Fehér, and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and his idea of multiple modernities. See Rundell, ‘From Indigenous Civilization to Indigenous Modernity – Sacred Narratives, *Terra Nullius* and an Australian Bestiarium’. In Rethinking Civilizational Analysis, edited by Said Amir Arjomand and Edward A. Tiryakian. SAGE Studies in International Sociology 52, 2004, pp 201-16.
human capacity – also a need – to learn and engage in social action. Over the course of each life there takes place a process of dovetailing of the biological and social a priori, that is, of a person’s genetic endowment, and the historical conditions in which one lives, or as Heller puts it, into which he or she is ‘thrown’. This is in the nature of a tension never resolved, an antinomy whose resolution is our ‘whole human existence.’

In these ideas, Heller was influenced by the work of Arnold Gehlen. Gehlen perceived the human being as an unspecialised life form insofar as only the remnants of a system of instincts remain. Lacking the instinct-like mechanisms basic to the animal kingdom, the human being is in essential respects unfinished at birth. The ‘undetermined animal’, the human being possesses an ‘unspecialized instinctual structure’ that makes possible adaptation to and development in any number of natural environments. As we engage with our surroundings, undertaking what Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, in a discussion of Gehlen’s ideas, call ‘everyday commerce with things’, we develop ‘modes of symbolic signification’ that render our perceptions and experiences meaningful, and our interventions effective. In this way, the human being ‘frees himself in action’ from the ‘defective’ beginnings common to his species. He is compelled by the unfinished character of his impulsive systems to ‘engage in action that gives form to his needs and wants, that structures his perception and that guides his motility.’

Gehlen’s ideas form important philosophical building blocks in Heller’s critique of naturalistic theories of instinct, which, in turn, informs her theory of feelings. As Heller puts it, Gehlen demonstrates that in human life ‘the purely biological stimulus functions always as a social stimulus and need, deriving from man’s nature oriented

37 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 23.
40 Ibid, S7. Gehlen’s ideas on this topic developed in relation to a theory of institutions as the necessary force binding humans into social structures. See in particular, Gehlen’s work entitled Man, His Nature and Place in The World.
towards teleological action.\textsuperscript{41} It is on account of the unspecialised nature of the human being that there arises in human life the question of the ‘hiatus’, to do with realising one’s capacities, needs, and desires within one’s time and place, and in relation to such ‘expectations, objects, customs and norms’ as hold therein.\textsuperscript{42} Each human existence is ‘the solution of this antinomy, the bridging of this hiatus.’\textsuperscript{43}

Heller’s work on the psychic and social structures of human life invites comparison with the writing of Norbert Elias, especially the ideas about ‘affect structures’ and social change Elias develops in \textit{The Civilising Process}. In that work, Elias posits the fluid, changing nature of both personality structures and social structures, as well as the importance of the inter-relationship between the two. Elias writes that the historical development, in ‘civilised’ countries, of centralised political authorities in which the state exercised a monopoly on physical power saw a corresponding shift in the personality structure dominant within those societies, namely from the widespread spontaneous expression of affects, to their habitual concealment, control and ‘civilising’. In Elias’s analysis of social action and emotions, including the external as well as internal constraints shaping emotional experience, behaviour and expression, he covers similar ground to that traversed by Heller in relation to instincts and feelings. The homology between the social and the biological is weaker in Heller’s work than it is in Elias’s: for Heller, the socialisation process never entirely encompasses the dovetailing process that occurs in each life, and the parameters of personhood are never a perfect match with the social codes and customs of the world the person inhabits. In particular, Heller asks of the evaluative stances a given social actor holds and articulates, and the actions and responses his experiences and circumstances draw from him. In this respect, the social actor’s feelings can be seen to help constitute his actions, within one or other concrete socio-cultural environment.

Heller’s non-naturalistic reading of feelings and emotions, like her critical anthropology as a whole, Honneth and Joas remind us, had its roots in the political and philosophical questions the Budapest School set itself in Hungary in the context of

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 15-16.
\textsuperscript{43} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 23.
Eastern European socialism. Heller and the other members of the School set out to render ‘the bureaucratic forms of domination of Eastern European socialism indirectly transparent by showing that the core of historical materialism consists of an ethics and of the philosophy of praxis.’

Heller’s investigations into Kantian questions to do with the nature of ‘Man’ were intended to fill ‘the normative anthropological basic framework of Marxism’ developed by Heller’s colleague and friend György Márkus. To take one example, in Heller’s work on instincts she foregrounds the ‘‘socio-culturally’ mediated’ configurations evident in behavioural actions and patterns which might otherwise be attributed to an underlying aggressive instinct universal among human beings.

It is not that there is a ‘human rage affect’ at work as an intrinsic ‘motivational element’, or basic drive, in the human being. Rather, we can observe matrices of motives and actions, linked ‘through socially binding patterns of interpretation.’

Our plastic human instincts become bearers of ‘the aggressive activities that are traits of a given social structure (eg war, envy, hate).’ To explain the human behaviour in question in terms of a basic instinct for aggression involves a ‘philosophical abstraction’ grounded in ‘the historical and ideological ‘basic experience’ of the ever given present’: it is in the nature of a ‘theoretical retroprojection’ which reduces a complex phenomena, typically encompassing diverse behaviours, relations, institutions, character traits etc, into an apparently ‘natural’ series of events.

Heller’s writing on feelings and emotions, like that of many other philosophers working in the cognitivist tradition that encompasses phenomenology and existentialism, challenges the Cartesian legacy that has seen the human subject emphatically divided between mind and body. One such philosopher was Robert C. Solomon. The following formulation by Solomon emphasises an evaluative component seen to be integral to the ‘passions’: an emotion, he writes, is ‘a judgment (or a set of judgments), something we do… my embarrassment is my judgment to the effect that

44 Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, 91.
46 Ibid, 96.
48 Ibid, 97.
we are in an exceedingly awkward situation. My shame is my judgment to the effect that I am responsible for an untoward situation or incident. Solomon, like Heller, regards the emotions as essential sources of meaning and value which, ideally, inform each life, and infuse in countless ways each person’s subjective perspective on the world. To grasp the world of the (hypothetical) lover, for instance, requires recognising how feelings such as love, devotion and affection structure and influence his reality, while the world of the person who is happy may be understood to be shaped by emotions such as joy and contentment. Additionally, Martha Nussbaum has written that a person’s deep, powerful emotions reflect his investments in those people, ideas and things of central importance to him. An element of vulnerability inheres in such feelings, Nussbaum further writes, citing the Greek stoic view of emotions as ‘appraisals, or value judgments, which ascribe to things and persons outside the person’s own control great importance for that person’s own flourishing.’ Deep emotions are an acknowledgement of the needy, non-self-sufficient character of human life. Inseparable from what makes each life meaningful, complete and singular, emotions are ‘suffused with intelligence and reasoning ... part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning.’ These investigations by Nussbaum and Solomon of the conceptual and cognitive dimensions of human feeling, and their inter-relationships with judgment and rationality, and with questions about the function and importance of emotions as part of a meaningful life, echo similar themes in Heller’s work.

At the same time, and as indicated above, Heller’s analysis of feelings and emotions unfolds in relation to a set of political and philosophical questions which is addressed to those living in modern societies, and which wrestles with the unique characteristics of and problems arising in those societies. Her phenomenological approach foregrounds the sphere of everyday life as a locus of change, while her

51 Ibid, 16-17.
54 Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 1.
philosophical writing on the subject prioritises the exercise of a capacity for autonomy and responsibility directed at one’s emotions and personality. Such core themes give shape to her engagement with the nature and possibility of humane, democratic change in modern societies. Her investigation into feelings and emotions form one strand of that wider project. The title of one of her later books – ‘an ethics of personality’ - speaks to the main chord of her work in this area.

Historical questions occupy a central place in Heller’s philosophy. To reiterate, Heller argues that social regulation has taken the place of instinct regulation in human anthropology. Social norms and rules, and more specifically our relationship to the social code, therefore become important determining factors in each life. Consequently, historicity can be seen to be basic to the human condition. What this amounts to, Heller writes, is a state of “living in tension” – a quintessentially creative tension, but a tension nonetheless. Perhaps we identify with others, or instead differentiate ourselves from those around us; we may seek security on one occasion, and reassert our personal freedom on another; very probably, we long for dependence and at the same time also need to feel independent. Heller offers these and other examples to illustrate our continuing negotiation of the world, and of ourselves. The ontological condition she outlines points up the illusory nature of those ‘end of the subject’ arguments advanced in numerous contemporary and twentieth century schools of thought. The conditions making possible subjectivity and selfhood, Heller shows, remain very much intact.

Heller’s concept of the ‘subject’ puts the accent on authorship. To be a subject is to be the bearer of a historical consciousness centred around one’s own life and existence, with its distinctive value horizons, background and commitments; moreover, to comprehend this life is also to voice it, relative to such temporal, spatial, interpersonal, spiritual, existential and other contexts and parameters as may be salient to it. Heller underlines the importance of a continuing process of narrating the

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55 For a summary by Heller of her main ideas on this subject, see ‘The Human Condition’, in Agnes Heller, General Ethics (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp 22-23.
57 Ibid, 23.
58 See Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, Can Modernity Survive?
world as one sees it, in light of one’s own experiences, self-belief, point of view, etc. She identifies the dual authorship inherent in modern autobiographies: ‘The person is the author of the text (whether written or taped), and he or she is the author of his or her own life.’\(^59\) It is this dual authorship that ‘guarantees the truth content’ of the autobiography.\(^60\) That we become hermeneuts of our lives, and of the world, is for Heller a reflection of the freedom offered by modernity. At the same time, that freedom also attests to the extent to which very important elements of life remain unpredetermined at birth for the hypothetical modern subject, including the meaning his or her life is to bear, as well as the meaning of life itself, in terms of spiritual, existential and other like belief systems. Such ‘unfounding freedom’, Heller is at pains to point out, can and very often does lead to a grave diminution of purpose and stability in peoples’ lives. Heller discusses certain risks of this existential tension in similar terms to those outlined by Ferenc Féher in his essay on hermeneutics as Europe’s mainstream political and moral tradition (Féher and Heller co-authored the book of which this essay forms one chapter). Tendencies towards cynicism and fundamentalism are the ‘shadows’, Heller cautions, of the kind of reflective standpoint on modernity prioritised in her work.\(^61\) Féher, conversely, points to the problems of relativism and fundamentalism which have dogged the ‘European project.’\(^62\)

In Heller’s philosophy, as János Boros reminds us, the act of narrativizing is salient both to Heller’s conception of the modern subject, and also her methodological approach as a philosopher. Boros discusses the tradition of ‘narrative philosophy’ Heller’s work advances in significant way, a tradition which encompasses philosophers such as Ricoeur, Derrida, Habermas and Rorty, and, going further back, Nietzsche, Montaigne and Augustine.\(^63\) Boros refers in particular to Heller’s trilogy of works on ethics (General Ethics, A Philosophy of Morals and An Ethics of Personality), as well as

\(^{59}\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, Can Modernity Survive, 70. Emphasis in original.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.


\(^{63}\) For more on Heller’s ideas about questions of narrativizing in relation to a post-modern historical imagination, see in particular her A Philosophy of History in Fragments (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1993).
two recent works, *Megtestesülés*, and *Imhol vagyok. A genezis könyvének filozófiai értelmezései*. Boros translates these titles – the works themselves having not yet been translated from the Hungarian – as *Incarnation*, and *I am Here. Philosophical Interpretations on the Book of Genesis*, respectively.\(^{64}\) Doing ethics, for Heller (following Kant), ‘involves telling the stories of good people’.\(^{65}\) Heller’s ‘narrative ethics’ eschews prescriptive tracts in favour of descriptions and narrations about the ‘ethical choices and ethical lives’ of specific, concrete people, albeit people who may be drawn from fiction, or other similar sources. Heller’s work elucidates a certain form of “narrative sense-giving” that goes on in, and is essential to, our lives.\(^{66}\) As Boros puts it, in the aftermath of metaphysical system-building, as we look to refashion the basic ideas and problems of philosophy in a manner that rejects grand narratives, Heller’s narrative philosophy is a way of asking the same questions in different ways, which allow each of us ‘to find our individual lives, with the help of impersonal concepts and language of philosophy.’\(^{67}\) As can be seen from Boros’s insights, investigating the worlds of feeling of characters from *The Little Company* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, as I do in the case studies in this thesis, is an approach consistent with Heller’s own work.

**Agnes Heller on Character and Art**

Heller explores the inter-relationships between ethical and aesthetic questions – including both the act of self-narrativising, and also listening to and reading the stories of other people – from many angles. Heller frequently illustrates and elucidates her ideas about emotions with examples drawn from literature and other art forms.\(^{68}\) In her writing on aesthetics, she has endorsed the project of interpreting literary characters in relation to moral, ethical, social, subjective and other imperatives. One of her philosophical personae, Fifi, writes to her grandmother (Mrs Sophie Meller, cited above) of the existential singularity of morality, which ‘rests ultimately on the

\(^{65}\) Ibid, 103.
\(^{66}\) Ibid, 110; the cited text is Heller, *Megtestesülés*.
\(^{67}\) Ibid, 114.
\(^{68}\) See in particular Heller’s analysis of the ‘historical dynamics’ of the ‘bourgeois’ world epoch, as depicted in various European literary works of the past, contained in Chapter 6 ‘About The Historical Dynamics of the Modern World of Feelings In General’ of *A Theory of Feelings*. 27
individual person. ... One cannot say anything about individuals unless one speaks about them directly. This is why there is more moral philosophy in Shakespeare than in all the books of moral philosophers.69 In Heller’s recent work on Shakespeare, she celebrates the wealth of the human personality as depicted in Shakespeare’s plays. Referring to the 'subjective' depth characteristic of those characters, Heller observes that each character’s '[o]pinions, judgments and passions can be separated only superficially and artificially'; furthermore, ‘the characters become the authors or co-authors of their own destinies and are not simply the manifestation of their destinies'. Differentiating between Shakespeare’s creations and the protagonists of Greek tragedies, she concludes that ‘history and character differ entirely from myth and mythic individuality’.70

Heller has also observed the historical significance of the ‘socio-historical novel’ genre specifically, for what it reveals about matters of emotions and subjectivity. Her brief comments on this genre, which she also calls the ‘bourgeois novel’, are directly relevant to my project, and they build upon ideas discussed above. It is the reception of this literary genre that Heller focuses on. As readers of such texts, she writes, we commonly respond to the attributes, experiences and problems of the characters, usually identifying with one or other of them, following the twists and turns of the plot, and imagining and anticipating what might happen next. In this sense, we become ‘captives of the story’. One reader may know a greater depth of reception than another, but all are ‘captured by the characters and the story, all laugh and cry, sharing sorrow, fear and hope with the heroes’. Heller relates such reception of the text and its characters, in turn, to our historical consciousness as modern subjects, i.e. our situatedness in a particular time and place. The reader may or may not consciously comprehend herself, or the characters of a given novel, in such a contextualised fashion, but the premise of her engagement with them, and with the text, is that they are so situated. The experiences of the protagonists, in this respect, are not so very different from those of the hypothetical reader: their mentalities, feelings and thoughts emerge from and are folded back into an everyday world in which certain

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69 Heller, An Ethics of Personality, 249.
70 Heller, The Time is Out of Joint, 7, 9.
concrete conditions prevail. In this respect, the socio-historical novel can be seen to be ‘imbued with the spirit of the times’ in which it is written, and, in this sense, it ‘has a history’.

It is the particular ‘character of the adventures’ codified in the bourgeois novel, Heller further states, that makes this genre such a rich record of changing patterns of modern selfhood and individuality. The characters inhabit a changing world, and their own fates and fortunes are inextricably linked to that world. This applies in particular to their inner lives, narrativisation of which forms the definitive element of the genre as a whole. Dickens, Balzac and Dostoevsky are among those writers whom Heller identifies as consummate storytellers in this tradition, attuned to the avenues of ‘imagery or portrayal’ that spoke to the ‘internal experiences’ of their age.\(^{71}\) The adventures depicted in the socio-historical novel are ‘largely internal, although internal adventures may be related to world experiences’.\(^{72}\) Heller elaborates:

> The outstanding importance of internal adventure (a tendency which peaks in Proust’s work) makes the bourgeois novel sensitive, to an extreme degree, to the turning points of social experience and historical consciousness. Whenever historical consciousness, or people’s basic perception of their world, is undergoing marked transformation, then the relation between portrayed internal and external events and characters’ relations to their world will change – and so too, then, does the style and the organization of the novel that renders them.\(^{73}\)

These observations by Heller show socio-historical fiction to pivot around the exchange between internal and external events; between consciousness and conditions; between experience, interpretation and meaning. Along similar lines, Heller concludes in her work on Shakespeare’s plays that ‘[s]omething is in constant flux in the internal rooms of Shakespearean characters’.\(^{74}\) The ideas and relationships conveyed in these extracts from Heller’s work speak to themes at the heart of my study. The fictional

\(^{71}\) Heller, *Immortal Comedy*, 73.

\(^{72}\) Heller, *Immortal Comedy*, 73.

\(^{73}\) Ibid.

\(^{74}\) Heller, *The Time is Out of Joint*, 9.
characters whose emotional households are the subject of Chapters Five to Eight of this thesis offer rich stories in the vein Heller describes.

**Of Characters and Their Worlds: Background to Fictional Case Studies**

This, she thought, was to be a year when normality itself would seem abnormal; when to see trains running, people shopping, housewives hanging out their washing on Mondays, would seem curiously unreal against the more urgent business of shatter-proofing windows, fixing blackout paper, depositing buckets of sand about the house, digging air-raid trenches, learning A.R.P. and first-aid.\(^\text{75}\)

For Marty Ransom, a character in Eleanor Dark’s *The Little Company*, waking up to war has come to seem eerily normal. It is the first day of 1942 in Sydney, and preparations are being made in suburban backyards and on the city’s streets for the possibility of enemy raids. Marty observes a disturbingly surreal quality to the events they are living through. All around her, she observes ‘profound psychological readjustments’ being made to the wartime emergency. Yet the very fact that it seems so ‘strangely simple’ to ‘revert to the conception of life as a perilous thing - precarious, insecure’, is to Marty a reminder of the ‘thinness’ of the ‘civilised veneer’. The year ahead seems to be even more ‘laden with menace’ than had previous ones. It is Marty’s 41\(^{\text{st}}\) birthday, but the occasion holds none of the feelings of ‘friendly affinity with the New Year’ she had known earlier in her life. A writer, Marty has lived through the First World War and the mounting chaos of the 1920s and 1930s, and she has come to understand herself to be ‘living in history’ – an agent of history, and not merely its passive subject.

Marty Ransom’s perceptive, forthright temperament comprises a distinct thread in the chorus of voices to be heard in my case studies in this thesis. Marty and the other characters whom I consider in this thesis are drawn from two Australian novels: *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* and *The Little Company*. Written during the early 1940s, these two wartime novels chronicle an era of rupture and

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unprecedented change, what has been called ‘the cumulative crises of the 1930s’. Responding to the emergence of fascism, in particular, was paramount for many writers at that time, including Eleanor Dark, author of *The Little Company*, and M. Barnard Eldershaw, the pseudonym under which Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw collaborated to produce *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, as well as five earlier works. David Carter has described the extraordinary innovation apparent within Australian writing of the 1930s-40s, as writers engaged with contemporary political, social and economic issues and problems. ‘[E]xpanded forms of fiction’ were created as authors experimented with literary form and content, and, particularly, as they challenged the traditional liberal individualism of the novel genre, encompassing in their narratives topics such as work, ideological viewpoints, social and class relations, and political dissent. In Australian letters at the time (and elsewhere, as indicated above), the traditional terms of liberal humanism seemed ‘inadequate to comprehend such massive social change’ as was then occurring. The heightened debates over ‘cultural meanings’ taking place in the 1930s, including the relationships between ‘fiction and society, individuals and society, and not least intellectuals and society’, found expression in many fictional works of the time.

The plurality and diversity of literary styles, themes, voices and settings which Carter writes of are a hallmark of *The Little Company* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. For Dark, Barnard and Eldershaw, the global crises and debates of the 1930s and ‘40s had a decisive effect on their political views, which in each case were broadly progressive and liberal, and on their objectives as writers. An interest in

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78 Carter and Modjeska’s readings of *The Little Company* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* have substantially informed my own understanding of the two novels. This includes Modjeska’s introduction to the Virago edition of *The Little Company*, and Carter’s essay on the utopian and dystopian dimensions of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, entitled ‘“Current History looks Apocalyptic”: Barnard Eldershaw, Utopia and the Literary Intellectual, 1930s-1940s’, *Australian Literary Studies* 14, no 2 (October 1989).
historical subjects and themes, including questions to do with Australia’s history as a nation, is apparent in Dark’s works from this time (they include the novel she is best known for, *The Timeless Land*, a story about European settlement at Sydney Harbour in 1788, told from European and Aboriginal points of view). In Barnard Eldershaw’s case, a historical focus had always been a feature of their writing. From this time, political and philosophical issues took on a different, and in some respects, a greater significance to the stories these authors sought to tell. They set out not only to narrativise society, but also to document and criticise it, to ‘engage with this new social reality – at once individual and historical’. The *Little Company* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* are significantly different from each other in many respects, but at the centre of both works are broad questions about the kind of society the war was being fought to protect, in the context of far-reaching, unprecedented socio-economic change, and the nature and importance of the role of the individual in the social order. Debates about materialist and humanist modes of explanation of social and historical events and developments shape and inform both of them. Dark’s novel is the more psychologically oriented of the two, in keeping with the author’s modernist aesthetic. Carter identifies in both *The Little Company* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* an ‘ideological struggle between optimism and despair – a crisis of faith in human nature’, as reflects the shifts and tensions within the authors’ liberal and humanist stances.

Although neither *The Little Company* nor *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* is focused exclusively or even mainly on the private lives and emotional dilemmas of the characters, questions about personality and individuality are critical to both works. Both novels feature protagonists who make concrete, in a variety of ways, the experience of living otherwise ordinary lives in extraordinary times. Questions explored in these two works include: What does it mean to live in a time of socio-political crisis? What can and should the individual do in the face of turmoil and chaos?

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81 For more on this, see Carter, ‘Documenting and Criticising Society’, 385.
What place does art and the artist have in such conditions? Why particular characters do what they do, their reasoning and intentions, and the consequences of their decisions and actions, are matters explored and illuminated in each narrative. Hence, characters’ emotions, particularly the emotional palette distinctive to each protagonist, also form part of each story. The social milieu in which *The Little Company* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* were written would change utterly after the end of the war, but at the time of writing, an impetus to effect progressive change in human affairs was not necessarily incompatible with seeing life ‘in the round’, and taking a position on subjectivity that assumed a moral imperative. A commitment to, if not an uncritical endorsement of, Enlightenment values, is common to both the social theory and the fictional works discussed in this thesis. Both novels demonstrate an engagement with an essential human capacity for practical reason, as well as the limits of rational debate and analysis. This is part of their exploration of the human condition, and of a core tenet of liberal humanism, as Carter puts it - ‘human nature as a source of value and continuity’.

These are crucial factors making *The Little Company* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, and the fictional universes they open onto, especially well-suited to a reading in light of Heller’s work.

**Synopses of Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow and The Little Company**

They took a couple of tranced steps toward each other. She was in his arms. His arms fitted close about her. Strong wings were beating closer, closer in the silence. She lifted her head and tried to say, “I love you, Harry,” but his mouth fastened on hers. All the world drew slowly into the vortex of the kiss. This had been coming for months. Now it had come. They were engulfed in Now.

Love proves a precious and unanticipated salve to Harry Munster, protagonist in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, in the form of an affair, at mid-life, with colleague Gwen Leslie. There had seemed no end in sight to the monotony of Harry’s job driving a lift at a large department store. Life in the city, where he and his wife Ally

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84 M. Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (London: Virago Press Ltd, 1983), 196. A heavily censored version of the novel first appeared in 1947, under the title *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. The cuts made by the wartime censors are in the second half of the book, and thus they do not affect the material I draw on from Barnard Eldershaw’s novel for this thesis.
eke out a living for themselves and their three children, has seen the affection and trust in his marriage long since evaporate. The Depression took a heavy personal toll on Harry: things seem to him now to go on in an unchanging fashion, though he registers the possibilities inherent in contemporary debates in relation to the war – and, as importantly, the peace. In the case of Ally, the pressures of the family’s precarious financial situation have contributed to an aggrieved mentality, centred on her unfulfilled desires for a life of comfort, ease and prosperity. As Harry and Allys’ children come of age, responding to the winds of change is not a choice so much as a part of daily existence. Ben, adaptable and observant, takes in the escalating tensions at home and abroad from the vantage point of his role as an apprentice mechanic, while Ruth, his shy and sensitive older sister, strikes up a friendship with Sid Warren, a young man from the inner-city neighbourhood where they live who has returned from fighting in Spain. For one member of the Munsters’ circle, Olaf Ramsay, Harry’s employer and benefactor, there is a growing sense of anxious helplessness at the turbulence of change and the clash of viewpoints and cultures: the British empire is fast unwinding, there is mounting conflict among European countries, and Australia is disengaged from her Asian neighbours and geographically remote from Britain. Olaf finds some solace in providing material assistance to Harry – to his mind, the archetypal ‘Everyman’. The Munsters, Sid Warren and Olaf Ramsay are among the cast of characters whom the reader accompanies as events in the (partly fictionalised) Second World War unfold. Things take an unexpected turn when a group of capitalist states, including the United States, Great Britain and Germany, form an alliance opposed to communist Russia. When Australia looks set to be recruited, against her will, to the side of the former, the conflict culminates in a massive show of resistance by those in Sydney who would rather see the city burn than become a resource for their political foes.

This tale of a city and its inhabitants caught up in a global conflict is the creation of another character in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. In his latest work, Knarf has sought to recreate a society which to him seems riven by contradictions, enmired in policies of profit and material gain that routinely fail to provide for the material needs of its citizens, and which contribute to a culture
pervaded by greed and resentment. Knarf, who lives four hundred years in the future, holds strongly to the view that ‘Whatever man has been, every man can be’. Ord, Knarf’s collaborator, is a scientist by training and temperament, and he brings an empiricist approach to understanding the past, and specifically to the project Knarf has just completed to grasp the social order which had previously existed on the land where they live. The measures of reason and rationality which prevail in their own time, and the policies and institutions built upon them, bear little similarity to Australian values and traditions. The nation now forms part of an international order run along technocratic socialist lines, and the application of technology has succeeded in eradicating poverty and war. But governance by bureaucrats and technicians, and policies based on strictly behavioural principles, have not created the utopia which its proponents promote. Involvement in running the country is restricted to a small elite, and, for most of the population, their working lives end before they turn thirty.

Challenging the status quo is an urgent priority for Ren, Knarf’s idealistic son. Knarf, who has grown apart from Ren, tries to convey to his son his support for his goals. For Knarf, responding to the problems underlying their outwardly stable, prosperous society can best be done by an artistic gesture founded in universal human values. It is with this aim in mind that he has set out, in his newly completed work, to record the human experiences of life in the late capitalist era, including grinding economic hardship as well as cataclysmic events. Over the course of a single day, Knarf reads out his newly completed manuscript to Ord. *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, then, takes shape as a ‘novel within a novel’, its two narratives together creating a work with an epic scope.86

Across town from the Munsters’ working class neighbourhood, the middle-class Massey family also face private turmoil in the context of an escalating global conflict. The Masseys and their circle are the chief protagonists of Eleanor Dark’s *The Little Company*. The family’s outward image of respectability and commercial success belies a significant internal division, centred on the family patriarch, Walter Massey. Walter’s arch-conservative world-view, religious moralism and unforgiving character have never

found favour with his children – Marty Ransom, her elder brother, Gilbert Massey, and their younger brother Nick Massey. The siblings share a broadly progressive standpoint – Nick is a socialist, while his siblings, and Marty’s husband Richard, are liberals, as is Gilbert’s daughter Prue. For Gilbert and Marty, political and social questions are intimately connected to their aims and ideals as writers. They share deep-seated beliefs in individual freedom and expression, and observe with fear and dismay, as do others in their circle, the spread of wartime propaganda and censorship, as well as the events unfolding in theatres of war in Europe and the Pacific, and elsewhere. For Marty and Gilbert, this is compounded by a creative crisis, in the form of writer’s block: unable to create the kind of relevant, critical works they aspire to write, each of them sets out to investigate the causes of the problem. This self-examination takes on a retrospective flavour in the wake of Walter’s death, which occurs shortly before the novel begins.

The story is relayed from a shifting point of view, involving multiple characters, and as it takes shape, the reader is shown a family, and a society, at a turning point. As the Pacific war escalates, public fears of an invasion by the Japanese are growing. Gilbert, who manages the family stationery and bookselling business, follows events closely from the home front. Gilbert views the escalating conflict as one who had himself fought in the First World War, and whose understanding of the political and ideological issues raised by contemporary events reflects both personal and intellectual insights gained in the decades since that war. The conversations among Gilbert, Marty, Nick and other characters reveal the range of perspectives among them on the war and the debates surrounding it.

Meanwhile, as Gilbert and Marty strive to overcome their inability to write, each confronts within themselves certain tensions stemming from their past. In Gilbert’s case, an affair with Elsa Kay, a local writer, brings to a head the problems in his marriage to Phyllis, whose world-view reflects the influence of Walter, her late father-in-law and also her step-father. Phyllis and Gilbert’s views and values have all but diverged. This is a situation that both of them, in their own ways and for their own reasons, avoid confronting, and one that causes Phyllis mounting psychological strain. These and other developments within the family unfold against a backdrop of the
bomfing of Pearl Harbour, and as the nation confronts the realisation that Australia must defend itself without its traditional ally, Britain. When the Japanese mount a submarine attack on Sydney Harbour, for Gilbert, who experiences the attack with Elsa in her city flat, the experience brings the war into his mind and heart in ways he had not anticipated. The sudden and unexpected death of Gilbert and Phyllis’ daughter Virginia, caused by complications in a pregnancy of which neither of her parents were aware, is likewise a moment of reckoning for him, while for Phyllis it spells a turning point of a very different kind.

From the fictional worlds brought to life in these two novels come five characters whose emotional households I investigate in this thesis. Gilbert Massey and Marty Ransom from *The Little Company* form two of my case studies, together with Knarf, Harry Munster and Ally Munster from *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. Employing the ideas and concepts which feature in Heller’s writing on emotional households, and other closely related writing by her, I seek to elucidate the world of feeling of each of the characters discussed. I explore particular incidents, exchanges, decisions and projects involving that character, for what they reveal of his/her situation, way of life, temperament and personality. In different ways, my case studies illuminate questions to do with reason and ethics, and with the flourishing of the individual and the good life.

This thesis utilises the capacity of the novel to take the reader inside the worlds of characters, exploring their hopes, fears, problems and dreams, or as Heller puts it, their ‘internal adventures’, as they engage with the world around them, and with their own life. My aim is not a comprehensive reading of any of the characters discussed, a project that lies beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I offer sketches of each protagonist, focusing on the crucial early sections of both novels. In these opening parts of each work, the reader gains a host of information as to the choices, aspirations, reflexive capacity, core beliefs and circumstances of each character concerned. It is certainly true that each of these characters continues to develop as the story unfolds, and that the reader comes to understand each of them in more depth, and in some cases (depending on the protagonist) to recognise other, different aspects of his/her personality than I identify in my reading of them in this thesis. Nonetheless,
an important foundation of knowledge is conveyed about each of these characters as
the story in which they appear begins, and as the reader ‘meets’ them for the first
time.

I begin this thesis with four chapters investigating and reconstructing Agnes
Heller’s concept of emotional households. A central focus of those chapters is Heller’s
philosophical anthropology, and in particular its main text, *A Theory of Feelings*. That
work contains Heller’s most extensive analysis of feelings and emotions. Additionally, I
also look at two essays by Heller, on the death of the subject, and the question of
emotional wealth, respectively. In the latter essay, Heller elaborates specifically on the
concept of emotional households. The second half of the thesis, Chapters Five to
Eight, comprise the case studies. Harry and Ally Munster are discussed together in
Chapter Seven, while my readings of Gilbert Massey, Marty Ransom and Knarf each
make up separate chapters.

With regard to the terminology employed in this thesis, note that the terms
‘feeling’ and ‘emotion’ are more or less interchangeable in Heller’s philosophical
vocabulary, notwithstanding the specific ways she employs the term ‘emotion’ in her
classification of feelings, something I discuss in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER ONE

INFINITE RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM (I)

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR EMOTIONAL HOUSEHOLDS

At all times, human beings have tasks. They must produce and act; they must reproduce themselves and the social organism into which they were born, and they must solve individual tasks, more or less well. What types of feelings are formed, and of what intensity, as well as when feelings are formed and which of them become dominant is primarily a function of these tasks. “Paying attention” to feelings or the need for a conscious “emotional household” arises during the solution of these tasks.¹

In the roles and commitments that inform our lives, and the plethora of actions and exchanges each day brings, may lie an expressive element significant for our emotional households, as the concept is defined by Heller. Moreover, as Heller observes in the passage cited above, in the course of carrying out ‘tasks’, and solving problems, the need arises, from time to time, for direct engagement with our feelings, i.e. for a ‘conscious “emotional household”’. For Heller, this need is also a possibility – part of realising the potential for autonomy in our emotional lives. Such independent emotional housekeeping, she stresses, can only be ‘relative’, and depends not only on the person himself, but also and primarily ‘the age, and on the social structure which provides the tasks for the individual’.² Heller draws a comparison, in this respect, between traditional societies, in which the range of tasks and ways of living, as well as personality “configurations”, remains relatively constant and unchanging, and societies in which it is a person’s position in the division of labour which is the main determining factor in his life path and overall place in society.³ Societies of the latter kind – paradigmatically, modern societies – offer their citizens many different models of ways of living, and thus also a proportionately greater range of possible emotional household. Of the particular concrete feelings which come to be characteristic of a given age and social strata, Heller refers to ‘dominating configurations of feeling’, rooted in particular ways of life.⁴

¹ Heller, Theory of Feelings, 165.
² Heller, Theory of Feelings, 165.
³ Heller, Theory of Feelings, 165-66. The term personality configurations is drawn from the work of anthropologist Ruth Benedict.
⁴ Heller, Theory of Feelings, 166.
In the writing of Heller’s discussed in this thesis, the concept of emotional households comes to signify a way of understanding feelings and their place in our lives and personalities. The concept foregrounds the decisive ways that emotions may motivate, guide and orient us throughout our lives, and how they crucially inform and inflect our words and actions and how each of us sees the world. Heller’s concept of emotional households surfaces in or is salient to a diverse range of her writing. That writing, of which the above quotation is one example, is in different philosophical styles and oriented around a variety of issues and questions. No single reference to the concept contained in her work is definitive; rather, read in conjunction with each other, we may gain an understanding of how Heller comes at questions regarding emotional economies.

In the first four chapters of my thesis, I seek to establish the essential features of Heller’s concept of emotional households, through a reading of the main writing by her salient to it. My reading of the concept takes shape gradually, as reflects Heller’s own work, and, in some cases, particular ideas and terms are discussed in multiple, different contexts in the course of my analysis. My focus in Chapters One, Three and Four is the phenomenological analysis of feelings and emotions contained in Part One of Heller’s work, *A Theory of Feelings*. Heller first developed the concept of emotional households in *A Theory of Feelings*, which remains her single most extensive body of ideas on feelings and emotions.

My reading of Heller also takes in other concepts in her work salient to her model of emotional households. In particular, I consider her analysis of the subject and the Self, and the personality. Like the emotional household itself, these are topics which are closely tied to Heller’s understanding of the modern social arrangement. I consider two articles, entitled ‘Death of the Subject?’ and ‘Are We Living in a World of Emotional Impoverishment?’, in which Heller investigates emotions in relation to the modern subject. As I show, Heller’s argument that modern subjectivity is closely entwined with rationality and reflexivity is central to her concept of emotional households.

In the remainder of this chapter, I look at the ideas contained in an extended essay by Heller entitled ‘What Does It Mean To Feel?’ This essay makes up the first chapter of *A Theory of Feelings*. In this essay, Heller sets out to clarify ‘the referent’ of her theory of
feels as a whole. She establishes the specific domain salient to her theory of feelings – the sphere of the individual in her everyday life. Heller’s main interest, in this essay, is those everyday situations and structures in relation to which the social actor makes a life for herself, forming judgments, acting and reacting, and otherwise applying her understanding and knowledge. The lion’s share of the essay is dedicated to the significance of a person’s emotions in the maintaining of her homeostasis as a social organism. Following a general introduction, my discussion of ‘What Does It Mean To Feel?’ is in three sections: individuality and everyday life, a section on the relationship between feelings and volition, and finally a consideration of the essential roles played by feelings and emotions in matters of communication, expression and information.

Toward the Emotional Household

... in an active life there are major commitments and minor commitments. There are life-long as well as merely temporal preferences. Therefore there is a hierarchy and not just a difference. ... Deep emotions are steady, constant, essential to the subject. They are not just one among several emotional shades. They stand out, they steer and sometimes even compel. (emphasis in original)

In general terms, we can observe two main sets of inter-connected ideas about emotions in play in Heller’s concept of emotional households. A person’s feelings and emotions constitute primary expressions of individual singularity, which she commonly experiences as among the most intimate, private aspects of her experience. As is conveyed in the above quotation, Heller underlines in particular those deep feelings which, for any given person, are most characteristically expressive of her character and personality. Heller writes at length of sentiments and dispositions – feeling habits that decisively shape and reflect a person’s patterns of thought and behaviour, and which are integral to her worldview. Heller pays close attention to how such feelings pertain to practical judgment and agency. The social actor, as Heller envisages her, lives a life in which there are typically multiple and often conflicting obligations and duties; that life is bounded by various parameters, most decisively the biological limit set by mortality. There are choices to be made, in the various situations and problems which arise in life, as to where one’s priorities lie. Emotions may

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5 Heller, Theory of Feelings, 7.
6 Agnes Heller, ‘Are We Living In a World of Emotional Impoverishment?’, Thesis Eleven, Vol 22, No 1 (February 1989), 53, 54.
serve an important shaping and directing force in life; perhaps one or other sentiment itself becomes subject to cultivation and fostering, thus facilitating enrichment of the household as a whole. This is part of deepening one's 'inner rooms', and developing emotional wealth.

Additionally, Heller's ideas about emotional households reflect her engagement with the social, intersubjective nature of the social actor's existence. A person’s emotions, especially his characteristic emotional dispositions, are central to who others know him to be. Heller shows how our interpretation of emotional expressions reflects a core hermeneutic dimension to our lives. As social beings, we rely on our emotions, including our ability to adequately recognise and interpret emotional cues, to ensure our homeostasis in our environment. This begins from our earliest years: the infant learns to recognise joy, happiness, fear, anger and countless other emotions from the faces, gestures and tone of voice of others. Such learning generally occurs in the context of close emotional attachments. With the acquisition by the child of language, and later the development of an introspective voice, this literacy expands on to new levels. The expanding of our emotional vocabularies reflects the core normative and social components of emotions. This includes the way our emotional life is structured in essential ways by the roles and duties associated with our place in the division of labour, as was foreshadowed at the beginning of this chapter. These questions around normativity also pertain to whether and how we judge our emotions, including judgements of feelings as good or bad, true or false etc, as well as the judgments we pass regarding other peoples’ emotional habits.

In practice, as Heller’s writing makes clear, singularity and sociality are two inseparable and inter-related aspects of our lives and individuality. The emotional household exists for Heller at the juncture of our shared existence as members of our time and place, and our subjective, reflexive world as idiosyncratic beings. In her conception of emotional households, Heller thematises the relationship between feelings and individuality, with the accent on the capacity for individual choice and selection in life. Emotions, in Heller’s work, are a key factor in individual initiatives, objectives and goals, in the life shaped and lived, in outcomes both planned and unintended. Moreover, emotions – at least, some kinds of emotions, depending on the person, the situation and many other variables – are stable and enduring dimensions of each human life, which typically lend that life some of its essential meaning and purpose. Heller’s concept of emotional households
places emotions within the frame of human effort and endeavour; it attests to our involvement in the world, inseparable from our way of life, and any abiding commitments therein. Each household embodies certain value preferences and aims in life, a marshalling of resources for what matters most to us. Another aspect of the concept pertains to personal cultivation and flourishing, particularly development of our sensibilities and enriching of our emotional palettes. Whether it is the young child learning to speak, work roles or the task of creating ‘valid human relations’, such conduct and actions help to ensure continuing human reproduction on both a singular and a collective level.⁷

**Individuality and Everyday Life**

Heller begins her essay ‘What Does It Mean To Feel?’ by exploring the idea that feeling is ‘involvement’. By way of example, she considers a hypothetical person who sets out to solve a mathematical puzzle. The person in question engages in a form of involvement that is both positive and direct should the solving of the problem incite in her feelings of excitement and interest, and satisfaction at striking upon the answer. Conversely, it comprises a positive but indirect kind of involvement, if what occupies the person is the recognition, or other reward, she stands to gain upon successfully completing the puzzle. The act of reading the newspaper is described as a ‘reactive’ involvement, in the sense that ‘I’ (as the hypothetical reader) react only to that ‘which means something to me’. The involvement can be said to be direct if the information in question pertains to ‘my ideas, my goals, the circumstances of my life’, whereas it is indirect if my interest relates not to ‘the informational content itself, but rather to the process of acquiring information (I want to find a place for this bit of information in my environment, or I want to brag about how well-informed I am tonight in company)’.⁸ In both cases, I become involved, that is, I relate the information to myself. Upon reading the death notices, for example, I may feel pity, fear or anxiety, or perhaps I enjoy another’s misfortune. How broadly I become involved will be reciprocally related to the ‘degree of “familiarity” borne by the information’. The breadth of my ‘circle of involvement’ will reflect the breadth of the integrations and concepts ‘with

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which I identify’. Hence, I may mourn not only the death of my neighbour, but also the passing of ‘a hero in a distant country’.  

Heller characterises involvement as ‘the inherent constructive factor in acting, thinking etc’, as opposed to ‘an “accompanying phenomenon”’. We never reach the lower limit of our involvement, i.e. a state of complete indifference, while the upper limit is determined both by factors stemming from the ‘social organism’ and also from ‘the social circumstances’ in question. In both cases, what constitutes the upper limit will vary from case to case, and from person to person. Each society seeks to regulate the intensity of the expression of feelings and in some cases also the content of particular feelings. The primary form such regulations take are social customs and rites, their function in such cases being to ensure that ‘the upper limit of their socially prescribed and accepted intensity, as well as their content, do not reach the limit exceeding the one tolerated by the biological homeostasis’. Culturally specific mourning rites, for instance, may regulate the intensity, duration and circumstances of mourning, as well as the content of the feelings. To ‘exceed the upper limit set by society’ – for instance to refuse to eat or drink when mourning the death of a parent – invites judgments of hubris, and ‘deviation from the “limits of maximum pain” prescribed by society’.

Although, in theoretical terms, the lower limit of involvement is never reached, involvement is virtually nil in the case of ‘repeated actions, including repetitive thinking, in which the innumerably repeated and spontaneously reflexive or practical actions (those executed without paying attention) have the character of means’. The activities in question, such as dressing oneself or tying one’s shoelaces, are ones done so regularly and routinely that the degree of involvement tends to be minimal – instead, one thinks about other things, or rather, other involvements, which are of greater personal significance or novelty. An example given is of a child learning to tie his laces, a task that initially calls for ‘unusual concentration of attention’ and one that is ‘an end in itself, and if properly executed, it signifies success’. With repetition, the activity becomes a means to an end, and

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9 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 12.
11 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 13. Note that Heller spells the term ‘reflexivity’ both with an ‘x’ and on other occasions as ‘reflectivity’. I have chosen to adopt the former spelling in this thesis.
the involvement is likely to decrease. However, this is not the case should an obstacle arise while carrying out the task – should the laces snap, for instance – at which point ‘the means becomes an end and involvement enters the game: we become impatient, irritated etc.’

Neither is it the case with actions which remain an end in themselves. Repetition is not ‘emotion-free’, for example, in the case of the ‘practiced movements’ of the discus thrower, for whom the ‘spontaneous and repetitive’ actions are inseparable from ‘the entire process’ of his sport.

If throwing the discus is a pleasure in itself for him or if he intends to win in discus-throwing events (direct or indirect positive involvement), then this involvement cannot be abstracted, in actuality, from a single one of the practiced and spontaneous partial elements of motion.

Heller observes certain general characteristics of involvement. We may be involved in something with our personality as a whole or only partially, in a momentary or a lasting fashion, intensively or extensively, or in relation to the past, the present or the future. Additionally, we can distinguish between ‘background’ and ‘figure’ involvements. In the latter, the feeling itself is the ‘focus’ of one’s consciousness. Fear is a feeling which is ‘unequivocally the figure (and so it stands at the centre of consciousness)’. Likewise, if upon ‘listening to a melody, I am moved to the point of breaking into tears’, then my involvement can be seen to be foregrounded in my consciousness. Alternatively, should the object in which I am involved be front and centre, then my involvement (feeling) retreats to the background of my mind. Instrumental actions, problem solving and perception form three kinds of experience in which background involvement, or background feeling, is characteristic.

Background feelings, Heller writes, form an ever-present feature in each social actor’s ‘world of feelings’, comprising ‘an indispensable predisposition of the figure itself’, and commonly a decisive influence on our patterns of reasoning and judgment. To illustrate her point, Heller posits a ‘miser, who is very much involved in acquisition of money’ but whose greed is suspended ‘precisely in order to better achieve his objective’, i.e.

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14 For more on feeling as involvement, and background feelings, see Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 15.
to choose from among the possible investments, evaluate the varying degrees of risk, etc. ‘Greed, as background, is always present’, Heller writes of such a case, ‘otherwise our miser would not be meditating on the means towards this end.’

Yet in our everyday lives, background feelings tend to be widely overlooked as feelings at all. Heller observes a general tendency for our engagement with feelings and emotions to be focused narrowly on the affects, i.e. those feelings of a biological or primarily biological nature which are innate in every member of the species (the affects, which include rage, shame and fear, are discussed further in Chapter Three of this thesis). This focus on the affects, Heller writes, reflects in part the moral, ethical and other dilemmas posed by affective feelings in relation to human judgment and action, given their capacity to block and otherwise problematise cogent thought.

To understand feeling as involvement, as Heller does, is to ask of the relationships among a person’s feelings, and also between her feelings and her habits of mind and Self. It is in this vein that Heller writes as follows of the process of the formation of subjectivity:

Subjectivization is nothing but the formation of the individual’s own world in the organically connected process of acquiring the object and realizing our own self.

Subjectivization, the formation of our ‘inner life’, is inseparably, interdependently and tangentially related to our development – what Heller calls our objectification – as social beings. As beings involved with, and in, the world, in any given instance it may be our feeling that is to the fore, or it may be that in which we are involved which is foregrounded. It is in the nature of our experience of our emotions as we go about our lives that the feeling tends to be either figure or background. Less frequent, but potentially transforming, are experiences of deep, intensive involvement in which we surrender ourselves completely to the person, idea or object in which we are involved. Citing Lukacs’ concept of catharsis, and Abraham Maslow’s idea of peak experience, Heller refers, for instance, to ‘the character of every “great moment” in which two lovers unite surrendering temporarily the separate

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16 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 18.
17 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 27.
existence of I and the You’, and also the contemplation of beauty.19 (The latter topic arises in my discussion of the character of Knarf from Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, in Chapter Eight of this thesis.) Heller shares Maslow’s views that that life ‘in which involvement has not become one with its object’ at least once is not complete, and also that it is in the nature of such experiences that they tend to be, in themselves, (if not in their potential consequences), of short duration. What is more characteristic of the ‘course of life’, in this respect, is the mutual exchange, and separation, between subject and object.

As Heller continues elaborating on feeling as involvement, she further refines her use of the term involvement. She refers to a capacity for self-regulation in one’s environment, that is, the capacity to maintain that level and kind of involvement that will ensure the person’s homeostasis in her environment. Through our involvement as members of our time and place, we learn what is necessary to maintain and reproduce ourselves, socially and biologically. This process of self-formation and individuation reflects an antinomy essential to the human condition, a tension Heller outlines as follows:

We are born with an organism into which are fed, by the genetic code, only the conditions for the “human species existence”. At the same time this organism is an independent system – in each case an idiosyncratic system – which turns towards the world as such and which can “build in” everything only by departing from the self, by never transcending the self.20

Everything which ‘makes man de facto man’ remains external to her organism at the moment of her birth, located ‘in those interpersonal relations into which we are born.’ As well as interpersonal relations, Heller also identifies language, habits of thinking and reasoning, forms of manipulation and use of objects, and modes of action as elements of that ‘species essence’ transmitted to and acquired by each human infant.21 We receive such human ‘essence’ from our environment with ‘the whole organism as an organic entity’, the brain being the ‘directive center of the organism’ in this respect. The process in question is essential for the development of the infant, who lacks the ‘biologically provided instincts’, that otherwise makes possible such development (i.e. realisation of the genetic code received at birth) in new born animals. Among non-human animals, all such information

‘pertaining to its species’ is received at birth in the biological code. To illustrate her point, Heller writes that the horse raised among humans would remain a horse, i.e. remain a member of its species. A human being raised among horses, on the other hand, ‘would not be a human being, would not be a member of its species’.  

The human being begins to appropriate the tasks of the world departing from his own organism at the moment of birth. It is the world that provides the tasks to be appropriated. Everything that I appropriate (“build” into the self) becomes the Self, and in the future it is more and more the projection of the Self which leads the way in the further appropriation of the world.  

This quotation by Heller about the formation of the Self through appropriation of ‘the tasks of the world’ pertains to the socially conditioned nature of human consciousness. Individuality is shown to be inextricably linked to sociality. Each of us is born into a world in which we learn the habits and forms necessary for our own existence. Our involvement in our environment is grounded, in key respects, in our inborn aptitudes and propensities, and the guiding force of our own singular needs, circumstances and viewpoint. In the course of living, we acquire capacities and skills that enable us to survive and flourish; in the process, our essentially idiosyncratic selves are indelibly formed and shaped by the world around us. Hence, the process of selecting and executing worldly tasks is ‘organically connected’ to the ‘formation of the individual’s own world’ and to ‘realizing our own self’. 

Heller presents a model of selfhood which evolves in one or other social and historical setting. Each Self is idiosyncratic, and embodies a singular bridging of the ‘hiatus’ between the person’s genetic code and the given conditions and possibilities of his environment. In turning to the world, we depart from the Self and with the “equipment” of the organism’. The accent is on the evolving and forming of a person’s abilities, mentalities and emotions – on the making of the Self and the developing of the personality – and, at the same time, on a process bounded by intrinsic parameters:

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We are finite beings, finite in space and, more importantly, in time. We are also finite in our capacity to store information. Yet to live with this contradiction is permanent.\textsuperscript{26}

Our actions and responses in relation to the tasks assigned to us by ‘the world’ and also those we ourselves choose, are likely to reflect, and perhaps also express, not only our thoughts and actions, but also, and even more primarily (in ontological terms), our feelings and emotions. By way of example, Heller identifies three preconditions for the acquisition of language: first, the biological means to acquire language, including a ‘brain programmed for ideation’, second, an environment in which such learning is possible and valued, and, finally, the child’s feeling that he needs to speak and is impelled to learn to speak.\textsuperscript{27}

The capacity for emotional differentiation begins early in life: from a very young age, the child learns to distinguish what he feels from what he thinks. The ability to differentiate between ‘what it is that he does, what it is that he thinks, that he feels, that he perceives’ is integral to the evolution of the Self. The development of the Self ‘proceeds along with the differentiation, and with the continuous reintegration of the functions’, i.e. this reintegration occurs ‘simultaneously with differentiation’. The term ‘task’ is used in broad anthropological terms, in such a way as to encompass the gamut of capacities, skills, attitudes and actions required to reproduce oneself, and one’s way of life. Heller calls attention to three specific everyday ‘tasks’ – the use of language, competence in the use of everyday objects, and a capacity to act in accordance with prevailing social and moral norms – as fundamental in this respect. Acquiring, to a greater or lesser extent, capacities for the use of language and everyday objects, as well as a conversance with social norms, is a necessary part of each human life.

When I act, perceive, think, then I not only “select” that which is decisive, fundamental to me, that which threatens the preservation, extension and continuity of my Self; but also realize myself, I render my own world coherent and I put my own stamp on everything I do, perceive or think.\textsuperscript{28}

Citing Wittgenstein, Heller writes that each of us experiences our emotions as an expression of the singularity of our being. While it is true, she writes, that there is no such thing as a

\textsuperscript{26} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 23.
\textsuperscript{27} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 25.
\textsuperscript{28} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 24.
private language, concept or objectification, the following assertion is also true of human affairs:

...what it is I express, and what I refrain from expressing, what I reflect upon and what I do not reflect upon from amongst the tasks assigned to me by the world – that is the projection of the Self, that which Husserl called “intentionality.”

Heller identifies a process of appropriating, or ‘turning to the world’, in which one can ‘depart only from the self, only with the “equipment” of the organism, and never transcending it.’ Our involvement, or our feeling, is basic to our existence as subjective, reflexive beings, from infancy and throughout our lives.

Involvement is nothing but the regulative function of the social organism (the subject, the Self) in its relation to the world. This is what “guides” in the preservation of the coherence and continuity of the subjective world, in the extension of the social organism.

How a person is involved in the world, his patterns of expression, reflection and action, speaks to the singularity of his point of view and perspective. The Self constitutes the ontologically primary grounds of selection: involvement entails regulation of the appropriation of the world in the process of preserving and extending the Self, always ‘starting out from the social organism’. As expressions or projections of the Self’s engagement with and in the world, our feelings and emotions may possess an essential intentionality. Passages like those cited above from Heller’s work get at the element of finitude and transience characteristic of the human condition, and the fundamental – and generative - tension associated with that impermanence, as she sees it.

Feelings and the Will

I am disturbed; I have bad premonitions “perhaps I have offended him?” I feel insecure, I seek reassurance. Love, the yearning for reassurance, involvement in the past or in the future (“I want to re-establish things”), fear

29 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 24-25.
30 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 23.
(of losing him) – all these feelings, and yet others, are attached to my objective as polyphonic emotions.33

Heller’s investigation of what it means to feel takes up the relationship between emotions and the will. To illustrate her point, Heller envisages a hypothetical social actor responding to a problematic turn taken in one of her friendships: the friend has become cool towards her. In the passage above, Heller describes some of the social actor’s ‘polyphonic emotions’ as she attempts to establish and resolve the problem, restoring trust, friendship and peace of mind. She puts aside her feelings of irritation, jealousy, feeling upset and offended, while her feelings of love and gratitude to her friend come to the fore.34 In this scenario, the worried friend exercises an evaluative faculty in her responses to and judgments regarding herself and her experiences. Her emotions, like her decisions and conduct, demonstrate an investment in the importance of friendship: that priority shapes and reflects her character and personality, her reasons for doing things and the reasoning process she follows when faced with the envisaged problem. Friendship is an emotional disposition with unique significance, for Heller, who highlights its affinities with feelings of love, comradeship and solidarity.

In addition to the worried friend, a second example of Heller’s hypothesis on this topic involves a writer who, in the interests of ‘the truth and perfection of his work of art’, allows ‘his favorite protagonist to be “cruelly” humiliated or even to perish’. In acting thus, the writer puts aside his own feelings of pity, as well as any feelings of self-pity stemming from his identification with his hero.35

Concrete, polyphonic emotions connect to the object of my will. In the case of more complex situations, and practically all significant situations are complex, the goal itself is not homogenous.36

The two examples discussed above underline the importance of emotions as aspects of character and personality. While these examples are not articulated explicitly by Heller as demonstrations of emotional households or housekeeping, they speak to a key part of Heller’s approach in this respect. These examples serve to illustrate the hierarchies of task

33 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 30-31
and of feeling which are integral to the emotional household, in which emotions and feeling habits both shape and are shaped by the social actor’s value preferences and the decisions and actions expressive of those preferences. This is connected, in turn, to a central argument in Heller’s phenomenology: to feel is to be involved in something, and, critically, to have a capacity to regulate one’s involvement, or feeling, in line with one’s will, conscience, and preferences.

Heller’s phenomenology of feelings posits the unity of feeling, thought and value in the human psyche. Such unity is advanced as both empirically and theoretically factual (the idea that dis-unity is equally real is also encompassed in her argument in *A Theory of Feelings*). In this respect, Heller’s theory of feelings involves a critique of Cartesianism and the internally divided Cartesian subject. Writing of the ‘rigid contrasting’ between feeling and thinking in everyday consciousness and some scientific theories, she observes the applicability of such a distinction in relation to cases of ‘collision’ between our desires and our will – ‘those cases when our will turns towards the feeling itself, pro or contra’. Following Kant, Heller categorises will as ‘a “desire of a higher order”,’ on the grounds that it prompts us to ‘mobilise our involvement (or involvements)’ in the course of acting upon our evaluation of what a given situation calls for. Thus our feelings, and not only our thoughts, readily become the object of our will. The acts of emotional foregrounding and relegation carried out by the worried friend and the honest novelist, outlined above, are testament to this idea. Not only are our emotional lives not inconsistent with voluntary desire, they are subject to and critically shaped by the will. This ongoing process is part of human development. Throughout our lives, and especially in childhood, Heller writes, we experience and respond to “‘appeals to feel’” which have a decisive impact on the formation of our worlds of feeling.

“Appeals to feel” include direct injunctions, such as “you should be ashamed of yourself!” and “don’t be afraid!” Injunctions like this ‘communicate a social experience in the form of an appeal, regarding a social norm’. The implication of these statements is that all situations similar to the present one are properly the trigger of shame. While statements

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like this do not invariably trigger shame or fear in those to whom they are directed, Heller writes, such feelings are in general unlikely to arise in a person who has not experienced injunctions of this kind. Such injunctions, especially those which are repeated many times and/or expressed by someone who is a “significant other” in my eyes, effect the evolution of feelings by directing the will “inwards” as well as “outwards”. Thus they lead to the eliciting/foregrounding of the nominated feeling, and the relegation or elimination of other feelings. 40 “Internalisation” may also be present, should one subsequently repeat a particular directive to oneself. Heller refers to the adult who, as a result of the continuing influence of childhood experiences, feels shame upon ‘discarding dry and inedible bread’.

Social norms also shape and inform the evolution of our worlds of feeling in other, more direct ways. One example given is the biblical commandment “Honour your father and mother!”, conveyed among members of a traditional community. Social norms, Heller write, are misunderstood if conceived as a command to demonstrate a particular behaviour, irrespective of how one is actually feeling. Rather than causing the feeling, or causing the change in emotion, the norm serves as a conductor of feeling, indicating the kinds of emotions probable among social actors in given situations. To merely pay lip service to a normative preference to respect one’s parents would be likely to result in bad conscience, a feeling most people strive to avoid by relegating into the background those heterogeneous feelings inconsistent with the norm in question. By such means, feelings ‘become the goal (object) of the will’.

These ideas about the relationship between feelings and norms deepen Heller’s argument about the self-regulatory dimension of our feelings and emotions, i.e. the role they play in allowing each of us to maintain social and biological homeostasis in our environment. It is this role, Heller argues, which is the single most important anthropological function played by feelings and emotions in human life, and which chiefly differentiates them ‘from other human capacities within an integrated human system of relations’. The ‘selection’ of tasks by the Self has as its over-riding objective the sustaining of ‘the homeostasis of the organism’. It is feeling that primarily guides the social actor in

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40 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 34.
maintaining a homeostatic equilibrium. In maintaining homeostasis, we are guided, potentially, by a very wide set of feelings, including the drive feelings (the drives, which include the need to eat and to drink, for rest and activity, etc, are discussed further in Chapter Three). The satisfaction of biological homeostasis always occurs within a wider sphere of social and psychological homeostasis:

It is not that we must merely maintain ourselves, we must maintain ourselves in a given social context, we must acquire the attitudes towards work, the aptitudes for the manipulation of objects, the system of customs and norms, the language, etc. Psycho-social homeostasis encompasses not only the maintenance, but also the expansion, of the social organism. Extension is particularly significant in the ‘process of growing up’ in a given society. In societies that are ‘open and oriented towards the future’, the maturation process does not end when the person reaches adulthood, but rather continues ‘on a different level’. Yet, Heller repeats, it is the need of every social actor to preserve the continuity of the Self. Thus, we relate new knowledge to that which we have previously acquired, and we are also led by our feelings in relation to the proportion of new and old, as for instance in the desire for familiarity and security (eg in the form of a home, or ‘a “reliable” man’), or for change and adventure. The ‘“thirst for experiences”’ among Europeans living highly routine and monotonous everyday lives was evident in the excitement felt by many when war broke out in 1914, an example of the ‘rather negative role’ the quest for adventure has played in history.

**The Expressive & Communicative Functions of Emotion**

A further aspect of Heller’s discussion of feeling and self-regulation pertains to the communicative and expressive functions played by our feelings and emotions. Communicating and expressing our feelings, and interpreting and responding to the emotional cues expressed by others, are integral aspects of human feeling. On the relationship between feelings and human motivation, Heller underlines the primary

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importance of a person’s emotional expressions in illuminating his motives. Feelings and emotions typically serve as a primary source of information in our enquiries into those motives. Emotions are likely to enter the equation in this respect when we seek answers because others behave in ways we don’t understand, or as Heller puts it, in cases of ‘idiosyncratic action (behavior) in our own world’.

For instance, Heller continues, we might ask of a mother “‘What motivated her not to raise her children?’” Yet we never ask, “‘What motivated this mother to raise her children?’”, as the action in question is covered by and consistent with the prevailing norm. Our interest is in those factors ‘which explain to us (make it possible to describe, to grasp) the action that constitutes a deviation from the mores’. Depending whether the forthcoming account is consistent or not with the prevailing ‘value-preferences’, we may either speak of what ‘caused’ a particular action, or we may assign ‘motives’ to the person’s action. Likewise, one may ask such questions of oneself or of another should someone behave in ways that seem out of character. Hence, we undertake “detective work” of a brave man who ‘runs away unexpectedly’, in order to understand what is going on, ‘[b]ecause we want to understand his flight, and something is “missing” from our understanding, something that was not missing as long as the man known to be brave behaves bravely.’

Heller concludes:

We are involved in the preservation and expansion of the Self; in the continuity of the Self, in knowledge of human character, in finding our way in the world, in arranging, understanding, ordering the facts of life, in ascribing meanings to actions. We are involved in our values, our habits, our objectifications. We are involved in the world and in our self: this is why we ask about motives, it is from this point of view that we ask about motives.

This passage encapsulates Heller’s conception of the reflexive, interpreting subject, with the accent on applying one’s ‘knowledge of human character’, finding one’s way in the world.

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44 Quotes this paragraph, Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 45-47. Heller refutes those psychological schools of thought that would equate feelings with motivation. She concludes that investigating the question “What motivates man?” is an unhelpful avenue of inquiry in psychological and anthropological terms. In light of the questing, active character of the human being, the answer provided to this question in ‘the psychologico-anthropological approach’ will always come back to the individual’s genetic code and environment. In this sense it is a redundancy. Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 46. See Terezakis’s critical reception of Heller’s ideas on this subject, Terezakis, ‘Review: Agnes Heller: A Theory of Feelings’, 117.

45 Quotes this paragraph and the last one, Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 47-49.
and ‘ascribing meaning to actions’. It is in this context that emotions serve a vital clue as to the motives of another person.

Heller observes that, with the exception of the affects, the expression of feelings is at once spontaneous and also learned. The differentiation of feeling types ‘is related to the cognitive and situational differentiation’ – that is, in all significant situations our thoughts and feelings differentiate in ways consistent with our response to the given situation, in particular our orientation to the task at hand.

The expression of feeling is always a signal which bears some significance. Not only must we learn the differentiation of expression of feeling; we must also learn their significance (as signs). We do not learn this on ourselves (in front of a mirror), but on the face, in the gestures, in the tone of voice, the reaction types, in the behavior of others. In order to be able to move in our social element we must acquire the “language” of feelings just as much as we acquire the language of concepts.  

The “language” of feelings’, in its ‘direct’ forms of expression, encompasses mimicry, gestures, phonics (such as ‘ouch!’), inflexion, types of reaction, action and behaviour in general. Reports about feelings constitute ‘indirect’ expression. Heller writes that all feeling is expression, be it direct or indirect, acknowledging that the distinction between direct and indirect emotional expression is often hard to draw in practice.

At the same time, feeling is information. We learn, and relearn, modes of emotional expression in each new environment in which we find ourselves, and in our relationships with each other:

Not only must we learn the signs in general, but we must also learn the specific significance of the specific signs of individuals. He who learns to “read” the idiosyncratic signs quickly, he who solves the hieroglyphs of the unique individual and understands their significance, has a good knowledge of human character. (True enough: even in the understanding of the specific signs of the individual we are always guided, at least in the beginning, by the general meaning of the signs.)

46 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 52.
47 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 52.
It is in the nature of our appropriation of the world – more specifically, our explication of emotion and of human character generally - that interpretation and judgment begin from ‘the general meaning of the signs’. But such general meaning is but the jumping off point, so to speak, for more differentiated and idiosyncratic translations of emotional expressions. This passage and others like it in A Theory of Feelings suggest that the primary measure of our communication of our own feelings, and of our interpretation of the feelings expressed by others, is adequacy and accuracy, rather than perfection or completeness. Heller accents the continuing, evolving nature of the learning process in question, as well as the importance therein of developing and applying a ‘good knowledge of human character’.

**Conclusion**

In the writing of Heller’s discussed in this chapter, we see take shape an image of the human being in context. Heller takes us into the person in his/her own world, a person whose fate and fortunes are indelibly interwoven with – if not necessarily determined by – the concrete time and place of which she is a member. This is at the essence of Heller's conception of feeling as involvement. A broad claim of Heller’s on these topics is that our involvement in the world effects the formation of our inner worlds, and is in turn indubitably shaped by subjective factors. Emotions shape our lives in countless ways, and, like thoughts, they are part of socially conditioned consciousness. Emotions, either as background or as figure feelings, serve as an essential guide in regulating our general patterns of involvement in life.

Our intersubjectivity as social organisms is integral to our need for emotional equilibrium: as Heller writes, ‘It is not that we must maintain ourselves, we must maintain ourselves in a given social context’. The ‘appeals to feel’ which shape our emotional development are rooted in social and moral norms that serve to conduct feeling, rather than triggering a change in feeling; thus, they attest to the ongoing exchange of meaning between individual and society, or at least the potential for such dialogues. The impulse is felt from the inside, or it may be, rather than comprising a ‘command’ to comply with the customary patterns bound up with a given emotion. The social actor’s core patterns of consciousness and conduct emanate in the first instance from her own measure and sense of things, reflecting idiosyncratic preferences and needs. It is in the nature of subjectivity that each of us learns to function in our environment in ways consistent with the realisation
of those preferences and needs; in this way, we help ensure our own homeostasis, including biological, social and psychological equilibrium. Heller’s work in this area accents the wholeness of our being, as we act to meet our needs and realise desires, to order the facts of life and ascribe meaning to actions.

Heller’s theory of feelings is founded partly on the idea that, for each of us, our feelings and our thoughts may operate in fruitful conjunction with each other as we go about our lives. In her essay on what it means to feel, which forms part of her phenomenological analysis of feelings, Heller investigates certain key ways this unity of emotion and cognition finds expression in each human life. In terms of the communicative function performed by our feelings and emotions, the knowledge we acquire and the habits we learn in the way of emotional expression are crucial to ‘the preservation and expansion of the Self … the continuity of the Self’. Heller’s work suggests that each of us draws upon the language of feeling in essentially idiosyncratic, interpretative ways, not unlike the ways we enact and fulfil the rules and customs surrounding linguistic vocabularies, grammar and syntax. Exercising a capacity for meaningful expression and articulation of emotions, including being able to recognise and identify concrete, individual feelings we may feel, or which we see expressed by someone else, is one relevant aspect of this topic. Heller’s work foregrounds the variety and richness of the feelings and emotions which make up our worlds of feeling.

Also apparent in this chapter is the close connection between our sensitivity to our social environment and the volitional aspect of our actions and responses in life – a connection that is essential to Heller’s concept of emotional households. That our emotional lives are interconnected with our will, conscience and, generally, our consciousness, in a myriad of ways, is shown to be by no means incompatible with the fact that our emotions and their expression are socially regulated. It is in this context that Heller refers to the polyphony of feelings which may attach to the object of a person’s will. ‘Background feelings’, emotional ‘polyphony’ and ‘hierarchies of feelings’ are some of the terms and ideas that go to establishing a narrative of emotional reflexivity, based upon the idea that our emotions are active, dynamic aspects of our consciousness and existence. Feelings and emotions are shown to be vital not only in enabling the individual to achieve
and maintain homeostasis in her environment, but also and more broadly in the formation and realisation of her personality.

The above observations signal some of the philosophical questions and ideas that underpin Heller’s concept of emotional households. This includes the close links between emotions and the interpersonal and social aspects of our lives, and also between emotions and the will. The expressive and communicative functions played by feelings and emotions are essential to each of these issues, which relate to the vital function played by emotions in ensuring our self-regulation in our environment. Each of us needs to preserve our social and psychological homeostasis, and emotions play many roles in ensuring this. These ideas speak to the ‘tasks’ each social actor performs to keep body and mind together across the course of their existence: it is in this light that Heller refers to the evolving of the Self through appropriation of the world. The need to reproduce oneself and one's world is the need of every social actor, even if it is not – or, to Heller, should not be – the object of that life. In her writing on this topic, Heller comes at issues around particularity and generality, as well as the relationship of the individual to the world, from the vantage point of the emotions. In the present chapter I have introduced Heller’s phenomenological writing on these questions. In the next chapter, I consider two essays in which she investigates questions about subjectivity and emotions as they relate to philosophical problems specific to the modern social arrangement.
Our life is finite for the approximation of the infinite.¹

The element of finitude in our emotional lives, as in our lives as a whole, is a topic that centrally informs Heller’s concept of emotional households. Heller has observed two equally true, yet seemingly paradoxical, facts about human feelings. First, '[w]e express our feelings and thus we communicate them'.² A decisive aspect of human emotions concerns our communicating and expressing of our feelings – part of the core social dimension of our lives. Our emotions are a primary source of information regarding our point of view, desires and motives, central to who others know us to be and who we know ourselves to be. Yet at the same time, '[o]ur feelings in their totality and in their concretion are uncommunicable'.³ Citing Wittgenstein, Heller writes ‘‘[w]e are inclined to say that when we communicate a feeling to someone, something which we can never know happens at the other end. All that we can receive from him is again an expression.’’⁴ While each one of us is a singular being, ‘in each case an idiosyncratic system’, it is equally true that our existence relies upon our ‘‘being-in-the-world’, by subsistence and orientation in it, by the existing system of symbols – such as language, forms of manipulation, objectifications in general’.⁵ Put another way, the permeation of the ‘object’ by the ‘subject’ – of our own ‘idiosyncratic system’ by the ‘existing system of symbols’ – is intrinsically of a finite nature. Throughout Heller’s theory of feelings, she returns periodically to this antimony, which gets at a central economic dimension to feelings and personhood, and thus also to emotional households as she defines the concept.

As we saw in the previous chapter, a distinct philosophical anthropology underlies Heller’s concept of emotional households. Our emotions are shown to play many decisive functions in the forging of individual consciousness and sense of Self. Heller’s work suggests that to grasp the value hierarchies, personal qualities and mentalities characteristic of any

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¹ Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 53.
² Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 53.
³ Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 53.
⁴ Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 53.
⁵ Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 21, 22.
given human life, generating a singular texture and rhythm therein, one may start from the emotions. The inseparable inter-relationship between emotion and thought is an important aspect of Heller’s philosophical anthropology. The points of view and priorities that structure each emotional household relate in essential ways to a person’s self-understanding and reflexive disposition.

A further articulation of these ideas by Heller can be found in the two essays by her which I discuss in this chapter. The themes and issues posed in these essays are reflected in their titles: ‘Death of the Subject?’ and ‘Are We Living In A World Of Emotional Impoverishment?’ These two essays appear in her book Can Modernity Survive?, in which, as the title suggests, she is concerned with questions around the nature and future prospects of modernity. In ‘Death of the Subject?’ and ‘Are We Living In A World Of Emotional Impoverishment?’; Heller articulates ideas about the dialogical nature of the Self, and the ways hierarchies of values and commitments come to structure each life, or may do. Additionally, in Heller’s investigation of the question of emotional wealth and impoverishment, she writes explicitly about the nature and function of the emotional household – an elaboration that is crucial for my project.

‘Death of the Subject?’: The Subject as Author of Her Own Life

When someone talks about ‘the subject’, one has to ask first what kind of subject they are speaking about. ... Just ask yourself whether subject means to you primarily Philosophy, Art or Peace, or rather the singularity of your voice and that of the Other human creature; in all probability you will come down on the side of the second interpretation.

‘Death of the Subject?’ is an exploration of the nature of the subject, and an argument against certain schools of thought which have proclaimed its death. Those traditions include behaviourism, French structuralism, and ‘neo-Heideggerian and neo(post)-structuralist’

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7 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’ In Can Modernity Survive?, 62.
Heller understands the subject in terms of ‘the singularity of your voice and that of the Other human creature’. The communication by the subject of his distinct point of view is key. Heller articulates these and other aspects of subjecthood through a discussion linking the narratives of the ‘end of philosophy’ with those pertaining to the end of the subject. Heller’s argument that the subject is not dead, and that the conditions continue to exist that make possible the kind of generation of meaning and cultivation of value central to its formation (as defined by Heller), is conceptually in line with her idea of the emotional household.

Heller begins by pointing out the continuity of an interpretive tradition underlying the very idea of the ‘end of philosophy’. This declaration, she observes, in fact ‘fits smoothly into the tradition of philosophy; it is the philosophical tradition par excellence.’

Even the philosopher who declares the ‘end of philosophy’, perhaps out of a conviction ‘that there is only one philosophy (theirs)’, still remains ‘within the confines of philosophical language games’. Heller elaborates:

The best among them bring forth a world (a philosophical edifice) and furnish it with categories, tricks and rules of the game. They invite others for a visit or a stay. Whoever enters that world will be at home there. He or she will constantly rearrange the (existing) furniture, play the pre-given tricks and play them according to the rules; he or she will interpret and modify the categories to the extent that the world of that philosophy permits. Those who enter the world of a philosophy accept the world’s language as their natural tongue, they speak it, and they think in accordance with it.

The accent in this passage is on philosophy as grounds for meaningful human exchange – as a ‘philosophical edifice’ with which others may engage, perhaps rearranging the conceptual ‘furniture’, and otherwise exercising a free field of play within the ‘categories’ structuring that world. In stepping into the ring, as it were, the hypothetical visitor partakes of and responds to the given ‘philosophical position’, within a particular ‘network of unsociable sociability, of conflicts, alliances, abuses, loves, friendships, that is, a network of affections

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8 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 63; see also 62-68 et passim.
9 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 65.
10 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 65.
and commitments’. In this respect, the philosopher (she whose philosophical world it is) can be seen to be embedded, by virtue of her philosophy, in a ‘network of affections and commitments’. It is in this sense that Heller describes philosophies as ‘the mirror images of our unsocial sociability’. Others who engage with our philosophical stance, in turn, do so on the presupposition that it is one among many: whether it is judged positively or negatively, it is at least taken on its own merits. In particular, it is no kind of response to that stance to say – anyhow, each philosophy is just as good as all the others – or to deny the very existence of the ‘categories, tricks and rules of the game’ in question. Heller elaborates:

Whenever someone offers you a world in which you can dwell, a language that you can speak esoterically, a framework of speculation where you can toy with many dominant and subdominant elements, you must know that this world (or language game) was not thought out by the perfect hermeneutician, nor will you be one as long as you find satisfaction in toying with the dominant or subdominant elements of this world. This world is an individual, for you can identify it in all its difference (many books and studies). It is a meaning-carrying individual, which interprets (self-interprets) and lends itself to practically infinite interpretations, but not to all kinds of interpretation. It is a self (of course, not a mono-centred one) by virtue of its dominant and sub-dominant elements. And, if it is modern, it is also a subject, for it bears the hallmark of contingency, which has been pulled together into a personal destiny.

In this passage, Heller’s focus evidently includes not only the philosopher, but also, and more broadly, the human subject: both are encompassed, for instance, in the reference to ‘a world in which you can dwell … a framework of speculation where you can toy with many dominant and subdominant elements’. In relation to subjectivity, Heller’s observations in this passage recall her comments, cited in Chapter One of this thesis, to the effect that our appropriation of the world, beginning from our perceptions, thoughts and feelings, serve to render the world coherent and put one’s stamp on one’s words and deeds. She also accents the many-centred quality of selfhood, which possesses ‘dominant and sub-dominant elements’. To ‘dwell’ in the world on offer is to engage with its singularity, as well as its

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11 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 66. Of artworks, Heller cites Lukacs in describing artworks as 'closed worlds, cold stars that bring warmth only to the recipients' and as 'the mirror images of our existential solitude'.
12 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 66.
13 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 67-68.
multivalence. The allusion in the passage cited above to contingency references the characteristically open, undetermined nature of the modern social order, as Heller sees it, and the possibilities for personal freedom and choice therein.

Heller explicitly rejects a relativistic approach in which ‘one philosophy is as good or bad as any other’. A philosopher holds to the philosophical stance she does because she thinks it to be true, the best such stance around; this conviction is inherently at the heart of things as one proceeds to ‘stake one’s personality or unleash one’s imagination to bring forth a world where one and others can dwell’. To assert at the same time that “anything goes” is to adopt the position of a spectator: it is only the spectator who ‘can be a perfect hermeneutician, a hermeneutician through and through.’ The end and object of the meaning-making at issue here centres on creative exchange and propagation of ideas, perspectives and interpretations, and on the construction of a philosophical standpoint. By contrast, to adopt a relativistic stance to the effect that no philosophical stance ‘is more true than any other’, is to hold out for the possibility of perfection in the act of hermeneutic enquiry.\(^{14}\)

Most of the ‘end of the subject’ narratives are simultaneously ‘end of philosophy’ fictions as well, given that Philosophy (or metaphysics) is said to be guilty of producing the Subject or of being the Subject incarnate.\(^{15}\)

The ‘dominant and subdominant’ qualities and capacities of the subject, and those commitments or centres judged to be of most importance, are elements in what Heller calls ‘the threads of our contingency’. As becomes apparent, in ‘Death of the Subject?’ Heller envisages the subject as one who manifests a distinct vantage point and voice expressive of her singular frame of reference, commitments, qualities, values etc. To be a subject, in Heller’s understanding, is to be engaged in understanding and acting in the world, in relation to a specific set of tasks, needs and circumstances. It is to make one’s way in a concrete time and place, and also, potentially, to have an existence that transcends one’s immediate and given environment.

\(^{14}\) Quotes this paragraph, Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 67.
\(^{15}\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 65.
Heller cites as paradigmatic the title of John Irving’s book entitled *The World According to Garp*; for each modern subject, there is a ‘world according to’ him or her.\(^1\) The autobiographical text, and its authorship, possess paradigmatic significance for ‘our own historical consciousness’ and ‘historical horizon’. By way of contrast, Heller refers to Augustine’s autobiography, which was ‘not about the world according to Augustine, but about the representative ascent to Truth’. Similarly, Rousseau’s *Confessions* were not the confessions of a ‘contingent person’, but rather the confessions of a ‘representative personality’. In terms of the emergence of the modern subject, Heller cites as definitive Friedrich Schlegel’s statement that ‘everyone can write at least one good novel, his or her autobiography’. Modern autobiographical writing involves ‘a dual authorship’ – the person is posited as the author of the text, and of his/her own life.\(^2\) It is this dual authorship that ‘guarantees the truth content’ of a work; thus, the reader is presented with ‘a true world’, the world of the author. The reader expects the author to ‘relate a ‘real’ story’ i.e. not a fictional one, and also:

> ... to present a world (or rather two worlds, one internal and one external) as they see it, experience it and assess it; this is a world ‘according to them’.\(^3\)

No matter if it contains ‘chunks of stereotyped banalities’, the text ‘needs the makebelieve of a world that is the author’s own making’. In thus ‘presenting a world ‘according to them’,’ they ‘happen to present themselves as subjects’. The ‘subject’ of a person is ‘the world according to’ him or her.\(^4\)

The fact that a person presents himself as a subject, presenting the world as he sees it, presupposes a certain anthropological genealogy, which will be familiar to the reader from Chapter One of this thesis. First, he was ‘born into a meaningful human universe’ in which he was ‘born with the destiny to be related to all other bodies by meaning’.\(^5\) In turn, he received from ‘his social universe’ a certain ‘network of meanings’ embedded in and

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\(^1\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 69.
\(^2\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 70.
\(^3\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 70.
\(^4\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 70.
\(^5\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 75.
\(^6\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 71.
mediated by social norms and customs that prevailed in his everyday life. It is in this context that his own existence and being took shape:

Joh, like all other Johns before him, started his life in making out the meanings of the received meanings, while filling out the received meanings with his personal experience.21

Thus, he received objects to satisfy his ‘inborn drives’, such as suitable food to satisfy his hunger, ‘yet he developed a taste of his own’. Likewise, ‘[h]e was taught how and when to manifest his innate affects (like fear), yet he became courageous or a coward’. In such ways, ‘Joh’ became ‘a single person different from all others’. Joh’s feelings served a primary function in this process:

Before learning the importance of sentences like ‘I think’ or ‘I speak’, he certainly learned the importance of the utterance ‘I feel’. Every Joh is the navel of his universe.22

Joh’s relationship to the world – the matrix of qualities, values and preferences informing what he makes of the meanings he receives from society – is decisive from the point of view of his personality. Heller contrasts this general scenario with traditional societies, whose members receive ‘not only the network of meanings but also the general explanation of all of them’. Had Joh been born ‘a few hundred years ago’, he ‘would have received a fairly complete map of the external and internal world’, whether in relation to explanations of the cosmos, human mortality, the nature of the human soul or other questions. Consequently, ‘there would not have been a world ‘according to Joh’, for there was no subject’.

Heller’s conceptualising of subjecthood in relation to the narrativising of one’s life and world can be read in conjunction with her argument about historicity as ‘the constituent of the human condition. Men are mortal, for they are conscious of their finitude.’23 The conception of historicity Heller has in mind here is a paradigm primarily of language and communication, with ‘historical’ defined in terms of the German term geschichtlich (story/storied) rather than historisch (historically informed practice). For each person, his/her identity involves a convergence of singular and collective dimensions: ‘They are

21 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 71.
22 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 71.
23 Heller, A Theory of Modernity, 2.
identical with themselves and they are identical with at least one group, the so-called “social a priori” into which their “genetic a priori” had been thrown, and with which it needs to be dovetailed in the process of being a certain kind of person.’ This is identity defined not in formal terms, but rather as ‘sameness through difference and differentiation … [i]dentity in place and identity through time’. The plurality of meanings which any given group of people attribute to its way of life, ‘its language, rules and norms, beliefs, ceremonies and so on’, are homogenised into a single meaning, ‘into a world which includes the geography and the narrative of this people’.24 Heller continues:

The famous questions of Gaugin’s Tahiti painting – “Where did we come from? What are we? Where are we going?” – are constantly raised and answered. I call the answer to these questions the “historical consciousness”. It is the historical consciousness that presents a world.25

Claiming responsibility for the present moment is one defining characteristic of the ‘consciousness of reflected generality’ which Heller identifies among modern subjects in the contemporary world. Living with awareness of the paradoxical quality of freedom – its importance, as well as its elusiveness – is another.26

For the modern subject, consciousness of historical horizons extends to feelings and emotions. The hermeneutics carried out by the reflexive subject, as conceived by Heller, encompasses ‘subjective hermeneutics’. The ‘problematic individual’ is conscious of the reflected and consciously shaped nature of his/her feelings, of their ‘no longer “limited” character.’ He ‘reflects his own feelings along with the age, and recognises them as socially determined ones’. This ‘historical determination’ of feelings compliments the ‘cultivation of the emotional personality’ – that is, his feelings become ‘individual feelings’. The connection here, Heller admits, is a ‘tendency’ only. She concludes:

The more evolved the individual of the modern age, the better he announces the historical nature of his feelings, what more, its commensurability to some specific task, or to the principle of an inexistent task.27

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24 Heller, A Theory of Modernity, 2.
25 Ibid.
26 These two themes feature in the first chapter of Heller’s A Theory Of Modernity.
Whereas Heller’s conception of the subject centres on who we are in relation to others, and on voicing our own singular interpretation of our experience, her ideas about ‘Self’ and selfhood speak to those aspects of our being which (potentially) are of most importance to us, and where our deepest feelings and beliefs are likely to be invested. When we think of ‘the subject’, Heller writes, we normally conceive of the existence of ‘certain features, faculties or capacities’, located ‘inside the body of’ the social actor. The heterogeneous nature of ‘our conscious and unconscious ‘inside’’ is a fact known to all cultures; ‘many a map of the soul has been drawn and provided by religions and philosophies alike’. In comprehending those non-homogenous ‘insides’, what is offered by ‘the representative fictions’ is ‘meaning’, specifically a ‘standpoint of … (provided) meanings’ which enable each of us to ‘understand or interpret our own ‘inside’; thus we make sense of our pre-cognitive intuitions.’ Such fictions form part of the ‘intersubjective’ sphere of meanings, customs and practices that we may pull together ‘into a personal destiny’ in the course of creating a coherent and meaningful ‘world’ from the threads of one’s contingent existence.

The fictions Heller refers to include spiritual ideas and beliefs, and implicitly also psychology, moral and ethical codes, mythological narratives and cultural beliefs. One’s sense of Self tends to originate from those world-views and belief systems given in one’s environment; in the manifesting and living of the world-view, it may become more truly one’s own, taking the flavour of one’s own insights and understanding. Modern conditions offer not ‘one single meaningful world-view or a conglomeration of a few world-views that provide the model-map for understanding the inside of us all’, but rather, ‘a marketplace where any world-view is freely exchangeable for any other.’ In this reference to the marketplace, Heller highlights the possibility and need for the social actor to choose among the different world-views which exist within his environment.

The act of deriving meanings such as explain and make sense of one’s existence is inseparable from self-formation. As Heller puts it:

The map of the interior can be termed the *self*.

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28 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 74.
29 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 75.
30 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 75.
In Heller’s view, the Self is very far from being ‘mono-centred’, or constituting ‘the fixed centrepoint of a circle’. Indeed, Heller places that centre-point ‘outside the self, it is ‘in’ the world. ... everything can be that centre if referred to by a possessive pronoun.’ Thus the centre of myself, Heller elaborates, may be my beloved, my child, a political commitment or profession.

Only a few issues, people, things, goals, propensities that are mine can be the centres of my self; they become really mine exactly because they are one of the centres of my self. The ‘world according to Jill’ will encapsulate these centres of Jill’s self.\(^{31}\)

For Heller, the centre of the Self is ‘the thing, the person, the cause we are involved in, beyond and above everything else’.\(^{32}\) To choose oneself is ‘to choose the focuses around which our personality begins to develop’. In thus choosing oneself, ‘we become what we are; this or that kind of individual personality.’ Furthermore, Heller writes, self-choice presupposes the choice of oneself, as opposed to something outside oneself: one chooses oneself as a philosopher, for instance, rather than choosing philosophy per se. Thereafter, one will be passionately interested in philosophy.\(^{33}\)

Not only philosophy, but also the subject, Heller concludes, is ‘alive and kicking’.\(^{34}\) At the same time, Heller identifies a state of existential unhomeliness intrinsic to modernity and its emancipatory possibilities, uncertainties and paradoxes. Both Heller’s ‘anthropological optimism’, as well as her ‘anthropological pessimism’,\(^{35}\) are apparent in the following passage, in which she is discussing the predicament of a hypothetical social actor, Jill, who lacks the firm solace her grandmother knew by virtue of understanding herself ‘as being composed of a mortal body and an immortal soul’.\(^{36}\)

We know that Jill has not inherited a master map of the soul to guide her self-understanding; neither did she receive from her ancestors a master narrative to guide her understanding of the world. ... [and] she has not inherited any ideal or real object as the centre of her self and, in this sense, as hers by birthright. These three privations together amount to a bunch of

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\(^{31}\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 75.

\(^{32}\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 76.

\(^{33}\) Heller, A Theory of Modernity, 228.

\(^{34}\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 66.

\(^{35}\) Heller employs the terms ‘anthropological optimism’ and ‘anthropological pessimism’ in her introduction to the first edition of A Theory of Feelings (1979), pp 2, 3.

\(^{36}\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject’, 74.
open possibilities. The bunch of open (because indeterminate) possibilities equals contingency. Modern men and women are contingent; they are also aware of their contingency. Mere possibilities are empty, yet they can be filled with an infinite variety of contents. Mere possibility is the potential of personal autonomy; it is also the potential of a total loss thereof. Modern men and women are unstable and fragile, yet they seek some solidity; they easily stumble into chaos, so they need at least a fragment of ‘cosmos’ to make sense of their own lives and, possibly, render meaning to it.\(^{37}\) (emphasis in original)

In passages such as this one, experiences of an existential unshackling and invitation to freedom, and also of an unmooring and kind of homelessness, are shown to be paradigmatic among men and women in modern societies, such is the contingency of their existence.\(^{38}\) Heller writes that ‘[t]o be thrown into a world in which one does not receive one’s destiny, for better or worse, means to be thrown into Freedom’.\(^{39}\) To be aware of one’s contingency is to have the potential to transform it into ‘freedom’ in a substantive sense.

Subject is the idiosyncracy of the interpretation of human world experience and self-experience under the condition of modernity.\(^{40}\)

Each of us interprets ‘human world experience and self-experience’, becoming a hermeneutician, an interpreter of interpretations. The contingent nature of modern subjectivity, Heller continues, throws into relief the contrast between the tendency of the ‘particularistic’ personality to identify unquestioningly with her psychological propensities and given social world, and the ‘individual’ personality, who maintains a critical distance from her experiences, values and circumstances. The individual personality engages in a continuing reflexive process of defining and assessing her own worldview, core values and priorities. For Heller, this is a matter of honouring, and honestly evaluating, the various threads that make up who one is, and of claiming the idiosyncrasy of one’s being.

We are not subjects, we do not carry inside something called a “subject”. Yet we manifest ourselves as subjects, and we cannot help it. We are destined to

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\(^{37}\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 75-76. Heller’s analysis of philosophical and theoretical writing about ‘the subject’ in this article encompasses the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and ideas drawn from behaviourism.

\(^{38}\) In relation to Heller’s ideas of home, see particularly, Agnes Heller, ‘Where Are We At Home?’, Thesis Eleven, Vol 41, No 1 (May 1995), pp 1-18.

\(^{39}\) Heller, A Theory of Modernity, 57.

\(^{40}\) Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 77.
manifest ourselves as subjects (in modernity), for we are not destined to be or to become this or that, to understand the world exactly this way or that way, for we are born as clusters of open and undetermined possibilities. ... For the time being the death of the subject is not in sight.\textsuperscript{41} (emphasis in original)

In her article 'Death of the Subject?', Heller encompasses questions of ethics and psychology in a philosophical narrative about individuation, shared social ties and personality. Heller's subject is a narrativising subject, engaged in interpreting her experience, and herself. Heller likens each subject/philosophy, metaphorically, to 'a world in which you can dwell', a world/self which can be seen to possess 'many dominant and subdominant elements' and can be identified 'in all its difference'. Her concept of the 'subject' involves a pulling together of the disparate threads of one's contingent existence 'into a personal destiny'.

Regarding the 'historical consciousness' or 'historical horizon' which is central to this subject, Heller draws a connection with the modern autobiographical text. An authentic autobiographical account constitutes a genuine representation of one's point of view and experience, which others may engage with, and perhaps like or dislike, and which ultimately has a coherence and truth in its own right.

Of the Self, Heller’s focus is more directly on interiority: she writes that each one of us has a different interior ‘map’. This reflects the subject’s need for sound knowledge to live by, and to understand her own existence and purpose in life. She has the capacity to choose those commitments of most importance to her – the centre points of herself. Heller’s model of the subject and of selfhood highlights the essential exercise of choice in life, via one’s interpretations, evaluations, judgments, and by the values one lives by. Though we are beings for whom meaning is easily lost, who 'easily stumble into chaos', we may grasp a 'fragment of 'cosmos'' to guide our understanding and action.

It is the subject engaged in shaping a life for herself, realising aims and honouring commitments, whose emotions may come to possess an economic element, in the sense of forming part of an emotional household. Part of the everyday life of the social actor, for Heller, consists in ‘arranging, understanding, ordering the facts of life, in ascribing meanings to actions’, as Heller puts it in her phenomenology of feelings. Emotions may inform the

\textsuperscript{41} Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, Thesis Eleven, 1990, 37.
subject’s reflexive dialogue around value and meaning, just as they may themselves be
subject to hermeneutic scrutiny. The question of emotional households arises explicitly in
Heller’s essay on emotional impoverishment, in which her focus is the subject whose
reflexive dialogue encompasses engagement with, and differentiation and cultivation of, her
deepest feelings. It is to that essay that I now turn.

‘Are We Living In A World Of Emotional Impoverishment?’ - The Emotional Household and
Emotional Wealth

From Plato’s *Philebus* to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, philosophy has established the
tradition of understanding emotions as “cognitive and situated feelings”. This
means, on the one hand, that emotions affect judgment. On the other hand it
means – and this is the crucial issue – that the kind and intensity of a
particular emotion is dependent on our understanding of a situation.42

It is our deepest feelings – those steady, constant emotions which are a decisive shaping
force on our habits of mind and action – which are of most consequence in our emotional
households. The above quotation from ‘Are We Living In A World of Emotional
Impoverishment?’ provides a clue as to why this is. This passage gestures towards a decisive
aspect of the relationship between feelings and thoughts, between emotions and reason. It
is our deep feelings, or emotional sentiments, which, Heller argues, are most important to
emotional wealth. In ‘Are We Living In A World of Emotional Impoverishment?’, Heller
relates the questions of wealth and impoverishment to our emotional households, engaging
with the intrinsic finitude and transience of our lives, and with the spectre of scarcity
present in our emotional households. Just as, in ‘Death of the Subject?’, Heller finds ample
cause to declare ‘the subject’ well and truly alive, so too is this anthropologically optimistic
standpoint borne out in ‘Are We Living In A World of Emotional Impoverishment?’, though
in the latter piece she responds in the negative to the question posed in the title of the
essay, while retaining a sense of hope about the future.

Heller begins the essay by reflecting on precisely what is at issue when we talk about
emotional wealth. Such a judgment makes sense not in relation to any single feeling one
may feel, nor to traditionally defined notions of temperament or character, but rather in
relation to emotional ‘dispositions’ and sentiments. An emotional disposition or sentiment

42 Heller, ‘Are We Living In A World of Emotional Impoverishment?’ (hereafter ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’),
entails ‘the presence of a disposition to develop certain feelings and emotions every time the object of our sentiment – or our relation to the object of our sentiment – is affected’. Over time, and in different situations, a person’s dispositions and sentiments characteristically give rise to spectrums of feelings which are at once distinctive and diverse. It is these emotional spectrums – feeling habits which tend to embody something quintessential of the person’s character and personality – that lend themselves to categorisation as rich or poor.

In elaborating on this idea, Heller states that each emotion and sentiment, both of which ‘are also cognitive and judgmental processes’, is made up of both ‘feeling-aspects’ and ‘judgment-aspects’. Among ‘unspecific’ feelings, which include the feelings of pleasure and pain, the evaluative aspect may occur in conjunction with the feeling aspect. Should this occur, the ‘feeling-aspects remain unchanged, for it is the evaluation which defines them and makes them perceived as a particular emotion’. Thus, ‘the feeling of displeasure (discomfort) is defined or perceived at one time as grief, at another time as envy, at yet another time as anxiety or expectation of bad news’.

Our sentiments, by contrast, are generally less readily identified by means of the available ‘emotional terms’, and, in fact, they may seem to defy adequate description by means of any such terms. Faced with sentiments which lack any readily identifiable emotion concept, the person begins to ‘delineate the quality of the feeling through a combination of several emotional terms’. This second ‘elementary experience suggests that our feelings are unique and qualitatively distinct’. At issue in this case is an emotion which is cognitively inflected to a substantial degree. Heller writes:

Whenever the cognitive-evaluative aspect of the emotion inhere in the sentiment itself, ones’ love or friendship for different people, ideas or things – that is, for different beings – will be qualitatively distinct. In such a situation, one’s world of feeling will be like a palette with a rainbow of colours. (emphasis in original)

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44 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 46, 47
45 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 47.
46 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 47. (emphasis in original, all quotes in this paragraph)
It is because our sentiments embody something of our characteristic ways of seeing and understanding the world that they come to foster a ‘world of feeling’ akin to a ‘palette with a rainbow of colours’. Emotional wealth and poverty are connected to the breadth and depth of a person’s emotional palette, rather than any single emotion he may feel.

In relation to the conception of human subjectivity which is presupposed when one asks whether a person’s ‘emotional universe’ is rich or poor, Heller observes that the distinction between emotional wealth and impoverishment cannot be read back into the categories of temperament differentiated in the classical world, such as melancholic or choleric. The ‘everyday observations’ underlying the latter categories of temperament ‘rested on combinations of deep-superficial and strong-weak emotional “units”,’ rather than on a distinction between wealth and impoverishment. The question of whether the ‘inner world of Odysseus or Don Quixote’ was rich or poor ‘seems somehow to be misplaced’, requiring the use of ‘artificial intellectual efforts and devices’ to be properly answered.

Heller contrasts this with nineteenth century fiction: titles such as Sense and Sensibility ‘needed no interpretation in their own time’. Heller explains this difference between ‘ancient’ and modern in terms of the nature of modern subjectivity. Unlike its classic counterpart, the modern world ‘lacks plasticity. ... Modern “romantic” art excels in painting, poetry and music; they are the genres par excellence of subjectivity’. The distinction between a rich emotional life and a poor one arises in ‘a world where subjectivity develops in full and is being cultivated; but only in a world like this’. In the reference above to ‘plasticity’, Heller implies an organic or ‘natural’ relationship between the social entity and its members. In the ‘ancient world’ which is Heller’s focus in this example, autonomous reflection upon and engagement with shared codes and customs by the social actor existed neither as a need nor a possibility, at least not in a manner or to an extent comparable to modern conditions.

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49 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 49.
50 Citing Marx, Heller describes as ‘natural’ that division of labour in which the conditions of birth determine a social actor’s overall social role and existence. See for instance Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 166.
The following statement by Heller begins from what will by now be familiar ideas about subjectivity:

I am convinced that subjectivity comes about through the self-reflexivity of the subject. The emotional life of men and women can be rich or poor under the condition of “subjectivity” alone. Subjectivity establishes a personal, individual and unique relation of the subject to intersubjectivity (and not to the object). In this context, the subject is no longer a distinct but exhaustive incarnation of intersubjectivity, the sense in which Lukacs denied the “subject character” of the Homeric heroes. Rather, it separates itself in order to unite itself with such aspects of intersubjectivity that have been re-confirmed, re-affirmed and condoned by the subject himself or herself. The circumstance that the subjects themselves are intersubjectively constituted, is irrelevant for the hermeneutics of subjectivity.51

In this passage, Heller articulates a conception of the self-reflexive subject who separates in order to unite with that which he likes, respects or needs. This passage precisely captures Heller’s twin allegiances to both the practice of autonomous critical reflection by the social actor, and the world of intersubjective ties and socio-historical conditions salient to such reflexivity. Intersubjectivity is the main condition for the subject’s emotional hermeneutics, but in terms of how subjectivity is experienced by the subject himself, the latter is to the fore. These ideas echo Heller’s conception of the subject as ‘the singularity of your voice and that of the other human creature’, as discussed above. Heller rejects the idea that the subject is ‘a distinct but exhaustive incarnation of intersubjectivity’, a phrase conveying constitution through passive embodiment and conditioning, rather than an active and dynamic process of selection and interpretation. It is not possible to understand the formation of subjectivity, Heller insists, solely in reference to the impact of external factors, i.e. a person’s social and interpersonal environment: rather, each subject inhabits a world which forms in important ways through his own continuing judgments, interpretations and selections therein – through what Heller calls the hermeneutics of subjectivity.

The dual reference points of subjectivity are also borne out in Heller’s definition of self-reflexivity. ‘Self-reflexivity’ is defined as ‘an interplay of reflection/self-reflection’. One ‘makes use of the cultural language of inter-subjectivity for self-understanding’ while also making use of ‘his/her own self-understanding to accept or reject single practices, norms

51 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 50.
and rules put forward by the prevalent language of culture’. Also discussed is differentiation between concrete and abstract norms, with the latter an important potential ‘moral authority’, while the former are subject to evaluation by conscience. These statements speak of involvement (feeling) which is multi-layered, an engaging with and evaluating of normative and social structures which sustain or are otherwise salient to a person’s existence. Heller accents a capacity for critical self-examination and for distance from the customs and expectations ‘given’ in one’s social world.

Self-reflexive subjectivity of the kind Heller outlines ‘opens up a treasure trove of potentials for emotional differentiation. The person becomes the hermeneut of his or her own emotions’. Emotional hermeneutics constitute neither ‘observation’ nor ‘self-knowledge alone’, but rather:

In interpreting her emotions, in putting them under hermeneutical scrutiny, a person creates an “emotional palette” of different shades of one particular emotion. This is not creation but, as mentioned, interpretative differentiation.\(^{52}\)

It is emotional hermeneutics that lay the foundation for emotional wealth, through ‘interpretative differentiation’ of one’s deep feelings and sentiments. That which is deepened exists already in one’s inner world and character, and for this reason, Heller talks of ‘interpretative differentiation’, rather than ‘creation’, as such.

Given that the interpretation is inherent in the quality of feeling itself, one or another shade of the palette will be felt in subsequent contact with other people, children, books, flowers or anything else. The tension between the (relative) poverty of emotional language and the richness of feelings themselves will assert itself.\(^ {53}\) (emphasis in original)

Through active, critical engagement, one may cultivate and deepen one’s world of feelings, refining and developing its emotional shades and nuances. The final statement in the quotation above raises the question of communicating one’s emotions and sentiments. The tension referred to is linked to an anti-sentimental stance within the contemporary culture within which Heller wrote, that resulted in traditional emotional terms (for instance, the statement ‘I love you’) coming to be seen as banal, with an ensuing prohibition on their

\(^{52}\) Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 51.
\(^{53}\) Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 51.
use. This prohibition means that 'even the ingredients of an emotional household will be in short supply', the emotional terms being understood as 'forms and framework' – rudimentary but essential – within which sensibility 'develops and blossoms'.\(^{54}\) Two solutions are offered to this tension: one either adapts and extends the available language for emotional expression, or erases ‘the self-differentiation of emotions’ and strives to regain ‘emotions which are – once again from the perspective of subjectivity – strong, fundamental and undifferentiated.’\(^{55}\) The alternative, Heller concludes, is likely to result in an inability to communicate one’s emotions to others:

> Once the split between emotional terms and personal-emotional differentiation widens into an abyss, the differentiated self of emotional sensitivity becomes incommunicado.

> Emotional differentiation (wealth) should not become prohibitive of communicability. If that happens, the real subjectivity of the person disappears.\(^ {56}\)

In this context, Heller refers to solipsism, madness and a Kierkegaardian sense of ‘[i]ncognito.’\(^{57}\) Once again the narrative builds upon an idea of subjectivity’s decisive intersubjective dimensions, here discussed with reference to balancing emotional differentiation with the need to communicate one’s emotions. Self-furthering and ‘the differentiated self of emotional sensitivity’ are, for Heller, integral aspects of emotional wealth, but not if they come at the cost of meaningful exchange with others. He who engages in differentiating his ‘emotional world’ is likely to face ‘the dilemma of communicability’.\(^{58}\)

As well as differentiation of one’s deep feelings and sensibilities, emotional wealth is also shown to turn on the presence of a cultural environment in which such emotional cultivation and ‘refinement’ is not only accepted, but also actively fostered.\(^{59}\) The ‘language of art’, in particular painting, poetry and music, continue to be important means of generating and communicating deep, authentic emotions and sensibilities.\(^{60}\) In relation to

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54 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 57.
55 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 51.
56 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 51.
60 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 51.
the cultivation of one’s sensibilities, Heller cautions of the potential for an experience of what she calls emotional impoverishment. The context here is the risk that the fostering of one’s sensibilities will come at the expense of an ability to communicate one’s feelings and emotions, and Heller historicises her argument in relation to developments occurring in European societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Heller writes that the vital condition of ‘emotional self-cultivation’ is that the ‘original normative framework of behavioural patterns, duties and rights remain intact.’ Should the ‘binding character of the socio-political intersubjective norms and rules disappear[,]’, what is likely to remain is only ‘the esoteric sign-world of the ceremonies of sensibility’ as well as ‘the person – carrier of this sensibility’. On the question of emotional impoverishment, Heller writes:

The 19th century spoke the language of wealth and poverty, and Marx was no exception. Communism ensures the appropriation of the wealth of the species by every individual. The ideal is the person rich in needs as well as, needless to say, rich in emotional culture. For the 19th century, scarcity was a heavily negative term, the shame or “dark side” of human existence.

In this passage, the topic of scarcity makes an appearance in the text, framed by the conceptions of wealth and poverty that featured in Marx’s work. ‘Wealth’, in this context, pertains to emotional wealth, and its cultivation – a core object of the emotional household.

Next Heller turns her attention to the kind of subjective hermeneutics which pertain to the emotional household itself, and to emotional housekeeping. She reiterates her conception of self-reflexive subjectivity:

Subjects relate subjectively to the world of political-social norms, institutions, rights and obligations, insofar as they re-cast and re-activate them within their frameworks at the same time as they reject those which cannot be condoned by conscience. As long as they re-cast and re-activate these norms, as long as they go on about their everyday and non-everyday business in company with their fellow creatures, they have to make choices.

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61 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 51.
63 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 53.
64 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 52-53.
Here, Heller outlines a reflexive relationship to social customs and practices. The hierarchy of priorities and commitments guiding the subject’s choices is said to be a value hierarchy in a double sense. The hierarchy is not ‘social in nature’, nor does it necessarily constitute ‘the internalization of social hierarchy’. Rather, the social actor knows a preference for one or other value, and he also stands back from that preference, consulting his deepest feelings and chosen commitments. Of this double value hierarchy, Heller writes:

We may ask ourselves, which value is preferred over another? We may also ask ourselves, which thing, person, activity or profession of value is more valuable for me, my personality, for me as a subject? In a scenario like this, the “old” distinctions between particular emotions maintain their relevance. Deep emotions are steady, constant, essential to the subject. They stand out, they steer and sometimes even compel.

The relationship between emotions and values moves into the centre of Heller’s focus. It is our deep emotions that may guide our recasting and re-activating of ‘political-social norms, institutions, rights and obligations’, through the course of everyday life. We may cultivate and be guided by some of our ‘sensibilities’ and not by others; some shallow sentiments may ‘wither’ and vanish from the palette, and not be missed; others are ‘strong if the situation so requires, and weak if it does not’. In the following quotation, Heller links this process of interpretative differentiation of our emotional and value hierarchies to emotional housekeeping:

This is not a scenario of less subjectivity, but one of less subjectivism. It is one I like to call the “emotional household”. Like every household, it too copes with scarcity. It is a scenario of subjectivity because it is precisely the person who has to learn to cope with the limitations of his/her own emotional resources and use them properly, in good measure, in accordance with his/her obligations and desires. It is a scenario of less subjectivism because one manages a household (including an emotional household) for others as well as for oneself related to others. Cultivation of sensibility is a constituent of a household like this, but one which must be held in correct proportion.

While our emotional hermeneutics may have as a central objective the fostering of emotional wealth, this aim forms one part of a broader function of the household, to do with shepherding one’s ‘emotional resources’ in accordance with one’s goals, commitments

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68 Ibid.
and relationships. Just as there is the potential to cultivate emotional wealth, so too it is always possible that we encounter scarcity in those resources, which are intrinsically finite. It is up to the subject himself to manage his emotional resources, as he sees fit, and to reckon with interpersonal imperatives including the needs and interests of other householders. These tasks reflect Heller’s conception of subjectivity as self-reflexive. The emotional household, thus defined, can be seen to have important moral, ethical and interpersonal dimensions.

The passage of text cited above is among the most explicit descriptions by Heller of the nature and purpose of the emotional household. Her invoking of the concept of emotional households here turns on an idea of emotions as resources to be cultivated, acted upon or kept in check, all within the context of the entirety of one’s commitments and values in life. The deepening and developing of one’s feelings, in the name of the cultivation of sensibility, forms one key dimension and object of the emotional household. This relies on the presence of ‘emotional culture’, i.e. culture receptive to and sustaining of emotional depth. While the emotional household has as one of its objects the cultivating of sensibility and enriching of the social actor’s world of feelings, the household, as a shared economic entity, also encompasses the needs and considerations of other householders.

In relation to the question posed in ‘Are We Living in a World of Emotional Impoverishment?’, Heller implicitly answers in the affirmative. An inauspicious contemporary trend in this respect, in her view, is the emergence of a ‘cultural language’ centred on a “discourse on the body” – a language of “‘health versus sickness’” – in which questions about ‘calories, headaches, heartbeats and exercises’ take precedence over matters of ‘love, friendship, the colour of the sky, the modulation of a voice’. For Heller, this discourse of the body is an example of a cultural language that is unconducive to ‘the subjectivization of the human individual, but which is nevertheless capable of guiding men and women in their daily lives’. Such ‘health-talk’ cannot yield true differentiation of subjectivity, but only a sharpened awareness of ‘one’s own body’; it can only foster “‘bodily quality’” and not “‘personality quality’”.

69 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 58.
Heller’s observations about the lack of a culture sympathetic to the cultivation of emotional sensibilities speak to the highly constricted nature of the opportunities for autonomy and personal flourishing among most men and women in modernity. Likewise, in terms of the ‘reproduction of the person’ effected in everyday life, very often our existence is a matter of enduring a narrow subsistence in which there is little or no possibility for fostering our talents or otherwise furthering ourselves. Yet Heller is optimistic about the future development of a culture sympathetic to emotional cultivation. Although emotional wealth has retreated for the moment, Heller concludes, the conditions conducive to its re-emergence, i.e. modern conditions, continue to exist. It is only ‘emotional refinement’ that can confer the differentiation we seek, even at the level of physical differentiation by which one body becomes erotically appealing to another.70

In ‘Are We Living In A World Of Emotional Impoverishment?’ Heller identifies the cultivation of our deep emotions and sensibilities as paramount to emotional wealth. The emotional household, as she defines it, has the cultivating of such wealth as one of its central objects. In refining and deepening his emotions, with their ‘cognitive-evaluative aspect’, the social actor is involved in cultivating ‘a palette with a rainbow of colours’. The need to balance multiple factors and variables is emphasised, including a reckoning with our own ‘emotional resources’ and with the needs and desires of others in the household, as well as the pursuit of deep emotions and emotional wealth. To differentiate one’s emotions at the cost of communication with others is to jeopardise the ‘real subjectivity of the person’. Broadly, Heller envisages the social actor involved in the world, engaging reflexively with his own existence and emotions, and with the world around him: thus, Heller imagines the self-reflexive subject who separates itself ‘in order to unite itself with such aspects of intersubjectivity that have been re-confirmed, re-affirmed and condoned by the subject himself or herself’. We are reminded of the antinomy in modern subjectivity which Heller calls attention to, as outlined at the beginning of Chapter One, to the effect that subjectivisation ‘is nothing but the formation of the individual’s own world in the organically connected process of acquiring the object and realizing our own self’.71 The mutuality and

70 Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 60.
interdependence between Self and society constitutes a fundamental condition to our emotional households.

**Conclusion**

The Self, for Heller, is made, not born. Its formation and development occur through its involvement in the world. Heller emphasises the social actor’s capacity for conscious evaluation and individual judgment, as well as his situatedness within a particular, concrete social and historical milieu. Heller’s model of subjectivity highlights an essential exercise of selection in life via one’s perceptions, interpretations, evaluations, judgments and actions. The subject is constituted in its relationship with other subjects and, ideally, knows a breadth of deep emotional investments in the world, i.e. it is a many-centred Self. Feeling as involvement presupposes the presence and interaction of multiple elements in our worlds of feeling, factors kept in balance in the course of living. The Self as agent of involvement is present from the earliest years of life: for Heller, where there is a person acting in a purposive fashion, be it the playing and imitating of a child, or adults engaged in tasks, there, ‘realising the object’, is the Self. Its absence or disturbance entails what Heller describes as ‘pathological’ problems.

Heller’s concept of Self has a strong hermeneutic aspect, with the accent on interpreting and deriving meaning from experience, including emotional experience. Heller’s elaboration of these themes emphasises our need to render meaning to our lives and grasp ‘a fragment of ‘cosmos’.’ Reflexivity is conceived as a continuing dialogue over value and meaning in which emotion, conscience and judgment all play vital roles. Self-reflexivity encompasses an engaging with and narrativising of one’s emotions and thoughts in ways that encompass questions of character and morality, right and wrong. The self-narrativising subject, as outlined by Heller, is very much alive, and is formed and developed in important ways through its reflexive, hermeneutic dialogue with the surrounding world.

The emotional household, as defined by Heller, is intimately linked to these ideas about a dialogical form of selfhood and subjectivity. As we have seen in this chapter of my thesis, Heller has articulated and defined that concept with reference to the issue of emotional wealth and impoverishment. Emotional wealth, for Heller, has to do with cultivating our deepest feelings, our emotional sentiments and dispositions. The cultivating
of feelings with deep roots in one’s personality is a key function and object of the emotional household. The deepening of our sentiments and sensibilities is one imperative within one’s emotional household, together with reckoning with the inherent scarcity factor present in the household, and balancing the needs, interests and perspectives of other people within the household. It is as beings engaged in self-furthering, and in ensuring that our needs for personal stability and continuity are met, that we carry out emotional housekeeping, responding to different feelings in different ways.

Thus, our feelings and emotions are shown to acquire an economic dimension in the context of our involvement in the world, chiefly in relation to those commitments and value hierarchies that structure one’s existence. Therein, one or other emotion may guide, inflect, drive or warn us, and they may also become objects of cultivation and deepening in themselves. As Heller writes elsewhere: ‘the selectibility of values and tasks appropriate to our individual nature, this is what places feeling housekeeping in the center; the investment of feeling or saving of feeling, the object into which we want to invest or not invest, the formation of the hierarchy of feeling needs are a condition sine qua non of growing up and of the development of the personality.’\textsuperscript{72} Heller’s concept of emotional households is predicated on the social actor understood as a questing, interpreting being who, as a member of one or other concrete, everyday world, and within the parameters of her singular means and circumstances, is engaged in understanding, articulating and realising her own needs, desires, and point of view.

Additionally, our emotional households are shown to turn on the element of ‘give’ that exists in the relationship between the modern social actor, and the tasks and norms that decisively shape his world of feelings and subjectivity. It is in this context that Heller has referred to the potential for an ‘individual’ emotional household, writing that ‘it is no longer a matter of the affects conforming to the prescription of customs and norms, but rather is connected to the conscious evaluation of individual opportunities and inborn qualities and, along with it, to the development of one’s individual capacities.’\textsuperscript{73} To carry out emotional housekeeping, as Heller employs the term, is part of realising the potential

\textsuperscript{72} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 185-186.
\textsuperscript{73} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 172.
for creating a life of one’s own choosing which is inherent in modern conditions. The social and historical grounding of our values and feelings becomes conscious in the emotional hermeneutics of the individual personality, whose recognition of this historicity is part of his existential choice of himself. These are questions I elaborate on further in Chapter Four.

The scarcity/wealth factor to our emotional households speaks to the capacity of our emotions to bear value: the value they bear, moreover, tends to be intimately associated with the personality of the person whose feelings they are. As emotional housekeepers, scarcity is a factor to be recognised and taken into account, rather than something that may be eliminated once and for all. As finite creatures involved in appropriating the infinite, each of us is an ‘independent’ and ‘idiosyncratic system’ that ‘turns towards the world’ and “builds in” values, qualities and ideals ‘only by departing from the self, by never transcending the self’. The factor of scarcity in our emotional households, Heller suggests, is elementary to our anthropology; the process of shaping a world of feelings to the measure of one’s character and constitution occurs within the parameters of human mortality, and it is also framed within the singular set of needs, capacities and circumstances specific to each individual. An intrinsic dimension of our emotional households, scarcity is evidently not exclusive of emotional wealth.

Thus, it is in the nature of the emotional household that it encompasses both the ever-present spectre of scarcity, and the potential for wealth. To reiterate, the palettes of emotions, and emotional nuances, which may arise in the course of a social actor’s lifetime, expressing her ways of understanding and being in the world, and the pleasures, interests and insights associated with her personality, are central to Heller’s concept of emotional wealth. Emotional wealth and abundance, in Heller’s work, are terms which speak of the realisation of emotional depth and cultivation of the personality, and potentially also realising universal human endowments and virtues. The beauty of emotions and their possibility of enrichment, for Heller, is inseparable from the beauty of the cultivation of the personality as a whole, and, by extension, of the person as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE

INFINITE RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM (III)

HELLER’S PHENOMENOLOGY OF FEELINGS

Morality exists – but how is it possible? ... One of the roads for the establishment of possibilities is to start from the feelings.¹

Heller’s concept of emotional households posits an essential structuring role played by feelings and emotions in human consciousness. The first and second chapters of this thesis examined a significant selection of Heller’s writing about the functions played by feelings and emotions in relation to Self-formation and individuation. The analysis in Chapter One drew upon Heller’s phenomenological analysis of feelings, in which, more than any other single body of writing, she sets out her argument that feelings and emotions are by nature situated, and that they have cognition built into them. This argument underpins her work on the relationship between feelings and the personality, a topic which is, in turn, central to her concept of emotional households.

In this chapter I resume my reading of Heller’s phenomenology of feelings, as set out in A Theory of Feelings. I discuss two chapters central to the work, which follow the essay, ‘What Does It Mean To Feel?, and in which the broad subject under investigation is emotional classification. A taxonomy of different types of feeling is followed by analysis of how we learn to feel.² The body of writing in question lays out ideas critical to Heller’s concept of emotional households, (as Heller herself has recently noted³), even though the term itself does not appear explicitly therein.

The importance of the essays considered below lies in the specificity and detail they afford into the ‘mechanics’ of human emotion and subjectivity, and the inter-relationships between feelings, thoughts and values. These essays deepen Heller’s model of the place and role of feelings and emotions in the unfolding and evolving of each individual life, particularly in relation to judgment and, more broadly, personality. The essays extend key

¹ Heller, A Theory of Feelings (1979), 1.
² Also contained in Heller’s phenomenology of feelings, but not discussed in this thesis, is her essay on what she calls the ‘value orientation categories’ that guide our evaluation of and discrimination among our emotions as good or bad, true or false etc.
³ Heller, A Short History of My Philosophy, 50, 89.
ideas of Heller’s discussed above to do with feeling as involvement, the social regulation of feelings and subjectivity, and conceptions of emotional wealth and enrichment. Especially pivotal is her analysis of the evolving of conceptualised and cognitively-inflected types of emotions from feelings of a more biological and universal kind. It is the ‘cognitive-situational feelings’, as Heller calls them, which are at the heart of human feeling – crucial to the mediation and deliberation of values and value preferences, the fostering of emotional breadth and depth, and ultimately the flourishing of our personalities. When Heller turns to questions of how we learn to feel, her writing both further extends these ideas, and is also on new ground in key respects. The following discussion encompasses the main ideas in these essays, without seeking to cover every idea and argument contained therein.

Classification of Feelings

At the centre of Heller’s concept of emotional households is the inter-play between feelings, values and actions. This inter-relationship is made explicit in her classification of feeling types. Rejecting the idea that feelings can be designated as either simple or compound feelings, Heller insists on the importance of understanding each concrete feeling in relation to the ‘context and situation’ salient to it.4 Heller begins by acknowledging the innate conditionality of all acts of classification of emotions into different types: the classifier, she writes, deems one or other factor ‘essential from a certain point of view knowing full well that we are abstracting from the totality of the syndrome.’5

Heller’s classification is based upon a ‘philosophical point of view’. In it she traces a progression from feelings of an innate, biological, universal kind, to feelings which, by virtue of being closely integrated with human values and cognition, are characteristically idiosyncratic. The progression is based on the following five broad factors salient to the content and composition of feelings: from feelings that relate to bio-social reproduction, to those pertaining to social reproduction; from feelings ‘in which we have little liberty’ to feelings that ensure or presuppose a greater degree of liberty and scope for activity; towards feelings with a greater cognitive content; from feelings common to the species, to the more idiosyncratic feelings; and finally, from feelings that are value-indifferent, to

feelings that bear value.⁶ We may understand the feelings classed in this way, Heller states, as a ‘single type’ and a ‘family’, while also recognising that the progression outlined is not ‘unconditionally valid in every instance’.⁷

There are six categories (and additional sub-categories, as we shall see) in Heller’s classification. In brief, the six main groups are drives, affects, orientational feelings, cognitive-situational feelings, character and personality feelings, and emotional predispositions. Drives and affects are our most innate and universal feelings, in which there is a substantial biological element. Drives ensure the biological preservation of the species: they include signals of the need to eat, drink and rest, the need for activity and for sexual activity. Feelings of bodily pain are discussed as a category of feelings closely related to the drives.⁸ The affects, as indicated in Chapter One, include feelings of rage, fear, shame, disgust, curiosity, gaiety and sadness.⁹ The affects constitute responses to external ‘trigger stimulus’, i.e. stimuli from outside the subject, by contrast to the drives, which originate in internal stimuli. Some affects, including appetites for food, for sex, and for activity, are built upon drive feelings.

Orientational feelings are ‘yes’ or ‘no’ feelings, i.e. intuitions and hunches that something feels right or doesn’t feel right (though they should not be confused with good or bad feelings). As their name suggests, the orientational feelings serve to orient the social actor towards, or away from, those objects, persons, ideas or other things which trigger them. Hence, this class of feelings expresses and embodies an intuitive preference or leaning, either positively or negatively. Orientational feelings are entirely social, i.e. not given at birth, and so too are the cognitive-situational feelings, which Heller also calls ‘emotions “proper”’. The latter feelings, in which the cognitive element is decisive, are entirely idiosyncratic in their patterns of expression.

It is principally the cognitive-situational feelings which inflect and inform a social actor’s character and personality. Character, the broader category of the two, is a ‘value-free concept’, encompassing those feelings that are “given” with the genetic code or

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⁷ Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 63.
⁸ Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 66.
⁹ These particular affects are classed by Heller as ‘original’ affects.
‘become fixed in infancy, before the formation of the moral personality’. By contrast, emotional personality is ‘an evaluating concept’, i.e. it invites evaluative predictions about the person’s likely future actions and responses, while the feelings connected with it invite categorisation as Good or Bad. We are responsible for our personality feelings, which are “binding”, and which, by virtue of the judgment or standpoint they encompass, invariably oblige us to something. Emotional predispositions (*Lebensgefühl*[^10], mood and caprice) are predispositions towards a certain feeling or quality of feeling which is not specific to any single object (as opposed to emotional *dispositions* or sentiments). Examples given are ‘the lust for life, melancholy, spleen or, as background feelings to cognitive behavior, optimism and pessimism.’[^11]

At the heart of Heller’s classification, especially with regards to the relationship of feelings to thoughts and volition, are the affects and the cognitive-situational feelings, and the relationship between them. The affects, including patterns of expression of them, are said to possess a universal character, in the sense of being common to all human societies. They are not the subject of individual acquisition and learning *per se*, and every culture knows both every affect as well as its characteristic patterns of expression. However, the affects are subject to social modification and control, and this is significant both at the level of the individual and the social collective.[^12] Regulation of the intensity of affective expression may be based on salient social prescriptions, or it may reflect ‘individual decisions and preferences’.[^13] For the most part, the modification of a social actor’s affects occurs as a result of his building in of ‘secondary emotions, of cognitive-situational emotions’, i.e. emotions in which the biological element is less dominant. On account of this regulation, ‘pure’ expressions of affects are rare among adults.[^14]

The social regulation of affects occurs by means of ethical norms. In relation to fear and courage, Aristotle’s definition of the brave man is cited: ‘he who is afraid when he

[^10]: The term ‘*Lebensgefühl*’ is defined as a feeling predisposition characteristic of an entire life or a large period of it. See Heller, *A Theory of Feelings*, 96-97.
should, that from which he should, in the place where he should’. Another statement derived from Aristotle also features in the text, to the effect that the brave man is not the one who does not feel fear, he is the one who ‘behaves as if he were not afraid’. Both these dicta highlight the importance of the social regulation of the affects and of their expression: a person’s affective feelings are at once socially regulated, and also self-regulated, in theory at least. Furthermore, the relationship between the sublimation and channelling of affects, and ‘normative regulation’ is of a mutual nature:

Sublimation and channelling become significant precisely because of the normative regulation (in other words, normative regulation becomes possible because affects can be sublimated and channelled); furthermore we are speaking of feelings that can be decreased intentionally, or stopped through practice.

Should one fear something he is not supposed to fear, or feel it in a time or manner that would be judged inappropriate ‘according to the accepted norms’, then he may ‘repress his fear with the help of other affects or emotions, or he can sublimate and channel them; he comes up with a situation in which fear is permissible, and then he feels fear’. In such situations, it is often the case that the stimulus which elicited the fear ‘does not become conscious’. Heller concludes ‘The only conscious stimulus is the one we have found for the sake of the affect, and in relation to which we can sublimate or channel the affect.’ The sublimation and channelling of the affects is key to the formation and influence of cognitive-situational feelings, as we shall see.

An essential malleability characteristic of the affects is salient to their most dangerous quality: if sufficiently strong, affects may block the cognition of the social actor feeling them. Of all feelings, only one’s affects may be ‘caught’ by another, i.e. they are ‘contagious’. Writing of lynching and ‘the case of panic’, Heller refers to ‘en masse’ (homogenous affects) that serve to ‘force into the background within a matter of seconds the norms regulating these affects, even in the case of persons in whom these norms were strong’. As discussed in Chapter One, it is precisely because affects may block or

15 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 71.
17 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 71.
18 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 71.
19 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 72.
problematise cogent thought that this category of feeling has come to overshadow other categories, including background feelings and more highly conceptualised feelings, in the popular imagination.

Heller discusses a number of specific affects. Fear is said to be among our most expressive affects. Its expression is ‘characteristic of the species in general’, although that which elicits fear ‘is always socially given’. Of the affect of fear, Heller observes:

... should I hear a knock on the door at midnight. ... If I await my beloved I feel happy, he has arrived! If I am not expecting anyone, then I am seized with fear; who can it be? A stranger. I keep feeling fear until I can identify him, until I know whether he is dangerous or not. With the non-affective fear this cannot happen, I always know of what it is that I am afraid.

As Heller illustrates in this passage, the affect of fear may be provoked by an ‘object’ one knows to be dangerous, or by an unfamiliar object whose significance is unknown. Those who feel pervasive anxiety, potentially in response to anything they encounter, demonstrate a form of fear that is to some degree paradigmatic of the ‘obfuscated social relations’ ubiquitous in modern societies. Shame is the ‘social affect par excellence, the affect derived from our relationship to social prescriptions – we feel that we have departed from these prescriptions’. Shame is characteristically expressed in blushing, lowered eyes, turning one’s head away or lowering one’s head, and other signs of humiliation.

In contrast to more conceptualised feelings, my affects do not ‘express my personality’. Should a man feel shame upon being scolded in public, this in itself is not conclusive of his ‘moral makeup’ - he may have no ‘bad conscience’ and on future occasions may even repeat the action in question, ‘if he can get away with it’. Equally, the affective feeling itself is not ‘“binding”’ on the person who feels it, but only the action which results from it, eg I am responsible should I respond to my own anger with an aggressive act.

Unlike our affects, matters of personal judgment and responsibility are integral to our ‘cognitive-situational feelings’, a category of feeling which Heller often dubs, simply,

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emotions. The cognitive-situational feelings are intimately and constitutively bound up with our thoughts and judgments. Whereas an affect is always prompted by a concrete stimulus, and the affective feeling subsequently expressed is recognisable to another without any knowledge of what elicited it, to understand and recognise a cognitive-situational feeling entails knowledge of the situation in which it arose. The cognitive and situational element that inheres in our emotions and sentiments generates their essentially idiosyncratic nature – a hypothesis introduced in Chapter Two. In the following passage, Heller elaborates on this key idea:

That which causes a particular emotion, the thing towards which we feel a given emotion, belongs to the emotion itself, whether we are dealing with different emotions, or the different “nuances” of the same emotion – actually also different emotions. The content of the feeling cannot be separated, in principle, from that which elicits the feeling and from the interpretation of the feeling. For instance, to the feeling of contempt belongs the evaluation, the interpretation of the other person’s personality, actions, the thing because of which I despise him, to the feeling of forgiving that to whom, why, when and how I forgive. The forgiving of Fielding’s Amelia is full of goodness and lenience, that of the Joseph of the Bible is a forgiving full of triumph, that of Prospero a forgiving of resignation.\(^{25}\)

Here, Heller probes the links between particular, concrete emotions and the evaluations and interpretations which are bound up with them. The idiosyncrasy of a social actor’s cognitive-situational feelings reflects the fact that they embody a response to and interpretation of the situation, person or object that triggered them. In the following rebuttal of the argument that we can classify feelings into simple and compound feelings, Heller underlines the potential diversity of our emotions:

The “it hurts” and the “it is good” do not combine to “add up” love as their “sum” but may become the feeling contents of an infinity of specific emotions; similarly, fear and shame together do not “add up” and become a bad conscience.\(^{26}\)

For each of us, the ‘feeling contents’ of our characteristic emotions and sentiments are likely, over time, to give rise to ‘a variety of shades of feelings which are qualitatively distinct’.\(^{27}\) A social actor’s deep emotions and emotional nuances reflect and manifest

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his/her characteristic ways of seeing, understanding and acting in the world, giving rise to emotional palettes which change and develop over time.

To further demonstrate her hypothesis about the situated nature of feelings, Heller considers certain historical dimensions to the topic. Not all emotions, she writes, ‘are present in every culture’, and ‘whereas certain emotions develop under certain social structures, other emotions develop better under other conditions’. The following emotions have been present in some eras and not others: ‘bad conscience, devotion, the desire for independence, humility, love of mankind’. Different emotions of love are said to have existed in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the nineteenth century. Drawing on the characters of Shakespeare, Heller compares the love demonstrated by Romeo, Miranda, Lady Macbeth, Brutus and Cleopatra as an example of idiosyncrasy within one particular era; she also contrasts the love Romeo felt for Rosa to his love for Juliet as an example of personal idiosyncrasy.28

On account of the range of emotions each of us is likely to experience in life, in general, we are likely to experience more emotions than we are conscious of or can identify. Drawing a contrast with the affects, Heller describes the following statement as entirely realistic - “I thought I was in love but I was wrong”. But, Heller asks, would one be likely to say “I have just discovered that I have felt disgusted at the sight of blood all my life?” If I did not feel disgusted before, then I was not disgusted’.29 Of the emotions, Heller writes:

Precisely because of their situational, cognitive and idiosyncratic nature, we do not dispose, for reasons of principle, of sufficient emotional concepts for their expression; we can only approximate them by classifying them under concepts. This is why we attempt to describe them again and again, and often in a different manner. This is why we ‘read’ the meaning expressed from the Other’s sign with accuracy only satisfactorily from a pragmatic point of view.30

It is equally possible that the ‘relation between the individuals “transmitting” and “receiving” the signal’ swing the other way, and that others know our emotions better than we do ourselves. Heller cites a case in which a jealous man is unaware of his own jealousy,
while everyone around him knows that he is jealous. Perhaps, Heller suggests, the man has never felt jealous before or has not been jealous in this particular way, or perhaps he has rationalised his jealousy which is a feeling he despises — “this is not jealousy – I do not hate him, despise him because of jealousy, but because, etc.” Each emotion concept, for Heller, is made up of a ‘category [of feelings]: the grouping of an infinite number [of] qualitatively different, specific emotions,’ the broadest of which are pleasure and spiritual pain.

The differentiation of our emotions is at the same time the accumulation of our human wealth. Our wealth in feelings is part of our personality. Through a process of emotional differentiation, we may foster a rich palette of deep feelings and thus tap the springs of emotional wealth: this idea echoes Heller’s essay on emotional wealth, as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. This is to realise the emotional nuances of one’s personality. The possibility for such emotional enrichment varies between individuals and across cultural strata and historical periods. The absence of a biological basis to our cognitive-situational feelings means we are ‘potentially the freest’ in relation to these feelings, notwithstanding that they may be integral to the functioning of the social strata, class or age to which they belong. But at the same time, it is our cognitive-situational feelings, and only this category of feelings, which are subject to being quantified and alienated. In this sense, emotional ‘impoverishment’ is not only a possible but likely outcome, given the often unconducive conditions prevailing in modern societies. For this reason, Heller places at the centre of her theory of feelings ‘the role and function of feelings in the constitution of our personality’, rather than issues such as the affects of rage and fear.

The emancipatory significance of our emotions, as it emerges in Heller’s work, is succinctly conveyed in one example she gives of their importance to our reflexive habits as a whole, and especially in relation to our affects. Should a particular affect cloud a person’s judgment, the situation may be recovered through the influence on her train of thought of other feelings, in particular the mobilising force of emotions which are ‘largely

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32 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 89.
33 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 89.
conceptualized’.  

Heller cites the biblical story about Moses smashing the stone tablets from Mount Zion upon witnessing the ‘idol of gold’. Moses set out to obtain new tablets not because he had reflected on the matter and thought better of it, but because his ‘love for the law and for God was his dominating passion, and because it became master over his rage’. An altered evaluation of the situation is at stake, in which the reintegration of different attitudes and perspectives into Moses’ train of thought prompts a different set of decisions and actions.

In addition to the main categories of feelings, as already outlined, in her classification, Heller also distinguishes among feelings on the grounds of periodicity and strength/depth. She differentiates between emotional dispositions (as discussed in Chapter Two), and ‘one-off feelings’, which she also calls ‘emotional occurrences’. One-off feelings tend not to recur, to last a relatively short time, and have few behavioural consequences. Some categories of feelings, including the drives and affects, are characteristically one-off feelings, at least among adults. To reiterate, emotional dispositions and sentiments are ‘of a more or less long duration’; they are ‘auto-igniting’, and generate a desire and a tendency to create ‘again and again the emotional situations’ consonant with one’s feelings. Heller cites the man in love, who needs no ‘special indication’ to think about and evoke images of his beloved in her absence.

Taking responsibility for and evaluating our emotions is of particular importance with regard to feelings that are deep and/or intense. Any and every feeling may be judged to be more or less intense, but a designation of depth can be applied only to cognitive and situational feelings, that is, ‘those spiritual feelings in which the “natural” and the “inborn” have no part’. Those feelings may be said to be deep which set ‘our whole personality into motion: we feel deeply when we become involved in something with our whole personality, either positively or negatively.’ For instance, feelings of responsibility, being moved or a bad

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34 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 27.
35 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 27.
36 Quotes this paragraph, Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 27.
37 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 83-84
38 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 92.
conscience may all be ‘profound’ or trivial, deep or shallow. Should someone deeply despise traitors, then ‘betrayal repels him in his entire personality structure’.\(^{39}\)

Most of the feelings that a person feels in life, even those felt repeatedly, have no consequence for his/her emotional character or emotional personality. It is ‘feeling habits’ which are integral to character and personality. The element of responsibility for those habits features only in relation to personality feelings; likewise, it is personality feelings that most importantly give rise to evaluative predictions by others about our likely future judgments and actions. To make an evaluative prediction about how another person might act or react is always an abstraction from the entirety of someone’s personality, but it is a necessary abstraction in that it ‘regulates or “leads” our expectations, our behavior and our evaluations.’ Furthermore, our evaluative predictions are always conditional rather than definitive, given that the person in question may subsequently change. The kind of change Heller has in mind is transformation of the entire personality structure in response to the experience of ‘catharsis’. King Lear’s feelings of ‘empathy with other sufferers’ are cited, feelings for which King Lear had no precedent and which grew out of his own suffering.\(^{40}\)

Our deepest cognitive-situational feelings, and only these feelings, may become passions, which are at the pinnacle of Heller’s classification. To be passionately committed to something is to be involved with one’s ‘whole personality in one feeling disposition’. Heller continues:

... I “invest” my whole personality into a relationship, an affair, an idea, a desire, a project; I stand or fall as a person with this relationship, affair, project, or the attainment of that desire.\(^{41}\)

However, insofar as passions of any duration may and often do narrow one’s world of feelings, thus extinguishing other, incompatible feelings, they are incompatible with ‘variety of feeling (wealth of feeling)’.\(^{42}\) The need arises in this case for conscious acceptance of one’s passionate feelings, which are intrinsically ‘intense and deep’; having taken


\(^{40}\) Quotes this paragraph, Heller, *A Theory of Feelings*, 94-96. Note that Heller also identifies a number of exceptions to the conclusions discussed above about the relationships between emotions, character and personality.


responsibility for one’s passionate commitments, ‘priorities’ and ‘a hierarchy’ may develop among them. Far from passions precluding a polyphony of feelings, ‘there can be no wealth of feelings without passionateness’.  

Heller’s classification of feelings decisively expands on ideas central to her concept of emotional households, centred on a subject whose inner life, structured around a matrix of values, dispositions, capacities, etc, is realised in her judgments, expressions and actions in life. The basis of this is the cognitive and evaluative, i.e. value-bearing, aspect of all feelings, which is decisive in the emotions "proper", a category central to Heller's classificatory project. Heller’s work on cognitive-situational feelings invites us to grasp an emotional household by considering the emotional palettes - i.e. the deep feelings expressive of personality - it gives rise to in each person. As an expression of personality, the palette is closely aligned with reflexive habits and patterns of judgment. The reference to Moses responding to the stone tablets illustrates the kind of evaluative stance Heller has in mind, suggesting a subject with differing emotional registers. The idea of the social actor whose passions and deep feelings are ‘invested’ in the tasks in which she is most closely involved is also central to Heller’s model of emotional wealth. These ideas serve to extend the conception of emotional economies implicitly present in Heller's phenomenology of feelings. They do so in conjunction with her ideas about learning to feel, to which I now turn.

**The Learnt Nature of Feelings**

... the fact that man feels is not acquired. But each particular feeling is in some way related to learning, or is learned outright.  

Following her taxonomy of feelings, Heller turns to a discussion of how we learn to feel. Of the inter-relationship between feelings and thoughts, Heller reiterates that ‘all our feelings as feeling either include the factor of cognition or at least are related to cognition, goals and situations and only become relevant as feeling through interaction with these’. In her essay on learning to feel, Heller outlines an ongoing learning process of a developmental nature, one that is framed by the maturation of the social actor and the formation of her

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44 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 105.
emotional world, while stopping short of implying a predetermined sequence of consecutive stages.\textsuperscript{46}

Heller identifies multiple ways we learn to feel. We learn to distinguish between drives and affects, a distinction evident in the child who insists she is hungry, but turns down food when offered something other than what she had in mind to eat. We also learn the appropriate forms of behaviour in relation to each drive. Acquiring knowledge of the affects includes learning any relevant socially designated triggers. Heller writes: ‘Those stimuli with regard to which the affects must “react” are usually culturally defined’. Hence, the child who digs into feces with pleasure must be told repeatedly “ugh!” and “disgusting!” until feces becomes a stimulus that provokes disgust. Likewise, small children must be told not to go with “strangers with candy” on the street, because to do so is dangerous; thereafter, they begin to feel fear. Heller reiterates that in the case of the affects, the limits to our learning process is set by the innate, universal nature of these feelings, notwithstanding that they may be modified, and are in fact modified, \textit{via} social regulations. Within this limit, every person must acquire knowledge of the affects, and knowledge of how to “read” the affects, “lest he perish”.\textsuperscript{47} As these few observations show, the learning process in relation to the drives and affects attests to the inter-relationships between feelings, tasks and norms that structure our emotional households in essential ways.

Heller’s work on patterns of learning in relation to cognitive-situational feelings is especially salient for my purposes. A crucial part of this learning process is acquiring knowledge and understanding of ‘what emotions and feeling dispositions actually exist’. We may do this by “fitting together” feelings with the emotion concept or concepts salient to them. Perhaps we already know of a particular emotion concept prior to having experienced it, as commonly occurs with romantic love.\textsuperscript{48} Alternatively, we may experience an emotion we cannot identify, and thereafter seek ‘a concept that “fits” our feelings’.\textsuperscript{49} The fitting

\textsuperscript{46} Heller argues that the infant begins life with unformed, incipient sensations which develop over time into familiar, recognisable feelings. She cites Arnold Gehlen’s work on the hunger pangs of the newborn, which in all probability he/she experiences as painful, unpleasant feelings. The infant’s nascent feeling becomes oriented ‘through repeated impressions and images of support’, growing into ‘an aimed, concrete, that is assembled need’, which subsequently ‘presents itself’ in ‘fantasy images of satisfaction’ and ‘as a concrete drive, as ‘hunger-for-something-like-that’.’ Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 126n.

\textsuperscript{47} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 107.

\textsuperscript{48} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 113.

\textsuperscript{49} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 116.
together process in question is ‘a successive and protracted procedure, which never becomes complete, perfectly finished’. Heller refers to the parent who conveys the meaning of envy to a child who returns home from the nursery upset: ‘“Sue has broken my doll and I did nothing to her”’. The parent explains to the child the behaviour of her companion, ‘“Sue is envious of you. If someone is envious that means that she cannot bear you to have nicer toys than she has, to receive new dolls, etc”’. The parent may subsequently call attention to any signs of envy displayed by the child herself, although even if this does not occur, the child will in other ways acquire the knowledge of what it means to be envious. The knowledge in question is necessary for an adequate understanding of the concrete situations one may meet in life, and also the human condition more broadly. In light of the ‘cognitive situational’ nature of our emotions, we learn anew each time we encounter a new situation or experience: ‘[p]ity for the foe is the learning of a new feeling no matter how many times one may have felt pity for members of one’s family or for friends’.  

Experiences like those of the envious child, who learns about her own lived emotions by fitting them with the corresponding emotion concepts, serve as an essential ‘point of departure’ in the formation of the child’s ‘“world of feeling”’. Each child encounters two turning points in the denomination of his feelings: when he becomes capable of ‘verbal thinking’, and when he ‘begins to “keep his feelings to himself”’. The naming of feelings, as Heller outlines it, is part of a process of engaging with and gaining insight into the nature and qualities of those feelings. The social actor uses ‘the nuances of emotional concepts’ to circumscribe his ‘emotions and moods’, thus ‘“supplying” them with attributes and adjectives’. The following passage pertains to the internal dialogue of a teenager learning to observe ‘his own feelings’, and in the process acquiring a greater range and complexity of ‘feeling concepts’ in order to ‘express them completely’:

The feeling “I like him” splits, it takes on many shades: I sympathise with him, I feel attracted to him, I feel friendship towards him, I adore him, I respect him, etc. “I am in a bad mood” splits: I am sad, I feel regret, my heart is aching, I feel desperate, I suffer, I feel depressed, etc. The feeling of not being

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52 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 117, 118.
able to express my feelings in all its nuances now appears; the process of circumscribing emotions begins.\textsuperscript{53}

Here is the social actor engaged in interpretative differentiation of her feelings, as Heller describes in her essay on emotional impoverishment. The differentiation process outlined constitutes ‘the beginning of a new process’ rather than ‘the final point of an already completed process’.\textsuperscript{54} As we become ‘aware of the concrete quality of the emotion’ itself, we thereby partake of the ‘very quality’ of the emotion, and this is likely to effect a change in the feeling itself.\textsuperscript{55} Should a person tell herself “I no longer love this man”, she thereby becomes conscious of the absence of love, or may even cease loving the other person; ‘togetherness’ is thereafter lived ‘in a different way’, and ‘the “magic” collapses’. Likewise, our appraisals of the emotions expressed by another are similarly subject to change, eg should I re-interpret the kindness of another as “merely outward appearance; in truth he is selfish and cold”’, from that time ‘I accept all his kindliness only with a grain of salt’.\textsuperscript{56} As these examples demonstrate, an essential part of the learning of feelings is learning to accurately recognise emotions, and to interpret, or ‘read’, expressions of feeling. In relation to the idiosyncratic cognitive-situational feelings, and their equally idiosyncratic patterns of expression, this is a ‘continuous task; we can never say “now I know”, at most we may say “now I know it better”.’\textsuperscript{57}

In our fitting together of emotions with emotion concepts, ‘the latter are decisive’. In this respect, Heller heralds the arts for its capacity to evoke in us all the emotions we know. We empathise with Othello’s jealousy, and with the tragic outcome of Tristan and Isoldes’ love for each other, because we understand the situations and the feelings concerned, whether or not we have actually experienced the feelings ourselves. Emotions may be felt, as well as interpreted, ‘simply through the situation’. What characterises children’s novels in this respect is that they represent concepts and situations in ways that make the emotions represented therein comprehensible to their readers, ‘and thus enable them to

\textsuperscript{53} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 113, 117.
\textsuperscript{54} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 117.
\textsuperscript{55} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 116, 117.
\textsuperscript{56} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 117.
\textsuperscript{57} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 122.
They primarily differ from novels written for adults in the scope and complexity of the situations and emotions represented.

The process of naming and grasping feelings, in response to certain concrete sensations, impulses and/or thoughts we experience, constitutes a ‘direct’ learning process which is characterised by active engagement with the content and evaluative structure of the concept, and also with any salient normative dimensions such as social customs and prescriptions. However, this is the less common means by which we learn to feel. We are more likely to acquire knowledge of feelings ‘indirectly’, and to learn emotion concepts along with ‘the expectations, customs and social evaluations’ which pertain to them. The indirect learning process lacks the element of independent selection by the social actor of the feeling itself, or of any salient values and perspectives associated with it. The learning process in question is less autonomous and reflexive, and is more likely to involve unquestioned acceptance of those prescriptions and norms given in one’s environment.

In the majority of cases, the formation of a social actor’s emotional habits reflects the impact of external stimuli of a prescriptive kind directed at one or other affect. When fostered by specific situations, affects are transmitted along with the pertinent social prescriptions; those prescriptions, in turn, are ‘always emotion creating’. Following Darwin, Heller writes, ‘The channelling and regulation of affects plays the leading role in the early formation of emotional behaviour.’ In the course of channelling and regulating our drives and affects, emotional habits of an idiosyncratic nature form. Heller refers again to Aristotle’s dicta that the courageous man is one who fears what he should, where he should, when he should, the way he should. The courage of Aristotle’s brave man is conceptually and experientially bound up with – ‘conducted by’, as Heller puts it – the prevailing social norms regarding the affect of fear, in particular its restraint.

At the individual level, the regulation and control of our affects begins from self-control exercised in relation to the expression of these feelings. Self-control is said to be a

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59 Thus, Heller further deepens her analysis of the role feelings have come to play within the human species. As beings not guided by instincts, humans rely upon the power of cognition to guide, shape and evaluate feelings; it is the feelings we learn that enable us to “help ourselves” in the absence of guiding instincts. Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 105. See also Heller’s On Instincts.
60 Quotes this paragraph, Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 118.
significant form of ‘the regulation and channelling of affects (i.e. of their transformation into emotions)’.  

For example, whereas expressing a feeling outwardly may serve to intensify the feeling, repression of the feeling may have the opposite effect. Heller also puts the question another way: it is the need of every child to ‘learn to dominate his affects’. The ‘regulation of the affects by evaluation and by means of self-control’, she writes, ‘goes along with the regulation of the expression of affect’.  

It is through having internalised ‘the negative relation to the affect in this or that case’ that the expressions of feeling become moderated. Having learned to dominate a given affect, the response thereafter becomes emotional habit, and self-control plays a less substantial role.  

With this analysis, Heller builds upon her arguments about the central place of will and volition in our emotional households.

As these ideas suggest, an essential part of learning to feel is learning the social evaluations and prescriptions associated with one or other feeling. We apply, as well as acquire, such knowledge in the course of identifying and evaluating the emotional habits of others (among other ways). The interpretations and judgments we form in this respect have a significant normative dimension: as Heller puts it, ‘[g]eneral moral norms apply to emotional habits at all times. It is child’s play to judge the emotional habits of others’.  

By contrast, the evaluating of one’s own emotional habits is not primarily a matter of ‘reading’ the emotions in question: the Self is not given to ‘reading’ its own emotional habits, or even to experiencing those feelings as signs to be read. Rather, as Heller puts it, our own emotional habits are ““ready facts”, we have learned these already’.  

A second kind of emotional learning thus comes into play – the social actor learns to ‘coexist’ with her own emotional habits. That is, she learns to live authentically with them, accepting those she evaluates positively, and striving to ““balance”” the others, i.e. avoiding situations likely to elicit them. Additionally, she learns to consciously regulate the behaviour, judgment and expectations to which they give rise. For example, one who is jealous ‘by nature’ strives to avoid behaving jealously, a person with a melancholic tendency resists judging the world through a depressive lens, and one who is ‘naturally’ passionate does not expect her

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61 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 118.

colleagues to share her passion. An important condition for such coexistence is ‘critical self-knowledge’, a virtue Heller considers to be as vital as it is rare in human life.\textsuperscript{63}

In contrast to emotional habits, very few social norms exist to guide our evaluations of our one-off feelings and emotional dispositions. Two examples of extant norms pertaining to emotional sentiments are identified: the injunction to love one’s parents, and to mourn one’s relatives when they die. The level of generality characteristic of such norms, as well as the prevalence of internal contradictions among them, are factors that tend to complicate the social actor’s evaluation and selection of particular feeling occurrences and emotional dispositions. Yet notwithstanding the absence of ‘permanent specific evaluation’, i.e. social and moral norms, applicable to these ‘particular feeling events’, the imperative remains to evaluate them. It is in the act of evaluating each such feeling that the social actor learns its idiosyncratic meaning, that is, its ‘particularity’. To learn to feel, in this case, means ‘to learn to relate to each one of our feelings and to judge our individual feelings idiosyncratically’, grasping, in each case, salient objects, triggers and evaluative dimensions of our feelings, and their overall significance for us. In contrast with emotional habits, the judgments which a person’s one-off feelings and feeling dispositions invite in him usually amount to ‘the terminus, the result’ of the appraisal process in question.\textsuperscript{64}

Let us remember that emotional habits are emotions we have already learned and with which we have to learn to get along from then on. It is simple to evaluate them on the basis of norms. On the other hand: every specific emotional occurrence “must be learned” again and again and must be evaluated idiosyncratically, even if the learning becomes simpler after the accumulation of life experiences (the formation of the assurance of yes- or no-feelings), although it will never become quite simple.\textsuperscript{65}

Our orientational feelings (yes- or no-feelings) come to inform our responses to those emotional occurrences that arise from day to day. How a person evaluates his one-off feelings and feeling dispositions will tend to reflect his character and personality. Those evaluations may also reflect his “‘secondary learning’,” that is, selection from among his

\textsuperscript{63} Quotes this paragraph, Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 120.

\textsuperscript{64} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 121.

\textsuperscript{65} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 122.
emotional habits on the basis of conscience and value preferences. Of secondary learning, Heller writes:

The individual consciously relating to his emotional habits confronts one emotional habit with another and strives to “judge” his specific feeling occurrences on the basis of the emotional habits he deems to be more valuable.66

Such active, autonomous reflexivity, Heller adds, is impossible for what she calls the ‘inauthentic personality’. She considers a hypothetical case of an inauthentic experience of repentance: the emotion may be truly felt and truly expressed, ‘but since it does not emanate from the emotional character and does not even alter that character, it disappears without leaving [a] trace.’ Of emotions, Heller defines as authentic ‘those feelings which express our emotional character and especially our emotional personality; whereas we call inauthentic those feelings which either are not in organic contact with our emotional character, or contradict it.’67 Secondary learning is a further example of a ‘direct’ form of learning, involving an active and independent engagement with feelings, both in terms of ‘their evaluation (their preferences, their selection, or their negative appraisal)’, and ‘the content of emotional concepts (i.e. of their meaning)’. Heller draws the following overall conclusion on these questions:

The more developed the Self, the more idiosyncratic its feelings, the greater the discrepancy between the feeling occurrence and the emotional habit.68

The feelings in question are idiosyncratic due to the fact that they reflect and embody the consistent exercise of reflexivity in the mind and Self from whence they issued. Were this not the case, the feelings would take their stamp from the salient social norms and be of a less differentiated nature. The individual, idiosyncratic character of this world of feelings throws into relief those one-off feelings which may arise.

In Heller’s essay about learning to feel, she outlines a lifelong process in which, as reflects her classification of feelings, the cognitive and evaluative dimensions of emotion play a key role. A basic element in each world of feelings is the evolving of more

67 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 123.
68 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 120.
conceptualised, cognitive-situational feelings. Such ‘higher’ feelings typically evolve in the course of learning to contain and channel one’s affective feelings, perhaps keeping them in check or expressing them in socially acceptable ways – processes in which social norms and prescriptions play a central role. Additionally, the act of interpreting others’ emotional habits commonly has a normative element. Those judgments and prescriptions applied tend to be socially derived, at least in the first instance. The learning processes in question most often occur indirectly, that is, unreflexively and/or automatically, often from, or at, an early age, and result in feelings that take their tenor from prevailing social conditioning and other environmental influences.

We learn to feel partly by fitting together our new and/or inchoate emotional experiences with emotion concepts. That feelings are an object of human learning in the ways outlined attests to their vital place in our self-regulation and self-furthering. Stress is laid on the potential for active engagement with our own emotional habits, and with the patterns of judgment and action relevant to them. Our emotional literacy may reflect a perspective and insight informed by self-knowledge and conscience, and a capacity for what Heller calls secondary learning. Such acts of learning will tend to involve the social actor in his own perceptions, assumptions and values. The knowledge acquired through such direct cognitive and evaluative engagement with the feeling, and with the social prescriptions and evaluations salient to it, may alter the person’s understanding more broadly, implicitly or explicitly, and thus shape judgments and actions, as well as emotions. These ideas deepen the image of human subjectivity and individuality present in Heller’s writing on emotions, as discussed above in Chapters One and Two.

**Conclusion**

Heller’s phenomenology of feelings posits a multi-dimensional model of personhood in which our inner lives, and particularly our emotions, are a foundation of agency and ethical judgment. That body of writing underlines the dynamism as well as the potential unity of the human subject. Heller’s essays on emotional taxonomy, and on the learning process in relation to emotions, demonstrate how feeling, entwined with thought, performs its function in human life, and how both feeling and thought are shaped and inflected by value. These essays, and the ideas they contain about the inter-relationships among emotions,
subjectivity and ethical choice, advance an essential foundation for her concept of emotional households. This is based on a core idea of the Self whose inner world is effected in involvement in the world, as discussed in earlier chapters.

A central thread about individuality runs throughout the two essays: the roots of the personality are in the social and historical world, and more particularly in the world-view and perspective from which one 'departs' in life. This is centrally about the values and value hierarchies which guide and shape each life. The value preferences and evaluative stances associated with the personality are key to Heller’s concept of emotional households. Our deep emotions tell us about ourselves, expressing and embodying our needs, desires, judgments and values in manifold ways. In her philosophical anthropology, Heller identifies the social and normative influences on our lives as essential structures which may nourish and sustain human existence, and at the same time, she advocates looking beyond those structures in our quest for change, progress and self-furthering in life. For Heller, the question is not whether individual choice is more or less primary than factors such as age, class and sex, but rather that in our individuality, and more specifically, our personality, such factors are, or may be, manifest through the prism of our singularity.

A number of specific dimensions to our emotional households emerge in Heller’s phenomenological analysis of feelings. One central theme relates to the cultivation of our feelings, and general patterns in emotional cultivation. Heller draws out the relationship between emotional cultivation and our regulation, selection, and reflexive engagement with our emotions. Unchecked expression of an emotion is not seen to be the only or even the most optimal way of honouring that feeling, nor is such expression, in itself, a measure of emotional wealth. The emotional habits formed in our youth play an essential function in the formation of our emotional lives, in particular the curbing and moderating of affects such as fear and rage, insofar as this serves to foster and cultivate more conceptualised emotions such as courage, resilience and fortitude. This idea echoes the work of Heller’s discussed above in Chapter One, on the ways we relegate emotions in the course of making decisions, taking action and achieving goals in life: crucially, the relegated emotion remains a significant part of and influence on the person’s world of feelings, as a background feeling. Heller underlines how our passions and personality feelings may and often do serve as a driving force in our worlds of feeling, and she also highlights a capacity to keep one or other
feeling in check, and a readiness to stand back from our emotions in the interests of understanding and acting upon or in relation to them.

Heller’s emphasis upon emotional selection and evaluation is complemented by her ideas about how we learn to feel. The interpretative nature of human emotions as outlined by Heller can be seen to involve a life-long social learning process. In learning what feelings exist, we acquire knowledge of the internal logic and impulse intrinsic to each particular feeling, as well as culturally sanctioned patterns of expression. Also acquired is knowledge of any prescriptions, expectations and social evaluations salient to the feeling in question. Learning is integral to our reflexive engagement with our emotions, including naming feelings and distinguishing among them, the latter being equivalent to exploring and realising their nuances, for Heller. Thus, she refers to secondary learning, and to the self-reflexive subject whose reflection opens up a ‘treasure trove of potentials for emotional differentiation’. Heller’s ideas about emotional hermeneutics attest to the widening circles of differentiation our feelings are subject to from infancy, in which key junctures are the acquisition of language and the formation and deepening of one’s introspective voice.

The learnt nature of emotions is also key to our ‘reading’ of other peoples’ emotional expressions and emotional habits, a process with an inherently evaluative, interpretative element. As John Grumley writes, the self-knowledge we draw upon as a crucial source of insight and basis of action tells us that we know ourselves best, yet others may know us even better, on account of knowledge gained through social interactions and relationships. ‘The necessary corrective to the self’s sense of privilege’, Grumley writes, ‘is the knowledge that it is co-created by other selves in the form of recognition and self-evaluations.’69 We engage in a similar evaluative process in relation to our own one-off feelings and emotional sentiments. In the act of identifying, differentiating among and evaluating such feelings, one may grasp their triggers, causes, qualities, significance, etc. In these ways, Heller’s model demonstrates how emotion and reason, like feeling and reflection, are entwined on both constitutive and regulatory levels. That inter-relationship is

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significant in relation to the nature and content of the feelings themselves, as well as to our relationship to our feelings.

The writings in this chapter attend to the social actor’s need and capacity for both interdependence and autonomy in her emotional life, encompassing themes of realising the depth of one or other feeling or emotion, as well as the need for an element of detachment from one’s emotions. In general terms, thought emerges as a necessary and important guiding influence upon emotion; as outlined above, at key junctures in our emotional lives, the structuring power of the mind and the will is shown to be decisive. A significant focus of this writing is the functions performed by the mind and the will in the channelling and regulating of feelings and emotions, and also in their development and cultivation. This centres on the essay about the learnt dimensions of human feeling, a key example of which is the need for every child to learn to dominate her affects. It is also borne out in the general trajectory of our emotional learning processes, as defined by Heller, in which there is an implied element of incremental growth and progress, with our emotions shown to become more fully formed, and more encompassing in their capacity to guide us, across the life span. By contrast, a different set of dynamics is characteristic of the emotional household of the ‘harmonious personality’, a type of personality discussed by Heller which I discuss in the next chapter of my thesis.

Each human life, Heller suggests, may be understood as ‘personality, with its own world’ – a world the person in question tends to be centrally concerned with striving to ‘preserve and extend’.70 Heller’s work also illustrates different forms which our patterns of involvement in life may take. This ambit is the beginning point of the next chapter of my thesis. The main focus of that chapter is Heller’s analysis of the individual personality and the particularist personality as two contrasting models of personality, and implicitly also two distinct orders of emotional household.

70 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 127.
CHAPTER FOUR

INFINITE RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM (IV)

THE INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY

The feelings of the individual are emotions evaluated on the basis of his own criteria of choice; even though he chooses his values, of course, from among the ones “provided” by the world, their constant intentionality, the fact that he is at the origin of the selection, the fact that he takes responsibility for them, all these insure the continuity of the Self.¹

Heller’s investigations of emotions and emotional households relate in many ways to ethical concerns focused on the possibility and importance of an autonomous, reflexive form of individuality. Those ethical questions surfaced explicitly in Chapter Two, where I briefly considered Heller’s ideas about the individual personality and individual feelings, terms associated with a perspective informed by active, critical thought and reflection. In Heller’s essay on the individual personality, contained in A Theory of Feelings, she considers at length the world of feeling characteristic of the individual personality, which she compares and contrasts to that of the ‘particularistic personality’. For Heller, it is the morally engaged individual, one who continues to evaluate his own emotions in an active and conscious way, who can most fully realise the potentials of emotional housekeeping. For Heller, as Rundell writes, values constitute ‘the imaginary horizons through which actions, which include feelings, are orientated and evaluated.’² In emotional terms, the distinction between the individual personality and particularist personality pertains broadly to whether and how feelings are mobilised, and their relationship to the value horizons of the subject.

My focus in this chapter is Heller’s essay in A Theory of Feelings on the individual personality. In that essay, Heller posits a person whose relationship to the world, including her world of feelings, is characteristically ‘individual’ in nature. It is in this essay, which concludes Heller’s phenomenological analysis of feelings, that she first explicitly introduces to the text the idea of emotional households. Her analysis in this essay both emerges from the theoretical concerns apparent in the preceding chapters, and in certain respects also

¹ Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 143.
marks a distinct change in philosophical direction, as Heller herself has written.³ Heller’s investigation of certain patterns characteristic of the world of feeling of the individual personality, including her account of a model of personality she calls the harmonious character, contains a significant application of her concept of emotional households, as she herself has written.⁴

**Reflexive Individuality: Of Feelings, and the Relationship to Feelings**

The Self in evolution (the Self’s own world) relates to the world “given” to it; with its feelings the Self (the social organism) selects in this world from the aspect of self-preservation and expansion. Of course, there is not but one way to preserve and extend the Self and there is not but one type of relationship to the world. Can we distinguish (and if yes, how?) the main tendencies of the various kinds of relationships? I must answer this question.⁵

Towards the end of Part One of *A Theory of Feelings*, Heller turns to consider ‘our ways of being in the world’.⁶ What comes to the fore as Heller sets out the order of involvement characteristic of the individual personality is her interest in questions about bringing about change of a humane and democratic kind, and specifically in the type of personality likely to effect such change.⁷ The essay encompasses ideas about some of the ways feelings may perform their functions in the human personality.

Heller begins by observing how each person’s relationship to the world is ‘more or less codetermine[d]’ by his ‘particularities’ – those innate capacities and tendencies, such as a predisposition towards one or other affect or mood, which are received in his genetic endowment. However, this codetermination leaves free the formation of the moral character. Although the Self is ‘always and inescapably particular’, and we are never able to ‘pass beyond the boundaries of the Self’ in our selections in life, the givenness of ‘our

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³ The essay in which Heller elaborates on the distinction between individual and particularistic emotions makes up the final chapter in Heller’s phenomenological analysis of feelings and emotions. Heller has described that chapter as a bridge between her phenomenological analysis of feelings, and her social philosophy of feelings, which makes up the second part of her theory of feelings. See Heller’s introduction to the second edition of *A Theory of Feelings* (2009), 7.
⁷ Helping usher in a socialist future was also part of Heller’s aims at the time of writing *A Theory of Feelings* in the early 1970s.
particularities and our angle of vision’ does not imply a givenness in how we relate to the world in general.\textsuperscript{8} The particularistic personality ‘is characterized by complete identification with his own world (with himself).’\textsuperscript{9} He develops himself and his world by selecting from the environment ‘on the basis of his particularities and particularistic point of vision’. Those selections are centred on ‘mere self-preservation in the environment or expansion without conflict’. This entails identification with the prescriptions and norms given in his environment; his relationships to both his own consciousness and character, and to the social integrations of the given world, tend to be undistanced and uncritical. By contrast, the individual personality selects from ‘the system of customs of his environment’ on the basis of ‘values chosen by himself’. Likewise, he selects individually ‘from among the constituents of his psychological character’, prioritising some traits and habits, and repressing or eliminating others ‘on the basis of the choice of values’.\textsuperscript{10} In this respect, the individual personality relates both to the world, and to himself, from a standpoint of distance.

Heller applies the distinction between individuality and particularity to our emotional lives on two, inter-related grounds. It pertains not only to our feelings, their content, triggers etc, but also to our ‘evaluative standpoint with regard to our own feeling’.\textsuperscript{11} In relation to the affects, for instance, I may identify with my feelings, or perhaps I ‘set a distance between myself and them on the basis of my choice of values’. One person may feel shame solely in response to ‘the shame stimulus provided for him by his environment’, while another evaluates and selects among those stimuli, as to what is rightly shameful. Envy and vanity are ‘par excellence the feelings of identification with particularity’. Yet we may adopt an individual relationship even to our envy and vanity, observing, for instance, an act to have been motivated by envy, and resolving not to let it happen again.\textsuperscript{12}

For the most part, any and all emotions ‘may function as individual feelings’. Self-love is one of Heller’s examples. In one scenario, self-love may amount to ‘total self-identification’, a feeling intrinsically informed by self-pity and vanity. Alternatively, self-love

\textsuperscript{8} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 144.
\textsuperscript{9} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 144.
\textsuperscript{10} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 145.
\textsuperscript{11} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 147.
\textsuperscript{12} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 148.
may be characterised by a distance ‘directed at the values of our Self’, in which case it is likely to be inflected with pride, and possibly also self-irony. The object of the former example of self-love is ‘the Self as existence’, whereas in the latter case it is ‘the Self as value object’. Each instance of self-love has a different quality, as well as function within the Self. In relation to feeling offended, the feeling is not individual should the feeling be triggered by something ‘which questions our particular self-love’, for instance if another person ‘should tell the truth to our face’, or be ironical. But it is individual in situations in which there was an aim to inflict hurt. In the latter, individual ‘form of the emotion’, our feeling of offence constitutes a correct, negative judgment of ‘the intent to hurt’.\textsuperscript{13}

Heller also elaborates on individual love and affection. In the particularist form of love, there is no distance from given social prescriptions and codes: we love the person whom we are ‘supposed to love in a “quasi-natural” way according to the norms (customs), without reflecting on the nature of our love, without questioning the worth of the persons we are supposed to love.’ Conversely, love in which ‘we choose its object ourselves on the basis of his inherent human values’ may be love of an individual kind, and it is definitely individual should we love that person for those chosen values, rather than for reasons to do with ‘our own particular Self’. Heller refers to Abraham Maslow’s distinction between what he termed ‘“deficiency love”’, reflective of a ‘“permanent desire to be loved”’, compared to ‘“love for Being of another person”’. In the former case, the person ‘loves only with reference to himself (in a particularist way)’, and his love endures ‘only as long as the Other belongs to him or her, as long as the Other loves him best’. Heller continues:

The main value attached to the beloved is belonging. If this should cease, so do affection or love; love shifts into hatred, into contempt. As long as the other belongs to him, the identification with the Other is unconditional.\textsuperscript{14}

Whereas, he who loves as an individual loves the other his own sake and his own being:

Of course, this love too demands a response, as all emotional dispositions demand it. But love is not motivated by the other being “ours” or “becoming ours”, but by the fact that the other is worthy of love and affection on the basis of her qualities. Individual love knows distance. No matter how overpowering the feeling of love he may yet judge the other person, may

\textsuperscript{13} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 148.
\textsuperscript{14} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 149.
resort to irony, although it is true that this distance nevertheless assumes the unconditional acceptance of the other’s personality.\textsuperscript{15}

Even in the case of particularistic feelings, one can and often does have an individual relationship to the feelings in question. Heller envisages a person distancing himself from the feeling in question, ‘mainly by not allowing the expression of his own feeling in adequate behaviour or action.’\textsuperscript{16} If the feeling, and the negative evaluation of that feeling, should occur together, such distancing may accomplish repression of the feeling and of its expression – ‘the individual keeps the particularist feeling to himself and does not cultivate it, but forces it into the background’.\textsuperscript{17} Often, she notes, there is a delay between the emotion surfacing, and its being evaluated negatively, and then such distancing is also delayed: for instance, should a person feel offended that someone has told him the truth to his face. The initial feeling of being offended – a feeling which, in Heller’s hypothetical illustration, shows on the person’s face – changes after she recognises that the words were said in love or friendship. Thereafter, the feeling of affrontedness or insult gives way to gratitude in his response to that person.

The above examples of Heller’s distinction between particularist and individual feelings demonstrate the inter-relationship of feeling and thought with regard to self-love and love, and taking offence. Heller’s interest is in the judgments that inhere in our feelings, and the scrutiny we subject them to. The connection to action and agency is foregrounded, most importantly in relation to whether or not an emotion is expressed or acted upon. In all these ways, her analysis reflects a conception of the social actor as emotional housekeeper, reckoning with the nature and significance of his feelings and emotions in relation to his own moral and ethical code (if he is an individual personality).

This analysis broadens as Heller elaborates further on the main qualities that distinguish the individual personality from the particularistic personality. The key to the individual’s code of conduct is self-knowledge. The individual’s relationship to those deep emotions and emotional dispositions expressive of her personality is decisively shaped by her ‘secondary learning’ (as discussed in Chapter Three) – a willingness to engage actively

\textsuperscript{15} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 149.
\textsuperscript{16} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 149.
\textsuperscript{17} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 149-50.
with her emotions, and the main behaviours and qualities associated with them. The learning in question involves applying self-knowledge in relation to emotional habits, as part of a continuing dialogue with oneself (and possibly also with others), which is critically informed by one’s own chosen values:

Secondary learning consists in eliminating the symptoms of emotional habits judged to be negative, by choosing situations in which they cannot be realized, or by confronting “negative” emotional habits with ones judged to be “positive”. Since, however, the individual is characterized by the will of self-building and self-change initiated by himself (and along with it the joy felt at successful self-building and self-change), his relation to the self cannot on the whole be negative.  

In this quotation, Heller identifies a capacity to restrain or counteract those emotional habits which one evaluates negatively as a vital condition of ‘successful self-building and self-change’. Moreover, the individual’s act of self-building takes its hue from the pleasures and contentment intrinsic to the process, and not from the fact that certain emotional habits are judged negatively, or the consequences of this negative judgment. By virtue of the fact that the individual has ‘initiated the self-change on the basis of his own selected values’, he becomes not the object, but:

the active subject of the development of his own values; thus he always approves his own personality on the whole. The distancing from particularist feelings, from emotional habits judged to be bad, not only does not contradict the self-enjoyment of personality, the two actually presuppose one another.

The particularistic character may likewise ‘judge certain of his emotional habits negatively’, but the basis of his judgment is ‘the uncritical acceptance of the system of customs and norms’. Thus, he applies those social codes ‘not chosen by himself to his own personality and represses within himself all those feelings which deviate from or contradict these’. Yet the repressed, particularist feelings continue to exist within the personality structure, and in all likelihood will subsequently shape and influence the person, and his judgment and actions.

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The core function of human feelings, Heller repeats, is to ensure the ‘relative continuity’ of the Self, that is, ‘the regulation of the proportions of “preserving” and “expanding”’ the Self. In addition, everyone has a need - to a greater or lesser extent, and in different ways - to have his/her personality approved. There is an essential difference in how this function is fulfilled in the particularistic personality, compared to the individual personality. In the case of the particularistic personality, it is defense mechanisms that chiefly preserve the “identity” of the Self: ‘the function of particularistic emotions is precisely to satisfy the defense mechanisms’. Should our beloved not return our love, we hate and despise him. Should a desire go unfulfilled, we judge it unimportant or unattainable, or out of reach on account of ‘intervention or meddling by evil persons’. By thus ‘reacting with particularist emotions to every danger threatening the identity’, self-approval and identity are ensured. In the case of the particularist personality, the extension of the personality occurs only in relation to ‘the system of norms and customs accepted without reflection’. His acceptance of ‘everything prescribed’ determines the ‘particular sphere’ of expansion by which homeostasis is ensured.20

The feelings of the particularist personality cease guiding him in the case of “borderline situations” (i.e. certain catastrophes and traumatic events). In such scenarios, he is ‘subject to panic or lamentations (“why did this have to happen to me?”’)’. The demands of the traumatic situation are such that ‘the particularist Self is incapable of preserving the “identity” of the personality; the Self “falls apart”, and personality disturbances such as neurosis or even madness occur.’21 The lack of distance in the structure of the particularist personality mean resilience is intrinsically limited.

In the case of the individual personality, the feelings ‘fill the function of the Self’s social homeostasis’ differently. Defense mechanisms are either absent, or are taken account of and kept at bay, i.e. they are not acted upon. What is central here is that the feelings of the individual are ‘evaluated on the basis of his own criteria of choice; even though he chooses his values, of course, from among the ones “provided” by the world, their constant intentionality, the fact that he is at the origin of the selection, the fact that he takes

20 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 151.
21 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 151.
responsibility for them, all these insure the continuity of the Self.’\textsuperscript{22} Distance from the Self as well as pleasure in self-building may result in ‘self-enjoyment of the personality’, an emotion which is over and above self-approval of the personality. Nor is this self-enjoyment of personality disrupted should we make a ‘fresh choice of values (as often happens); the intention still has its origins within us and the structure of the person remains individual’.

**Shaping and Cultivating the Personality: the ‘Individual Gardener’**

Part of Heller’s model of the individual personality involves the fostering of one’s emotions as a form of self-expression and self-furthering. A continuing process of being aware of and realising one’s deep feelings is conveyed in passages like the following:

> The particularist gardener will cut down everything he finds inappropriate to the uncritically accepted system of customs, yet he will let the weeds thrive everywhere else. The individual gardener will cultivate his garden on the basis of his knowledge of the world and of self-knowledge. He will cultivate the most beautiful flowers the given soil will permit. Everyone has an image of what man should be like. The particularist person says: “I am what I should be” or “since I cannot be what I should be, I am satisfied that I am exactly what I am”. The individual says: “I try to be what I should be as far as possible; I must take advantage of all possibilities”.\textsuperscript{23}

For the individual, cultivating his feelings is part of enriching that self-knowledge which is a crucial guide in life, and it also holds an intrinsic pleasure and satisfaction. The world of the individual is a world informed by his deep emotions, and also by the shaping, guiding force of the evaluative stances those emotions embody and contain. The above quotation also suggests the intrinsic aesthetic quality inherent in those emotions which embody something of the personality. Passages of text like this one exemplify the interaction between emotions, subjectivity and volition which is central to Heller’s concept of emotional households. The idea that the individual engages in forming and deepening his emotions – becoming a ‘gardener’ of his emotional world – gets at principles central to that concept. A further extract along these lines reads as follows:

> The self-knowledge, the relearning of the relation to emotional habits, the acceptance of the “soil” of the personality as something given, the fact that we mean to cultivate the most beautiful flowers possible from this soil, in

\textsuperscript{22} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 152.
\textsuperscript{23} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 151.
other words the conscious acceptance of ourselves as the “raw material”, is sufficient in itself to guarantee identity through every alteration, every self-change, every turn of fate.  

Self-furthering involves a way of relating to one’s emotions, a conscious engagement with their many different nuances and palettes, informed by a meaningful self-assessment. The strength and resilience which characterises the individual Self reflects the fact that ‘it is a Self worked out in the conscious relation to the species’. There is a capacity to tolerate solitude (loneliness), ‘not being loved’ and borderline situations: in response to such scenarios, the individual will ask, not “why did it have to happen to me?” but rather “what should I do to stand pat even in such a catastrophic situation?” In this light, Heller refers to Hamlet as a well-developed and, moreover, a representative, individual, who questions both his environment, and also the grounds of his own urge to exact revenge for his father’s murder. A ‘ruthless knower of self’, Hamlet restrains his disposition to vindictiveness, a trait he admits to Ophelia: one thinks of the scene in which a chance arises for Hamlet to take his uncle’s life after the latter’s guilty conscience has been revealed to the court, and Hamlet turns away from his uncle. His response to his uncle’s crimes ultimately demonstrates most centrally his prioritising of the norm regarding a desire for justice, Heller writes, and that it was this norm that most decisively guided his behaviour.

The individual personality, as defined by Heller, shares the particularistic character’s need to have his personality approved. However, the former expects and needs only the approval of those ‘significant persons’ whom he values highly, and has no expectation of ‘the love, worship or recognition of others’. Moreover, his ‘Self-strength’ is not based on this approval. He hopes to find approval and love because of who he is and his actions, rather than doing things in order to elicit others’ approval.

The fact that the individual personality exercises an essential reflexive capacity – that his feelings are ‘determined by the distance between the Self and the reflexive evaluation of the “world” (on the basis of the conscious relation to the species)’ – is not synonymous with his feeling less emotion. The opposite is true, insofar as his feelings tend to express his

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24 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 152.
26 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 152.
whole personality, and are commensurately deeper by virtue of this fact. His ‘world of feelings is conscious and reflexive’, and thus, his feelings are likely to be ‘subject adequate’. Those feelings are subject adequate which stem from or are ‘organically related’ to our emotional personality, ‘or at least from our emotional character’. Examples of false or ‘deceptive’ feelings in this respect include mourning for a person someone did not care about (though the feeling may be genuinely felt, i.e. she is not a hypocrite) and feelings of forgiveness felt by a vindictive person.\(^{27}\) However, if the individual’s feelings are subject inadequate, he is capable for evaluating them as such.

Furthermore, just as with the particularist personality, the individual’s feelings may or may not be ‘situation adequate’, i.e. they may or may not constitute an adequate assessment of the situation, person or idea that triggered them. Feelings are situation inadequate, i.e. false, if ‘we do not feel something when and where we are supposed to’. Feelings which correspond to no actual ‘situation’ include, should someone feel jealousy when in practise there is no cause for jealousy, or should he hope for ‘the renewal of a relationship that cannot be renewed’.\(^{28}\) As Heller puts it, even the individual’s feelings may ‘err’.

Furthermore, Heller continues, individuality (i.e. the individuality of the individual personality) fosters a more reliable experience of self-abandon than does particularity: put another way, ‘the individual is more “prepared” for the so-called feelings of “self-abandon” – for giving himself to feelings’. Following Erik Erikson, among others, Heller places great importance upon self-abandon (which she defines both as a feeling in its own right, and also as a response to one’s feelings) as a measure of Self-strength. A robust capacity for self-abandon demonstrates a Self which does not fear ‘that it will lose itself in giving’. Heller continues:

The weak Self is afraid of self-abandon, because it is always jeopardizing itself. If the beneficiary of the self-abandon proves unworthy, then the particularist person stands “robbed”, and loses himself.

\(^{27}\) Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 137-38.
\(^{28}\) Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 137.
The ‘individual Self’, by contrast, knows no fear upon self-abandonment, which only makes him stronger, even in the case that the ‘beneficiary of the self-abandon proves unworthy’.

Undoubtedly, the individual Self since it is strong, abandons itself without fear and without even stopping to think. The individual love is not anxious, not suspicious. On the other hand, the subject that feels particularist love or friendship is often “on guard”, often suspicious; he seldom experiences the pleasure of the unconditional.  

The nature of the self-abandon of the particularistic Self attests to the conventionality which is a defining characteristic of his decisions and actions in general. Should he exercise self-abandon, he does so only in relation to those integrations, principles, persons or institutions “‘ready-made” in his environment, with regard to whom or to which self-abandon is included in the social norms, not chosen by himself.’ This results in the paradoxical fact that ‘the particularist Self always gives himself only to himself’. Even should his act of self-abandon be for the benefit of something or someone beyond his own Self, such as a member of his family or his country or a particular cause, in each case it is something/someone in relation to which there is complete and unquestioned identification. Alternatively, it may be perceived as ‘the extension of his own Self’. In this case, the recipient is that person, institution or principle ‘that constitutes the “We-consciousness”.’ Heller explains as follows how this act of self-abandon can be seen to be ‘addressed to itself’:

Because if the recipient of self-abandon separates him- or herself from the We-consciousness or does not identify itself with us, then self-abandon immediately ends; the Self either empties or is filled with opposite meanings. The recipient of self-abandon becomes the recipient of hatred, of resentment instead.

Heller contrasts this to the self-abandonment of the individual personality, who does not ask ‘what he might become’ through giving himself to a particular cause or person. His self-abandon is unaffected by the presence or absence of either recognition or reciprocity. The only potentially consequential circumstance is when the value of that person, thing or idea the person abandons himself to is reassessed as being no longer of value. In this scenario, Heller writes, we are looking at the issue of ‘the so-called investment of feeling. The more

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abandoned the feelings of someone, the more (and the more intense) feelings he “invests” in a subject or object. For both the individual personality, and the particularist personality, the “wasted” investment of feeling is painful, and may lead to ‘a “deflation of feeling” … i.e. the loss of the capacity for self-abandon’. What varies between the particularist Self and the individual Self in this respect is only the likely causes of the deflation in question.

That the individual personality is capable of a more reliable self-abandon, as described above, demonstrates that distance and self-abandon are not mutually exclusive. We may even have a ‘distanced relationship to the person to whom we have given ourselves completely and without reservation’: this is born out in the individual emotion of love, described above. In the following passage, Heller elaborates further on the divergent tendencies of the individual and particularist personalities as ‘gardeners’ of emotion:

The person who knows how to tend his own garden of feelings will know how to tend well in those of others. Of course, the individual Ego cultivates the Other’s “ground of feeling” the same way he does his own: he considers the soil from which the flowers grow as “given” and approves and appreciates the personality as a whole. The particularist person also cultivates the feelings of Others as he would his own; he either wants to assimilate the Other to himself, independently of the soil of the Other’s feelings, of his emotional habits and thus uses force against the Other’s personality, or allows the weeds to thrive in the other’s garden as well; the lack of distance also means lack of respect for the other’s personality. These observations apply not only to love, sympathy and friendship, Heller observes, but also to self-abandon in relation to a cause or principle, in both of which cases, the individual becomes the “gardener” of the cause or principle. His enthusiasm is not given to developing into fanaticism, or to making the cause in question ‘the mere instrument of his own approval’, without tolerance for counter-argument or scepticism. The individual abandons himself in a spirit of trust, the particularist Self, one of ‘blind faith’. The “good gardener” is the person engaged in fostering his own sensibility and feelings, as well as the insights and emotions of others.

 Quotes this paragraph, Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 154-55. On the question of investment of feeling, Heller also writes of the tendency for the individual personality to resist any suggestion of ‘the change in value of the object of investment’.

Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 155.

Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 155.
Heller defines the ‘individual and particularist relationships to reality’ as ‘two basic tendencies’ among modern social actors.\textsuperscript{34} Referring generally to the ‘world of feeling of those we know’ (i.e. the dominant patterns observable in our everyday lives), she concludes that while there are people who are entirely individual or wholly particularist, ‘the majority of people are more or less particularist or more or less individual’.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, she finds that most people ‘are rather particularist with regard to their actions’, and that even among individuals, the majority ‘remain individuals only in the tendency of their actions’\textsuperscript{36} In the case of the particularist personality, individual feelings or an individual relationship to feelings ‘are exceptional and do not leave a lasting mark on that person’s world of feeling, on his behavior.’ The reverse is true of the individual personality, whose ‘particularist feeling to which he is unable to relate individually at a given moment’, periodically experienced, leave no trace in his world of feelings, ‘primarily because he condemns them himself, post festum’.\textsuperscript{37}

In the same vein, Heller also refers to the potential for each of us to experience what she calls “fluctuations of feelings”, that is, ‘collisions’ between the particularist and individual feelings, and also between particularist and individual responses to one’s emotions, specifically one’s emotional habits. By way of example, she refers to such a collision with regard to a feeling of jealous hatred: we ‘triumph’ over the feeling, only for it to overpower us again, then action ensues, only for another of our feelings – perhaps respect or pride – to resurface, ‘and we attempt to neutralize through action our first action, or take responsibility for its consequences, etc’.\textsuperscript{38} In such a scenario, what is ‘basic from the point of view of a person’s world of feeling is the final decision, the final behaviour resulting from such fluctuations’. This partly reflects the fact that it is our behaviour that most decisively affects other people, but more importantly, it is because of the potential for our action or conduct to set a precedent in our own world of feeling. In other words, this final decision:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Heller also writes on the individual personality in other works, beginning with \textit{Everyday Life}.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 156.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 157.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 156.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Heller, \textit{A Theory of Feelings}, 157.
\end{itemize}
provides a predisposition (either particularist or individual, depending on the outcome of our final decision) for the probable outcome of future fluctuations of feeling; in other words, it shapes our emotional personality. \textsuperscript{39}

Similar fluctuations of feeling may occur in relation to ‘situations of judgment’. In the exercise of judgment, Heller underlines the need to suspend not only ‘the relationship to my own particularist Self, but the pertinent analogies as well’. Hypothesising in relation to a member of a jury, Heller writes that ‘[i]f the particularist person discovers in the accused an analogy to the offense he himself has suffered, he will find it easier to vote guilty’. The individual’s capacity for ‘self-analysis and self-distance’, by contrast, makes possible suspension of:

his particularist feelings and the particularist relationship to his feelings, in order to place in the forefront the self-abandon to the chosen values, whether they be love of justice, love of humanity, or considered pity.

Whether or not this attempt at suspension succeeds will partly reflect ‘the “mobilization of reserves of feeling”.’ The mobilizing of feelings is also key in cases of collisions among individual feelings. In such cases, Heller writes, we are looking at:

a collision of values; I have to develop the hierarchy of feelings on the basis of selection among values. “I love Plato, but I love truth even more”. It is only this final decision of Aristotle that posterity has preserved, hence it is only in imagination that we may cover the road which led to this decision. Surely he did not arrive there without “fluctuations of feeling”, since such fluctuations also exist in the collision of values of the individual. \textsuperscript{40}

The passages above, in which men and women are shown acting upon one or other evaluative stance, in which there is a mobilizing of certain feelings and emotions, recall other similar examples from Heller’s work discussed earlier in this thesis. They include the writer who relegates her pity to ‘kill off’ her hero or heroine, and the scriptural passage in which Moses’ love of God sees him overcome his rage, in relation to the stone tablets. In each case, the ideas discussed align closely with Heller’s work on emotional housekeeping, and with her work on the ways our involvement is bound up with our value hierarchies and value horizons, and the possibility of autonomy and freedom implicit in this relationship.

\textsuperscript{39} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 157.
\textsuperscript{40} Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 158.
Autonomous Individuality and The Harmonious Personality

In her closing comments about individuality, Heller reiterates the importance of a capacity for distance from oneself and from the world, manifest as an active choosing of some social norms over other norms, based on one’s own values, as well as a critical stance on one’s own actions, and on oneself. Heller highlights the potential for a person’s moral and intellectual character to ‘assume different relations to one’s own psychological character, thereby distancing oneself from oneself.’

She cites an early essay by Kant on the beautiful individual and the sublime individual.

The beautiful person is a harmonious soul, because she can do the right thing while guided by her emotions. She does the right thing happily.

Heller has written at length elsewhere of the kind of harmony of character she describes above. She describes a young person who recognises and responds to her intuitive feelings such as curiosity, joy and pleasure: thus, she is ‘pulled by her character’ rather than being ‘pushed by her past, [or] by her environment’. The person’s world of feelings becomes inner-directed, characterised by both active engagement with her emotional dispositions and feelings states, and also a choosing and taking responsibility for those feelings as expressions of her personality. There is a felicitousness about the way the feelings and emotions of the harmonious personality, or ‘beautiful character’, guide her judgments, including as to forms of involvement in life that are appropriate for her character. The person in question feels ‘the ‘pull’’, Heller writes, and is moved by curiosity or other feelings to explore the ‘source and reason’ of the emotion in question. To follow ‘one’s good sense’, in this way, fosters a quality of lightness and a feeling of relief, as well as the promise of harmony. For the beautiful person herself, the experience is not primarily one of harmoniousness, as such, but rather one of ‘a vague feeling of self-certainty’. The emotion of self-certainty, as well as its likely counterparts, uncertainty and doubt, are integral to the ‘feeling of life (Lebensgefühl)’ in question:

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42 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 161. Kant’s pre-critical essay on aesthetics was entitled Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime.
43 Heller, An Ethics of Personality, 233.
44 Heller, An Ethics of Personality, 237.
45 Heller, An Ethics of Personality, 239.
The feeling of vague certainty makes one lighthearted, but this lightheartedness remains open. One is open for surprises, for the sudden appearance of paths one has never expected, lanes one can begin to tread on, although one treads on each of them without a map. Openness – sometimes called freedom – implies the ‘rather this than that’ (has Heidegger said something similar, speaking about Leibniz?), the sense that a direction is set, that you are in the process of becoming what you are – till death.\(^{46}\)

The harmonious personality exercises a capacity for self-determination, and her harmonious shaping, and continuing re-balancing, of her own world of feelings is decisive in this respect. In this respect she acts upon an emancipatory impulse. Heller observes a corollary of that freedom, namely that self-choice does not remove the risk that the person may inadvertently diverge from paths compatible with her own constitution and value hierarchies. Heller’s writing on questions of ‘moral aesthetics’ is centred on the relationship between the good and the beautiful, and between aesthetic and moral aspects of human character.

By contrast to the beautiful character, the sublime individual ‘is constantly torn internally. His distance to the world takes the form of world rejection, of fury or escape; and his distance from himself can take the form of self-hatred or the feeling of guilt without reason and remorse.’ Whereas the sublime character ‘rarely makes peace with himself or with the world’, the beautiful person ‘regains emotional balance even after disappointments and defeats.’ In the following passage, Heller once again draws on the metaphor of cultivation, and specifically the act of gardening, to distinguish between the emotional households of the sublime character and the beautiful character:

Thus the emotional household works in another way for the beautiful soul and the sublime soul. The first keeps her internal garden in order, whereas the sublime weeds everything out radically to plant things afresh. The beautiful person’s self enjoyment is constant, yet ironical, whereas the sublime person rarely enjoys his own personality, yet if he does, then without irony. The beautiful soul can be pleased with life, grateful for having the opportunity to live; for the sublime soul life is a duty fulfilled. Both are models of moral and intellectual rectitude.\(^{47}\)

\(^{46}\) Heller, *An Ethics of Personality*, 239.

In this passage of *A Theory of Feelings*, the concept of emotional households appears explicitly in the text for the first time.\(^\text{48}\) The emotional household of the harmonious personality is characterised by an atunement to her feelings and the imperative embodied in them, especially at crucial points in her life. There is a conscious engagement with the value stances inscribed in her feelings. The harmonious personality is said to ‘keep[] her internal garden in order’, by contrast to the volatility of the sublime character, yet each of them demonstrates an individual relationship to her feelings.

Both the harmonious character and the sublime character demonstrate Heller’s concept of the individual personality. The accent is on a radical reflexive capacity centred on the weighing up of values in the situations and experiences one encounters in life. Self-knowledge and self-reflection serve as primary guides in the ‘world of feeling’ of the individual personality, by contrast to the defense mechanisms that dominate the world of feeling of the particularist personality. Heller discusses questions regarding our ‘investing’ of our feelings in one or other person, idea or institution, and our capacity for reliable self-abandon. On these and other topics, Heller frames emotions in relation to individuality, approaching her topic from the point of view of the person as a whole, situated in one or other intersubjective and social context, and with a capacity for a vital degree of autonomy within that environment.

**Conclusion**

Over the past four chapters of this thesis, we have seen how Heller’s concept of emotional households posits a theory of the individual in her everyday life, a theory which casts light on the subjective orientation and constitution of that life and associated sense of Self. As Burnheim writes, Heller amply demonstrates the multiple threads that may fuse to make a life meaningful and coherent: those elements may be moral as well as ‘aesthetic, cognitive, effective, skilful, competitive and imaginative’, and to this list may be added emotional.\(^\text{49}\) Morality is not a sphere unto itself, but rather an attribute and capacity that inheres across the ‘diverse aspects of the complex of everyday activities that are our lives’. To understand

\(^{48}\) Note that this explicit reference to emotional households features in the second edition of *A Theory of Feelings* but not the first edition.

the experience of the social actor in his world, Heller insists, one cannot omit the central importance of his emotions to both his uniqueness and the communal roots of his existence.

The emotional household attests to the cognitive and evaluative content that may be found in feelings and emotions. It is the elements of intentionality, personality and responsibility which may inhere in our feelings that makes them the building blocks of a household. At stake is an idea of subjectivity as the object and entity of our involvement and investment in life, inherently finite, bounded by internal and external parameters, and often inseparably tied to those people, objects and ideas in the world that are its end and object. It serves a primary function in the subject’s self-regulation in his environment, and reproduction of himself as an individual, a process which Phillipe Despoix, summarising Heller’s ideas on this matter, describes as ‘the finite subject’s relationship to human history through the social forms he acquires, reproduces and modifies’. 50

The idea that an element of finitude is inherent in each life and Self, and at the same time that there is the potential for enrichment, centred on emotional cultivation, is basic to Heller’s concepts of emotional households and emotional housekeeping. Hence, one of her most explicit passages about emotional housekeeping and the emotional household appears in her essay about issues of emotional wealth and impoverishment, as we saw in Chapter Two. The alignment of feelings and value stances within the personality is also highlighted in numerous other ways in the writing of Heller’s discussed above. The foundations for this are laid in Heller’s phenomenology of feelings, of which I have written extensively. In her writing on feeling as involvement, Heller establishes certain fundamental premises of her theoretical model of human feeling. The emphasis is upon the ways we exercise a capacity and satisfy a need for self-regulation, and also, and at the same time, upon the many ways our lives and beings are subject to social regulation. Heller looks to the tasks, commitments and relationships a person makes her own in life, and which acquire a central place in the Self.

Heller further links the formation of our feelings to the social and moral norms and customs we encounter as we go about our lives: value preferences are mediated and

50 Phillipe Despoix, ‘On the Possibility of a Philosophy of Values, A Dialogue within the Budapest School’ in The Social Philosophy of Agnes Heller, 32.
transmitted through those social codes and prescriptions, forming one important set of value hierarchies in the formation of our worlds of feeling. How we interpret and fulfil social norms, and whether and how we exercise choice and autonomy in fulfilling them, are essential aspects of Heller’s work on human feeling and subjectivity. We evaluate, and may also ‘select’, feelings, when we form judgments of the emotional habits of others, and when we respond to ‘appeals to feel’ from our environment, such as injunctions and social norms. The tasks and norms Heller has in mind are present throughout our everyday lives; they speak to connections at the heart of the formation of subjectivity. That process of self-formation, for Heller, encompasses both a ‘building-in’ of values and capacities from the environment, and at the same time an unfolding of in-born potentials and qualities.\(^{51}\)

Central to Heller’s concept of emotional households is the idea of the emotional palette, (and a closely related term – the idea of a polyphony of feelings), in which the focus is those feelings and feeling habits whose roots are in the personality. The emotional palette is a definitive aspect of any emotional household. What becomes apparent from this investigation of Heller’s work is not only the fact that the palette is made up of many different feelings, but also the continuous interplay among those feelings, as expressions of character and personality, with links to conscience, volition and will, etc. The spectrum of colours in the palette is likely to reveal patterns, and not just differences, in hues and textures. From the mix of dispositions and motivations, loves and hates, of ‘dominant and sub-dominant elements’ of the Self, will come an emotional economy with its own distinct registers and tensions. In Heller’s article on emotional impoverishment, as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, the accent is on balancing one’s ‘emotional resources’ in order to realise goals and honour commitments. Such formulations suggest that, for Heller, the household itself is substantially realised in, and inseparable from, the act of housekeeping. The household can be seen to embody the value horizons of the social actor \textit{vis à vis} her feelings and emotions. To be an emotional housekeeper is to be a subject with an inner life - an emotional life - open to being cultivated and deepened.

\(^{51}\) That the ‘building in’ of values and attributes is not exclusive of an ‘unfolding from within’, is a point made by Heller in her introduction to \textit{On Instincts}, 2. See also Grumley, \textit{Agnes Heller: A Moralist In The Vortex of History}, 46.
Thus, Heller’s writing highlights the way our deep feelings guide us in life, and how they may express and manifest our needs, desires, judgments and values in manifold ways. Two evocations of the emotional palette which feature in Heller’s work are her example of the child learning to distinguish one form of sadness from another (discussed in Chapter Three), and also her hypothetical example of the worried friend, who puts aside her feelings of confusion and hurt in order to pursue a course of action aimed at restoring a relationship (as discussed in Chapter One). As the latter example illustrates, very often we guide our emotions, perhaps keeping them in check, moderating our emotional expression, or relegating them into the background of consciousness while pursuing a course of action, thus giving rise to background feelings. In such examples, the development and explication of the emotional household occurs as a part of the person’s emotional hermeneutics and emotional housekeeping. These examples speak to the dynamic, many-faceted nature of the emotional palette, and also to the way the palette is closely tied to the person’s evaluative stance in life.

Throughout the writing discussed above, Heller reiterates the importance of a reflexive capacity, a readiness to engage in dialogue, including introspective dialogue, about the meaning and significance of one or other person, idea, object or experience, including emotional experience. As we saw in Chapter Two, her conception of the subject turns on this self-narrativising impulse. Heller defines self-reflexivity as ‘an interplay of reflection and self-reflection’. This is one of a number of formulations in Heller’s work conveying the interaction between interiority and exteriority which is intrinsic to our lives, as beings sustained by shared values to which we may also bring commitments and vantage points whose roots lie beyond custom and tradition. The emotional household relies for its nourishment on a mutual exchange with social norms, even if it is not necessarily or ideally defined by those norms. A defining feature of the individual personality is her active, conscious engagement with her feelings, including in relation to their social and historical dimensions.

The individual personality demonstrates two central and related attributes of our emotional households: the fact that an important function and object of the household is the cultivating of emotional wealth, and the element of freedom and autonomy inherent in such wealth. The freedom of most concern to Heller pertains to the objects and objectives
we make our own in life, and to the social regulations that bear upon our feelings and emotions. This, in turn, is likely to shape and reflect other aspects of our worlds of feelings, such as which of our feelings we act upon, how we interpret and appraise our emotions, and whether and how we comprehend the substance of and interplay among our deep feelings and feeling habits. All of this is, in turn, closely linked to the exercise of a capacity for self-reflection and self-examination.

The possibilities for freedom as well as wealth which are inherent in the emotional household, as Heller conveys it, are seen to reflect a defining element of modern conditions. Many times in the writing discussed above, Heller distinguishes between subjects whose worlds of feeling predominantly reflect the shaping impact of social customs and norms prevalent within their environment, and those whose emotional households more substantially reflect the influence of their own, chosen value stances. For Heller, this is ultimately in the nature of an existential choice of our values, experiences, qualities and circumstances which is open to each of us to make. Few of us, in Heller’s view, fully realise the opportunities for emotional wealth, and in turn for the freedom born of taking responsibility for our own emotions, thoughts and values, which exist within modern conditions. Emotional housekeeping ‘given to us as a norm’ differs decisively in its nature and its consequences for our personality from housekeeping of a self-willed, conscious and independent kind. It is true for all of us that the emotional parameters of our lives are closely related to our way of life, and that emotions perform necessary functions in ensuring our functioning and reproduction as social organisms. For the individual personality, emotions are also a source of personal flourishing and cultivation, with a reliable form of self-abandon significant in this respect. The individual personality, and the harmonious personality, represent ideal embodiments of moral autonomy – a type of personality able to ‘interpret diversely [and wisely] the necessarily summary prescriptions of moral discourse in practical situations’.52

To reiterate, this critique of particularity, and of the dominance of particularistic ways of understanding and being in the world, occurs within a body of work strongly focused on the ways our involvement in ‘the world’ effects and reflects the formation of our

inner worlds. This key idea runs through Heller’s work on emotional households and housekeeping. Heller returns many times to questions about how we make judgments, the nature and functioning of our evaluative stances, and the forces and faculties bound up with these things. The act of taking responsibility for one’s value hierarchies, personality and circumstances in life is an existential choice, but we make it, as it is put in The Little Company, as social actors ‘living in history’. The tenor of Heller’s analysis on these questions is historicist, rather than historical.

In the remainder of this thesis, my focus is the wealth of material to be found in the modern novel – in two novels in particular – regarding the person in his or her world. As discussed earlier, Heller has described how the reader of the realist novel tends to accompany the characters across the course of the story, following in her mind’s eye the human terrain covered therein. The reader observes, for instance, what parts a protagonist plays in life, and who they are with and for others. Heller’s work invites us to enquire into the combination of factors in play in each character’s world, not least her emotional palette, and the ways they play out in different situations, and as a whole.

Heller encourages us to explore each character’s emotions and emotional dispositions, in conjunction with her relationship to her own emotions. We might ask of the place the emotions occupy in her habits of mind and internal dialogue, and of whether and how she reckons with constraints and conflicts, including inner conflicts. Also significant is which feelings she acts upon, and in what context, including specific triggers (internal and external) and circumstances. Another issue relates to the nature of the character’s response to the social expectations and judgments within her environment, as they pertain to her own words and behaviour, and to things, people and ideas outside herself. Important context for these questions includes the commitments and priorities the character has made her own in life. What gets overcome or put aside (including the relegation of emotions) in realising those goals? Relevant in this respect is the character’s singular personal qualities and disposition, as well as value preferences and a capacity for self-aware reflection. The emotional household underlines the close relationship between a person’s emotions and her habits of mind and reasoning. We may feel many different feelings, but

53 Dark, Little Company, 38.
not all of them have the same place or significance in our emotional household, and in particular, an emotion may be involuntary, but it is not necessarily chosen, or expressive of one’s personality.

Frustration, discontentment, fear and resentment are some of the feelings that surface in the everyday lives of the five fictional characters who form my case studies in this thesis. Other emotions include curiosity and patience, and, conversely, a refusal to continue forbearing one or other situation. Events may bring out a character’s wry irony, and/or an imperative to keep faith with one's conscience and artistic imagination. For a number of the protagonists, the political crisis at hand sees them take a stand on issues of importance to them. This vehemence of conviction contributes to the seriousness of intent evident across the following four chapters.

In each of my case studies, I focus on key early sections of the respective novel, seeking clues as to the emotional palette, habits of mind and worldview of the character under discussion. In *The Little Company*, characters and their worlds are revealed from many different angles, with inner voice as significant in the narrative as ‘real time’ action. I move back and forth across multiple extracts of *The Little Company* in my exploration of the emotional households of siblings Gilbert Massey and Marty Ransom. My discussion of Harry Munster, Ally Munster, and Knarf in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* is based on a number of discrete scenes from the novel salient to these three characters. In all my case studies, the analysis reveals something of the tone and texture of each protagonist’s personal qualities and temperament, demonstrated in his or her dominant patterns of reasoning and judgment, and in decisions made and actions taken. The reader is shown moments of deliberation, and in some cases significant life situations or crises. In each case the emotional palette of the character becomes apparent across the course of the narrative. The interplay of emotions and other factors cast light on the character’s world of feelings, providing the basis of observations which, while preliminary, offer important insights into their emotional households. It is to these protagonists that I now turn.
CHAPTER FIVE

INDIVIDUALITY AND THE ETHICS OF DUTY: GILBERT MASSEY

So he went on doggedly delving into what were nowadays known as World Affairs. He continued to question, to investigate, to read and think; he continued to discover and disbelieve, to rage and despair. He began to feel like an ant which has undertaken to remove a mountain, grain by grain. He uncovered what looked like a fact, stared at it incredulously, and threw it aside, only to find it cropping up again somewhere else.¹

A sober and patient industriousness is a cornerstone of Gilbert Massey's emotional palette. A central protagonist in Eleanor Dark’s *The Little Company*, Gilbert works by day managing the family stationery firm, but it is his novel-writing that primarily absorbs his tireless labours. The story begins in the autumn of 1941, and the maelstrom occurring in the affairs of the nation, and beyond, have recently brought a new focus and perspective into Gilbert’s fiction writing. In the passage cited above, Gilbert reflects on that experience of personal and creative transformation. His sense of responsibility, to his readers and also to his own convictions, is encapsulated in the image of the labouring ant undertaking to move a mountain, ‘grain by grain’.

Gilbert Massey is the focus of my exploration in this chapter of the patterns of involvement and reflexivity central to Heller’s idea of emotional households. In this chapter, I engage particularly with Heller’s ideas about the continuing exchange between our interior lives and the world around us, and about how our emotional households express and manifest our inner worlds, as beings involved in the world, and in ourselves. Heller describes the Self as ‘the map of the interior’ which evolves with one’s existence and personality. The emotional household is intimately tied to how we see the world, to our habits of mind and evaluative stance; each household evinces particular patterns of emotional expression, as well as value preferences. Along related lines, Heller has described the socio-historical novel genre as age-oriented, positioned in time as well as space, and inhabited by characters who ‘constantly change within the novel, whether they win or lose, succeed in their ambitions or become disillusioned.’ The genre as a whole registers ‘the power of their internal

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experiences’ in connection with the changing social and historical landscape. These ideas form important theoretical starting points for my reading of Gilbert Massey, and, in the next chapter of my thesis, of Gilbert’s sister, Marty Ransom.

The story of Gilbert’s emotional household, as it is interpreted in this thesis, reveals cross-currents of roles, values and norms, in the context of personal and social transformation, as well as political turmoil. The story traces a major shift in Gilbert’s creative role, as he comes to terms with the dislocations and dynamism of his times. The scale and complexity of the wartime conflict, evoked above in the reference to World Affairs, is becoming apparent to many of those living on the home front, including Gilbert. He is closely engaged with the threat posed by the rise of fascism and the escalating war in Europe and the Pacific. The fear and alarm these and other developments have aroused in Gilbert over the past decade have propelled him to act, as has the realisation of his own intellectual unpreparedness for the situation at hand. In recent years, he has set about educating himself about the international crisis they are living through, a process which has seen him confront many of his own values and assumptions. As a writer, Gilbert comes up against the problem of writer’s block which both he and Marty, who is also a writer, are struggling with.

To grasp Gilbert Massey’s world of feelings takes us into some of the multiple intersecting strands in the life of the Massey family as a whole, including the family’s past. Gilbert and his siblings were raised in a strict, religious household at the time of the First World War. As Gilbert and Marty engage with the problems holding up their writing, they think back to their childhood, when they first began to write. Gilbert, who is 45 years old, also confronts deep fractures in his home life. His wife Phyllis is a traditionalist who harks back to the values and customs of a past era. Phyllis is deeply threatened by the many and varied forces of social change which have been a feature of their lives. Her intransigence and narrow moral codes are a continuing source of conflict and discord in her ties with her family, as is apparent in different ways in her relationships with Gilbert and also Marty.

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2 Heller, Immortal Comedy, 73.
Family patriarch Walter Massey, who dies shortly before the story begins, continues to shape and influence the lives of both Gilbert and Phyllis in different ways. Walter’s zeal for commercial affairs was matched only by his religiosity: he is remembered as a man who was a missionary by temperament, as his wife was in fact. Both Walter’s first and second wives had been missionaries: following the death of his first wife during childbirth with his youngest son, Nick, Walter had married Phyllis’s mother. Gilbert and Phyllis, who were step-siblings prior to marrying in their early 20s, have raised their three children at Glenwood, the family’s traditional residence on the city’s North Shore, under the same roof as Walter Massey. Following Walter’s death, Gilbert, as the eldest son, has officially become the main proprietor of the family firm, Walter Massey & Sons, Wholesale Stationers and Booksellers - a role he had effectively been playing already.

The tight control Walter sought to exercise over his family has in fact served to foster a powerful independent spirit among many of his offspring. A broadly progressive stance is shared by Gilbert and his siblings, and also by Marty’s husband Richard, an Englishman seventeen years her senior. Both Marty and Gilbert are fellow travellers of the Communist Party, while Nick, their younger brother, is an active member of the party. The differences of temperament and values evident among Gilbert and his siblings are frequently the subject of their discussion and reflection. Gilbert and Phyllis’ younger daughter Prue also shares her father’s political interests.

*The Little Company* depicts a social and historical moment in which change and upheaval are constant, insistent facts of life; at the same time, the Massey’s world – and Gilbert’s world in particular – is shown to be indelibly shaped by inherited traditions and resources. The story of Gilbert’s emotional household – his expression of his emotional inwardness and inner life through the interpersonal ties and tasks that structure his everyday life – is entwined with that of his domestic household and family life. The disciplined, discerning eye Gilbert brings to his engagement with the war, and the issues it raises, reflects both his independent, analytic turn of mind, and his steadiness and sobriety. There is a constancy and thoroughness apparent in Gilbert’s engagement with questions of politics and public life – a moral as well as intellectual rigour. A man for whom duty has worn many faces, Gilbert’s quietly spoken ways belie the profound transformation taking place in his personal life, ideological beliefs and creative objectives. His involvement in
World Affairs will see him reassess viewpoints and relationships he had more or less taken for granted previously. In grasping these and other aspects of Gilbert’s world, the reader also gains insight into the obligations, desires and frustrations significant in his emotional household.

Heller’s work on the individual personality highlights the importance of the social actor claiming responsibility for herself and her existence, including her emotions, especially those emotional habits bound up with her personality. The question of individual responsibility is central to Gilbert Massey’s character. As foreshadowed above, a sense of moral obligation, to do with the imperatives of citizenship, is basic to his character, centred on his creative role and engagement with public life. His sense of duty also surfaces, in different ways, in his family relationships as son, husband and father. A sense of civic responsibility which is closely entwined with the continuing effects of the past emerges as a significant dimension of Gilbert Massey’s emotional household, as I show in this chapter.

In this chapter, my investigation of Gilbert Massey and his emotional household takes shape over three sections, each of which is oriented around different but related aspects of his emotional palette and daily life. The first is centred around the typically stern and thoughtful dispositions important in Gilbert’s character, looking at examples from his personal ties and home life. The second part builds upon the convictions around individual freedom and responsibility Gilbert demonstrates in relation to private and public affairs, and his response to the problem of writer’s block. Finally, and in the context of Heller’s ideas about a model of autonomous individuality, I consider the account of a turning point reached by Gilbert in his writing and his political stance, in which he confronts the continuing effects of his past.

**Self and World: Gilbert Massey as a ‘Lodging-House Boarder’ in his Own Home**

He had known only two homes in all his life – the old, square stone house which his grandfather had built up the North Shore line, and this rambling, weatherboard cottage at which they had spent week-ends and the children’s school holidays for the past fifteen years; in both he had been more like a lodging-house boarder than an inhabitant.³

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³ Dark, Little Company, 14.
In the drawing room of the Massey family’s mountain cottage, Gilbert views with displeasure the results of his wife’s recent efforts at interior redecoration. Coming in from the garden, he looks about him at the generic choice of furnishings, recognising Phyllis’s hand in a certain conventionality and amorphism of effect, an unrealised attempt at a pleasing and well-proportioned design. Cushions of strong and clashing colours – orange, vermilion and peacock green – are strewn about the room, a touch he knows to reflect the influence of a pamphlet Phyllis had recently read on the therapeutic effects of colour.

Gilbert silently admits his own lack of ability to invest a room with a personal touch – part of the sense of disconnection and remoteness he has known in his own home, be it Glenwood, the family’s traditional residence in town, or their mountain cottage. It is not as a home-maker, nor in any way other than through his writing, that he has any talent for self-expression. Yet the importance of domestic surrounds as an expression of personality is not lost on him.

The judgments Gilbert forms of others tend to convey something of the sober, contemplative dispositions central to his personality. This is apparent in his response to his Aunt Bee, a familial black sheep who is newly reconciled to the family in the wake of Walter’s death. When the novel opens, Gilbert is musing over the day’s reports of the war while sitting on a deckchair on the lawn of the family’s mountain cottage. A recent diplomatic visit made by the Japanese to Germany has elicited from the media ‘the guarded but soothing prognostications of “informed opinion”, and the even more soothing assurances of the Japanese Foreign Office.’ Gilbert follows the news of the war closely, but on this occasion his thoughts wander ‘from international to domestic affairs’, and specifically his father’s sister, Aunt Bee. When she was 16 years old, Bee had fallen foul of Walter’s moral standards as a result of an apparent indiscretion with her then suitor. Walter had disapproved so vehemently of Bee’s night-time carriage ride that she had been excluded from the family, a stance in which he had never relented. Bee, who had gone on to marry and have a large brood of children, is as demonstrative and talkative as Gilbert is reserved and quietly-spoken. As Gilbert reflects on what she is making of her niece and nephews at this encounter between them, he surmises that Bee is in fact not given to thinking at all, being rather,
one of those empty-headed, full-hearted old darlings who bestow affection at random in the happy assumption that everyone deserves it.\textsuperscript{4}

Gilbert’s reflections about his aunt contain an unintended trace of condescension – to him, Bee’s good natured, personable manner conveys a certain lack of discernment – and also, simply, a sense of curiosity about a character so different to his own. He recalls his ‘shamefaced’ reaction at the grief Bee had expressed at the funeral for her dead brother – ‘she had actually shed a tear or two into her scented handkerchief’, despite the fact that she had borne the brunt, for almost half a century, of Walter’s harsh moral judgments. Thus goaded by his conscience, Gilbert had subsequently invited Bee to stay with the family, only to be further abashed at the ‘naive delight’ she had demonstrated at meeting them all: to Gilbert, such enthusiasm seems striking in light of her advanced age, and the fact that she has her own family.\textsuperscript{5} He had overcome his initial concerns that their conversation, especially on political matters, might shock Bee, reasoning to himself that ‘if she’s going to know us … she had better know us properly’. He is reassured when their talk had elicited no more than ‘an occasional affectionate cluck of disapproval’ from Bee. Moreover, her comments and responses reveal a temperament as tolerant and socially engaged as his own. She shows an untutored curiosity about the world around her, as well as a sympathy for “rebels”, having herself stood against the authority and values of her brother and father as a young person. Her eyes briefly cloud over when her thoughts turn to Walter: ““He was, really, darlings – not a very kind man, your father. Not very understanding. Just a little narrow, perhaps . . .””\textsuperscript{6}

A person of irrepressible good will, Bee’s mild criticisms of her elder brother serve to call attention to his lack of kindness or understanding. Utterly opposed to the liberalising cultural developments of the time, Walter had sought to impose his traditional views on his children, just as he had on his sister. Gilbert thinks of Bee’s visit to Glenwood immediately following his mother’s death, and he recalls the effort made by his kind, well-meaning aunt to extend comfort and assistance to the family. He and Marty, then aged ten and five, had stood outside Glenwood and observed a lavishly dressed, highly perfumed lady getting out of a hansom cab. Remembering his loneliness, bewilderment and apprehension, Gilbert envisages ‘himself and his sister standing close together – his own expression remote,

\textsuperscript{4} Dark, Little Company, 9.
\textsuperscript{5} Dark, Little Company, 10.
\textsuperscript{6} Dark, Little Company, 10.
observant, non-committal, Marty’s warily hostile’. The fact that their mother had died days earlier, and that she had left in her place, ‘frightening and embarrassing mystery – a baby brother’, had combined to make life itself seem inimical at that moment. Bee had introduced herself to her niece and nephew, both of them aloof and yet also drawn by Bee’s charm and warmth. She had then been summoned inside by Walter, who is evoked, in Gilbert’s memory, by his penetrating stare and ‘voice of icy formality’. The pair had emerged shortly afterwards, Bee’s offer to help look after the children having evidently been rejected: her pride and anger are conveyed in her pink cheeks and bright eyes, and the fast clip of her walk, with her skirts held high ‘so that a foam of flounces danced round her pretty ankles and her shiny shoes’. Upon seeing the two children, silently standing under nearby gum trees, she had waved a sad goodbye, shaken hands coldly with Walter, and departed in the waiting cab.

What also flashes into Gilbert’s mind from that distant day, to his amusement (he suppresses the inclination to laugh, ‘for he was alone, and to laugh in solitude would have made him feel foolish’), is the association which he had drawn between his aunt and the United States of America. At that time, having with Marty recently embarked upon his ‘“education”’, Gilbert had learned that ‘the world was divided into the British Empire and, as Dickens expressed it, such other nations as there might happen to be’. America, ‘having once belonged to the family, had wilfully and ungratefully seceded’, and yet nonetheless had gone on to thrive and prosper. Likewise, Bee had flourished, ‘in spite of a regrettable mistake’. This association had done nothing to reassure him upon first meeting Bee, and he recalls that he and Marty had backed away, disturbed and speechless, from ‘this fragrant and mysterious aunt’.

Within Gilbert’s memory, an evolving web of emotions, associations and images illuminate his childhood years. His recollections demonstrate his quest for insight into his experiences, even as a boy. Gilbert contemplates the past, as he does most topics, in a careful, considered way, sensitive to contradictions and nuances, and also with a tendency

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7 Dark, Little Company, 12.
8 Dark, Little Company, 13.
9 Dark, Little Company, 12.
10 Dark, Little Company, 12.
to keep in check his intuitive responses to things. Thus, Gilbert stifles his expression of the humour associated with this memory. Bee draws out the element of formality in Gilbert’s character, even as he recognises a kindred spirit. He thinks grimly to himself that Bee’s assessment of his late father, her ‘mild, almost apologetic criticism’, had been ‘a masterpiece of understatement.”¹¹ For himself, he feels no such compunction – Walter’s treatment of Bee had been the actions of a man who was very far from kind.¹² When, sitting in his deck chair on the lawn, Gilbert hears a commotion coming from the garden – Bee’s shriek, followed by laughter – he supposes her to have slipped, and thinks of ‘those ridiculous shoes’ she is wearing.¹³ Such a censorious, if not uncaring, response from Gilbert, further illustrates his essentially serious nature and manner. Yet the rebellious streak in Bee’s temperament is a trait he values highly, and which also finds expression in his own character.

While Gilbert is characteristically emotionally reserved, with his wife Phyllis, this habit of suppressing his impulses also reflects his long-established response borne of intimate familiarity with, and intense frustration at, her emotional habits. As he sits in quiet contemplation on the lawn, in his mind’s eye he imagines Phyllis, Marty and Bee walking near the creek at the bottom of the garden. He thinks of the ‘sentimental raptures’ which the creek habitually inspires in Phyllis, who is given to exclaiming “There are fairies at the bottom of our garden!” Gilbert, who feels at that moment disinclined to join his ‘womenfolk’ at the creek, envisages the scene he knows will be playing out among them:

So let her show it off alone, and be chilled by Marty’s maliciously polite unresponsiveness; and then let her be cheered again by Aunt Bee’s generous, garrulous appreciation – her effortless, inconsequent babbling which still, somehow, included all the right things for making everyone feel happy.¹⁴

Gilbert’s irritation at Phyllis’s coyness surfaces obliquely here. The exasperation her behaviour excites in Gilbert implicitly influences his decision to keep to himself rather than join her and the others, even as his contemplating of the rancour between Phyllis and Marty, and the restorative nature of Bee’s ‘effortless, inconsequent babbling’, suggests a

¹¹ Dark, Little Company, 11.
¹² Dark, Little Company, 10, 13.
¹³ Dark, Little Company, 11.
¹⁴ Dark, Little Company, 11.
vicarious involvement on his part in the exchange taking place at the creek. Underlying his
behaviour is the same weary frustration demonstrated in his reaction to her redecorating of
the cottage, described above. Both passages of text depict the long-established reactions of
people whose interactions have become automatic, and set in a fixed pattern. To Gilbert,
each such incident is a minor irritant, an accustomed aggravation, something that barely
surfaces in his mind. He has grown accustomed to tuning out what to him are her
sentimental indulgences, or the fact that she strenuously denies the evidence of her limited
aptitude for her domestic tasks as a wife and mother. For Gilbert, this is merely the latest
instance of his wife’s predictably unself-aware behaviour, part of her intransigent
temperament and tendency to bluster and rationalise.

A habit of emotional self-control is to the fore in Gilbert Massey’s emotional palette,
as these few scenes illustrate. Gilbert tends to be aloof in his manner, as reflects his solitary
and serious-minded personality. This emerges in the standpoint he brings to his personal
ties - including his reflections above on his ‘womenfolk’ - and it is also inherently connected
to his feeling of having been a lodging-house boarder in his own home. The scenes outlined
above establish the continuing influence of the past on Gilbert’s world of feelings. The
means and resources that have sustained Gilbert and his family are inseparable from that
background: this world is the only ‘home’ he has known. Yet the dominant values associated
with his family’s past - and particularly the atmosphere of stifling traditionalism shown to
have prevailed in Walter’s household – are not the only ones to have shaped Gilbert’s life.
His sense of not being at home where he lives speaks to the turning point Gilbert has
reached in his life. A combination of factors is shown to have led him to question things he
has hitherto accepted, and otherwise to re-define his priorities in key areas of his life. As I
discuss further below, this centres on a new conception of his creative role – the task which,
more than any other, lends coherence to his world of feelings.

What is also characteristic of Gilbert, as is suggested in the scenes above, is the
breadth and depth of his intellectual and moral engagement with the world around him.
Heller invites us to understand a person’s emotions - at least some emotions - in relation to
his/her habits of mind. In Gilbert Massey’s case, both emotional dispositions and also habits
of thought are shown to be in play in the turning point he has reached in his life. Gilbert’s
recollections of his childhood on the day of Aunt Bee’s visit to Glenwood illustrates the
reflexive capacity he brings to his 'domestic affairs' - notwithstanding his tendency to keep a distance from his own emotions and desires - and to political and cultural questions. His restrained and formal temperament is complemented by a judicious mind: thus, Aunt Bee’s extroversion and emotional expressiveness inevitably shape his response to her, but he also recognises in his aunt other, more decisive, qualities and attributes. With Phyllis, but not with Bee, his reflections also show a note of disdain and contempt. Gilbert is a distinctly private person, inclined to keep his own counsel, though Marty is an exception in this sense. As I explore further below, this tendency of his world of feelings is connected to a valuing of personal and intellectual autonomy which is central to Gilbert’s character.

Tracking a Path Through Chaos: Patterns of Involvement Among the Masseys

Questions to do with politics, as well as tradition, are very often the cause of tension and miscommunication between Gilbert and Phyllis Massey. This is demonstrated in a conversation between the two of them in relation to their 21 year old daughter Prue’s attendance at political meetings. Prue’s political activities are a source of anxiety and disapproval for her mother, to whom such pursuits seem nothing short of unnatural in a woman. When Nick is seen by a family friend campaigning for the socialists at Speaker’s Corner in the Domain one Sunday, Phyllis is filled with righteous indignation. She directs a ‘querulous complaint’ to Gilbert about the “ranting, mischief-making people” he has become “mixed up with”: it is unfair to Virginia and Prue, as well as to Nick, she says, that the latter should stoop to being a “soap-box orator!”

Incredulous, Gilbert slowly points out that Nick “isn’t in bad company”, adding that no lesser figures than Christ, Socrates, Huss and Wat Tyler had also addressed the public from “soap-boxes”. Phyllis looks at him ‘suspiciously’ and insists “It’s quite different ... It isn’t the same now”, to which Gilbert replies simply “It never was.” Phyllis begrudgingly admits that Nick, at age 35, is old enough to make his own decisions. However, she declares, Gilbert and Nick must stop “putting your mad ideas into Prue’s head”, adding that she has instructed Prue to stop going to meetings, having learnt recently of an occasion attended by Prue when there had been “quite a disturbance. People started throwing things”. Gilbert knows a rush of anger that momentarily blurs his vision, but he tells Phyllis, still in a quiet voice, to leave Prue alone – “She won’t take any notice of your prohibitions.
anyhow, and she’s perfectly right.” For him, the clear priority is Prue’s personal autonomy:  
“I encourage her to do what she thinks is right.” Staring at Gilbert, Phyllis’s eyes fill with ‘the inevitable tears’, and her reply suggests that this time he has gone too far:

“You make me almost believe what people say about you. I used to try and comfort your father, and say it was just silly gossip. But when you talk like this, I . . . she twisted her apron nervously . . . ‘nobody would say such things unless he were a – a communist!’”

“Oh, don’t be silly!” Gilbert said wearily. “You haven’t the faintest idea what a communist is.”

As with scenes outlined above between Gilbert and Phyllis, this interaction between them implicitly presupposes countless other exchanges of a similar kind previously: Phyllis, upset and under strain, tries to do what she thinks is right, as Gilbert, hard-pressed to curb his annoyance and impatience, seeks to reason with Phyllis and get beyond her outrage and censure. A daughter’s obedience to her mother amounts to an unquestioned virtue by the standards of the middle-class circles Phyllis inhabits, whereas the label of communist is more or less its antithesis. Yet Phyllis also knows a begrudging respect for her husband’s views, and his grasp of contemporary events. Thus she is torn between two loyalties. In their efforts to communicate, she comes up against Gilbert’s reserved, detached quality, which is utterly foreign to her own emotional disposition. Gilbert, meanwhile, stifles the frustrations and on this occasion also spontaneous anger he feels at Phyllis’s moralism. Aware that Phyllis is under mounting confusion and stress on account of recent changes in his writing, and other developments which she neither understands nor approves of, Gilbert is increasingly likely to feel pity for his wife. The tone of their day to day communication, however, mostly reflects his frustration, and also dismay and fear, at her need to always be right and the simplistic and moralistic conclusions she readily draws about the world around her.

Equally as important to Gilbert’s character as his habit of self-containment, and linked to it, is the strength of his beliefs and convictions. Gilbert’s defence of Prue’s chosen political interests and affiliations in the scene outlined above is illustrative in this respect. Gilbert’s response stems from a deeply held belief in individual autonomy and expression,

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15 *Dark, Little Company*, 72.
and in the kind of cohesive, democratic society conducive to such freedom. It is typical of Gilbert’s parenting hitherto that he has remained at arm’s length from his children, a result of both temperament – what he describes as ‘his own imposed and conditioned attitude of slightly formal detachment’ – as well as his reaction, said to be ‘almost morbid in its intensity’, against the stifling parental influence Walter had sought to exercise over Gilbert and his siblings.\textsuperscript{16} But the idea that his children, and indeed, all children, should be free to pursue interests and activities of their own choosing, is for him beyond questioning.

Gilbert’s ideals in this respect are further apparent is his support for Prue’s business – a book shop and lending library in the city. Gilbert supplies the books which line its shelves, by means of the commercial resources at his disposal as manager of the family business. In this, he had stood against Walter, who had utterly opposed Prue’s plan when she had initially proposed it three years earlier. Walter had railed against the very idea of a young woman aged only 18, without commercial experience, setting up in business on her own, adamant that instead Prue should be at home helping her mother. The nature of some of the literature distributed in her shop, such as works on the problem of sexually transmitted diseases, had also provoked Walter’s ire, who proclaimed it wicked that ‘a young girl’ such as Prue would even know of the existence of such titles, let alone sell them.\textsuperscript{17} Gilbert had steadfastly fought his father on the matter, ‘as he had fought him over so many things all his life’, and he thinks with grim regret of having been hard on Walter, a regrettable but necessary stance in order to support Prue’s quest to form her own ideas.\textsuperscript{18} In Gilbert’s eyes, Prue’s devoted labours in her shop contribute to the task of cultivating ‘honest’ writing, and that ‘communal creative spirit’ necessary for any community, a spirit at present perilously threatened. Gilbert also sees in Prue the ‘new springs of energy in the young’, something he deems essential to social and creative renewal. Promotion of the nation’s cultural life is central to fostering the kind of just and open social order which Gilbert believes in.

Like many others, Gilbert has come to understand the war as the most recent manifestation of a crisis of historical proportions which poses an unparalleled threat to

\textsuperscript{16} Dark, Little Company, 51.
\textsuperscript{17} Dark, Little Company, 62.
\textsuperscript{18} Dark, Little Company, 62.
Western civilisation. It is from this starting point that he takes in the stream of news reports they receive each day from the front. In the following passage he reflects on the threat of cultural nihilism and political expansionism posed by fascism:

He had no more faith in his Government’s policy of appeasing the enemy to their near north than he had had three years ago in that other appeasement which led to Munich. Only a few weeks back, reading of Paternoster Row gutted by incendiary bombs, of millions of books going up in smoke, he had known that it could happen here. That the fury loosed against China might well – now that supplies no longer sped to her along the Burma Road – triumph, and turn south for further spoils.19

Gilbert thinks of the ambivalent reaction he has met in response to his own scepticism about the official policies surrounding the war, and particularly Japan:

He knew all that; he had said it, and said it, and said it, watching uneasy faces become closed and hostile, feeling distrust of himself spread like a fog, feeling the herd’s suspicion of anyone whose opinion dared to diverge from the dictated mass-opinion of Press and official pronouncement. Yet he had felt, too, with a shadow of hope, that his own certainties were already beginning to stir as doubts in many minds. Angrily resisted doubts.

His interlocutors would typically cite the traditional alliance with Britain, something he knows to be an increasingly frayed trust. He is cautiously optimistic about the signs of a gradual shift in public opinion, and sanguine about the fact that he himself has tended to fall between two stools politically. Often suspected of being anti-British, he is typically aligned with the communists, whose approach he is in sympathy with, though not unreservedly.

He had found a sour, rueful amusement in that. To be looked at askance by the conservatives for being a communist, and to be simultaneously regarded more in sorrow than in anger by the communists for not being one, placed a man, he thought wryly, in a very select sort of isolation.20

The ambiguities inherent in Gilbert’s own political stance, in light of the current political climate, here strike him as ironic. As a writer, as well as in his marriage to Phyllis, Gilbert has encountered the charge of communist. In fact, like Marty he is a fellow traveller, progressive in his beliefs, but independent of any particular political party or ideology. The reflections above bear out the strong belief in democracy, and in the importance of political

19 Dark, Little Company, 66.
20 Dark, Little Company, 66.
institutions and ideas which safeguard human liberty and dignity, that underpins Gilbert’s progressive stance. At the same time, Gilbert’s reference above to a herd mentality is reflective of his scepticism about aspects of democracy. It is imperatives borne of the pressing political and ethical questions they face as a society that most centrally occupy and concern him. The aims of helping foster a strong body politic and vibrant culture are uppermost in his mind, including through his own modest efforts as a writer. He can be circumspect about his own situation as a writer out of public favour, but the wavering and often passive reaction to wartime developments he observes among the public, for instance to the recently introduced harsh censorship laws, is likely to stir his fear and frustration. An article of faith in people, and particularly in the individual’s capacity for reason, insight and ethically informed action, is central to his writing, and more broadly to his world-view.

In the context of the unprecedented international crisis at hand, Gilbert’s objectives as a writer, and more immediately the pressures posed by his writer’s block, have acquired new urgency. Unable to complete any writing, Gilbert has been compelled to look again to his own creative aims and methods. Gilbert’s experience of a ‘nightmare impotence’ has brought home to him how his characteristic way of communicating shapes and reflects his self-discipline and sobriety. It has also thrown into relief Marty’s more expressive and informal habits of communication:

He knew that he was himself, as she [Marty] described it, a buttoned-up person, not expansive, not prolific, not perpetually bubbling over with words. He was accustomed to finding words slowly, with infinite labour; he was accustomed, often, to not finding them at all. But to see Marty’s pen halted gave him an almost superstitious chill.21

Gilbert, who is inclined to be his own harshest critic, recognises the truth in Marty’s characterisation of his buttoned-up, deliberative manner and habits of communication. By contrast, Marty possesses a ‘quick and volatile’ mind rarely able to ‘outpace her tirelessly scribbling fingers’, yet she too is unable to complete any work. Gilbert draws the following observation of Marty’s writing:

She wrote as naturally and easily as she talked, and, while he recognized that her candidly topical matter, her carelessly colloquial manner might not rank as “literature” in the more austere sense of the word, he had recognized its

21 Dark, Little Company, 15.
value in a world where most people only read if they could keep on running at the same time.\textsuperscript{22}

Gilbert’s characterisation of Marty’s writing implicitly acknowledges the reach and relevance of her work, and its immediacy and application to readers’ everyday lives. At the same time, the kind of ‘literature’ he refers to – more austere and formal in nature – is implicitly in keeping with the kind of works he himself creates, or aims to. For both of them, the aim of communicating with their readers about the questions raised by the war and the historical events associated with it seems to currently be beyond their reach. Faced with the breakdown of their abilities to complete any writing, the element of reflection and self-reflection which is basic to their creative role, and to their personalities, has come to the fore.

These are not problems which their younger brother Nick, also a writer, is subject to. Nick’s writing is closely tied to his socialist beliefs – too closely, in Gilbert and Martys’ opinions. He readily puts together what Gilbert describes as “‘factual’ stuff’, drawing efficiently on all available ‘figures’ and ‘data’ to generate his letters to the paper and articles.\textsuperscript{23} Nick is frankly incredulous at his siblings’ inability to find within the welter of contemporary events any suitable fictional subject matter:

“What’s wrong with you both? It’s all there. Good God, the world was never so full of stories! You can take your pick – anything from the obscurest psychological agonising to the rankest melodrama. Nothing’s too complicated or too simple to be true nowadays. And all you can do is to tear up paper!”\textsuperscript{24}

There is a scornful impatience apparent in Nick’s tone: for him too, there is a pressing need that their voices as writers – reforming voices, concerned with building a world that is fair and open, and free of war and political tyranny – be heard. Additionally, Nick’s socialist views demand a certain kind of single-minded commitment: his tolerance is quickly exhausted when those around him are less certain in their outlooks.

Gilbert, who says nothing, identifies with Nick’s terms without sharing his conclusion. Nick’s reference to melodrama reminds Gilbert of a dark night the previous year

\textsuperscript{22} Dark, \textit{Little Company}, 16.  
\textsuperscript{23} Dark, \textit{Little Company}, 16. 
\textsuperscript{24} Dark, \textit{Little Company}, 16.
when he had helped two friends bury a box of books in the orchard at Glenwood in order to avoid the censor’s scrutiny. Gilbert had lost the tip of his finger in a mishap during the incident – a ready reminder that their daily life is in many respects far from ordinary. Gilbert also has his own experience of what Nick derisively refers to as ‘obscure psychological agonising’, his mind readily wandering ‘from unproductive activity to numb inertia and back again’. Nick’s words rub salt in the wound for Gilbert, who is painfully aware of the breakdown in his means of working up this seeming abundance of raw material.

In Heller’s work on feeling as involvement – involvement being ‘the inherent constructive factor in acting, thinking etc’ – she describes how tasks mobilise feelings in ways consistent with the character and personality of the person whose feelings they are. She identifies three spheres of involvement that structure our lives in especially decisive ways, one of those spheres being the use of language. Patterns of involvement, Heller stresses, may be repetitive and automatic in nature, but there are also more comprehensive orders of involvement. Heller cites the discus thrower, whose love of her sport sees her engage closely with each of the ‘practiced and spontaneous partial element[s] of motion’ that make up throwing a discus. The responsibility she exercises for realising her aim – to exploit to the full her ability to throw the discus, given her talents and circumstances, and perhaps also to throw it further than her competitors – align the discus thrower with Heller’s model of the individual personality. Heller also describes how a breakdown in the usual means of carrying out an action, or solving a problem, is likely to result in the emotions associated with it coming to the fore in the person’s consciousness.

As the Massey siblings discuss and reflect on the difficulties facing them as writers, the narrative casts light on the questions of involvement Heller writes of. Gilbert’s engagement with World Affairs constitutes a direct, active order of involvement – one that, indeed, recalls a hypothetical example of Heller’s, discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, in which she articulates the various modes of engagement possible in the act of reading a newspaper. For both Gilbert and Marty, to write is to engage with wider events occurring in the cultural and political spheres, and with the implications of those developments for

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25 Dark, Little Company, 16.
26 Heller, A Theory of Feelings, 12.
peoples’ lives. These issues are also critically important to Nick. It is in relation to these shared goals, as well as their familial ties, that the dialogues between them about their creative roles, as depicted above, takes place. Their exchanges with each other and with Nick demonstrate the rivalries, as well as respect, among them, together with an underlying discontent as they bring their critical faculties to bear on the situations facing them. For Gilbert and Marty, moreover, questions about the ways they employ language, and the habits of expression associated with their personality, go to the heart of what they do as writers, especially in light of the fact that both are struggling with writer’s block. Gilbert’s anxious discontent and frustration in response to the challenges facing them are as likely to be the subject of his silent, self-critical ruminations as they are to be outwardly expressed.

The restraint and quiet perseverance central to Gilbert’s character are apparent in the scene in which he endeavours to write about his experience of writer’s block. He likens that experience to being unemployed, seeing in it “certain educational value”, specifically insight into “the frustrations, the lowered “morale”, the general sense of personal deterioration which invariably goes with unemployment”. His keen sense of responsibility regarding his writing is overlaid with a painful sense of inadequacy, on account of not having produced any new works for four years:

The writer who cannot write – who cannot, despite long hours at his desk, achieve anything in which he can feel that independent life which is his signal that what he is doing will (in the mountain-climber’s phrase) “go”, is unemployed; and the moral blight of unemployment descends on him.28

An air of grim determination characterises Gilbert’s account of the unemployed writer striving to recover his usefulness by returning to the “elementary function of his job” – namely, documenting his experience, and recording the ideas, personalities and events he comes across in life. He must forget, for the moment, his desire to shape words into “beguiling patterns’ and “shapely phrases”: instead, the need is to drive through “that invisible, intangible obstruction in oneself”, to put his head down “like a labouring ox, and going ahead,” with the hope that some glimmer of interpretation may emerge in the process. He describes the mind of the writer as “dulled, blunted and half-anaesthetised by

28 Dark, Little Company, 162.
its necessary, self-preserving defence against too frequent and too brutal assaults”, a reference to the impact of the prevailing political strife and conflict.

The terms and sentiment of Gilbert’s essay illustrate the singular resolve and ‘unrelenting determination’ central to his character.29 The references above to personal deterioration and moral blight exemplify the deep moral impulse that propels Gilbert’s task as a writer. To realise that independent life which is his as a writer is a duty and obligation – an undertaking integral to who he is. There is also a sheer creative resourcefulness about his attempt to overcome his writer’s block by writing about it, though the respite from the shame and futility induced by his ‘unemployed’ state turns out to be brief, as his impulse stalls once again.

These demonstrations of the distinctive tone of Gilbert’s writing, and of his artistic styles and aims, provide an important clue to the myriad of forces that converge and interact in his world of feelings. As foreshadowed above, to grasp his serious-minded character, and the single-minded patience he brings to his writing, is also to understand something of his values and beliefs. He shares with his siblings a commitment to free expression and debate, and to the importance of an open exchange of ideas. Like Marty and Nick, Gilbert expects that each of them will engage with and, where they feel it necessary, contest each other’s viewpoints and methods as writers. Their dialogues, like their written works, attest to a shared belief in social and economic reconstruction along progressive, democratic lines, Nick’s socialist stance notwithstanding. Additionally, those dialogues also reveal the independence of mind and spirit which is characteristic of Gilbert and the others. A rebelliousness finds expression in different ways in each of them, as it does in Aunt Bee’s personality. This is implicit in Gilbert’s recollection of his boyhood association of Aunt Bee with the United States, both of them deemed ungrateful children in the minds of those against whom they rebelled.

The figure of Walter Massey stands behind Gilbert’s story in important and complex ways, as he does the family as a whole. Resistance of Walter and his authority is one part of that relationship, as is apparent in Gilbert’s actions in support of Prue’s business. At the

29 Dark, Little Company, 51.
same time, an element of continuity between father and son is implicit in the text. The formal aspect of Gilbert’s personality – the industriousness and sense of responsibility that sees him sit at his desk wrestling with the problem of writer’s block – is key in this respect. His musings speak to the nature of writing as self-expression, and to the struggle Gilbert faces as he confronts the apparent breakdown of his creative talents. As he reflects on his stifled creativity, Gilbert’s thoughts speak to the complexity of his inheritance, and the subtle, intangible legacies of his family environment, in ways that will become clearer below. His individuality is shown to emerge from and be closely tied to his sense of responsibility, and to his inherited roles and values. What is also apparent is that his relationship to that inheritance is undergoing a fundamental shift.

**Staring Down Fear and Change – The Reckoning of a Troubled and True Mind**

The interwoven threads evident in Gilbert’s emotional household bear directly on the issues raised by his latest book. *Thunder Brewing*, published four years earlier, had formed an expression of his then incipient understanding of the causes of the international upheaval that had begun with the First World War. Gilbert is aware that the book poses a ‘curious dilemma’ for some in his circle, most importantly Phyllis, who is at once anxious that his writing career may be over, and fearful about the tenor and content of any subsequent books he might write. What had chiefly offset ‘the still only whispered hints of his unorthodox views’, he recognises, is the social and material capital he enjoys as a businessman. Under the cover of near-darkness, Gilbert ‘allowed himself the rather grim smile he felt’: it is the ‘tyranny of customs, of “background”’ which had been decisive in putting to rest the ‘vague confusions’ in which his reputation had become enshrouded.

No man with a bank balance is a social outcast. No man occupying a permanent and respectable niche in the commercial world need be looked at askance. ... His own “background” as manager of Walter Massey and Sons, Wholesale Stationers and Booksellers, had, he realised, partly counteracted that vague suspicion with which writers were apt to be regarded.30

Questions about the orthodoxy or otherwise of Gilbert’s view, and the continuing influence of his past, are crucial to the turning point at which he finds himself. The incongruities and contradictions inherent in Gilbert’s situation are conveyed in the wry irony of his tone.

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30 *Dark, Little Company*, 16.
Gilbert is not one to privilege customs and traditions for their own sake, nor to pay unquestioned allegiance to the maintaining of decorum and upholding of the status quo. Yet his personal affairs, including his commercial and creative roles, are cut through with these standpoints – an irony that is expressed in the inverted commas around the word “background”.

A sense of bitter indignation is further apparent as Gilbert reflects on the fact that he remains living ‘in the odour of his father’s sanctity’. Walter Massey and Sons operates out of a nineteenth-century building in the city that remains largely unrenovated, a testament to Walter’s loathing of innovation, and his identification of the old as synonymous with the good. The building on York Street is dark and narrow, lacking the convenience of even a lift. A plate glass window fronting the street is a veritable shrine for the works of scripture displayed there. That window, Gilbert acknowledges soberly to himself, is ‘perhaps the strongest evidence of his own “respectability”’.32

A log fell from the fire, and the room shone redly for a moment while sparks rushed up the chimney. Gilbert, drawing thoughtfully at his pipe, admitted that his “background” was, through no fault of his own, deceptive.33

Gilbert’s thoughts also turn to the ‘renewal of fluttering indecision’ which the publication of Thunder Brewing had sparked among those of his readers who were acquainted with him personally. Many of those readers would have praised his previous works as being thoughtful, substantial and serious – and, at the same time, for stopping short of being heavy, alarmist or highbrow. Such readers would have valued what they judged to be the good taste apparent in his early novels, insofar as they had maintained a ‘soberly critical note’, while remaining free from ‘that insistent propaganda, that rabid agitation, that ranting bitterness’ which they perceived to mar much fiction of the late 1930s, making it simply ‘awkward and embarrassing’.34 These subtle distinctions are shown to be paradigmatic of the section of the community in question, whose members were uninclined

31 Dark, Little Company, 16.
32 Dark, Little Company, 17.
33 Dark, Little Company, 17.
34 Dark, Little Company, 17.
to actively engage in ideological debates, although not without an investment in political matters as such.

_Thunder Brewing_, by contrast, had manifested Gilbert’s ‘first shock and his first anger,’ signifying his receptivity to a different way of conceiving and responding to the events occurring on the national and international stages. Gilbert recalls the book, and himself writing it, ‘through a long tunnel of mental and psychological experience’. The first swallow of a different kind of work to any he had previously written, _Thunder Brewing_ had been a nascent expression of his ‘awakening’ to an unprecedented political crisis, the nature and extent of which he had initially been able to grasp only vaguely and incompletely:

The painfulness of his own awakening, which had found its way into the pages of _Thunder Brewing_, had lain less in the fear of a dark future than in the staggering realisation that the intellect of humanity in general, and of himself in particular, was totally unequipped for facing it.

In common with a small but increasingly vocal minority of like-minded people, in the years following the First World War, Gilbert had come to understand that conflict as symptomatic of a deeper problem facing Western democracies. Thinking back to that time, he remembers

a stage of development so painful and so alarming that even now he disliked the memory of it. The war of 1914-18, he had begun to see, was a nightmare from which most people had awakened only to roll over with a sigh of relief, and go to sleep again.

Coming to terms with the origins of the First World War had meant confronting ideas and beliefs fundamental to how Gilbert saw the world – a painful and alarming ‘stage of development’, and one he prefers not to think about. Those who had voiced their fears at that time had met with widespread public apathy and hostility for their perceived ‘ tiresome, persistent and ill-mannered vociferousness’. Having thus ‘disturbed the slumbers of the majority with warnings’, they had become unpopular people, judged ‘agitators, scare-mongers’. Gilbert counts himself among those ‘few light sleepers ... roused

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35 Dark, Little Company, 18.
36 Dark, Little Company, 18.
37 Dark, Little Company, 18.
by the clamour to listen, at first sluggishly, reluctantly, and then with rising anxiety, to the hullaballoo'. Even the shock of the Depression had generated only indifference among a large proportion of the public, much to Gilbert’s angry frustration.

For Gilbert, the most painful insight into the economic and political volatility unfolding internationally had been the awareness that the populace – including himself – was mostly unable, and in many cases also unwilling, to respond to that turmoil with resolve and imagination. Few had grasped the political origins of the war and related developments such as the emergence of fascism. Gilbert connects this failure to an education akin to ‘a fish-net, more holes than substance, offering no resistance to the gathering gale of barbarism, no shelter from the threatening deluge of catastrophe’. He thinks of the ignorance he had confronted in himself as he became aware of the scale of the crisis at hand:

So he had become one of the intellectually-groping millions, feeling his way through the fog of his “conditioning”, stubbing his toes against his own prejudices, bumping into time-honoured traditions, endlessly beguiled by some fancied gleam of light from a tempting by-path, only to find it a blind-alley, and return again to a road of still Stygian blackness.38

Driven by his fears and need for insight to address the limits to his understanding of the developments they are living through, Gilbert had engaged anew with the social and political order, and also with his own attitudes and preconceptions. Together with many others, he had tracked a path through a large and complex body of information and perspectives. This quest for comprehension had served to raise his consciousness, fostering a new conception of the body politic in and for which he wrote. The novel which had issued from these labours – a work that had constituted only an ‘instinctive shout of warning and alarm’– had ultimately ‘chimed with a prevailing, though only half-realised mood’, and consequently sold well and received positive reviews.39 The commercial success of the work had, in turn, helped to preserve largely intact his literary standing and reputation, with allowance made for ‘a streak (so natural in writers) of eccentricity’.40

38 Dark, Little Company, 18.
39 Dark, Little Company, 18-19.
40 Dark, Little Company, 19
As the scenes discussed above make clear, Gilbert’s latest novel spells a break with his past. Also illuminated is the nature of his relationship with that past. The very image of Gilbert sitting on his own by the fire, drawing on his pipe while deep in thought about his life and certain forces that have shaped it, evokes the tensions implicit in his “background”. His demeanour reveals traces of his late father: his pipe smoking establishes a link to Walter, as does the essential uprightness of Gilbert’s character, and mantle of responsibility which is his in his domestic and other roles. Gilbert’s surrounds further connect him to the world he has come from, the cottage forming part of the family’s not inconsiderable material resources. The origins of those resources lie partly in his father’s commercial success, which is in turn inseparable from the patina of respectability Walter had accrued over his lifetime. Walter’s unyielding moralism and puritanical sensibility is evoked in Gilbert’s reference to his father’s sanctity, and the ‘odour’ associated with it. If Gilbert’s relationship to his past has undergone a fundamental change of late, as his latest novel shows it has, the past nonetheless remains present in his life. Such comments highlight the overlapping emotional and material dimensions which feature in Gilbert’s inheritance as Walter’s eldest son. The past exerts a pull on him from the inside, in the structure and orientation of his personality, as well as in terms of bricks and mortar, in the means and resources which sustain him and his family. But his personality is increasingly oriented in another direction, one directly opposed to Walter’s traditional values.

Gilbert’s reformulating of his priorities and perspectives had contributed to a turning point with political, personal and creative dimensions. The slow epiphany of his awakening reveals an emotional household forged around a scrupulously disciplined mind and strong convictions - the principled stance which is apparent in his championing of Prue’s business. Reckoning with the problems in which the Western world was enmired had set his mind in a new direction. Recognising that ‘the intellect of humanity’ was unequipped to face the spectre of a ‘dark future’, Gilbert had confronted the apparently inevitable prospect of far-reaching political and social turmoil, as well as the problem posed by an essentially passive public. At the same time, he had grappled with his own ignorance and the shortcomings in his understanding of political affairs. Educating himself had brought him face to face with the way the past continued to shape his world-view, as he felt his way ‘through the fog of his “conditioning”, stubbing his toes against his own prejudices’. These phrases convey a
transformed political outlook, based on a reconsideration of ideas and assumptions he had previously taken for granted. In re-evaluating his own values and ideas in light of his recent insights into World Affairs, Gilbert had thus put a distance between himself and the world of his youth – Walter’s world. The momentous events intrinsic to Gilbert’s awakening, the text suggests, had shaken the conceptual and emotional foundations of his generation as a whole.

Gilbert’s changed standpoint as a writer has subtly but significantly affected his relationship with his readers. The reference to readers who would have praised his earlier books as being thoughtful, while stopping short of being alarmist, illustrates the distance Gilbert himself has travelled from the world-view associated with his past. Like before, his main aim is to engage his readers, and to speak to the world they inhabit, including its political and cultural dimensions – only now he seeks to do so explicitly, and from a position of dissent. It is in this sense that he seeks to take his readers with him, to challenge their preconceptions and expectations, and encourage a more critical engagement with the problems facing their times.

Additionally, after the first flush of Gilbert’s re-education about the world he inhabits, he finds himself looking again at how best to realise his goal of rendering human lives and dilemmas in fiction. After completing Thunder Brewing, conscious of ‘a drag somewhere’ within himself, Gilbert had met a block in his usual slow, steady process of literary creation: ‘he found himself floundering among innumerably false starts, discarding, beginning again, altering and revising until the thought he had begun with was entirely lost, and all was to do over again’.41 Betrayed by ‘his own ignorance’, he had found himself making repeated false starts, losing his train of thought and being obliged to begin anew.

Characters and “situations” which he would once have regarded as mere fictional material could no longer be regarded as such when they had become manifestations of a social disorder. Somewhere behind the description of a collapsing business, a society hostess, a broken marriage, a tubercular child, a swagman waltzing Matilda along the outback roads, he recognised a common truth which must be captured and expressed. His thoughts and his pen

41 Dark, Little Company, 19
halted, arrested by his writing conscience, which told him sternly that he was giving short measure.\footnote{Dark, Little Company, 19}

This passage reiterates the moral drivers central to Gilbert’s altered evaluative stance. His success as a writer turns largely on his ability to create authentic and convincing fictional characters and their worlds. It is in the understanding necessary to do so truthfully and persuasively, honouring the ‘common truth’ embodied in his fictional subject matter, that he recognises a shortfall. Goaded thus by his writing conscience, Gilbert had embarked on a more comprehensive investigation of political, economic and social questions. Sustaining him through the ensuing process, one of intellectual discovery, questioning, disbelieving and despairing, had been his ‘growing alarm’, together with ‘a certain native habit of perseverance which had made him, as a small boy, collect stamps for years with joyless patience.’ His painstakingly thorough labours are encapsulated in the image of Gilbert as an ant, toiling to move a mountain ‘grain by grain’, doggedly sifting through a welter of ideas and perspectives, and weighing up the veracity and significance of each of his findings. This metaphor also evokes the shared, human endeavours that are ultimately his focus as a writer.

Of the transformation effected in Gilbert’s life, the text reads:

Even worse was the discovery of how much he had to un-learn, for he was even then approaching middle-age, and the discarding of conventions and ideas to which he had been bred was as painful as the stripping of bandages from a dried wound. His alarm, mounting with his knowledge, reshaped his impulse, detaching it from him, changing it from “I want to know” to a more impersonal and peremptory “You must know.”\footnote{Dark, Little Company, 19}

Once again, the narrative calls attention to an experience of reflection and redefinition of values on Gilbert’s part. Gilbert compares the ‘un-learning’ of conventions and ideas hitherto taken for granted to the stripping of bandages from a wound, a simile that evokes the element of self-definition, or redefinition, in his recent experiences. The description lends a visceral edge to Gilbert’s re-ordering of his viewpoint as an artist and an individual, and underlines the fortitude required to stand against given values and traditions. For Gilbert, that emotional pain is something to be borne so as to able to focus on the more
important issues at hand – honouring his point of view as a writer, and responding to the crisis abroad. Gilbert’s ‘reshaped impulse’ as a writer involves an altered kind of internal motivation, centred on an expansion of intellectual and moral autonomy. As in the metaphor of the labouring ant, Gilbert’s account of enduring the pressures and rigours inherent in his self-education, and the image this gives rise to of a man bearing a heavy burden, signal a personality organised largely around fulfilling the responsibilities that are his. He is a man who is reliable and constant, entirely without casualness, and perhaps also without lightness of spirit.

He was able, now, to move about with some confidence in the sociological labyrinth. His forces were ranged and stabilised, his convictions clear, his emotions strong and whole. Just as Gilbert’s foray into the problems facing the ‘intellect of humanity’ attests to his artistic objective of explicating the varying elements and patterns of social life, so too does the reference above to a ‘sociological labyrinth’ speak to his efforts as a writer to interpret the social code, and create a mirror into which readers might recognise themselves and each other. Though he continues to struggle with writer’s block, Gilbert finds himself on firm intellectual and personal grounds in his new understanding of his world, and of himself, chiefly in relation to his purpose and priorities as a writer. His dogged self-education has afforded him a critically deepened grasp of his times, and thus, he emerges as a writer equipped for a task which, in redefining, he has also re-selected. That task has come to centre on synthesising and articulating his deepened comprehension of and convictions regarding his subjects. The boldness of his vision speaks to a quality of intellectual courage, and to the way his fulfilment of the role of writer is informed by the strength of his convictions. From the brooding discontent which contemporary political events excite in Gilbert, and have done for over a decade, has come the kernel of an objective that has for some time been central to his existence: to write a work that articulates his grasp of the events they are living through, and how the prevailing crisis surfaces and intervenes in people’s everyday lives. His latest novel, Thunder Brewing, had formed a first step in realising this aim.

44 Dark, Little Company, 20.
The reference in the passage above to strong and whole emotions recalls those feelings associated with Gilbert’s awakening, particularly his initial anger and alarm, the steady patience which sustained his enquiries, and the driving force of his idealism and determination. Conceived broadly as fully formed emotions, as they are here, they attest to the integrity of the process he has undergone; in Heller’s terms, they signify an involvement with the entirety of his personality, encompassing those emotional habits expressive of his personality. His reckoning with the expectations and values of his past, and taking stock of where life has brought him, focused on his creative endeavours, can be seen to involve an altered pattern of emotional housekeeping. A decisive tipping point for a man who for most of his life has felt himself to be a lodging-house boarder in his own home, this experience, while having little outward sign, signals a consequential shift in terms of Gilbert’s understanding of himself, and capacity to honour the values and beliefs of most importance to him.

Conclusion

Underpinning Heller’s ideas about individuality is a self-narrativising subject, engaged in understanding the world, and herself as an agent in the world. A person’s emotional palette offers insights into her characteristic patterns of involvement in life. Her world of feelings is likely to demonstrate certain distinct qualities and tones expressive of her personality and existence. Heller pays particular attention to the relationship between a person’s tasks, and the feelings and social norms associated with those tasks, as a nexus of unique importance in how her emotional household forms and evolves. The social actor’s relationship to social norms and codes is also decisive in Heller’s concept of the individual personality, with the accent on a capacity for autonomous judgment of and distance from such norms and conventions.

Detachment plays a central and complex role in Gilbert Massey’s character, surfacing in his ethical codes, his emotional reserve and his intellectual rigour. He is a man of marked emotional restraint, with an undemonstrative manner: while the reader is shown Gilbert’s inner struggles in relation to his aims and methods as a writer, to those around him, Gilbert generally expresses little emotion. He demonstrates a habitual self-discipline and thoroughness, and a certain uprightness in his way of thinking and carrying himself –
qualities apparent in the contrast between his writing and Marty’s. His keen sense of responsibility is conveyed in these dispositions. The judiciousness of his mind and his steady, rigorous thought process are linked to the quality of his convictions, as when he steadfastly stands up for Prue’s autonomy in the face of Walter’s opposition to her idea of setting up in business on her own. Gilbert’s sense of duty is married to a belief in truth and liberty. His detached disposition strongly inflects his serious-minded, grave emotional palette. As well as shaping his judgment, it also invites his self-reflections, and it surfaces in his typically quietly-spoken and restrained patterns of communication with others.

Also shaping Gilbert’s solemn emotional palette is his self-reflexiveness, his appreciation of life’s ironies – even if he tends not to express levity – and the sheer constancy and rigour of his mind and moral character. His characteristically stern, and sometimes grim, manner can be censorious, though never punitively so, as is apparent in his response to Aunt Bee. He is aware, often painfully so, of the stiffness and formality of his demeanour and the distance this creates with those around him. Later in the novel, his regret as to the impact of his emotional reserve upon his relationships with his children becomes apparent. There is something of Gilbert’s self-critical temperament in these examples. His self-recriminations are sharpest in relation to his continued failure to write any new works, particularly in light of the troubled conditions society faces, and the heightened sense of responsibility this fosters in Gilbert. He is less directly involved in his deteriorating relationship with Phyllis, a reflection partly of his tendency to keep at one remove from those around him. The narrative conveys his sense of futility in relation to his marriage, and the absence of any real affection or trust between he and Phyllis, and of meaningful communication between them. His stance demonstrates a remoteness reflective of his habit of remaining apart from emotional and personal dimensions of life in general. This impasse in his feelings about Phyllis – an impasse not unlike Marty’s relationship with her sister-in-law, a topic I discuss at length in the next chapter of my thesis – and his ambivalence about acting on those feelings, plays out over the course of the novel.

It is in relation to Gilbert’s sense of duty, and how that sense of duty informs his role as a writer, that his emotional household begins to assume its own idiosyncratic shape, grounded in the events associated with his ‘awakening’. Deeply troubled by the scale and intractability of the contemporary political crisis, and also by the depth of his own ignorance
about the institutions and policies governing national and international affairs, Gilbert sets out to comprehend the forces shaping their social order and to voice his new insights through his writing. His self-reflexivity takes on an extra significance in light of his task as a writer, engaged in grasping and articulating the human personality, in all its diversity. Waking up to a world in chaos, and realising the limits of his capacity to comprehend that chaos, is for Gilbert a turning point of far-reaching significance. Deep feelings play a central, if understated, part, in his transfigured evaluative stance.

An important dimension of Gilbert’s experience is his changing relationship to his past, and the way his current standpoint is shown to have evolved and changed over time. Eldest son in the Massey family, the conscientious, self-critical nature of Gilbert’s habits of mind inherently reflects his family "background" and the influence of Walter Massey on his life and character. It is this continuing influence which is salient to his sense of himself as a lodging-house boarder in his own home, and which he comes up against in his marriage to Phyllis, who typifies the world of their youth with its rigid creed and narrow moralism. He reckons with both the legacies of his background – relearning and re-evaluating values and attitudes laid down in his youth – as well as the complex scenarios at play in the world at large, centred on the wartime emergency. Gilbert is shown to be a man pulling away from his past – something conveyed in his need for a new kind of dwelling, emotionally as well as materially. If he tends to keep at one remove from others, he has thus far also been estranged from himself in essential ways, as the image of him as a boarder – a visitor – in his own home attests to.

Against this broad canvas, Gilbert’s character can be seen to demonstrate the qualities of the individual personality as defined by Heller. The account of his awakening makes clear that what Gilbert is grappling with is partly his own acceptance of roles and attitudes he acquired as Walter Massey’s son, and which have shaped his commitments as a husband and father. While he never accepted the narrow traditional culture of his youth, nonetheless the inculcation of a sense of responsibility, and of his obligations to his family – and to the nation, including through his service in the First World War and more recently through his writing – had been basic to his childhood. This is the implication of the references to the entrenched nature of his conditioning, and his background, subjects he thinks of with a wry sense of irony. What is also conveyed in the text is that Gilbert’s moral
and intellectual autonomy have been crucial in facilitating his challenge of inherited roles and values. His conscious, active engagement with his principals and ideals is evident in the way he reckoned with his changing goals as a writer in the context of the prevailing crisis, and also in his actions in relation to Prue’s business. The capacity for self-examination that sustains his self-reflexiveness about the values guiding his actions is in line with Heller’s model of the individual personality.

Gilbert also demonstrates qualities of fortitude and resolve, a bearing of personal trials in the interests of realising values and achieving objectives of a moral, ethical nature. This is apparent in how he sees through the transformation associated with his re-education: the experience of re-evaluating ideas and values he had previously taken on faith is likened to stripping bandages from a wound. A motif of self-invention – more specifically, of re-invention of oneself when faced with the failure or limitation of one’s central beliefs and preconceptions – is conveyed in such passages of the novel. In these ways, Gilbert can be seen to demonstrate a form of individuality by design, with the re-alignment of his political views, and the corollary in his personal life, having led to a rebuilding of his personality as a whole.

Gilbert’s morally reflexive individuality is also connected to the breadth and inclusiveness of his conception of the human condition – the subject that is ultimately at the heart of his creative pursuits. Gilbert demonstrates a commitment to the public good and to a strong democracy: one of the 'intellectually-groping millions', he had confronted his 'conditioning' and prejudices until he found himself able to 'move about' freely in the 'sociological labyrinth' his research had revealed to him. These descriptions speak to his new understanding of human character and a resolve to articulate an explicitly progressive political standpoint in his writing - a choice which he knows will, in the prevailing conditions, provoke fears and prejudices from some readers, specifically his traditional readership. In such ways, Gilbert can be seen to have negotiated a changed relationship to his task, and to the social customs associated with it. A quiet pride and deep sense of conviction is in many ways at the heart of Gilbert Massey’s character. His aims as a writer have come to centre on honouring the singularity of the individual, while also doing justice to the social collective they are all part of.
The account of Gilbert’s self-education vividly illustrates the internal dynamism and coherence of his personality; that transformative experience is expressive of who he is in his entirety, with all his nuances and inner tensions. There is no separating the ‘buttoned up’ Gilbert from the man driven to do the right thing in response to the crisis facing Australia and other nations. Serious and contemplative, he turns his methodical patience and valuing of ‘honest writing’ and a vital culture to a problem that will ultimately see him redefine his creative role. How Gilbert comprehends and defines that role takes shape in relation to Marty and Nicks’ contrasting standpoints as writers; this common ground between them is further illuminated in the discussion of Marty’s character, in the next chapter. Gilbert’s formulation of a world-view which stands in opposition to the one Walter espoused stems from a moral feeling important to Gilbert’s character – expressed, for instance, in his intense frustration over the ‘moral blight’ of his unemployed status as a writer – and an abiding sense of duty, as a citizen of a world in turmoil. It also speaks to the stoic patience and thoroughness that inflect his emotional palette, and his conscientious, critical habits of mind. These are some of the factors shaping and informing Gilbert’s emotional household at this defining juncture in his life.
CHAPTER SIX

INDIVIDUALITY AND THE REBEL: MARTY RANSOM

“Our brains are, so to speak, tuned-in to creativeness, and at present the mass-brain is tuned-in to destructiveness. We’re suffering, Gil, my poor lamb, from ‘interference’. The waves we try to give out are being jammed”.

Among Marty’s Ransom’s circle, and the audiences for her writing and public speaking, her voice is singularly direct and irrepressible. When Gilbert shares with her his alarm and desperation at his deteriorating concentration and mental acuity, Marty’s response casts new light on the problem of fatigue both are experiencing. Questions about the destructiveness of the contemporary world, alluded to above, are rarely far from Marty's thoughts, as is the case with Gilbert: as we see in this chapter, Marty fears how the international order has become unsafe for democracy, with political involvement increasingly confined to a small section of the public. Though Gilbert is impatient – as Marty knows he will be – with her suggestion of a clash of wave-lengths between them and their readers, dismissing her way of putting things as slapdash, picturesque and inaccurate, at the same time he recognises the truth in her diagnosis of a troubled social order and its inhibiting effect on their own work. It is like Marty to draw on modern technology for her metaphors, alluding to their writer’s block, as she does in the passage cited above, in terms of radio waves and interference. Her frankness is combined with a rich imaginative capacity and talent for finding ways to say what she wants to say. This plain-spokenness is apparent in Gilbert’s description of his sister’s ‘quick and volatile mind’, and capacity to write ‘as naturally and easily as she talked’, as referred to in Chapter Five.

As with Gilbert, for Marty, fulfilling her aims as a writer is an imperative close to the heart of her emotional household. In Marty’s case, a defiant disposition strongly inflects her emotional palette. Marty readily finds ways to voice or otherwise communicate things which would otherwise tend to go unsaid, and her patterns of reasoning and expression are characteristically swift and spontaneous. One instance of this occurs in the scene described in Chapter Five, in which Gilbert envisages Marty responding with ‘maliciously polite

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1 Dark, Little Company, 20.
unresponsiveness' to Phyllis's rapturous expressions about the creek that runs through the garden at the family's mountain cottage. That lifelong antipathy between Marty and Phyllis, reflective of a clash of world views as well as temperaments, is discussed further in this chapter.

As we have seen in earlier chapters of this thesis, a central part of the model of the individual personality is the kind of relationship a person has to the given elements of his world, as was discussed in Chapter Five in relation to Gilbert Massey's character. Marty Ransom also demonstrates the moral and cognitive autonomy of the individual personality, though in different ways to Gilbert. Marty's scepticism and frankness are apparent in her relationship with Walter and his traditional values. Below I discuss instances of this stance as it surfaces in her point of view on Walter and other family members, and also in her writing. The implications of this standpoint for Marty's relationship with Phyllis also feature in this chapter. The moralism and closed-minded attitudes common to Walter and Phyllis are inimical to the unrivalled importance Marty places on freedom of expression and individual autonomy, and on a social order committed to protecting and advancing such freedoms. At the same time, Marty demonstrates a self-reflexiveness and a readiness to explore and voice her emotions, if not a self-critical tendency. As she engages with emotions – both her own feelings, and the feelings of people around her – Marty deepens a narrative in *The Little Company* about selfhood, and about the nuances and tensions within the Self and the personality.

Marty's story, like Gilbert’s, includes recollections of her past, especially the narrow, insular environment of her childhood. Within that environment, the expectation was that Marty and Phyllis, as females, would take on domestic roles; additionally, their patterns of conduct were governed, at least in theory, by narrow moral codes centred around piety and obedience. As a girl, Marty had recognised and resented the way her independence was curtailed when her brothers were free to go where they pleased. In her family roles as daughter, wife and sibling, and in her writing, Marty displays a characteristic independence of spirit. Articulate and imaginative, she is forthright in speaking her mind, especially when she detects hypocrisy, or hidden motives, in others. In such ways, as I show in this chapter, Marty's individuality becomes apparent. Marrying within herself both a rebelliousness and a reflexive
capacity, Marty has forged a path through the repressive, confining atmosphere that dominated her youth.

The following investigation of Marty Ransom’s emotional household proceeds incrementally, moving back and forth across a range of different excerpts from the novel. The first section takes up questions about Marty’s family relationships, and the perceptive, unequivocal habits of mind she typically brings to them. The animosity between she and Phyllis is discussed. The second part of the chapter extends further into Marty’s critical reflexive capacity, as well as the scepticism she demonstrates in her political analysis and creative role. Finally, I consider insights revealed in Marty’s reflections on a decisive shift effected in her understanding and experience of history, keeping in mind Heller’s ideas about contingency and individuality.

**Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity – Knowledge and Emotion in Marty Ransom’s Family Ties**

In this chapter, as in the last one, the role and nature of feelings is explicated through the depiction of a fictional character as she goes about her life. Marty Ransom, like her older brother, invites reflection on Heller’s model of the modern subject as an interpreting and evaluating being, with a central capacity to cultivate value preferences in the course of everyday, and non-everyday, actions and exchanges. In her writing in this area, Heller outlines a dialogue between subject and society, involving a narrativising by the social actor of her own singular perspective and experience. A person’s autobiography, in Heller’s work, constitutes an authoritative account of what is, more broadly, a continuing narrative of selfhood, a true representation of the person’s idiosyncratic worldview, encompassing of beliefs, aptitudes, desires, ideals etc. Feeling as well as thought is intrinsic to the subjective hermeneutics outlined by Heller. Heller prioritises in particular the social actor’s relationship to those attributes, conditions and conventions which are widely accepted, often unquestioningly, in the world at large. The relationship to given social norms and customs is of decisive significance in determining whether or not the person develops a form of reflexive individuality of the kind Heller identifies in her writing on the individual personality.
These are questions Marty Ransom's character illuminates directly, through her decisions, actions and relationships, and also indirectly, through her understanding of the various personalities encompassed within her family. Between she and Nick, for instance, there is a longstanding point of difference centred on the nature of Nick's commitment to socialism and the socialist movement, such that all other ideological standpoints are rejected in toto. Marty can match Nick with her own incisive and impassioned stance, and she is a stubborn and articulate critic of her brother's, as well as an astute observer. Her knowledge of her brother (as with all her siblings), has been gained over a lifetime: she is five years older than Nick, and his infancy coincided with the years following their mother's death.

At a dinner at the family's mountain cottage, Marty catches sight of Nick's face – set, as it usually is, in a note of impatient anger. He has gaunt cheekbones, a large, thin mouth and square chin, and thick black eyebrows 'halted by the two deep, frowning furrows between his eyes' – all recognisable Massey family features, which have taken an accentuated form in Nick. Marty sees in Nick's characteristic expression something of his 'uncompromising attitude to life'. Pondering whether a person's character can be accurately interpreted from his features, she judges Nick to appear 'both ascetic and at least potentially fanatic.' Marty is struck by the parallel between Nick's standpoint and their father's religious stance. While she recognises that Nick's creed puts Marx and Lenin in the place Walter had reserved for the Bible, Nick's attitude nonetheless seems to her to be 'curiously reminiscent of the old man's remorseless and immovable conviction.' She thinks of Nick as a 'modern evangelist', who is equally as wedded to his 'sternly scientific' corpus of facts and data as Walter had been to the 'Scriptural thunder' with which he had 'rebuked the unbeliever'. Nick is 'tireless, self-denying, austere in his personal habits, a stripper-away of what he regarded as inessentials, a condemning of complacency, a voice crying indefatigably in the wilderness of political inertia' – a description that conveys a stance of righteousness as well as a proselytising impulse. What is also telling, in Marty's eyes, is the fact that this likeness to their father is one Nick doesn’t accept or acknowledge.

He would not, his sister knew, have been willing to see himself as a spiritual descendant of John the Baptist. Yet listening to him speak from a platform,
hearing him exhort the incurious to ask, hearing him urge the heedless to wake up, for the New Order was just round the corner, she heard also the echo of a voice saying Repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.²

With this description, Marty evokes the dogmatism and moralism she knew only too well from her childhood. She is a stubborn critic of such unrelenting fervency, be it in Walter or in Nick, judging it to be incompatible with respect for human diversity and complexity. Not only does Nick resist any comparison with Walter, but, of the three siblings, it is Nick who most bitterly and ruthlessly condemns their father's creed.

These reflections by Marty about Nick speak of their familial ties and intimate knowledge of each other, and patterns of relating to each other. Her stance bears upon the progressive ideological values she shares with both Nick and Gilbert, and the wartime conflict which has lent new urgency to their goals and ideals. The criticisms Marty lays at Nick's door in the above excerpt are made silently, to herself, but the themes in question surface frequently in the family's conversations. Her criticisms of Nick are summed up in the charge, made in a later exchange in the story, that he possesses a "gramophone mind ... turn him on with a word, and he’ll play the whole thing through for you".³ Yet ultimately, Marty’s perspective on her younger brother’s radical views is one of respect. While his ideological narrowness and the 'dangerous flavour of bigotry' in his political methods arouses Marty's fear and anger, she also recognises the essential integrity of Nick’s stance, ‘for daring to apply his theory to life ... for daring to present his faith as something that might, and must be practised as well as professed’.⁴ Both Marty and Gilbert consider such moral and intellectual courage to have been conspicuously absent in their father’s case.⁵

The scene outlined above is revealing of Nick’s character, and also of Marty’s. While their conversations are commonly highly charged and even combative, as is conveyed in the flavour of Marty’s criticisms as outlined above, those exchanges are neither meant, nor taken, as a personal attack. In the political ground shared by both of them, their own personal

² Dark, Little Company, 33.
³ Dark, Little Company, 147.
⁴ Dark, Little Company, 33.
⁵ Dark, Little Company, 39.
interests and needs have relatively little place: the questions they continually come back to, and which frame their ongoing dialogue, relate to issues of political reform and effecting change. Yet at the same time, Marty’s reflections are very centrally concerned with who she knows Nick to be as an individual. Her response to Nick takes in the quality of his characteristic emotional habits – conveyed in his air ‘of having a mind full of grim and dammed-back furies’ – and also the fact that his actions reveal him to have the strength of his own convictions. In these ways, Marty’s reflections throw light on her brother’s personality, as well as her own, while also suggesting patterns of interaction and exchange common among the siblings. The similarities between Marty and Nicks’ personalities become obliquely apparent: it is this likeness that sees them match each other as robust conversationalists. The anger Marty reads in Nick’s face finds a parallel in her own character, as her reference to family likenesses implicitly suggests. In Marty's case, anger is less the key note of her personality, than a persistent yet nuanced element of her emotional palette.

Shared creative and political ideals, as well as a shared past, underscore Marty's ties to Gilbert. Concern for the fate of the individual in an age riven by conflict and turmoil is a constant driver for both of them, as is belief in an open society and vibrant culture. To write, for each of them, is to hold up a mirror to society, and to address the issues and problems people face in their daily lives; these creative objectives attest to their beliefs in the important role played by the fiction writer in a healthy democracy. For Gilbert and Marty, this is an aim – as well as an article of faith – connected to the unreceptiveness of their childhood environment to such expression, and the narrow traditional values that had dominated their family home. The two siblings had initially taken up writing in a spirit of secrecy and jealous protectiveness, vaguely alarmed at the demanding, insistent nature of this new urge within themselves, sure only of the need to indulge surreptitiously an impulse which had 'sprung from themselves' and of which their parents would not approve. In a household in which an atmosphere suffused with guilt had fostered 'the pitiable, lonely secrecy of bewildered childhood', exploring the

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6 Dark, Little Company, 33
world of words by writing poetry, as they had then done, had offered not only rewards and insights, but ultimately a different way of understanding the world.\(^7\)

As we saw in Chapter Five, both Marty and Gilbert recognise a basic dissimilarity between them on matters of expression, and in terms of what each sets out to voice, and the ways they do so. Marty observes Gilbert's overall economy with language, in the context of their problems with writer's block, and his 'buttoned up' demeanour. Gilbert's self-contained temperament is familiar to Marty, as it is to all the family. During the family meal in which Marty muses over Nick and his uncompromising personality, she reflects as follows about her elder brother:

He was unaware of awkward moments. A silent company, he presumed, was a company which did not desire conversation, and was quite within its rights.\(^8\)

The family meal which Gilbert and Marty and the others are partaking of is uncharacteristically quiet, and Marty, reflecting on why this is, thinks of how Walter's death has, for many of those present, drawn their minds back to the past. In Gilbert's case, as the above quotation suggests, such silence also reflects the tenor of his personality. Conversely, she observes of Nick, who at that moment appears in the doorway, that 'the past never held his attention for more than an impatient moment'.\(^9\) Intimately attuned to her brothers' emotional habits, and closely engaged with the behaviour of the group as a whole, Marty thus reads what Heller calls the language of feeling displayed by those present, interpreting, in this instance, what is not said. Her reflections convey the thoughtful and pensive quality of Gilbert's demeanour, while suggesting a more restless tone to Nick's response.

It is characteristic of Marty and Gilberts' relationship – a collaborative bond centred largely on their writing, in which Marty is a confidante to her reserved elder brother – that the above reference to Gilbert's obliviousness to awkward moments is more or less without criticism of his personality or behaviour. Insofar as there is an element of judgment implied in

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\(^7\) Dark, *Little Company*, 39.

\(^8\) Dark, *Little Company*, 32.

the fact that the observation is made in the first place, this pertains not only, or even primarily, to Gilbert’s character, but rather to Marty’s way of seeing things. In particular, it speaks to her perspective on and role in social exchange and personal relationships. The immunity which Gilbert seems to display to the dynamics of that process of interaction and dialogue would be unthinkable in Marty’s world, which is closely shaped by her familial experience (in ways Gilbert’s world is not), and in which the managing of human relationships assumes an integral part.

The excerpts about Marty’s character discussed above demonstrate themes about selfhood and individuality salient to what Heller terms subjective hermeneutics. Heller outlines an interpretive act – of an idea, a text, a person, an event etc – which is expressive, to a greater or lesser degree, of one’s values, beliefs, patterns of reasoning and judgment, and emotions. As Heller puts it, the subjective (modern) being ‘establishes a personal, individual and unique relation’ to intersubjectivity.\(^\text{10}\) The social actor is both an interpreting being, and she is herself the subject of interpretation, by others and also by herself. A person’s emotional expression is a primary guide in the judgments formed by others of her attitudes and character. Additionally, a social actor’s basic emotional habits – those feelings and feeling habits bound up with her personality – are commonly a significant influence upon the meaning she derives from one or other experience.

These ideas about patterns of judgment and evaluative stances, and the emotional sentiments associated with them, resonate with Marty’s reflections on and responses to her two brothers. Her train of thought takes in her father’s influence in their lives in a way that casts light on the exchange between innerliness and social environment, both in relation to the dispositions she knows to be central to Nick and Gilbert, and also more self-reflexively, as a topic of interest in its own right. Her hermeneutics recall Heller’s argument that ‘subjectivity comes about through the self-reflexivity of the subject’\(^\text{11}\), with intersubjectivity the necessary glue, as it were, holding the process of self-creation, and self-furthering, together.

\(^{10}\) Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 50.
\(^{11}\) Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 50.
Questions about hermeneutics, and the ways emotion may guide, as well as undermine, judgments and actions, are also relevant to the acrimonious relationship between Marty and Phyllis. During a conversation with Aunt Bee and Gilbert, Marty comes to a realisation about her sister-in-law's character that affects how she thinks about Phyllis and her situation, and see her change her own patterns of behaviour in relation to her sister-in-law. The account of Marty's altered standpoint on Phyllis – part of an extended scene that takes place at the family’s mountain cottage in the weeks following Walter’s death – also provides insight into her own emotional household.

In the passage of the novel in question, Marty's feelings about her sister-in-law, and her memories of the enmity between them as children, come to the fore in response to an innocent remark made by Aunt Bee about knitting. Marty and Bee, together with Gilbert, are sitting around the fireplace in the drawing room at the family's cottage. Bee declines Marty's suggestion that she work on her knitting, confessing to Marty her shame-faced reaction to Phyllis's latest knitting project – a pair of "ugly khaki socks" hanging over a nearby chair. The socks are clearly being made for the war effort, and Bee is struck by the frivolous nature of her own project, a 'skittish bed jacket'. Phyllis' socks are evidently pursued with more zeal than skill, something both Bee and Marty observe but refrain from commenting on. Marty closes her eyes with a 'glimmer of amusement' at this reference to Phyllis and her knitting. For Marty, Phyllis's well intended but ultimately fruitless effort to aid their men who are away fighting stands in a long line of her sister-in-law's unrealised endeavours. The imperviousness Phyllis demonstrates to the knowledge of her own failures, and the air of righteous virtue she routinely demonstrates, exasperates and aggravates Marty, as it does Gilbert, and also other family members.

Marty's eyes closed again over a glimmer of amusement. Phyllis and her socks! How Aunt Bee must be wondering, with her innocent inquisitiveness, why Gilbert had ever married such a tiresome, unattractive woman! Sometimes she marvelled herself, until she remembered that strange childhood of

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bewilderment and repression into which Phyllis had been so suddenly introduced.\textsuperscript{13}

Thinking of the arch-conservative beliefs and customs that had held sway in their childhood, Marty's mind turns to the social and religious traditions that had determined and shaped her mother's maternal activities, as well as her work as a missionary in the islands. To Marty, the gender roles and conventions that had shaped the lives of both her mother and stepmother seem painfully limited and unpromising. At home, Marty's mother had been effectively a 'housekeeper', attendant upon the material needs of her children. Reflecting on the religious vocation undertaken by her mother and stepmother, Marty recalls the many 'comings and goings' of island boats she had attended as a child with her father. In Marty's eyes, looking back with the political insights gained in recent years, it no longer seems sufficient to evaluate that religious role in terms of the individual effort of any single missionary, no matter how assiduously he or she may have worked. The missionising role, as she had experienced it through her family, had also had another aspect, to do with trade and financial gain. Thus, Marty envisages the island boats she had attended as a child with her father, 'bearing Bibles and merchandise, missionaries and traders, Christians and copra, God and Mammon'. For Marty, the memory in question has become inseparable from a fundamental moral conflict inherent in the role of missionary. When Bee admits that she had "always felt sorry for the natives", Marty silently agrees.

The circumspect, contemplative tone evident in these cogitations by Marty on the values of the previous generation, from which she is removed by some three decades, is nowhere to be found in her memories of actually living through a 'childhood of bewilderment and repression'. Marty thinks of how her stepmother had seen 'nothing amiss in this unholy and unnatural association' between religious faith and commercial gain. A 'worthy' woman, she had 'done her duty according to her lights' with 'pagan islanders' and also with 'three motherless children.' This had led Marty to dismiss her 'both as a missionary and as a foster-parent; but Phyllis was a different matter'. As Marty stares into the fire, her mind back in the

\textsuperscript{13} Dark, Little Company, 22.
world of her childhood, she reflects that Phyllis had ‘given her her first lesson in hatred’. The text continues:

Why had she hated Phyllis so? Partly, perhaps, because Phyllis had courted Walter Massey so assiduously. “I wasn’t jealous”, Marty thought with detachment. “I disliked Father too much to value his good opinion. I suppose I thought of Phyllis as a person with one foot in the enemy camp. A quisling.” She saw her father with his hand on a fair, curly head. “Phyllis is my little sunbeam!”

Marty here turns her gaze unequivocally on the hatred she had felt for Phyllis as a girl, and equally dispassionately she recalls her dislike of her father. Her words, particularly the reference to an enemy camp, and her description of Phyllis as a quisling, convey the tangled skein of the Massey’s family ties, and the divisions and polarisation characteristic of that environment. Marty had intuitively opposed the traditional religious values and moral codes Walter had held to, including his stance on women’s roles. Marty’s rejection of what her father stood for had implicitly shaped her feelings about Phyllis, who had seemed to embrace Walter’s world-view. For Marty, that alliance between her father and her step-sister is symbolised in the mental picture of Walter issuing his blessing on Phyllis, as with his hand on her head he dubs her his “little sunbeam”. The image is one of parental affection in which there is a central, underlying subordinating impulse. The phrase, ‘little sunbeam’, conveys, to Marty’s way of seeing things, the ephemeral gender role to which Phyllis had effectively been assigned.

Marty has become highly attuned to the emotional tensions Phyllis labours under. When Bee gently enquires whether Marty had been properly looked after as a girl, and whether Phyllis had been a “nice playmate”, Marty reels at Bee’s words. Her train of thought goes as follows:

Poor self-righteous Phyllis, raised in sentimental godliness, working so hard at being a good, Christian child, a little sunbeam! Poor Phyllis, always yearning, craving, fishing for attention and affection; always blundering and intruding, romancing and falsifying! She reflected that in their home, as in every home where the child-adult relationship is limited to “don’t” and “did you brush your teeth?” there was a subterranean emotional life which the grown-ups never

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14 Dark, Little Company, 23.
suspected – except when they saw some eruption it caused. How surprised they were then – how shocked!  

Marty has long had the measure of her older step-sister. Thinking still of the hatred Phyllis had aroused in her, Marty’s thoughts turn to the repressive quality to their home life at Glenwood, and the ‘subterranean emotional life’ among the children which had been its corollary. In reply to Bee, she murmurs vaguely “We were fed and washed and combed”. She reminds Gilbert of their school mistress, Miss Plunkett, of whom he says, “Not one single qualification except gentility. She taught us what an isthmus was, and some simple arithmetic, and “The Stately Homes of England”, and – what else? To recite the rivers of New South Wales from north to south.” Miss Plunkett had tried without success to “make snobs” of Gilbert and Marty. This failure had been due partly, Marty points out, to the fact that Miss Plunkett’s views had been increasingly out of step with a liberalising element then taking hold in society:

“I suppose it was about the time when the air was beginning to be less charged with snobbery. And there were the Dodds. They lived in that little hovel that used to be grandfather’s groom’s cottage before he sold that bit of land – you remember, Aunt Bee?” She laughed. “We weren’t supposed to play with them – I could never understand why. Now I realise that though there was never any Mr Dodd there was somehow always a baby. The eldest was Sally. She was my bosom friend.”  

Marty’s recollections of her childhood convey a social order in the throes of change, in which previously unquestioned codes of respectability and moralism were giving way to a more open social order, in which the air was “less charged with snobbery”. Class structures and hierarchies are shown to have been breaking down, along with the importance attached to maintaining appearances and preserving the status quo for its own sake. Strict norms of female virtue and propriety had retained their influence in Marty’s childhood, however – part of a prevailing atmosphere in the Massey household which had been hostile to discussion, questioning and free expression. Her thoughts return to Phyllis:

And Phyllis, always following and prying. Always trying to get herself included in the games, admitted to mysteries and whispered secrets. And then, rejected,

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15 Dark, Little Company, 24-25.
16 Dark, Little Company, 25.
running off to her mother with tales, covering her betrayal from herself by pretending that she had a duty towards Marty — naughty, disobedient little Marty who mixed with undesirable companions!\(^{17}\)

This passage outlines a scenario familiar to Marty from her youth, in which Phyllis, rebuffed when she sought to join in Marty’s games with her friends, as she invariably was, would somehow ensure that thereafter her mother and step-father were aware of Marty’s friendships with children from local families. Such friendships had been prohibited among the Massey children by Walter and his wife. Phyllis would tell herself she was doing the right thing by her step-sister, a moral sleight of hand inherently linked to her narrow identification as ‘a good, Christian child’, and a certain slavish dutifulness which resulted from that identification. These actions by Phyllis, and others like them, had over time contributed to her step-sister’s animosity and resentment.

Marty ... found that even now she still cherished a sense of injury against Phyllis for having provoked all through those childhood and adolescent years, her worst, her most unlovely qualities. Phyllis had never been a match for her. Her own naturally sharp tongue had developed a razor edge for wounding. Her quick wits, her instinct for seeing into motives and hidden impulses had found no better outlet in those days than scheming for Phyllis’s humiliation and discomfiture.\(^{18}\)

Marty’s words make apparent a clash between her own defiant, forthright temperament and Phyllis’s tendency to obfuscate and need to always be right. Marty’s propensity for ‘scheming for Phyllis’s humiliation and discomfiture’ is apparent as she recalls having exacted revenge when the opportunity arose:

That sewing class! Phyllis incorrigibly clumsy-fingered, slaving over her botched sampler, and herself, bright-eyed with malice, manoeuvring for a seat just opposite, her own sampler, neat and smooth, with every stitch correctly placed, should be consistently visible to Phyllis’ resentful and sometimes tearful eyes!\(^{19}\)

In this passage, Marty’s youthful moral reckoning is shown to have gone unfettered by reflection except for a native sense of justice: her inflicting of injury had been wilful and

\(^{17}\) Dark, Little Company, 25.
\(^{18}\) Dark, Little Company, 26.
\(^{19}\) Dark, Little Company, 26.
stealthy. Even as a girl, Marty had viewed with resentment the role expected of her of domestic helpmeet. Yet she was keenly aware that her own aptitude for chores such as sewing and cooking, which she could do easily, had been a continuing source of chagrin and envy for Phyllis, who had no such talent. She herself had paid the price for Phyllis’s ceaseless striving to fulfil the expectations which had prevailed in Walter’s household around female virtue, heedless of her own deeper motivations and feelings. Hence, without saying a word, in their sewing class Marty had played on her step-sister’s self-deception and vulnerabilities. In this way, the tasks and paraphernalia of the domestic domain had served as props and cues in the battle between the two sisters.

Yet as she reflects, Marty recognises another aspect of Phyllis’s behaviour:

Now that she was grown-up she could see the pathos of a human being who wanted so badly to be loved and admired – and never was; who wanted to excel, and always failed; who worshipped efficiency, deftness, brilliance, wit and learning, and who remained bungling, clumsy, dull, slow of speech, and hopelessly muddle-headed.

Marty here recognises an inevitability to Phyllis’s actions and conduct: in essential respects, her control over her choices is undermined by a deep-seated internal conflict, and related misconception of her own personality. The pathos inherent in Phyllis’s predicament triggers a feeling on Marty’s part very like pity – a sentiment which in general is conspicuous by its absence from Marty’s emotional palette. It is decisive in terms of the action it prompts from Marty. Catching sight of Phyllis’s knitting – the ‘mud-coloured socks’, with the heel ‘in a mess’ – Marty pulls herself up:

There’s no excuse for me now, she told herself sternly. I understand now that she must have her compensations. If she can be nothing else, she can be a martyr – can one grudge her that? 20

Marty throws her half-smoked cigarette into the fire and gets up to offer Phyllis a hand in the kitchen.

20 Dark, Little Company, 26.
Feelings shape and are shaped by judgment in especially subtle – and in some cases, decidedly unsubtle – ways, in the scenes discussed above. Marty’s unflinching honesty is apparent both in her initial show of cruelty towards Phyllis - the intentional, calculated nature of her actions in the sewing class - and in her current appraisal of her own standpoint and conduct. The vehemence of the emotions in question, particularly of Marty’s hatred and spiteful malice, is forcefully felt, yet at the same time the reader stands back, to some degree, from the feelings in question, as Marty does. The detached nature of Marty's hermeneutic reflections is revealing of the family situation that aroused her emotions in the first place. The scenes recounted above show two temperamentally incompatible siblings whose home environment required and engendered an outward degree of civility and self-control. They can be understood to be part of each other's emotional household in a powerfully negative way.

At the heart of these extracts of the novel is Marty’s engagement with the animosity Phyllis has always aroused in her. As a girl, Marty had intuitively responded to how her step-sister had fulfilled the norms around femininity and womanhood which prevailed in their family home, norms that had also been decisive for Marty’s own life and future. As a sibling of a similar age and the same gender, Phyllis’s conduct and outlook were of much greater personal significance to Marty - a ‘different matter’ - than were those of her parents. From Marty’s perspective, Phyllis was not only ineffectual, irritating and lacking in self-awareness, but also sanctimonious and self-righteous, given to adopting the moral high ground out of a stubborn sense of always being in the right, rather than any more objective basis. What Marty most vehemently rejected in Phyllis’s actions was not any disloyalty to her, or that her parents knew of her working-class friends, but the element of duplicitousness in Phyllis’s actions. Phyllis’s thoughts and actions had been cloaked in a web of good intentions and pious impulses, intensified by her habitual rectitude, her ‘romancing and falsifying’. The vindictive hostility inherent in Marty’s flaunting of her sewing skills in front of her step-sister’s eyes is connected to her rejection of that hypocrisy. In these ways, the text illuminates to effect the interconnections between tasks, norms and feeling habits which Heller writes of in her work on emotional households. If, as readers, we are left in no doubt that the conflict was immediately felt for Marty and Phyllis as girls, we are also subtly reminded of how their experiences as
individuals were inseparable from the shaping influence of their environment, particularly the expectations and values stemming from their identities as females.

Additionally, the scene outlined above also pertains to questions explored by Heller regarding self-knowledge and a reflexive capacity. This centres on a turning point shown to have been reached in Marty’s point of view on her sister-in-law, and what makes her behave the way she does. That Phyllis’s inner world is troubled is never in doubt: Marty evidently considers Phyllis’s striving to fulfil her father's expectations of her as a 'good, Christian child' to have come at a high personal cost to her own psychological and moral character. Thus, Phyllis had covered her betrayal from herself when she told on Marty for playing with working class children by claiming that to do so was her duty towards her headstrong sister. These conclusions are in keeping with observations of Phyllis made by other family members, though they are voiced here in ways unique to Marty.

But what confronts Marty anew in the passages discussed above is the precise nature of the psychological conflicts which underlie Phyllis’s self-defeating behaviour and intransigent manner – the extent of those conflicts, and, importantly, their implications for Phyllis’s life and personality as a whole. Phyllis is not just unwilling, but unable, to recognise the situation she is in. Her judgment is critically flawed, and thus so too is her ability to formulate goals and aims which are commensurable with and appropriate to her personality and aptitudes, and which have a reasonable chance of success. There is an implicit curtailing of a meaningful sense of individual autonomy – the lack of a capacity to move forward in life. While Marty has been inclined to find Phyllis’s contradictions aggravating, or even wryly amusing, as in the knitting project she labours over to little effect, this realisation is of a different order. The scene closes with an instance of changed emotional housekeeping on Marty’s part, insofar as a restraining moral impulse sees her curb her readiness to behave cruelly towards Phyllis. This is in no way a narrative of redemption, nor is there any ‘softening’ in Marty’s stance on Phyllis. Rather, Marty resolves to moderate her expressions of ill-will towards Phyllis, in light of the inexorable contradictions that she recognises are in play in Phyllis’s inner world.
There is an implicit element of recognition in Marty’s about-face on Phyllis, someone she had previously seen as beyond the pale. Her new standpoint implicitly reflects a perception of Phyllis as an individual shaped, no less than she herself was, only in very different ways, by the conservative religious ideology that had prevailed in their family home, rather than as a foe and adversary, someone with ‘one foot in the enemy camp’. The narrative as a whole proceeds as a dialogue of sorts between Marty as a 40 year old, and her childhood self: thus, Marty’s altered assessment, as a ‘grown up’, of Phyllis and her situation, prompting her to bring her actions into line with the situation as she now understands it, and to intervene in what has long since become an automatic way of relating to Phyllis. Ultimately, what is foregrounded is Marty’s recognition that maturity calls for a changed pattern of behaviour than hitherto: the accent is upon her changed evaluative stance, and the reasoning process associated with it. Marty’s allegiance to her own moral codes and intuitive responses, as opposed to any external judgment, is highlighted in this incident. In these ways, while the text does not endorse the cruelty Marty showed Phyllis as a girl, the goading of her for her differences and perceived inadequacies, it sheds light on how things stood from Marty’s point of view.

A Critical Standpoint – Realising a Reflexive and Defiant Intelligence

As stated above, the unfolding wartime conflict is frequently in Marty Ransom’s thoughts. Marty’s natural spontaneity and articulacy, and her restless discontent, is further demonstrated during her exchange with her husband Richard prompted by the startling news that Nazi general, Rudolf Hess has arrived in Scotland. Marty’s initial relief as she reads the account in the daily newspaper, which asserts confidently that the demise of the Third Reich, and thus the end of the war in Europe, is imminent, soon gives way to a more critical reaction. Recognising the temptation to draw such a conclusion, Marty reminds herself that

in a disordered world you must, if you want truth, hunt for it, build it laboriously from a thousand scraps of data – and having built it, still not accept it fully, but set it aside for the confirmation or denial of time.21

21 Dark, Little Company, 79.
The stance evinced here by Marty on wartime reporting echoes the tone of Gilbert’s awakening. As Richard reads the article about Hess, he too is initially encouraged, and Marty thinks of the trials he has faced over the last few months as accounts of the London blitz had reached them. Two days earlier she had seen ‘an almost stupefied pain in his eyes’ at the news of the horrors faced by his ‘countrymen’:

“… waves of bombers streamed across London … not one moment of relief from mass bombers in the first five hours of the raid. Casualties were heavy … Famous streets became channels of fire ….” (emphasis in original)

As they discuss the significance of Hess’s presence in Britain, Marty recognises the need to tread carefully, mindful of the ‘shrinking, supersensitiveness of national pride’, which in Richard, as in as so many others, is a ‘raw, vulnerable spot!’ But she does not recoil from stating her views, putting to Richard that Hess came to the British Isles to say “‘We’ll lay off you if you lay off us while we attack Russia’.” At this, Richard, who is enduring a bout of sciatica, becomes even more ‘gaunt and wretched’ in the face than before. They confront the possibility that such a plan might meet with success, and that, as Marty puts it “‘there are people in England who would be willing to see it done’.”

Marty’s angry frustration surfaces when Richard presses her on her views as to the likelihood of this occurring:

“How should I know? Is the Red Bogey dead? How effective have the years of propaganda been?” She stood up and began to walk restlessly about the room. She stopped and asked him with sudden fury: “How long will people put up with having their minds belted about like shuttlecocks?”

That so “ugly” a plan should “‘even have been attempted’” fosters a deep horror and dismay in both of them. Marty affectionately caresses Richard’s head, taking in his ‘tired, aging face’, and thinning hair, and she leaves the room to let him try, unsuccessfully, to sleep.

In this exchange, Marty’s expression of angry frustration effectively brings into the foreground emotions latent in her conversation with Richard (and frequently also present,

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22 Dark, Little Company, 80.
23 Quotes this paragraph, Dark, Little Company, 79-83.
24 Dark, Little Company, 82-83.
explicitly or otherwise, in other political conversations among the characters). Not the least object of Marty’s despair and contempt on this instance, as in many others in the story, is how current circumstances have had the effect of reducing individuals to parroting received wisdom on these difficult topics, their minds “belted about like shuttlecocks”. What triggers an angry, despairing fury in Marty is the way people have prioritised an external value or influence ahead of their own judgment and reasoning faculties – something also salient to her perception of Phyllis vis à vis traditional notions of piety and virtue. Marty’s voicing of her strong, negative feelings at this latest turn of events is depicted as a way of letting off steam in the face of extraordinary wartime circumstances about which there is little any of them can actually do, a frustration accentuated for her and for Gilbert by their writers’ block. This conversation between she and Richard also makes apparent the foundation of personal affection, trust and sympathy between them, ties which sustain their expressions of uncertainty and anxiety, and their voicing of different points of view on the events taking place.

The good will and affection between Marty and Richard has been maintained in the face of the recent divergence of their respective ideological viewpoints. Their marriage had been founded partly on common political values: when they met, during the early 1920s, they had shared hopes for the advance of a more just and open society, perceiving, in ‘a world come safely through agonies which had made it safe for democracy [...] a future which seemed to offer no reason for doubts.’ Over the ‘ten, tormented years’ that followed, fascism had taken hold in different countries and another war seemed inevitable. Marty and Richards’ shared vision of the future had slowly eroded, and Marty had come to realise that ‘the man she had married had been mature when she met him’. Marty sees a necessary place for socialism within the existing political and economic order, whereas Richard holds to more orthodox Liberal views. That their marriage has endured attests to the ‘mutual forbearance of their love for each other’, and also, and more specifically, Richard’s tolerance, humour and sincerity, traits which have acquired renewed importance in light of Marty’s ‘impatient self’. 25

25 Quotes this paragraph, Dark, Little Company, 80-81.
The pressures common among those living on the home front in wartime, as civilians experiencing events at one remove, is palpable in extracts from *The Little Company* like the ones outlined above. In Marty’s spontaneous voicing of her angry frustration about a world in which people’s minds are routinely “belted about like shuttlecocks”, her strain and discontent comes briefly and decisively to the fore. Marty’s singular voice, which is grounded in an independence of mind and spirit, strikes a chord with Heller’s model of the individual personality. Heller highlights the importance of a conscious, active engagement with one’s emotions, and a capacity to stand back from those feelings rather than identifying with them. To set a distance between oneself and one’s feelings on the basis of chosen values, rather than identifying with those norms and expectations given in one’s social environment, is part of exercising responsibility in one’s subjective hermeneutics, and being accountable for one’s emotions and emotional habits, and those judgments and actions which issue from or pertain to them. The individual personality demonstrates a capacity for secondary learning, Heller also writes, when, as part of this subjective dialogue, and guided by self-knowledge, he intervenes when necessary in his own habitual patterns of emotional responses and behaviour in favour of those habits he judges positively.

In Marty Ransom’s case, a volatility and impatience of temperament coexists with, and is at critical junctures guided by, a habit of bringing to bear her deliberative judgment on one or other person, situation or action, including her own actions, that comes to her attention or in which she is otherwise involved. Her relationship with Phyllis, as discussed above, bears out these points. The spontaneous fury that erupts during her exchange with Richard reflects a certain free-thinking quality to Marty’s political consciousness, an emphatic conviction that individual expression and judgment must not be curtailed by social and political traditions and conventions. A spirit of angry defiance shapes her standpoint, reflective of her continuing protest against confining social conventions and their toll on human endeavours.

The rebelliousness which is central to Marty’s emotional palette also finds expression in her writing. As is the case with Gilbert, Marty has turned her attention inward in response to
the drying up of her writing, seeking clues as to where the problem lies. Her reflections reveal a mind inclined to question, with a vital spontaneity of imagination:

Marty’s restless, energetic but untidy mind saw things in flashes, in pictures, in metaphor; she was content to do so, recognising these lightning-sketches of her brain as a short-cut technique of thinking not without its value in a temperament which she admitted to be volatile, and impatient of discipline.26

The interplay between Marty’s emotional palette and her habits of mind is made explicit in passages like this one. She has a restless intelligence and an ‘energetic but untidy mind’. At issue here is her candour and articulacy. Also salient is the informality and creativity of her habits of mind, attributes foreshadowed above by Gilbert. In the absence of an aptitude for patient, disciplined analysis, it is the fund of apt and vivid metaphors, the pictures and ‘lightning-sketches’ that readily issue from her mind, that is primary in her reasoning.

Such pictures, she knew, were useful to her, for they were her brain’s only illumination; she merely laughed unabashed, when she caught herself making a metaphor to explain her use of metaphor – showing herself feeling her way through a dark room, striking matches as she went, seeing a chair, the corner of a table, a shelf of books leap from obscurity for a moment, and then going forward more confidently in the darkness for having seen so vividly even a fragment of the whole.27

In these passages, Marty articulates something of her experience of consciousness and of Self. Her capacity to quickly grasp and articulate things, especially human qualities, motives and desires, is likened to a form of cognitive illumination by which she may light up ‘even a fragment of the whole’. The description conveys an imaginative reach characteristic of her thought processes. She further reflects that what has broken down presently is not the flow of mental lightning-sketches, but rather ‘the thinking which must supplement her flashes, and through which alone she could build them into a coherent idea and project them on the outer world’. Her ‘receiving’ continues with alacrity: the failure lies in ‘her transmission’. The wartime emergency they are living through compounds for Marty the urgency of overcoming her current inability to communicate with and engage her readers on the ideas of importance

26 Dark, Little Company, 89.
27 Dark, Little Company, 89.
to her. Yet she recognises that that conservative, discordant environment is itself a powerful inhibiting factor on her work as a writer, as is the case with Gilbert. Marty’s reflections attest to a core of imaginative conviction which is central to her self-expression, in which self-enquiry and self-reflection also play an important part. They suggest a convergence of imagination and intellect, an understanding borne of both intuition and analysis.

Thus, as a writer and more broadly, Marty demonstrates an inventiveness connected to the immediacy and topicality which Gilbert identifies in her work. Her originality, in turn, is related to Marty’s readiness to challenge authority, and her rejection of parochial, reactionary political values. This is apparent in her satirical account of an elderly gentleman by the name of ‘Mr Blenkinson’ – a character who is a thinly disguised portrait of her father. Mr Blenkinson’s establishment views are reflected in the newspaper he favours, the ‘Daily Messenger’, said to have ‘brought to a high degree of perfection the art of saying nothing with great dignity and conviction’.

Any unwise outburst from some irresponsible person against established custom was gravely rebuked. Any suggestion that all was not for the best in the best of all possible worlds was swiftly damned with the word ‘agitation’. Any anxious advocacy of reform was treated with benign indulgence, which never failed to include a nostalgic sigh for unattainable Utopias.28

Marty sketches the contours of Mr Blenkinson, as observed by his daughter. Leaning down to collect the paper, his movements have ‘a certain stateliness’, and as he sits down to read, he meticulously cleans his spectacles. The contents of the paper itself invite, not a ‘greedy gobbling of news’ but rather ‘a sober, leisurely (and indeed sometimes somnolent) perusal’. The loyalty of the newspaper’s readers – the ‘Mr Blenkinsons of the community’ – is a matter of long established custom. The paper invites the unquestioned faith of its readers, Marty opines in her essay, much as the Bible does, affirming the status quo through swift rejection of any developments which might be unsettling or unconventional:

That useful cliché about confusing liberty with licence had not yet become a joke; it had many years of life still before it, in which to abash the simple-minded

28 Dark, Little Company, 123.
by suggesting that their timid groping after a broader culture and a truer democracy was merely an undisciplined grabbing for indulgence.\textsuperscript{29}

In judgments of character like the above, there is something of the driving force of Marty’s angry frustration, directed at constricting social norms and those who uphold and identify with them. Her polemic is aimed at Mr Blenkinson’s pompous earnestness and mannered demeanour, and the world-view, particularly the reactionary political stance, evinced by him and others like him. Marty’s essay depicts an individual, and a culture, characterised by complacency and smug self-satisfaction. The image of benign authority projected by this establishment figure is shown to centre on a deep hostility to change or progress of any kind. The trust he garners from his newspaper readers, in which the utter respectability and rectitude inherent in his persona is an important factor, is predicated on their trust that he will never shock their moral and political prejudices, or call on them to in any way examine their way of life and the ideals and beliefs underpinning it. Marty’s satirical essay on Mr Blenkinson recalls the account of her childhood relations with Phyllis, which also demonstrates Marty’s sensitivity to ulterior motives and rejection of hypocrisy. Marty is no respecter of persons, nor of the conventions and norms of the polite society in which she grew up.

\textbf{Living with Contingency, ‘Living in History’}

No one had ever suggested to her that she was living in history; no one had ever analysed or dissected those years for her, or even in her hearing, so that she might look at them, and at herself inhabiting them, with comprehension. She had been forced, long after she grew up, to learn laboriously from books, the significance of events in which she had participated; and she reflected now, turning restlessly on her pillow, that the intelligence of children was grossly under-estimated.\textsuperscript{30}

Finally, the contours of Marty Ransom’s emotional household, in which an impassioned defiance is combined with a critical, self-aware impulse, can be traced in her reflections on ‘living in history’. An awareness and understanding of the events, personalities and ideas shaping their lives and their times infuses Marty’s thought processes, as it does Gilbert’s; for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[29] Dark, \textit{Little Company}, 123.
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her too, the crises of the 1930s were a catalyst for intellectual exploration of and engagement with the past. As the above quotation suggests, it is only in recent years that Marty has acquired a meaningful grasp of the age she is living through, and a sense of her own membership of her time and place.

Marty’s childhood conception of time had been uniquely shaped by a chance biographical fact, namely that she had been born on the 1st of January 1901. From her earliest years, she had acquired an unshakeable sense that ‘[t]he years belonged to her’. Thus, she had felt the new century to be ‘peculiarly own’, perceiving it to have ‘grown with her in the slow, slow tempo of their mutual childhood’. For her, the years of wartime violence from 1914 had been associated with ‘her own ignorant and rebellious adolescence’, while her coming of age and discovery of ‘life and love’, a decade later, had seemed entirely in tune with the mood of ‘the rosy, pleasure-mad years of the early twenties. The years were hers, she believed; they kept step with her’. This affinity with the passing years had proved a crucial influence on her young life: ‘A restless flesh and blood, informed with rebellion, coming to terms with life only in one secret, mystical way’. The certainties Marty’s young life had thus been imbued with had been a ‘curious abiding comfort!’ and ‘intimate source of tranquility’ in a childhood over-burdened with ‘resentments and confusions’. A feeling of being anchored in time had been an abiding part of her experience of childhood:

Its days were long, though its moments flew, things happened in dream-like isolation, events momentarily disturbed an endless flow of weeks and months, and only now she realised that a life which had then seemed so solidly inevitable, was unstable, fluid, breaking down into chaos.31

This description of Marty’s stream of consciousness recalls Heller’s description of the Self as the ‘map of the interior’. Heller conceives of the ‘subject’ in terms of ‘the singularity of your voice and that of the Other human creature’.32 The exercise of an interpretative, evaluative capacity is, for Heller, part of pulling together the strands of one’s contingent existence ‘into a personal destiny’. In Marty Ransom’s case, a certainty of self-belief is shown to have taken root in her

31 Dark, Little Company, 37.
32 Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 62.
childhood, encouraged by an inchoate sense that time was on her side. The trajectory of events over the last decade, however, has decisively unsettled Marty’s trust and assurance that she inhabits a stable world:

Now, in the cold consciousness of maturity, she saw herself as keeping step, willy-nilly, with them [the passing years], learning through the uneasy thirties worry and disillusionment and apprehension, being dragged with them, nervously, nearer and nearer to the climax, borne down with them into catastrophe.33

Marty’s political perspective had shifted upon recognising the urgent and pervasive crisis then emerging in international affairs. Her youthful conception that the years were ‘taking their colour from her’, she now realises, was not proof of some special quality unique to her, but rather of ‘the boundless egotism of childhood’. She draws a connection to the dogmatism and intolerance characteristic of her youthful environment, which had provided scant preparation for children’s navigating of the world around them, thus obliging them to learn, years later, and from books, ‘the significance of events in which they had participated.’ Marty’s indignant anger is apparent at the ‘black screen of ignorance’ kept in front of the eyes of children. Reflecting that ‘the intelligence of children was grossly under-estimated’, Marty rejects as ‘blindly fatuous’ the assumption that contemporary problems and issues are beyond their grasp. Her suspicion of the motivations behind this attitude are aroused by the ‘drapery of sentimental fondness’ enshrouding attitudes towards children.

Let the little darlings be care-free while they can! They will have to face the wicked world soon enough! Old heads on young shoulders! Keep them carefree, keep them merry, and above all, for Heaven’s sake keep them ignorant while we wreck the machinery of their lives!34

This final phrase suggests the psychological ‘machinery’ necessary for self-understanding and a grasp of the forces and dynamics shaping one’s life. While such machinery has evidently not been ‘wrecked’ in Marty’s case, her reflections demonstrate her furious anger and a sense of wasted years. Marty thinks of the stumbling efforts she and Gilbert had made growing up –

33 Dark, Little Company, 37-38.
34 Dark, Little Company, 38.
their floundering and rebelling, in the face of their own ignorance, and of stifling social conventions and prejudices:

What were we taught of the fundamental relationship between man and man? There were “nice” people – and others! We weren’t exactly told – not in so many words – that the others were nasty; that was left to the logic of implication. But bad as it was, it might have been worse. It would have been worse thirty years earlier, just as it’s a little better now, thirty years later.35

Both an angry frustration and an analytic detachment are apparent in these passages of reflection by Marty. Her criticisms are directed at a Victorian attitude of sentimentality towards children, in the context of a social environment dominated by tradition and a narrow code of respectability. She shows an angry dissatisfaction about the inhibiting, distorting effects of the standpoint in question. The strength of her reaction owes something to the fact that she was herself a product of the assumptions and preconceptions in question – and that she has subsequently reclaimed her adult self from those values, and gotten to grips with their impact on her subjective world. This account of her dawning consciousness of herself as a person ‘living in history’ records an important chapter in her challenging of and distancing herself from the mental and emotional habits she had acquired growing up.

As Marty rails against a system that had sterilised independent thought, her reflections speak to the heart of the form of reflexive individuality embodied in Heller’s model of the individual personality. Heller highlights a capacity to reconcile the subjective nature of one’s feelings with understanding of the shared temporal, spatial or other influences revealed in those feelings. Such socially and historically informed self-awareness is, for Heller, a precondition for the exercise of a critical distancing from customs and norms, and of a capacity to develop a perspective beyond and outside that which is taken for granted in one’s environment. It is in this light that Marty’s hermeneutics are informed by historical consciousness. Marty is shown to have got to grips with what, in Heller’s terms, is a paradigmatic experience of modern contingency. Marty rejects as false those certainties advanced in the social order of her childhood as timeless and beyond questioning. Additionally,

35 Dark, Little Company, 38.
as a writer Marty holds to account those who exercise authority in the name of tradition, as in her satirising of her father’s political stance through her fictional character, Mr Blenkinson. Her anger and contempt at the unwarranted or unjust exercise of authority is apparent, as is her strong reflexive impulse concerned with comprehending her experience and perspective. Her education had left her woefully ill-prepared in the face of the dynamic, shifting nature of the global political situation of her youth. The distorting impact of the conceptions of Self and society she had acquired growing up, in an atmosphere that had been hostile to discussion and enquiry, arouses Marty’s fury and scorn. This is the rage of one reclaiming freedom and life from influences inimical to individual expression and fulfilment, a standpoint reflective of Marty’s refusal to be silenced or defined by such forces.

The experience Marty outlines here resonates with the encompassing shift in Gilbert’s intellectual and political perspective, an account of which featured in Chapter Five. In Marty’s case, her youthful conception of an equivalence between the trajectory of her own life and that of contemporary historical events had been transformed by the realisation that she too forms part of history, and that her life is unfolding within the stream of historical time. That experience, moreover, is centrally informed by its emotional dimension, as her sense of assurance and certainty – both personal and existential in nature – had come to be significantly informed by her recognition of the inherent instability characteristic of time in the modern world they inhabit. Rather than disappearing from Marty’s emotional palette, the text suggests that that confidence has taken on a new dimension and depth in light of her greater understanding of the inherently fluid, unstable world she inhabits.

Conclusion

In the same family environment as Gilbert Massey, Marty Ransom has come to voice as a novelist, and like Gilbert she is closely engaged with the developments shaping the culture and the nation. Marty’s fierce intelligence is manifest in her writing task, and in other ways. Her forthright, restless nature is in evidence, for instance, in her railing against the simplistic nature of their childhood teachings on the ‘fundamental relationship between man and man’. Astute and perceptive, and highly attuned to the motives and emotional habits of those around her,
Marty's understanding of that relationship can be seen to be both deep and broad. This chapter has built upon the account in Chapter Five of the kind of traditional and arch-conservative environment in which the Massey siblings grew up, and of the dominating presence therein of family patriarch, Walter Massey. Marty's perspective further demonstrates how Walter's influence has reached into the hearts and minds of family members, including herself, Nick and Phyllis. Seeing things through Marty's eyes, the reader also comes to recognise that her own personality is cast along very different lines, in terms of the weight of tradition and the responsibilities it brings, to Gilbert's. In important ways, her ethical code has its roots in an intuitive defiance of the inward-looking reactionary values which had prevailed in her youth, and the free-thinking sensibility her defiance had helped to foster.

Marty's creative products, like Gilbert's, attest to her involvement with questions of justice and personal freedom. But whereas for Gilbert, a sense of responsibility is inseparable from his formality and reserve, in Marty's case the pressures confronting them readily bring out her sharp intelligence and frankness. Marty is a character who is attuned to human character in all its aspects, whether positively or negatively. Thus, she astutely interprets the expression apparent on Nick's face, and articulates, by means of a blackly humorous writing style, something of her father's utter resistance to change and the element of hypocrisy in that stance (this hypocrisy on his part, centred on the fervent nature of his religious stance, make up a significant thread of Book One). These are both instances in the text of what Heller calls the language of feelings through which we express our emotions to those around us. Marty is an especially canny reader of this emotional language, and she is also aware of her own proclivities, such as her capacity for sarcasm and impatience. These qualities co-exist with her fluency and versatility of language use, which contrasts so markedly with Gilbert's laconicism, and restrained, reserved temperament. Whereas his formal, disciplined aesthetic involves an economy of words and language, and a writing style which is shorn of unnecessary elements and which implicitly speaks to the heart of those issues he chooses to write about, in Marty's case, her ability to convey ideas metaphorically allows her to explore subtle, nuanced aspects of experience - it is in this sense that her insights are dubbed 'lightning-sketches', which serve to illuminate her path, intellectually and also in other ways. Language - the main tool they employ...
as writers - hence becomes itself an expression of their emotional households, something Heller's work alerts us to.

Marty's habitual restlessness and impatience of discipline are emotional dispositions which intersect decisively with her autonomy and commitment to her own moral code, traits she shares with Gilbert and which are essential to the common ground they inhabit as writers. In Marty's case, that angry discontent also shapes her emotional household in other ways. She is resourceful in finding ways to resist and unsettle the expectations and social codes that govern her much resented domestic obligations, just as she finds ways to make her point about complex patterns of human behaviour in her dialogue and writing. Her actions towards Phyllis, as discussed above, constitute an expression of the hatred between the two sisters. At the same time, they involve a protest by Marty against the conservatism and conventionality Phyllis embodies and represents, centred on a world-view that would confine both of them to sewing and cooking and other household duties. Marty's reflections about Phyllis, and her own relationship with Phyllis, cast light on Heller's ideas about the connections between feelings and the tasks and norms associated with them in any given instance. Marty's refusal to be confined within social stereotypes and expectations, as well as her self-reflexive quality, are apparent in the way she re-evaluates her standpoint on Phyllis, and pulls herself up for allowing herself to act on the feelings of resentful anger and rancour her sister-in-law has always aroused in her.

The questions to do with restraining and regulating feelings which are central to Marty’s changed standpoint on Phyllis are also important more broadly across both Chapter Six and Chapter Five of this thesis. Heller writes that the controlling and channelling of emotions is basic to the evolution of a person’s world of feelings. It also pertains directly to emotional housekeeping. A capacity for emotional self-control is shown to take distinct forms in Marty and Gilberts’ characters. Emotional reserve is a dominant emotional disposition in Gilbert’s case. Additionally, Gilbert sublimes and channels his emotions in the course of pursuing a particular objective, the main example being the ‘strong and whole’ emotions stated to have formed over the course of his recent political education. An equivalent moment occurs for
Marty - who shows an equally strong temperamental disinclination to curb her impulses in this way - when she moves to help Phyllis with her domestic chores in the kitchen, putting aside the force of her own long-established emotional habits and preferences in doing so. Moreover, as Marty probes the causes and implications of her hatred of Phyllis, she extends her understanding of the feeling in question, and also of the place of that feeling within her world of feelings as a girl, and also currently.

Contrasting themes emerge around the representation of subjectivity associated with Phyllis Massey’s character, as depicted in this chapter from Marty’s point of view, and, in the previous chapter, from Gilbert’s perspective. The observations of Phyllis made by Marty make evident Phyllis’s troubled psyche, and they also reveal important dimensions of her character as a whole. This includes, for instance, the unquestioned faith Phyllis places in traditional religious values, and her embrace of female roles for which she has no aptitude. She strives to live up to cultural expectations of obedience and meekness which, from childhood, were expected of her as a female, even though her own character is not given to humility. Her sanctimonious and self-righteous manner are connected to her inability to stand back from her feelings. Marty’s reflections on Phyllis’ ‘romancing and falsifying’ ways are suggestive of the psychological and emotional conflicts Phyllis is prey to, something which alerts Marty to a moral dilemma in relation to her own behaviour towards her sister-in-law. For Marty, what is at issue in Phyllis’s personality are tensions that critically undermine Phyllis’s judgment and reasoning, the consequences of which tell, among other ways, in a certain ineffectiveness of action in the areas of importance to her. A crucial issue of individual autonomy, centred on the ability to make wise choices, arises in Phyllis’s character and personal situation. For Marty, for whom such independence is paramount, this results in a changed point of view on, and response to, Phyllis.

The topics discussed above contribute to the narrative of selfhood present in The Little Company. The impact, and implications, for Marty, Gilbert and Phyllis of growing up in a tightly controlled, rigid childhood environment, form a significant aspect of the story. A key difference is made apparent in the relationship which holds between art and life in Marty’s case, as
compared to Gilbert. The depth of knowledge of human character Marty draws on as a writer is inherently connected to her everyday world, and the part she plays in her family. Her keen powers of observation when it comes to social exchange and communication are salient here, as is the openness and spontaneity with which she expresses her mind, unfettered by the burdens Gilbert bears as he grapples with his responsibilities as a writer, and the mantle of public duty that role entails. Yet the need to reassess and redefine that creative role in light of their writer’s block affects her no less than it does him.

Marty’s re-evaluated sense of historical consciousness is salient in this respect, articulated as an experience of ‘living in history’. Marty’s awareness of herself as living amid conditions of change and flux resonates with Heller’s work on the contingent nature of modernity and of modern subjects. Historical/modern identity, Heller writes, is by its nature realised in a certain place and also through time, and possesses both individual and collective dimensions. Marty recognises that she is keeping step with the years, rather than vice versa – an insight illustrative of her active involvement with her times, and the assumption of responsibility for her part and place therein. Marty reaches this new equilibrium point in her understanding of herself and the world via that path of open, independent reflection and deliberation that is characteristic of her personality as a whole. Across the trajectory of scenes like this one, Marty’s qualities of fearlessness and courage become apparent. Her deep antipathy to the unjust or illegitimate exercise of authority, whether by people or institutions, and her forthright tendency to identify what she perceives as dangerous tendencies, put her inherently in accord with the qualities of the individual personality, as defined by Heller.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THROWN INTO THE WORLD: HARRY AND ALLY MUNSTER

“Looks like I’ve got a life sentence. Four kids and no money.”

“Things will get better. We’re not broke, Ally, we’re keeping up.”

She looked at him with cold fire. “We haven’t any money, not that we can spend. And the only thing that we’re keeping up that I know of is payments. You’re not working for yourself, you’re working for your creditors, the mortgage and plant and all. They’ve got a lien on your wife and children as well as on the land and house and everything. They’ve got a finger in everything we call ours and they have to be satisfied first.”

A bitter anger about her life has become a driving force in Ally Munster’s world of feelings, as is made brutally apparent in an argument she has with her husband Harry about their life on the farm, where they are raising their three children. When Ally learns she is pregnant for a fourth time, the news comes as the last straw, sparking a confrontation with Harry that lays bare the pressures borne of their straitened financial situation. As a result of their argument, the couple will leave the bush and move to the city, seeking better chances for themselves and their children. A time of personal upheaval, and also of unforeseen tragedy, the move to the city and the events leading up to that move call on an array of emotions for both Harry and Ally, as I show in this chapter.

Questions about material, as well as emotional, households are integral to the extracts of Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow discussed below, together with themes about the resources available in their management, and the needs, interests and ideals guiding the householders. Harry and Ally Munsters’ hopes and fears are central to that story. Harry himself is no stranger to discontent and disappointment, though Harry is, as a rule, one to keep his feelings to himself. Their new life in town excites deep frustrations and anxieties in Harry. He knows a sense of disillusionment and invisibility in town, particularly in the wake of the sudden death of their two year old son, Jackie. Yet he is also curious about the social order to which he...

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1 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow (hereafter Tomorrow), 62.
has brought his family. He sets about the gradual adjustment to the new and often unsettling environment in which he finds himself. Harry and Allys’ shared life as a couple features in this chapter, along with the qualities and perspectives characteristic of each of them individually.

We manage our emotional households, as we live our lives overall, mostly in conditions not of our own choosing, as Heller (following Marx) reminds us. At the same time, Heller also observes that choice plays a decisive and, in comparison to traditional societies, unprecedented role in how we respond to the circumstances and events of our lives. Heller’s work calls attention to the existential possibilities for individual agency, given the relative openness of modern conditions. Conversely, the possibilities for loss of meaning, and for alienation, are also commensurately greater. To exercise responsibility for oneself and one’s actions, in the face of this contingency, is, in Heller’s view, a precondition of development and flourishing on both individual and collective levels. Appropriating ‘species wealth’, and realising the possibilities inherent in our personalities, begin from our membership of one or other concrete social environment, and the commitments, value hierarchies and perspectives we bring to the world we live in. Those worlds, Heller recognises, are intrinsically complex and dynamic. In an early work, Heller writes that while modern conditions make possible development of the ‘human person-as-a-whole’, in practice such powers commonly unfold ‘one-sidedly in virtue of their being “distributed” by the social division of labour so that the majority of men are not able to develop certain higher order capabilities’. While Heller no longer writes of the social division of labour in these terms, the broader issues regarding freedom and justice remain critical to her work.

Issues of scarcity and wealth are interwoven through the story of Harry and Ally Munster. The Munsters get by with scant material resources, a fact which is linked to many of the situations and problems they face, as discussed in this chapter of my thesis. This includes centrally their shift to the city. That move has a different significance for each of them, reflective of their divergent standpoints on their life on the farm and their married life as a whole. Whereas Harry had not been averse to the living to be made on the farm, for Ally the

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2 Heller, ‘Towards a Marxist Theory of Values’, 20-21
move is the culmination of a desire and need to lead a different life than the one open to her on the farm. The story traces a critical change in Ally’s world of feelings, centred on the consequences of her resentful, aggrieved state of mind. Like Harry, Ally also faces continuing personal strains, and unforeseen trials, including, in her case, a harrowing encounter on a busy commuter train. For Ally, those experiences serve to radically intensify an unwillingness to see beyond her own perspective. It is from these circumstances that the story I trace in this chapter, and the story of the Munsters as a whole, begins.

Heller’s ideas about the individual and particularistic personality types are also considered in this chapter. An essential part of individuality, for Heller, involves the ability to stand back from the tasks and interests in which one is closely involved, and to examine critically the value stances and assumptions on which they are based. In this chapter, I consider the contrasting ways Harry and Ally tend to respond to the circumstances and situations they encounter, in light of Heller’s ideas about a reflexive hermeneutic capacity. As I discuss, events in Harry’s daily life often invite his dissatisfaction, and increasingly a sense of cynicism. He begins to look anew at the living on offer in the city, and to ask questions about the kind of society into which he has brought his children. He shows a need and desire to understand his experience, and in forming his own interpretations, he inherently moves towards clarifying the values of most importance to him, and realising his personality. At issue in Ally’s character, conversely, are the mounting frustrations and tensions of her everyday life and domestic roles. In the face of unforeseen events and difficulties, her mind becomes fixated on her own desires and unmet expectations. This works to the detriment of her capacity for open communication and engagement with others, and her capacity for self-reflection. In these ways, themes to do with a particularistic personality type pertain to Ally’s character, as I also discuss in this chapter.

This chapter on Harry and Ally Munster is in three inter-related sections. The chapter begins with discussion of a soliloquy by Harry in the period following the family’s move to the city, together with a reading of the account of the family’s first day in town. Then I look at Ally’s experiences some months earlier, on the day when she learns she is pregnant, including her
argument with Harry about their life on the farm. Harry’s soliloquy is once again the subject of the third, and final, part of the chapter.

Finding Oneself in a Foreign Place: Harry Munster & the City

A little farm up at Toongabbie, scratching like hell to keep going, wasn’t the way out. It was only the way out for you, but maybe it wasn’t. It was a little island of sand and the sea had got at it. It crumbled under you. It had crumbled under him. Everywhere it was crumbling under people and they were giving up and coming into the city. They couldn’t live in a tiny world and they were trying to live in a big one.³

Reckoning with the situation facing him and his family, Harry Munster thinks back to a disheartening past. Harry is sitting in his work van, eating his lunch, on the day after the birth of his son, Ben. Fatigued from the events of the night before, Harry’s thoughts roam across the recent changes in his life. Deprived of sleep, Harry has settled for a nearby lane in which to park his truck while he eats his lunch. Under normal circumstances, he searches out a local park, enjoying the ‘droughty smell of the earth, [and] soaking up the sun’, though Harry doesn’t readily voice such inclinations:

Being pleased or disappointed, or liking a bit of green weren’t things he’d admit. They were the things that got pushed to the wall, didn’t belong to the standing and status of lorry drivers.⁴

It is his work that sets the rhythm of Harry’s days in town. Harry delivers groceries for Mullangar’s Miracle Marts, a large firm of chain stores known to be the ‘[m]eanest firm in the city’. Unlike other companies, Mullangar’s hire no boys to work alongside the driver, ‘to give a hand and keep guard’. Harry would prefer a dog to a boy for company anyway, ‘A man had to be alone sometimes.’⁵ If asked, Harry joins the other drivers to share views on topics such as ‘dogs, S.P., women, engines, boasting and anecdotes’, though he thinks of the group as ‘Not much of a bunch.’ A two-up school run by one of his work-mates – ‘a bright spot in the drift’ –

³ Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 77.
⁴ Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 72.
⁵ Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 74.
reminds Harry of army days. His role as driver involves heavy demanding work, navigating of
the city’s streets, and, he has learned, various unwritten rules. After some time on the job he
came to realise that the first driver back from their rounds each day earns an extra shift. Harry
is gradually making his peace with his new routines, ‘[i]t was a job, he was getting used to it and
coming to think that way.’

As far as Harry can make out, the life on offer in Sydney is scarcely an improvement on
that which the family left behind in the bush. Up until six months earlier, Harry, who is aged in
his 30s, had run the poultry farm on the city’s outskirts which he had acquired after returning
from the front in the First World War. Harry’s lean frame and tightly drawn features speak of a
life shaped by ‘prolonged effort – an effort that antedated his physical maturity – to keep his
nose into the wind; the flesh was set and moulded upon the bones’. He had been a ‘zealot of
the Co-operative moment’ on the farm. At Mullangar’s, he has joined the Transport Union,
and also persuaded the five other drivers to do the same, with only Arnie, company storeman and
Harry’s brother-in-law, deciding ‘it was better not’ among such a small team. Harry admits to
himself that the farm had only ever afforded a bare living, and in the end it had proved
untenable: after ‘scratching like hell to keep going’, it had eventually ‘crumbled under him’. But
what Harry sees around him in this new world is far from reassuring.

Harry’s mistrust of the facelessness of the city begins with his first impressions on the
day the family arrive in Carnation Street, Darlinghurst, where they have taken rented rooms. As
Harry pulls up in his truck, the rapidly darkening dusk sky lets forth a mounting ‘rush’ of rain
and wind that sounds like ‘a procession in the narrow street, a procession that became a
rabble’. The atmosphere glowers: the flickering remains of daylight emit a ‘cold wet breath,’
with ‘every surface darkened with wet’. The gathering storm bears down on everything in its
path: ‘a white curtain flapping from a window, a white curl of water in the gutters, pedestrians
like leaves, the solitary tree straining at its roots’. Inside the family’s new residence, the
upstairs section of a terrace house, it is ‘dark as night’, with both front and back balconies

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latticed-in to expand the available living space. By candle light, Harry anxiously tends to two-year old Jackie, who is off-colour and breathing heavily. Ally explains the ‘screaming fits’ Jackie is subject to as a sign of teething – part of a normally ‘difficult babyhood’ and, to her mind ‘just another trial for their mothers’. Harry is not convinced. He plays down his rising anxiety about Jackie and the family’s future, connecting it to ‘the light, veering and flickering in the empty room’.  

The emotions Harry recognises in his wife’s expression and manner speak of an atmosphere every bit as black as the evening sky. Ally’s eyes, ‘alive in her sick, sullen face’, tell Harry that she looks to him for reassurance as to what their ‘hopes and future’ might hold. But Harry is not inclined to be sympathetic to Ally’s expectations and uncertainties. Their decision to move to the city, instigated by Ally the previous spring, had exposed a basic difference in their priorities, and eroded Harry’s respect and affection for his wife. The turning point had been Ally’s pregnancy, and the significance and implications of having a fourth child. As they face each other in the bare rooms of their new home in the city, Ally says nothing, but Harry feels himself ‘laid open to her jeering silence’, feeling reproached by both her ‘burdened body’ and ‘the sickly child’.

There was no need for words. The strain and weariness of the day, the savourless weight of the change they had made, had for the moment stripped them in one another’s eyes. This was the communication they had with one another.  

Repelled more than ever by what he has come to see as his wife’s greed, Harry neither can nor would provide an answer to the question expressed in her gaze:

Whichever way things went for them, well or badly, she’d have her cut. She meant to have all there was to be got, and if there was nothing, then she could still feed her resentment. Nothing dismayed her, she was invulnerable, and that was the measure of her power and their estrangement. They had this grudge against one another but they could never express it.

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10 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 67.
11 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 67.
Intimately familiar with each other’s temperament and outlook, Harry and Ally are reduced by longstanding hostility, as well as the pressure of immediate circumstances, to a tense and acrimonious silence. Harry responds strongly to the selfish greed and resentment he recognises in his wife’s eyes. He also knows a sense of guilt triggered both by her gaze, and his responsibilities as a father. Discouraged, and with ‘a bad taste in his mouth,’ Harry seeks the outside air.\textsuperscript{12}

From the verandah of the house, Harry views the crowded, ugly street with dismay. Nearby, other residents also view the approaching storm from their own dwellings, but nobody makes any attempt to acknowledge Harry, nor he them. Feeling ‘inferior and angry’, he senses a new and unfamiliar set of ‘rules,’ fearing that at any moment ‘he would blunder into someone else’s world’.\textsuperscript{13} Characteristically, Harry brushes aside these tensions:

He didn’t like it. It made him feel bad. It wasn’t anything to do with him, of course, and he’d get over it.\textsuperscript{14}

What Harry ‘gets over’ in this scene is his encounter with a foreign and, to him, potentially hostile environment, a situation in which he feels himself to be an outsider, and is overcome by ‘bad’ feelings. As his thoughts turn to unloading the furniture from the truck, he is overcome with embarrassment at the thought that ‘one of those lounging men might offer to help’. Behind him in the house, Ally ‘ungently’ washes the day’s ‘grime and stickiness’ off Wanda, who is upset ‘because everything was strange’. A slap from Ally stops Wanda crying. Ruth, a thoughtful, watchful child, comes to stand beside her father, holding onto his trouser leg, and Harry absent-mindedly twists a finger in Ruth’s hair. He is disheartened by the unneighbourly quality of the street, in particular its lack of play areas for the children: ‘They’d have to learn they couldn’t go where they liked. There wasn’t any place for them and they’d have to learn it’. He reflects that farming was not such a bad life after all: ‘Always said it was a lousy life, poultry

\textsuperscript{12} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 67.
\textsuperscript{13} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 68.
\textsuperscript{14} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 68.
farming. Everyone did. Still . . .’, 15 Harry has not tended to question or reflect upon his life or the values on which it is based, at least up until now.

As Harry is unloading the ‘dismembered beds’ for the children off the truck, the air is suddenly pierced by barely human screams. He rushes upstairs to find Jackie having a convulsion, his face ‘bluish and distorted’ and his body bent backwards. Taking the baby from Ally, his first thought is to take Jackie and run for help. But his ignorance of where to find a doctor or hospital kicks in, ‘His fear of the strange world was stronger’. At the door is Mrs Blan, the downstairs neighbour drawn by the baby’s cries. Harry decides to leave the two women ‘to do what they could’, and go out alone. The urgency of the situation grips them all, ‘The air itself changed’. He heads out of the house, followed by the sound of Jackie’s ‘hoarse screams’. On the street, he is directed by a passer-by to the offices of Dr Jones. He dives into the ‘river of traffic’ on Williams Street, dodging to avoid cars and a passing tram. A thought flashes into his mind, “What would they do if I was run over?” but he emerges on the other side, and battles his way across another road, as well as a ‘leisurely stream of people, lights, noise.’ He finally reaches the doctor’s office, where the square red lamp outside shines ‘calm and steady, rebuking.’ The doctor is in evening dress, and clearly put out by the enquiry, but he begrudgingly makes the house call.

At home, Ally’s face is swollen with fear. Jackie’s features bear an expression ‘common to all in extremis’. Harry stands by the door as the doctor, his ‘shirt front splashed with water, his face expressionless,’ tends Jackie by the light of the candle Mrs Blan holds up. 16 Mrs Blan screams “He’s going, doctor” – the only audible sound in the room – and the doctor ‘harshly’ tells her to be quiet. Harry’s clenched fists and a ‘wavering light’ dancing on the wall are the only outward signs of Jackie’s passing. The doctor touches Harry on the arm and takes him outside to the street to talk. In a ‘dry and matter of fact’ tone, the doctor issues instructions regarding the need for a coroner’s inquest and notification of the authorities, seemingly oblivious to Harry’s feelings about having just lost his son. He advises that Ally not be left alone.

15 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 68.
16 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 70-71.
He makes a cursory goodbye – ‘It had to be. He didn’t like the business. He’d had an
engagement. Well. He hoped he’d made it clear.’ He starts the car, which ‘took itself off neatly
and suavely’. Harry’s grief and shock become apparent when a passing policeman goes to book
him for leaving his truck parked on the street. “‘You get to hell,” he shouted. “Me bloody kid’s
dead, ain’t that enough?”’17 The policeman admonishes him gently, saying “‘Now, dig’.”

The passages discussed above illuminate Harry’s world in the context of two significant
life events – the family’s move to the city, in the context of their scarce financial means, and the
sudden and unexpected death of his son Jackie in what, to Harry, is a foreign and unwelcoming
place. Harry’s responses to these events, and the strong and often difficult emotions they
arouse in him, recall Heller’s ideas about the relegation of feelings into the background of one’s
mind. Such relegation is understood as an aspect of self-regulation, part of the process by
which a social actor regulates his involvement in one or other task or action. For Harry, finding
himself in an unfamiliar city environment, there is an adjustment to be made, in the face of a
deep-seated sense of misgiving and misquiet about his new surrounds. Harry’s stoic
endurance and tendency to put his own needs second is made clear in many ways. He keeps at
bay his preference for a ‘bit of green’ at lunchtime, as he does the anxieties aroused upon first
arriving in the neighbourhood where the family is to live. Likewise, his fears about Jackie’s
condition are displaced onto the play of light on the wall. The city is anathema to his
personality and worldview, having left behind a way of living that was self-sufficient, if not
physically easy, or perhaps even, in the end, tenable. The lean contours of his physique
embody the world from which he has come, as does his description of the family scratching like
hell to keep going on the farm, which had in the end crumbled under him. He intuitively rejects
a dehumanising aspect of his new environment, encapsulated in the absence of play areas for
the children. His sense of powerlessness in the face of forces he has no control over is
apparent. Harry’s courage and fortitude are apparent when he runs to find a doctor for Jackie,
staring down the distress and alarm aroused by what for him is an unprecedented and
traumatic situation. Keeping a tight control over his feelings in this way, the text suggests, is an

17 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 71.
automatic reaction on Harry’s part, and also a necessary part of reconciling himself to the pressures of the family’s shift, and of being in a new and unsettling environment.

Also evident as Harry copes with the demands of his new life is his reflexive capacity, and his need and desire for understanding such as will enlighten his experience. The family’s changed situation, and especially the strain and uncertainty bound up with it, move him to reflect on his life in new ways. He recoils from what to him is the impersonal element and sheer ugliness of the city streets, intuitively rejecting forces he judges to be inimical to human flourishing, especially the flourishing of the children, but he stifles his own ‘bad’ feelings and gets on with the task at hand. He is less able or willing to attune himself to Ally’s state of mind, something apparent in the silent exchange between them, overlaid with anger and guilt, as they unpack their belongings into their new home. The hostility and guilt which Ally excites in Harry in the scene above illustrates the emotional vocabulary that has evolved between them – an illustration of Heller’s ideas about the emotional languages by which we convey our emotions to each other. As Harry puzzles over the nature of things as he goes about his daily life, he demonstrates the hermeneutic capacity Heller writes of in her work on the modern subject. Harry’s deliberations as he goes about his activities are evaluative in the way Heller outlines, involving an engagement of an increasingly active and conscious kind with the meaning and significance of his experiences. He becomes an interpreter of his world, probing the meaning and significance of his experiences.

**Of Material & Emotional Scarcity: Ally Munster’s Unbounded Resentment**

For Ally, too, life involves uncertainties and disappointment. But for Ally, that burden has got past the point of being borne, as is suggested above in the account of the family’s first day in Darlinghurst. Her standpoint is connected to a decisive sequence of events which had occurred some months prior. The news that she was pregnant for a fourth time had been followed by an unexpected public ordeal on a busy commuter train. The day had culminated in an argument with Harry about their life together on the farm.
The reader joins Ally at Sydney’s Central Station, where she is making her way home from the city. She is in a black mood, filled with feelings of angry recrimination and bottled up frustration, triggered most immediately by the news of her pregnancy. Even shopping among the city stores, which Ally had been holding out for on this visit to town, has lost its appeal; she wants only to go home and forget this day ever happened. She stops under the clock to put down her basket and parcels, and get out her ticket; with four minutes remaining until her train leaves, she will not risk missing the train by going to the Ladies’ Room to change Jackie’s nappy. She feels ‘an unreasoning black resentment against the baby’s inert weight, his complete dependence on her.’ Her only thought is to ‘escape this clearing house of Babel, to go home’. She is close to tears, filled with a ‘[c]hildish disappointment’ that this day in town has turned out so badly: ‘To want to go home, at half-past eight, to want that hole. That was what she had come to, that was the measure of her misery’.  

Around Ally on the concourse, the station is a jumble of noise and motion. Beyond the crowded vestibule, a clash of whining engines and hissing steam emanates from the trains lined up at the platforms. There are ‘brisk streams’ of well-dressed people emerging from the suburban trains, many of them making for evening sessions of the pictures. There is also a second stream of people who are ‘laden, sluggish, tired and sated, returning from late night shopping’, people lugging parcels and packages, their ‘poor spoil from their sack of the city’. Some stand, ‘clotted round the indicators’, their faces ‘dazed, slowly comprehending’, awaiting the times and platforms of their trains. Over the waiting crowd a big clock hangs ‘as impersonal as a moon from the domed roof’ and a hard, ‘searching light beat down’. Soaring ‘high over the heads of the people’ are stalls bearing items for sale, such as apples wrapped in tissue paper, ‘medleys of brightly packaged sweets and tobacco’, and many tiers of coloured reading matter. On the platforms, a faint stir and excitement can be discerned among those travelling in the ‘bright compartments of de luxe travel’, as passengers anticipate their ‘journeyings’ on streamlined engines, making their ‘farewells touched with possible drama’.

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But the more pervasive mood, in particular among the ‘homing crowd’, is a ‘great tepid listlessness’. The ‘apex of the week ... Friday, payday, the shopping night’ has come and gone once more for this crowd, and once again they are returning ‘in a sluggish tide to their small homes and circumscribed orbits’, bearing such ‘fragments, often tawdry and lifeless’ as could be procured ‘in the course of their communal hunting’. The crowd lacks any distinct ‘pattern or direction’, or ‘common purpose or thought’. The text continues:

If there was a common denominator it must have been a sort of passive, unregistered disappointment, the inevitable concomitant of lives passed in the sight but not the possession of plenty. The seconds dropped off the clock like invisible, abrasive sand.\(^19\)

The city and its marketplace rarely deliver on the promise of ‘plenty’ among this crowd, among whom consumerism gravitates against both collective unity and genuine individuality.

It is from this melee that Ally makes her way to the Penrith train, finding the last remaining seat among the mostly full compartments in the final minutes before the train departs. Among those already in the carriage, the intrusion of a woman with a baby provokes a ripple of ill feeling and resentment.\(^20\) Perching herself on the ‘fraction of seat’ available, Ally ‘slowly pushed her body back with a powerful and not unrehearsed movement of her buttocks. The line gave; she had won a seat from the elastic flesh of her fellow passengers.’ Pressed in between two other women passengers, Ally gathered together her belongings at her feet and scrimped herself in, determined not to give cause for offence to those around her.

The train gets under way. The fat woman on one side of Ally endeavours to reclaim the space she has lost by means of ‘the exercise of lateral pressure and heavy rolling movements’.\(^21\) She and her sister across the aisle exchange withering glances when the young chic passenger on Ally’s other side accepts an offer of a cigarette from her neighbour, one of two poultry

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\(^{19}\) Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 45.

\(^{20}\) Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 49.

\(^{21}\) Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 49.
farmers returning from a meeting of the Co-op. Shirley, a wide-eyed, insatiably curious 14 year old is transfixed by the glamorous girl, with her glossy magazine and arch manner.

As the train passes Flemington, the reek of the stockyards wafts in through the window. Ally feels a wave of nausea like a ‘small, cold worm, stir in her stomach’ (a clue to the reader of her condition, her pregnancy having not yet been referred to in the narrative), and she struggles with Jackie as he squirms, whimpers, and goes to grab any item in reach. He is hot and uncomfortable, his clothing bunched up round his neck. With his every move he flaps the sour odour of his clothes around the carriage. After another of his lunges towards the other passengers and their belongings is thwarted by his mother, she roughly turns him round and ‘dumped him tightly on her knee. … Both were angry, they had worn each other out’. 22 As Ally holds in her strain and anger, her mood deteriorates with each passing mile.

Then something happens that utterly transforms the atmosphere in the carriage. Thinking to befriend Jackie, the elderly woman clad in black sitting in the corner of the carriage ‘raised a clawed hand and waved to him in the parody of a gesture that was, long ago, arch and gay’. Catching sight of her, Jackie is momentarily transfixed and eerily still, before arching his back sharply and yelling ‘with all his might’. Taken by surprise, Ally’s ‘nerve broke. Darkness rushed at her’. 23 All restraint is lost:

With one hand she tried to stifle his screams, with the other she beat furiously at his wildly-threshing legs. Her face was white and distorted with fury. A shock of horror ran through the compartment. The man opposite seized her wrists.

“Now, now, missus. He’s only a little fellow”.

In a second she relaxed trembling, and he let her go. 24

In the moments that follow, the only sound to be heard in the carriage is Jackie’s screaming. The other passengers, ‘profoundly and sincerely shocked’, are awash with horrified anger and discomfit. Shirley, ‘her pert mask dropped’, stares agog through this ‘peep hole into life’. The

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fat woman seated next to Ally, her face ‘mottled’, presses her hand to her heart – she had been given ‘quite a turn’. When she recalled the incident later, she would invariably conclude “If we hadn’t been there I do believe she’d have murdered that poor baby”. The two poultry farmers feel acute embarrassment, while the ‘prosperous man’ sitting across the aisle maintains a stern gaze at Ally - ‘the culprit … That was a fine termagant for a man to come home to.’

The ugly little episode had shocked them all in their finer feelings. Humanity had been outraged at its very font.

Pinned by the stunned, recriminating stares of the other passengers, Ally struggles to put words to what just happened. Her mind reaches for a familiar explanation.

She was in the dock before these people. Hysteria rose in her. The pack was after her. She wanted madly to explain that what had happened was not her fault. She’d had an awful day, she was trapped, caught, everything was against her, it was her husband’s fault. On that her mind reached its dead end, ran into the buffers. She looked from face to face, she must make her defence, but that would be the whole story of her five years’ marriage. It was his fault that she had disgraced herself in public, everything was his fault.25

Skewered by this public humiliation, Ally’s thoughts reveal the focus and object of her festering discontent to be Harry: in her mind, ‘everything was his fault’. She makes a halting effort to atone for her actions with the other passengers, saying with a ‘sickly, propitiatory’ smile, “He has his father’s paddy”, but her words falls on deaf ears. Unable to absolve herself or appease the crowd, Ally bends low over Jackie, who is still sobbing, ‘to hide him from their staring eyes. In desperation, she opened her blouse and put him to her breast’. The train pulls out from Parramatta, where two other passengers have disembarked, including the girl seated next to Ally. The space remains conspicuously vacant.

She was alone. Her heart was like iron. She waited for the minutes and the miles to pass.

These three phrases concisely convey Ally’s sense of isolation and the effects of overwhelming shock, borne of condemnation by her peers and an outlook steeled by renewed resentment.

25 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 54.
For the rest of the journey, as the train passes through ‘[q]uiet, flat country’, the atmosphere in the carriage barely changes. The text reads:

No one spoke. They were ashamed. The shame should have belonged to the woman only, but it did not. They all felt it. It embarrassed them to be ashamed, they wanted to be rid of it. The mushroom rights of private property in virtue had been infringed, the thin partitions of individuality pierced. By abhoring they had not freed themselves; in whatever had happened they had participated. They would deny the sharing that denial was killing everywhere. It was fixed only in the air and time, and the train could be trusted to carry them away from it.  

The train rocks onward with its human cargo, each of the passengers alone with his/her own feelings and thoughts.

The searing incident on the Penrith train catches Ally utterly off guard, as it does the other passengers. The passengers around Ally are left reeling at her show of pent-up rage towards Jackie: her loss of self-control provokes a ‘shock of horror’ among all those present. Their ‘finer feelings’ having been assaulted in this way, condemnation flows swiftly and, at least initially, unreservedly. Yet as the moments pass, it also strikes another, equally unsettling chord of an entirely different kind. Thus, her shame becomes their shame, a feeling they intuitively and strenuously resist and deny. For Ally herself, the force of mental habit proves decisive. Ally finds herself before a court of public opinion: ‘She was in the dock before these people’. Ally’s shame and humiliation quickly give way to her habit of laying the blame on Harry for her trials and unmet expectations.

For Ally, who articulates virtually nothing to Harry or anyone else of what happened on the train, the shock and strain of the experience serves to sweep away all remaining checks on her aggrieved mentality and wrathfulness. When Harry meets her at Toongabbie station, he comments on the dried tears visible on Jackie’s cheeks, and she describes the toddler as having had a show of “temper”, stating of the journey, “We was packed in like sardines and everyone nasty about it”.  

Her mulish ill-temper deteriorates further during the long drive home in

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their ‘battered old utility’. Sensing the tense silence emanating from her, Harry realises that something is very wrong. When they finally reach the farm, Ally opens the door of the house, and a ‘familiar smell’, of cheap varnish, stove polish, the oiliness of the new sheeting curtains and a bran mash for the chooks hits her ‘like a wave of sickness’. Harry recognises in her barely suppressed ire the ‘heavy murk’ redolent of past arguments, and he responds by ignoring it – an ‘old doomed strategy’.28

In the argument that follows, Ally’s bottled-up fury and discontent find their target, leaving Harry floored and, before long, angry. When he learns she is pregnant, an impulse to go to her is thwarted by the expression in her eyes. His thoughts turn to the countless material considerations raised by the prospect of a fourth child, a response he reproaches himself for. He thinks for instance of the doctor, who, unbeknown to Ally, he has not yet paid for delivering Jackie – ‘that would have to be settled at once in common decency’. Ally would need help at home towards the end of her pregnancy, and she would want cash to spend. Their other financial commitments – mortgage and plant payments, keeping up the account at the store, and managing the gap between disbursements and payments - ‘hammered painfully’ at him, ‘like stones fixed in his brain’.29 Managing their resources has come to be second nature for Harry:

... that was the way his mind was becoming rutted. It was his part. There was her part, worse than his. If each of them only thought of himself they’d never get through.30

But then Harry notices that Ally is closely studying his face, ‘as if she were reading his thoughts’. The ‘black resentment’ he again sees expressed in her face shocks him. They had had ‘flares of temper’ before, both being quick tempered, but never ‘the heavy oily swell of this undeclared quarrel’. The text continues:

Every quarrel they had ever had, every hardship she had suffered, every wish unfulfilled, every disappointment, besides this new burden, and a hurt he did not know of, were piled up against him. And he was the guilty party. His attitude had

28 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 58.
29 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 59.
30 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 59.
made things worse, for it was at once an admission and an opposition. He had not given a word nor a gesture of tenderness, the tenderness that was still in his heart for her, only overlaid by cares and anxieties. He wanted to break through.\footnote{Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 60.} (emphasis in original)

This passage conveys the fraught communication between the partners in a marriage in which discord and resentment have eroded trust and love, the latter buried, at least on Harry’s part, under his preoccupations and stoicism. As Ally begins to speak, her words come out slowly, with a venomous tone, ‘as if she had planned what she would say, and it had long passed from impulse to conviction, as if she now had the right to indict him’. Nothing about her situation pleases Ally: to her mind, her life on the farm, caring for three young children and with another on the way, is no kind of existence for a 24 year old. She presses Harry – does he think she can go on having children indefinitely?

“I could have ten children by the time I’m thirty and all you’d think about would be paying for them and having them work for you later on. What about me? I’d be an old woman if I wasn’t dead.”

Harry replies that of course she is not going to have ten children, to which she heartily concurs. She presses her claim about their way of life in the bush: “What do you think the last five years have been for me, living in this filthy, little hole. You wouldn’t know, because you never think of me.” Harry, while silently willing to admit ‘things hadn’t been altogether bright for her, for either of them’, is goaded by her tone of voice. He tells her ‘brutally’ she is working herself up.

“Am I?” she cried, “Am I? Listen to me for once. I was nineteen when you married me.”

“My God,” he thought, “My God”.

“You were mad to get me, remember? Well, you did. You got me properly. I’d had a good time and plenty of fun – but not after I was married. It stopped dead. You brought me out here. The house wasn’t much, you said, but we’d do better later. We’re no nearer now, we’re further away. I couldn’t have any nice furniture like other girls have when they marry. We couldn’t afford it. All right. Other people can’t afford it either, they get it on the hire purchase. You wouldn’t hear of it. Anyone would think it was a crime, getting decent furniture; you don’t
have to be ashamed of on the hire purchase. You get your incubators and I don’t know what on the hire purchase.”

He made an impatient movement. She forestalled him. “Oh, that’s different. They were things you wanted. You didn’t care what the house looked like, that was my place. It didn’t matter.”

Ally faults Harry for a life given over entirely to necessities. Even a weekly trip to the pictures, she storms, has apparently been beyond their means, as Harry has – meanly, in Ally’s eyes – always chosen some other priority: ‘you had to go into market in the morning or you were too tired, because you were too mean to get any help and did all the work on the place yourself.”

Then the girls had been born, “I couldn’t go anywhere or do anything or have anything. But I didn’t nag you.” Harry’s anger has by now subsided. He recalls, “She’d been as much in love with him as he with her. She’d forgotten.” He has no heart to be angry. Rather, their argument strikes him as pitiful and futile: ‘She knew how it had been, the struggle they’d shared and would have to go on sharing, but she refused to understand.’ In a gentle voice, he reminds her that they had been happy once, mentioning the children. But this only stirs Ally to more resentful recriminations.

“Always the children. When I told you just now you thought at once how much money another one was going to cost you. What do you think it costs me?”

She had him there.

Ally accuses Harry of failing to notice she was pregnant, so close was his focus on Jackie’s well-being. Harry tells himself to be patient and that her overwrought state ‘would pass’, saying “Don’t, Ally. Don’t, old girl.” But Ally continues, complaining of her “life sentence. Four kids and no money.” Harry’s reply that things will get better, and that they are “keeping up”, prompts a stinging rejoinder from Ally about the hopelessness of their situation and his culpability therein. It is their creditors, Ally states, who are calling the shots: “They’ve got a finger in everything we call ours and they have to be satisfied first.”

To her mind, what they must do – what Harry has signally failed to do – is tend to their own self-interest. She derides Harry as a “mug” not only

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for having gone to fight in the First World War, and thereby “let the chaps that stayed behind
get in front of you”, but also for having invested his wartime gratuity in the farm, “so that
someone would have a nice little investment”. She derides Harry for having invested his
wartime gratuity in the farm – they could at least have spent the money, had a “good time …
Then we’d have had something.” What would suit them both better, she goes on to say, is for
Harry to get a job, “Money coming in regular every week, nothing to do but spend it.” A job is
“about your measure” she adds, berating Harry for thinking too much of himself:

“Want to be your own boss. You are nothing like your own boss here. You’re a
slave and so am I. The only difference is you seem to like it and I don’t.”

Ally’s hectoring tone again begins to draw an angry reaction from Harry. The Co-op, she says, is
another demonstration of Harry’s unrealistic instincts in business. His reply, that “the Co-op is
going to make things better”, draws a frankly sceptical view from Ally, who replies, “Oh no, it
won’t, it won’t be let.” The Co-op, she continues, just gives Harry “a chance to swank”, leading
him to borrow beyond his means in building up the farm. Harry silently recognises the truth in
what she says, thinking of his need to back the scientific methods he readily advocates for
among the community; the Co-op ‘would be best in the end’, he acknowledges, ‘but the
sacrifice was now and the end a long way off’. Ally insists that “successful people” put their
energy “into looking after their own rather than supporting the Co-op”. When she accuses him
of being better at fathering children than he is at “keeping them”, Harry’s ‘mind blazed’. He
points out that the family had never “had to go without”, and that he always put food on the
table. At that Ally’s face shows a trace of fear and her eyes move rapidly,
‘with the old, quick
flicker of an animal when it means to break out of a trap.’ Harry ‘pressed in on her’, to the
effect that he could not be faulted for any lack of steadiness. At that, she laughs ‘with a sort of
broken jauntiness’.

… It was like a flame licking out of her. “Steady’s not enough. A steady man can
make you as miserable as a gay one. Worse. You and your steadiness. You don’t

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know you’re born, that’s what. Enough to eat. Well, so we ought to have. No one gets any fun out of enough. It begins after that.”  

Harry finds the whole conversation once again becoming ‘unreal’ to him, and he thinks of the fact that he has worked a long day without tea, and that he would have to be up at four the next morning to drive to the market. Harry’s reflects on his experiences on the front in the war: ‘He’d sworn then if he ever came back he’d not be ungrateful again for food and sleep, quiet, and a body free from lice. A woman wouldn’t know about that’. He reminds Ally that many people lack even the necessities of life. She admits ‘passionately’ that she doesn’t care about such people, or, by implication, the ethos of self-sufficiency and simple living which Harry has in mind. What she wants is “a share” of the “good things in the world”.

She thought of the city, its lights, its amusements, its piled-up plenty. She wanted all the silly things, the things she didn’t need, to lord it over them. The people who had them were the victors.

Even as Harry tries to placate Ally, saying she must “wait a bit”, he knows this is no ordinary quarrel. She replies she will not wait, while knowing that what he says is true. They fall silent, with the only sound the alarm clock ticking on the shelf over the range. They have nothing more to say to each other. Of the turning point reached in Ally’s outlook and state of mind, the text reads:

For a long time there had been a loose rubble of discontent in her mind. This day’s strain and weariness, the knowledge that another child was coming to rivet her chains, had trampled it hard. It was as if suddenly her unrest and distress had turned from dust, which a fair wind would blow away, to clinker. The incident in the train, of which she would never tell anyone and which she would herself forget, had left a wound that would become a scar.

Harry, aware of the ticking clock, goes out to check the incubators. When he returns, Ally has not moved, and he fixes her tea and bread and butter. At this, Ally bursts into tears, repeating “I’ve got to go through with it, I’ve got to go through with it”. Harry tells himself the ‘worst was over’, concluding that this was ‘one of those storms one must expect from a woman in her

36 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 63.
37 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 63.
38 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 63.
condition’. He has ‘already accepted the new situation’.\(^{39}\) Then Ally puts to him, ‘in a cool matter of fact voice’, that they sell the farm and move to the city, where “he could get a job. Arnie could get you one like his, driving a lorry. You’d have the basic wage, perhaps a bit more.”\(^{40}\) Harry – fed up, and thinking only of his early start the next day to drive to the market – tells her that they can “talk about that another time”. As the moment passes, Ally sees Harry’s face ‘harden’, while her own ‘sank back into the ugly lines of its obstinacy’. He is in bed asleep by the time Ally finishes in the kitchen and joins him.

The Munsters’ fight about the fraught question of how they spend their meagre resources, and their choices and priorities as a couple, has a painfully inexorable rhythm about it. In response to Ally’s increasingly personal and cutting arguments, Harry is by turns angry, imploring, and defensive, until finally, fed up and exhausted, he turns back to their immediate needs and situation. Harry explains Ally’s rancour as a sign of her pregnant state, though at the same time, in the depth of her discontent – for instance the way she reaches back to events far removed from their current lives – he recognises something unprecedented in their married life. He readily tunes out to his wife’s anger, a habitual passivity which co-exists, on this occasion, with the tenderness he still feels for Ally, as well as a sense of guilt about the family’s material circumstances – circumstances he has come to see as his chief priority in their shared life together. Ally’s comment, during her fight with Harry, to the effect that the bank has a “‘lien’” not only on their assets, but also on herself and the children, speaks to the overwhelming burden of debt carried by the family, and it also implicitly calls attention to Ally’s economic dependence on Harry. To this, there is nothing Harry can say except general reassurances that the family is “keeping up”. Ultimately, to him this is part of the struggle they share as a couple. The fight makes starkly apparent their divergent viewpoints and priorities about their life together, as is evident in the way Harry’s co-operative farming methods seem like a luxury to Ally, while he, in turn, is dismissive of Ally’s desire to spend more on furnishing the house. More fundamentally, their fight reveals the extent of Ally’s dissatisfaction with the narrow limits of her life on the farm and her domestic roles, intensified by the news of her

\(^{39}\) Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 58.

\(^{40}\) Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 64.
fourth pregnancy, combined with her stubborn insistence that it is Harry who must make up for these disappointments and unmet expectations. In placing her happiness in Harry’s hands in this way, she makes demands of him which are linked to their traditional roles as husband and wife. She also abrogates her own responsibility for herself and how she lives her life.

The depiction of Ally in the extracts recounted above, including critically her train ride home to the farm, is replete with images of one whose mind has been pushed too far, and whose emotional palette has contracted to a virtual monotone of rancorous, acrimonious hues. The reader is invited to sympathise with the unenviable financial position she and Harry are in. The family is indebted to their creditors to a level that seems to compromise their very self-possession. Yet Ally would accrue more debt in the form of hire purchases in order to improve the house. Like her criticism of Harry for being largely indifferent to the personal costs of her pregnancies, this situation is partly reflective of the fact that it is economic factors that take priority in their household, with the burden of debt part of a vicious cycle inherent to the Munster’s financial affairs.

But ill-will and a pervasive sense of malcontentment are also increasingly apparent as Ally’s attack on Harry unfolds. It becomes apparent from her words that the allure of the city – the prospect of a life of ease, material comforts and stimulation, rather than making do – has gone to work on her sense of greed and resentment over past hardships. She reaches out not only to a promise of abundance, but also success – making good as one of life’s ‘victors’. When Ally berates Harry as a mug for having failed to put self-interest first in relation to the farm and the Co-op, she voices a stance with the force of social convention behind it. Furthermore, by standing in judgment of Harry, and faulting him as a provider to his family, she exploits to the full the normative weight of that social code. Her standpoint, though inherently unreasonable – her implicit expectation that Harry should have anticipated the problems he faced, along with many others, as a returned soldier who went on to the land – is nonetheless keenly felt by Harry, as a personal attack on him as a father and husband.

A Tempered Discontent: Harry’s Emergent Reflexivity
The balance between disillusionment and hope evident in Harry Munster’s emotional household is demonstrated in his reflections on the day after Ben’s birth, discussed briefly above. Harry’s obligations at home weigh on his mind as he considers the living to be had in town. While eating his lunch on the day after Ben’s birth, Harry broods over their situation, cognisant of the intrinsic uncertainty of his and his family’s affairs. Harry’s sense of angry disillusionment and frustration in relation to the institutional structures which shape all their lives is especially raw in light of Jackie’s death. The coroner’s inquest had identified Bright’s disease as the cause of death. Harry thinks with bitterness of the specialist whom they had consulted about Jackie the previous year, who ‘the rich’d pay guineas to see. But if he didn’t bother, you were no better off.’

Perhaps Jackie’s death had been avoidable, perhaps not – Harry will never know. Jackie’s death had knocked Harry’s confidence in life more than he realises: it chafes at his mind, a stinging proof that the welfare of his children is in many vital respects not in his control. Feeling dissatisfied and betrayed, Harry thinks of the inquest for Jackie and the lack of satisfaction or resolution forthcoming from it.

Best clothes. Feeling guilty and angry and helpless and miserable. Going home when it was over – to Ally. Jackie’s death hadn’t made any difference in Ally or to their life together. She’d cried a lot but he hadn’t felt she really cared.

A credibility gap has become apparent in Ally’s behaviour, and her empty tears for Jackie add to Harry’s sense of angry powerlessness. He thinks of the hospital delivery of Ben the night before, likening the hospital to ‘a great factory’ in which he felt ‘shut in by high glass walls on which he could make no impressions.’ The couple experienced lengthy delays and an absence of staff to ask for help, as well as a feeling of simply being in the way. While he had felt anxious at previous births, he had not felt that ‘it was his fault. Ally hadn’t either’. Rather than feeling joy at the birth of a son, Harry is struck by an urge to beg forgiveness – to the hospital for apparently being a nuisance, to Ally for the pain of childbirth, and, most of all, it seems to Harry, to his new son. Harry resists the stirring ‘in his heart’ prompted by the birth of his son: ‘He wasn’t going to be taken in that way again.’

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41 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 75.
42 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 75.
43 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 76.
feelings of guilt, his train of thought suggests a loss of morale at their alienating experience of a hospital birth.

Harry’s spirits are revived as he washes down his sandwiches – bread with ‘slabs of cheese’ dried out by the wind – with tea from a vacuum flask. The flask had been acquired by Ally at a ‘bargain basement’ for one and sixpence. He thinks derisively of Ally’s stance on the availability of such cheap goods: she ‘thought that was one of the wonders of the world, that to be able to get it ought to resign him to leaving the poultry farm for the city’. Harry ‘worked it out’ differently:

... with all the wonders of science and inventions and progress and mass production, we ought to be getting everything cheap and plenty. To make big eyes when some little thing slipped through to us – that wasn’t sense. It wasn’t the right way to behave. Bobbing and pulling a forelock, new style. Flimsy things they were, and a good profit on the one-and-six, he’d be bound.\footnote{Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 76.}

Harry’s sense of scepticism comes to the fore regarding the consumer goods available to them in town, a reaction to the hype and adulation surrounding those goods, as well as to the goods themselves. A similar attitude characterises his views on his children’s education. Ruthie, who he thinks of proudly as a child ‘willing to give ... Best little kid in the world’, is soon to reach school age. He is wary of ‘the institution, or the mass, of letting a creature as tender as a child go so soon and so utterly into the world, delivering it over to forces he could not control or understand, to the indifference that he believed to have killed Jackie.’\footnote{Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 77.} Harry thinks of the ‘little bush school’ he himself had attended, with fewer than a dozen pupils and one teacher, and of his farm at Toongabbie.

The city. You couldn’t trust it. You had to hold out against the world. But you couldn’t. We were all in it together.\footnote{Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 77.}
Harry’s description of his farm at Toongabbie as a ‘little island of sand’ got at by the sea speaks of loss and frailty. At the same time, his reflections also make apparent his firm, simple belief in the possibilities of people working together:

Refusing wasn’t enough. Not enough to stall. It drove you into that, but you couldn’t stay there either. It’s not “These are my kids”. You couldn’t draw the line. All of them or none of them. You gave up your kids or you made things better for all the kids. ...

His mind turns to the Co-op, and to the principles underlying it:

The strong thing pulls the weak thing. But everything’s weak to begin with – like babies. Except us. Us is everybody. What we’ve got to find is a sticking point. It doesn’t much matter where. 47

Harry’s ideas about collective unity are entwined with his roles as provider and working man, which, in turn, form part of his conception of a fair society. In his mind’s eye, Harry envisions a general strike among workers and their wives: ‘Let everyone go to their bosses, whoever they are and whatever they do, on one day and say, “We won’t work unless the miners get a fortnight’s holiday on full pay every year.” Every one strike for it except the miners’. Harry himself is in no position to pursue such an audacious undertaking: he thinks of his family responsibilities, including his obligation to ‘keep’ Ally, even though he doesn’t ‘cut any ice with her now.’ He wonders if their relations will improve ‘now the baby’s come’, or whether ‘it’s going on like this always. Women are tough, give ‘em a grievance and they can stick to it till death do them part.’ 48 He finds solace in recalling his years in the army, with its given structure and living for the moment: ‘the man next to you was your mate, you went the same way, were all bits in some sort of design or thought you were. Perhaps you weren’t.’ On one topic Harry is sure: ‘No more kids.’

Forced to question his faith both in himself, and in the society he belongs to, in the final passage in the monologue, Harry recalls Ally’s criticism of him:

47 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 77-78.
48 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 78.
Harry sat collapsed over his wheel, and the hard rim pressed against his hard lean ribs. Ally was right, he was a mug. What she didn’t get was that he couldn’t have been anything else, hadn’t any choice. The smart alecs were mugs too, only they hadn’t dropped to it. Time he was getting on. He threw his greasy lunch paper into the lane and started his engine.

Harry’s hard-won insights reflect his disillusionment, as well as an implicit capacity for endurance. They demonstrate a strength borne partly of his comprehension of conditions which ultimately shape and twist everyone’s fate, including the ‘smart alecs’. Harry knows a deep-seated belief in a fair society, and commitment to an idea of co-operation and unity, summed up in the phrase, ‘[w]e were all in it together’. He wrestles with the limitations of their life, and with the forces that press in on him and his family, symbolised by the steering wheel in his work van that cuts into his frame. A servant as well as student of that life, Harry turns on the engine and gets back to work.

**Conclusion**

The pursuit by the social actor of a meaningful and coherent life is fundamental to Heller’s work on the contingency of modern conditions: she writes that social actors all too easily stumble into chaos, and that they have need for ‘at least a fragment of ‘cosmos’ to make sense of their own lives and, possibly, render meaning to it’[^49] The fictional narrative discussed in this chapter centres on a family starting again, giving up their life in ‘a tiny world’ to try and make a go of it ‘in a big one’. The narrow financial and material parameters of the Munsters’ world are signalled in many ways, most immediately the pressures posed by Ally’s pregnancy. Those pressures and limitations are essential context to the family’s move to and life in the city. An important aspect of what we learn of Harry and Ally is what they make of their circumstances – their points of view, priorities and ways of responding to and meeting the problems and situations they face.

In Harry Munster’s case, the need to fulfil his responsibilities in his private affairs and socially, together with his mounting unease and discontent, exert a dominant influence on his world of feelings. The steadiness and capacity for endurance he demonstrates are closely tied

[^49]: Heller, ‘Death of the Subject?’, 76.
to his roles and commitments as a husband, father and citizen. The obligations bound up with those roles structure his life and personality in important ways, as does a deep-seated, intuitive sense of affinity with those around him. Harry is generally at home with his fellow creatures, as is apparent in his involvement in the Co-operative and the union, if also accustomed to being his own boss. A working man, he sets about realising the duties that are his each day, and has generally given little thought to his own personal preferences and desires. But in their new life in the city, the tasks of importance to him have become freighted with uncertainty and vulnerability. He intuitively rails against certain defining aspects of the environment – proximity to others, physical ugliness, lack of facilities for the children. These factors, so essentially different to the world he has come from on the farm, pose an affront to Harry, and to his sense of personal autonomy, as well as his trust in society.

What is most significant about Ally Munster’s emotional household is the drying up of a capacity for open engagement with the world around her, and with her own motives and actions. Ally’s argument with Harry casts light on the couple’s past, showing it to have been a loving past. Their argument also demonstrates that the orientation of Ally’s world of feelings has turned decisively towards realising a new way of life, such as will allow her to make good on past hardships and disappointments. The couple are evidently up against it financially, and this is essential context to Ally’s response to the news she is pregnant, and her desire for a life of comfort and pleasure. Pressures borne of difficult circumstances and misfortune are in play in her changed emotional household, but just as important are her own emotional dispositions and judgments. Especially salient is a selfish greed, and an aggrieved sense of entitlement, directed mainly at Harry. The tenor of her emotional habits is suggested in Harry’s reflection on Ally’s readiness to ‘feed her resentment’, and on the way her greed seems to have rendered her impervious to dismay or shame – an invulnerability that has become the ‘measure of her power and their estrangement’.

A tipping point is revealed in Ally’s world of feelings, centred on her experiences on the day she learned she was pregnant. Her aggrieved state of mind is evident even before she boards the train: thus we see her making her way across Central Station, filled with
'unreasoning black resentment' regarding having to carry Jackie’s ‘inert weight’, mulishly indignant at the prospect of ‘another child ... coming to rivet her chains’. But the shame and distress associated with her actions on the train, and the ensuing reaction from those around her, constitute a trauma, or ‘wound’, the effects of which will prove permanent. Thus, she subsequently directs her resentment and discontent towards Harry about their life on the farm, demonstrating a level of vitriol and ill-will that floors him, as well as an utter unwillingness to compromise or see things from Harry’s point of view in any way. Fixated on her own grievances and desires, Ally absolves herself of the need to engage with the reasons for her actions and reactions, or their consequences. Nothing else matters but the kind of life she sees on offer in town, and her sense that she is owed that life, by Harry in particular.

The scene on the train, depicting a public incident involving a group of people filled with an array of strong negative feelings with a central moral aspect, highlights questions to do with the power of emotions to shape human behaviour, as well as what each social actor takes responsibility for and which norms hold sway in circumstances in which strong emotions are in play. Writing of the capacity for unfamiliar and unexpected events to excite more open and direct emotional expression than would otherwise be the case, Heller states that ‘[w]e are least able to control the expression of our feelings in the case of so-called “emotional situations”’. For the social actor involved in such situations, Heller observes, “custom leaveth him”.

Of all our emotions, as I discussed in Chapter Three, the affects have a unique significance in this respect insofar as one person may ‘catch’ another’s affects. Heller cites the example of crowd incited to rage.

These ideas of Heller’s about the relationship between feelings and judgments are pertinent to the scene in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* in which Ally strikes Jackie. Her actions elicit an immediate rush of shock and horror, leaving most of the other passengers acutely uncomfortable and lost for a response. Yet as the moments pass, the tension in the air gains a new complexity, as a sense of responsibility – a sense of this sorry situation being part of a human predicament they all share in – clings to them, and cannot so easily be confined to

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the disturbing stranger in their midst. That collectivism, or rather its shadow, is evoked in the earlier depiction in the text of the ‘homing crowd’ at Central Station, ceaselessly trying to draw what they need and want from the city’s shops, and coming up against a shortfall between their means and the goods on offer. The importance attached in that environment to self-interest and material gain creates conditions hostile to mutuality and dialogue, as does the resentment borne of being continuously excluded from the promise of shared plenty. When Ally fights to create space for herself and Jackie in the carriage, her actions similarly conjure up an image of a tenuous but vital unity and commonality. Ally’s ‘moment of disgrace’ serves to expose and call attention to the absence of common ground among them. Those around her back away, figuratively as well as physically, mostly lost for words, in the face of this aggressive outburst towards a child.

Moreover, in some cases the other passengers’ interpretations of Ally’s behaviour are devoid of empathy or imagination as to her circumstances, and what may have triggered or contributed to her actions, including their own involvement therein. For instance, the woman sitting next to Ally subsequently explains the other passengers’ role in the piece as having somehow saved Jackie, when in fact the atmosphere in the carriage had served to stoke Ally’s bloody-minded, embattled mood, with one passenger an inadvertent catalyst for the incident. The woman sitting next to Ally effectively construes her as a monstrous or criminal mother, capable of killing her own child, but for the restraints imposed by the presence of others. In such ways, the passengers stand apart, casting judgment. Then, to their discomfit they find themselves catching her shame – a reminder that she is not so unlike them, or they her. This response in turn gradually subsides, giving way with the passing of the moments and the rhythm of the train.

But for Ally the feelings don’t go away, and nor is she inclined to in any way acknowledge or articulate what has happened or its effect on her. In the heat of this distressing moment, all previous restraints on her tendency to construe her strain and unhappiness as Harry’s fault, fall away. Her will becomes fixed on the difficulties and frustrations in her life with Harry and the children on the farm, and the intolerable and unjustifiable burden she feels
her life to have become. She closes in on her own desires and problems at the expense of those around her, and of her relationship with the world at large. Ally’s emotional household comes to be dominated by resentment, greed and entitlement, in an illustration of what Heller terms an impoverished world of feelings. Any doubts or ambivalence Ally may have had about leaving the farm more or less retreat, as does any inclination to question the prospect of a life based around self-interest and financial gain. Without a second thought, she denigrates the approach pursued by Harry on the farm, and the ideals of collectivism and self-sufficiency in which that approach was grounded. The turning point reached in her habits of mind and reasoning is vividly conveyed in the metaphor of a mind transformed from a ‘loose rubble of discontent’ and dust into mental ‘clinker’. The image conveyed is of a mind closing, and an internal dialogue and conscience distorted by tendencies to remain blind to, or to rationalise, unwanted thoughts and feelings. In her complete, unquestioning identification with her own feelings and responses, Ally demonstrates the particularistic personality, as Heller writes of.

In Harry’s case, the drive to comprehend the world he finds himself in is critical in allowing him to realise an existence in that world which is compatible with his own temperament and ideas about things. As Harry puzzles over both his own situation and the social order at large, he exercises the critical reflexive capacity which Heller writes of in relation to the individual personality. Harry harbours deep-seated doubts and anger about what happened to Jackie, and a suspicion of mass institutions, intuitively railing against a system in which he and his family seem to routinely be dwarfed into insignificance. These emotional responses reflect the strength of will he brings to realising the chances of a fulfilling existence for himself and his family, though Harry wouldn’t put it this way. They also reflect his values around fairness and the kind of compassionate society he believes in, and has, up to this point, perceived himself to belong to. Implicitly, the work he undertakes to support himself and his family is aligned with those values and priorities. His fears, disillusionment, guilt and other feelings are subjective experiences to be borne, perhaps grasped, and mostly kept in check while he gets on with other things.
Harry Munster’s character demonstrates an emotional household built upon an ethic of care and responsibility. A capacity for forbearance is to the fore in relation to the many things beyond his control, or seemingly so. At the same time, his actions also reveal his courage and self-respect, a trust both in himself and his world, as when he plunges out of the house to seek medical help for Jackie, braving the streets that seem so foreign and hostile. Ally increasingly draws Harry’s contemptuous indignation and a loss of respect, in light of her preoccupation with her own needs and desires, and tendency to pay lip service to the concerns and problems they share, including in her empty tears for Jackie. Jackie’s death epitomises for Harry the impenetrability of the city, as he wrestles with the invisibility he feels in the face of its mass institutions, and his unease with its dominant commercial culture and alienating physical surrounds. Yet Harry’s future, and as importantly the future of his family, lies in the city, and so he endeavours to make good, keeping on earning the wage that covers the family’s expenses and, when necessary, responding to the exigencies that come his way. He implicitly draws strength from knowing himself to be part of something bigger, with a feeling for the common good evident in his sentiment that ‘The strong thing pulls the weak thing. But everything’s weak to begin with – like babies. Except us. Us is everybody.’ Harry is above all someone who gets on with things, doing his bit for his own family and for the social order at large. This intrinsic political consciousness is decisive to the outward-looking, autonomous evaluative stance at the heart of Harry’s individuality.
CHAPTER EIGHT

EMOTIONS AWAKENED

KNARF’S PASSION AND THE RECEPTION OF ARTWORKS

He was brushed for a moment by that excitement of the spirit which was the secret manna of his gifts. These hills, these wide horizons, these aboriginal contours, unchanging and unchangeable, must have had an added lustre against the background of a more turbid world. We don’t know peace, he thought, because we take it for granted.¹

Viewing the hills around his home in the Tenth Commune, Knarf, a 24th century writer, contemplates how his predecessors would have perceived the same land. Unlike the peaceful conditions that prevail in his own day, the Australians had known a much more insecure and tumultuous existence. The world of the Australians from four centuries earlier forms the subject matter of Knarf’s latest book. Knarf’s desire to render the past in all its facets, and to bring to life the customs and aspirations of the Australians, reflects that ‘excitement of the spirit’ which is integral to his talents as a writer. In the same passage of text as the above quote, Knarf thinks of the ‘fiercely indented’ way of life the Australians had lived, recognising a quality of serenity the earth would then have possessed in peacetime – not only the loveliness of peace, ‘it was peace over against turmoil, it was refuge, it was home.’ A citizen of a society in which war has been eradicated, Knarf is intrigued and puzzled by the volatility and conflict experienced by the former inhabitants of the country where he lives.

A quality of receptivity which is characteristic of Knarf’s personality, and which is at work in his recreation of a distinctly Australian sensibility and worldview, is demonstrated in the above statements. As a highly self-reflexive character, who is unequivocal in his fulfilment of his creative task, and specifically his latest novel, Knarf invites a reading in terms of Heller’s concepts of emotional households, the subject and individuality. On the relationship between emotional household and consciousness, Heller follows Aristotle in her observation that the

¹ Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 13.
frame of mind is that in which any pain is felt.\textsuperscript{2} How a person feels, as well as what he thinks, may reflect certain value stances and ways of looking at the world. It is not only the case that someone may gain insight into how someone else is feeling by observing his judgment and behaviour, but also that the expressed feeling, in its nature and intensity, will illuminate how that person understands the situation which triggered or is otherwise salient to it. More broadly, a person’s feelings, especially recurring emotional habits, will tend to inform and inflect her evaluative stance as she goes about her life. Self-expression through language, including the language of feeling, is central to the generalising and synthesising of consciousness, and thus also to individuality. In Knarf’s case an empathy and openness is an entirely intuitive response, though in many ways the emotions in question are an oblique presence in his character. They give rise to an order of involvement of a distinctly creative and imaginative kind.

Knarf’s character takes shape in the first instance around his current artistic project, one he has undertaken together with Ord, an archaeologist. Ord brings to their partnership his expertise in the Tenth Commune region, formerly the Riverina. Together the two men have investigated the evidence that remains from the time of the Australians, much of it fragmentary, and reconstructed those remnants to reach an understanding of the nature and organisation of the society as a whole. Knarf and Ord are both single-minded in their enquiries, and both place great value on intellectual autonomy. Each tolerates, with various degrees of wry impatience and frustration, as well as affection and respect, the other’s idiosyncrasies. Knarf’s recently completed novel is a focus of both men’s thoughts, as is, for Knarf, the collaboration between them, and their contrasting approaches as writers and scholars to their shared project. Ord is a highly detached, dispassionate thinker, and, as becomes quickly apparent, the scientific terms in which he perceives the past often put him at odds with Knarf’s artistic viewpoint.

Knarf and Ords’ characters resonate in many ways with Heller’s work on the individual personality as a model of reflexive subjectivity. Knarf and Ords’ interactions with each other

\textsuperscript{2} Heller, ‘Emotional Impoverishment?’, 46.
and their involvement in their creative and intellectual roles, and in the pursuit of truth, reveal the kind of critical awareness, including self-awareness, that Heller writes of. The individual relates consciously and deliberately to the world and to his involvement in it, and consequently his life and being become in their essence creations of his own making. The individual’s emotions belong to that which he lives responsibly, engaging actively and critically, when necessary, with his emotions and with the perspective and behaviour bound up with them. In this light Heller also refers to the individual’s consciousness of the historical trajectories salient to his emotions and sentiments.

In Knarf and Ords’ world, questions about change and responsibility unfold partly around a theme of reason which is linked to the political arrangements in their own society. The Tenth Commune is one cell in an international political order run on strict scientific principles. The application of rational methods, with governance by scientists and technicians, has resulted in the elimination of war and poverty. The rational foundations on which the social order is built, however, have concentrated power in the hands of specialists, leaving most of the populace outside the political process. Knarf, Ord and Knarf’s son Ren number among those for whom the highly regulated and systematised economic system and tightly controlled political administration have raised questions about a free and just social order, and how it might be achieved without sacrificing gains such as the absence of war.

Knarf’s character exemplifies a personality trait essential to reflexive individuality as Heller defines it, namely a capacity for self-abandonment. In *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, self-abandon features in the experience that led Knarf to embark upon his latest work. A visit to an archaeological site with stone fragments recovered from a war memorial in what had once been Sydney had proved a turning point in this respect. Knarf’s response to a resting soldier carved in stone had been immediate and unequivocal – a spark to the tinder of his creative imagination. Below, I consider that experience in light of Heller’s writing about the role of emotions in the reception of artworks. Knarf’s emotional palette demonstrates his receptiveness to beauty, a theme Heller writes of.
This chapter begins with a discussion of the soliloquy in which Knarf envisages the world of the Australians, in the faint dawn light on the morning he completes his book. After that, I consider Knarf’s openness to cathartic experience, in relation to the beginnings of his latest novel, before turning to Knarf’s relationship with Ord. Together, these three sections of the chapter cast light on the emotions, aesthetic judgment and convictions at the heart of Knarf’s emotional household.

Receptivity & the Creative Mind: ‘A Moment of Individual Consciousness in the Drift of Centuries’

The empathic cast of Knarf’s mind is initially revealed through his field of vision as a writer highly skilled in unveiling the past for his readers. In the opening pages of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, Knarf stands on the roof of his home at dawn on a day which for him is like no other: his latest novel, a historical project of seven years duration, is finished. Before him is a broad sweep of land flanked by ‘waking sky’ and ‘sleeping earth’; together, earth and sky form an enormous platter tilted towards the light, with the outline of the hills faintly visible on the horizon. The early autumn night has been still and warm, bringing a ‘feeling of transience, of breaking ripeness, of doomed fertility’.

With the dawn comes a cool mist and a rising light that slowly illuminates the land. To Knarf, exhilarated and exhausted after having worked through the night, the external world is alive with life-giving possibilities.

He was super-sensitively aware of himself, the tension of his skin nervously tightened by long concentration, the vulnerability of his temples, the frailty of his ribs caging his enlarged heart, the civilisation of his hands ... Flesh and imagination were blent and equally receptive.

The ‘wide sculptory of light, darkness, earth’ fills Knarf with ‘new wonder’, the crisp air striking his forehead with ‘a shock of excitement’. The sudden change ‘from work to idleness’ serves to momentarily heighten his senses. The black marks left by the touch of his fingers on the

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glimmering white surfaces of the dew-covered balustrades seem to him like another ‘contact, sharply intimate, with the external world’ of the misty dawn scene before him.

As quickly becomes apparent, the new day finds Knarf keenly attuned to the mystery of the natural and human forces at work around and within him. The half-light of daybreak, with its sense of possibilities and transition, resonates with his mood. The room behind him, empty except for the piles of manuscript stacked on a table, is akin to a ‘sloughed skin’.  To Knarf, having just completed his book, it is as if he has been born anew into the world on this day. He knows a sense of release from his intense, sustained intellectual labour – the blending of flesh and imagination – as well as a sense of fulfilment. To Knarf, the room seems to be suffused with the ‘vapours of a night of effort and struggle’, the lamplight ‘clotted and impotent’ against the ‘new daylight’.

In this pause between darkness and light he was between two worlds, a reality between two ghosts, a moment of sharp individual consciousness in the drift of centuries. 6

What Knarf sees with such clarity as he views the land around his house are the human lives the country had previously sustained. Indeed, so vehemently has Knarf been living in the past in his imagination that the present seems to him at that moment only half real. Looking out from his ‘nexus of time’, he recognises in the dawn vista before him a scene that, centuries or even a millennia earlier, would have seemed no different to ‘any living eye that had seen it, than it did to him today.’ Knarf knows that his sense of the immanence of the past is fleeting: in a few minutes, with the full light of day, the ‘world of to-day’ would be back ‘incontrovertibly, in its place’. But for the moment, ‘the old world, the past, might lie under the shadows just as easily as the present.’ 7

Two societies had previously inhabited the country. Further back in time were the ‘First People’, whose way of life saw human cycles intersect with mystic cycles, ‘the linking of rites and places, of ceremonies that were symbols of symbols forgotten even in the beginning of

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time but that continued to draw men through old, remembered ways. Bound upon the seasons, the First People had drawn from the land the food supplies they needed and formed a network of trade routes between the tribes. The tracks they had laid down on the hills had been light, the rhythms of their lives informed by an elemental simplicity oriented to survival but also fed by ‘deeper fountains of meaning.’ They had lived ‘scientifically, following a rational, adjusted, permanent design.’ Having all but died out long ago, they live on mostly in a few vestiges of rock art and faintly remembered song.

Those who had driven out the First People, the Australians, have themselves left only traces on the landscape. In their investigations into that past, Knarf and Ord found only remnants of ‘old Australia … scattered among the undulating hills and on the banks of the river’, no more than ‘the blind hieroglyphic of a life long lived and effaced.’ What Knarf has learned of the Australians both baffles and intrigues him. Knarf thinks of the Murrumbidgee River – its ‘old barbaric name’ – which he can see from his home, and which had not then ‘slipped quiet and full between canal-like banks, tame and sure, as it did today.’ Rather, it had ‘held the rich lands in a great gnarled claw’, its red banks ‘littered with the flotsam of old floods, an ancient tribal river that ruled like a god in these parts.’ By contrast to the scientific methods and principles and the technological advances central to his own society, the Australians had existed in uneasy tension, at best, with the natural resources available to them.

Knarf thinks of the local anecdote about a time of massive political upheaval and degradation of the land – a country ‘stripped bare’. The ‘beginning of the dark ages’, that epoch four hundred years earlier had seen one particular group, those ‘who would not make terms’, forced to leave the coast. The local river had been a frontier they had migrated along and beyond. In the context of ‘the long wars’ of the time, the Pioneers, as they have come to be known, had taken their belongings and stock, and ‘struck west and north for the safety of

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the bad lands." As the petrol had run out, the men had taken the wheels from their foundering trucks, cut down the Murrumbidgee gums and continued in rough drays, pulled by their horses or bullocks. Their needs drove them further and further out, each man and family for himself. Initially the conditions were favourable for the Pioneers, whose outlook had resembled those of their forebears, also called Pioneers. But this time, the lack of resources on which the Australians could rely was decisive. Without any market for their produce and in the face of harsh dry summers, the Pioneers were forced to abandon their flocks of sheep, retaining only a few animals to meet their own needs. The animals died in droves and the people learned to make do on the scanty resources provided by nature. Their priorities narrowed to water, food and liberty, the latter something ‘they could not help having and for which they had no use’. They were said to have become thin, tough and almost as black from the sun as the First People had been, but unlike the First People they had had no festivals, corroborees or traditional rites. Their return was impossible, and nor was any effort made to bring them back: ‘Such people were useless for the building of a new world.’ Knarf envisages the Pioneers travelling with their sheep over the plain beyond the river,

in a haze of dust, tall, brown, laconic men in dusty clothes, their heterogeneous belongings piled onto the makeshift vehicles already weathered to drabness, the slow flight into country without cover. . .

These former pioneers of the land are evoked in local anecdotes of Knarf’s time recounting ‘the rustle of sheep’s feet in the dust, the creak and clatter of riders, and even men’s voices singing in an archaic dialect’ – sounds said to have been overheard on moonlit nights, but always elsewhere, in remoter parts of the country. The primordial hold of this lost world is reinforced in an allusion to another, even older legend, namely the Hosting of the Sidhe. This reference by Ord to the Celtic legend of a band of otherworldly figures riding across the dawn sky thrusts the narrative ‘farther back into the world that was his own province.’

Struck anew by the truth of those mythic tales, Knarf is smitten with ‘imaginative conviction’. He knows a sense of recognition at his own train of thought:

Knowledge lay dead in his brain, so much ready-made merchandise on its shelves, and then, often for no obvious reason, it quickened and became part of the small, living and productive part of his mind.¹⁸

He anticipates that momentarily the past will once again be buried under the present, and that the scene ‘he knew so well and loved so deeply would cover and supercede the figment of his imagination which had had for the moment the intense overstrung reality of things that pass.’¹⁹ Once again he will see not the vistas of past eras, not the ‘bare hills of the twentieth century’, or ‘the irregular wasteful pattern of land overdriven and under-used but the lovely design of safe and steady fruitfulness.’²⁰ He judges the latter ‘a bright picture’ where no such had existed before. Yet he also recognises something unique and irreplaceable in the more turbulent and less ordered rhythms and viewpoints of an earlier civilisation. To the Pioneer, the surrounding hills would have been a no less edifying and welcome sight than they were to him today, in their eyes ‘a variation in pale colours, country under threat, a threnody for the wind’. The Pioneers’ way of life had perhaps even possessed a beauty and meaning which has been lost in his own times: ‘Eyes that had known it would be homesick today. Man might turn away from surfeits to pine for hard and meagre fare.’²¹

As strongly as Knarf identifies with the country in its present form – if not the social order built upon it – he has developed a feeling for both the geographical and human contours of that past world.²² He seeks to understand and represent the men and women of the past fully, in their own terms. He refuses to ascribe to the idea that the Pioneers were destroyers of the country who had then gone out, ‘irrationally and obstinately’, to die with the country.²³ To view the Pioneers in this way, as ‘in the last resort place-spirits, the half-evil genii of the soil,

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was a poet’s conception. Life was lived as fully than as now, now as then. This, that looks so sleek, is only an approximation too.’ Writing of the Australians, for Knarf, has meant engaging with a social world utterly unlike his own. Realising this objective has involved not just insight on Knarf’s part, into what made the past distinct, but also a sense of affinity with those of whom he writes. He prioritises fidelity to the multi-dimensional nature of that past world, over an ostensibly poetic conception that would efface the parallels between the cultural habits and outlook characteristic of that world, and those of the present day.

An array of emotions implicitly shape and inflect Knarf’s cerebral and highly focused musings. Knarf’s curiosity and wonder are apparent, as is his openness to diverse human experiences, including those of the First People and the Australians. His reflections reveal his love for the land on which he lives, and suggest how that love is connected to his engagement with its past inhabitants in his latest novel. The courage and resilience shown by the Pioneers, refugees of an as yet unnamed catastrophic event, especially captures his imagination. The efforts made by the Pioneers to survive had constituted a turning point in history, from which had arisen a ‘new world’ – a reference to the threads of continuity evident even amid the massive upheavals that were to come. A reverent tone, one of remembrance and wonder, inflects Knarf’s soliloquy. That soliloquy establishes the terms of a dialogue with that past that is central to his creative role generally, as we will see.

The necessary functions played by emotions in human consciousness and in reasoning and judgment are basic to Heller’s work on feelings, including her concept of emotional households. Fundamental to that concept is the close relationship between feelings and judgments; emotions may be cognitively and situationally co-determined, and a person’s distinctive emotional habits will tend to be bound up with her habits of mind. Furthermore, in Heller’s essay on the modern subject, she writes of the philosopher who fashions a singular philosophical stance reflective of her standpoint and value preferences. That stance is the basis of engagement by other philosophers, and non-philosophers, forming part of a ‘network of unsocial sociability, of conflicts, alliances, abuses, loves, friendships’. Such dialogues attest to a

capacity for assigning meaning and cultivating value preferences which is integral to the subject, as Heller defines it.

Knarf is not unlike Heller’s self-narrativising philosopher, who brings forth a world according to his own measure and sense of things. In both cases what is foregrounded is the highly specialised nature of the task in hand, and questions of intellectual discipline and creativity, rather than the social actor’s everyday world, as such. What our attention is drawn to in the above scenes from *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* is what Knarf sees in the past – what his mind makes of his rooftop view and of his investigations into its previous inhabitants. The centre-points of the Self, Heller tells us, lie beyond the Self. In *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, Knarf brings to his writing task a sensibility closely informed by an abiding involvement in the people he writes of, and their essential humanity. In the opening scenes of the novel, the reader sees, through his eyes, the fictional world he has made his own over the past seven years, into which essential aspects of his subjectivity and character are woven. As Knarf purveys the scene from his ‘watchtower of time’, envisaging in his mind’s eye the land before him as it is now and also as it once was, the contours of his emotional household are established in the sweep of his vision, in the connections he forms and the patterns he recognises.25

Knarf’s respect for the Pioneers’ courage, as people unwilling to compromise who had reckoned with bush conditions with only their own resources to sustain them, is all the keener for having been part of what, to him, is a bafflingly complex social order. He thinks of the Australians as ‘a very strange people, full of contradictions, adaptable and obstinate’.26 Their contradictions had spanned economic and social as well as political domains. He thinks, for instance, of confusions centred on their colonial past as a nation that ‘exalted patriotism as if it were a virtue’, while at the same time identifying strongly with Britain, a country on the other side of the world which many of them had never visited. He likewise thinks of the Australians’ involvement in foreign wars, often times ‘for an imperial design from which they themselves

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sought to escape.’27 They were a people at once ‘prodigal of its armies’ who fought hard for causes in myriad places: ‘Tough, sardonic, humorous, they were romantics the like of which the world had never seen.’ Yet if they were known to be among the bravest of nations, at home in times of peace they showed a universal resistance to fighting or being compelled to fight, evident in their comprehensive rejection of conscription in the early twentieth century. Such rebellion had constituted ‘one of their gestures of freedom, the curious truncated liberty to which they held.’ The Australians were not a belligerent people, they were rather a people whom war served to divide into two camps: ‘the fighting tribe – the Anzacs, as they came to be called – and the others who didn’t fight.’

Economic factors weigh heavily in Knarf’s evaluation of the Australians. Greed and inconsistency had distorted their managing of the land, notwithstanding the strength and endurance they had demonstrated in settling it. A flawed logic at work in their nation-building had proved literally fatal, as emerges in passages like the following:

They had drawn a hardy independence from the soil and had maintained it with pride and yet they had allowed themselves to be dispossessed by the most fantastic tyranny the world had ever known, money in the hands of the few, an unreal, an imaginary system driving out reality. They had their hardbitten realism and yet they co-operated in the suicidal fiction of production for profit instead of for use.28

Both the admiration and the perplexity the Australians inspire in Knarf are demonstrated in this passage. He sees a clash of opposing forces at work in their history, most problematically an insatiable pursuit of profit. The idea that they had brought about their own dispossession, and the reference to ‘suicidal fiction of production for profit instead of use’, like the reference cited earlier to a period of crisis dubbed the ‘dark ages’, gesture to the high price paid by the Australians for these tensions and complexities. Knarf thinks of them as having lived in a ‘perpetual high gale of unreason’, their way of life ‘stormy and perverse’.29

27 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 10.
28 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 9.
29 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 10.
To Knarf, there is something essentially inexplicable in the principles at work in the Australians’ way of life. He is no proponent of the narrowly scientific conceptions of reason and rationality dominant in his own society, but he is equally unconvinced by the patchwork of ideas and values that seem to have guided the Australian polis. In the face of rampant consumerism, with houses ‘choked with useless objects and meaningless ornament’, many people had struggled with poverty and hunger: ‘There was always too much and too little, never enough.’30 People’s confidence had been undermined by the insecurity of both bread and ‘faith’, and again by the effects of advertising and propaganda, the latter ‘spokes in the wheel whose hub and circumference were profit.’31 In such ways, ‘[l]ife went like a cart on square wheels’. It is the consequences of such ‘unreason’ for peoples’ lives, the heavy toll taken in terms of human flourishing, that most centrally occupies Knarf.

Knarf’s interest in the fate of the individual, in light of the particular structures and conventions acting upon people’s lives in Australian society, also centres around the question of freedom, as is suggested in his reference to the liberty possessed, if not enjoyed, as such, by the Pioneers. The particular conception of liberty that concerns Knarf has to do with freedom of expression and opinion – an impulse of an essentially democratic nature. In an exchange with his son Ren, he cites one of the ‘ancients’, Harold Laski, on liberty as

“a courage to resist the demands of power at some point that is deemed decisive and, because of this, liberty also is an inescapable doctrine of contingent anarchy. It is always a threat to those who operate the engines of authority that prohibition of experience will be denied. Where there is respect for reason there also is respect for freedom. And only respect for freedom can give final beauty to men’s lives.”32

Honouring human experience is an article of faith at the heart of Knarf’s emotional household as a writer. His conversations with Ren centre on questions to do with effecting political change, something both are preoccupied with, in different ways. For Ren, who is 19 years old, the issues demand an immediate response to try to bring about such change. Ren’s ideals are

30 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 11.
31 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 11.
32 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 36.
channelled into a project to bring about a new means of gauging public opinion so as to enhance popular representation in the political realm. During the same conversation with his father, Ren faults the earlier generation – the generation depicted in Knarf’s latest book – for its lack of vision:

“They thought everything there was to think and they said everything there was to say, but they didn’t accomplish much. They made a sad mess of doing, didn’t they?”

“There are so many by-products to whatever you do. It’s hard to know where you are going.”

Part of a continuing discussion between Knarf and Ren about questions of progress and freedom, this passage demonstrates a pragmatism borne partly of the fatherly protectiveness his son draws out in Knarf. He is entirely in accord with the tenor of Ren’s political activities, though he treads carefully in his interactions with Ren, aware of the fact that his own singular preoccupation with his writing project over recent years has frayed their personal ties. For Knarf, it is through his storytelling that he strives to contribute to a humane, just social order. Central to this is giving voice to characters, and rendering their lives and points of view truthfully and sensitively.

If the past strikes Knarf as utterly strange in some respects, in other ways it excites a sense of recognition. As a novelist, he seeks to articulate both its newness and its familiarity, to capture both the break from, and the continuity with, his own time and place.

The queer things had happened but they weren’t the whole, any more than the stone stripped of its rosy pulp and glowing skin is the fruit. It had been life in a different key, it had been transposed not lost.

Knarf’s sympathy ultimately lies with those whose fates had been determined by forces beyond their making and control. A capitalist system based on profit and competition had set people against each other, leading to increasingly destructive effects as monopolies developed. Constant disruption and uncertainty had been the lot of many: ‘economic forces levered them

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out, sent them circulating, rootless through the country or gravitating towards the cities.\textsuperscript{35} The Australians had brought ‘a new sort of death to the continent, – not overt violence but the unregarded, unrecorded death of dumb men and beasts, bound luckless upon the machine.’ Knarf thinks of ‘animals caught by drought on overstocked pastures, men caught by depression in overproduced cities, a needless repeating pattern.’ He is moved by the resilience shown by many of those caught up in such chaotic conditions: ‘All this side by side with pride and courage and independence, unvisualised for what it was.’\textsuperscript{36} Knowledge of the human consequences of a civilisation that put profits ahead of people has mobilised Knarf’s empathy, as an individual and a writer:

Knarf shivered in the dawn. This was one of the moments when, his spirit worn thin, he was oppressed by all the suffering that there had been in the world, especially the pitiful unrecorded suffering of those who died without redress or drama. It was as if he saw it still, like a lava stain upon the hills he loved so much.\textsuperscript{37}

It strikes Knarf that his own generation may be no less blind or cruel than those who came before: it is clear to him that the Australians had not been ‘inferior to us in mind or heart’. Thinking of the Australians’ love for their country, and catching a glimpse of the landscape through their eyes, and through ‘the eyes of his imagination’, Knarf is ‘brushed for a moment by that excitement of the spirit which was the secret manna of his gifts.’ Whereas, for he and his peers, peace remains an essentially second-hand experience, insofar as they take it for granted, for those living in ‘a more turbid world’ the ‘wide horizons … unchanging and unchangeable’ of the land had possessed ‘an added lustre’. Against the backdrop of turbulence and hardship, the experience of the earth itself had changed:

It wasn’t only the loveliness of peace, it was peace over against turmoil, it was refuge, it was home. If the sky was empty and the horizon unbroken, that was rest. These were not hills, they were the gentle breasts of the earth.\textsuperscript{38}

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\textsuperscript{35} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 12. \\
\textsuperscript{36} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 13. \\
\textsuperscript{37} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 13. \\
\textsuperscript{38} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 13.
\end{flushright}
Rocked by his own feelings, Knarf confronts the depth of identification which is at the heart of his latest work:

Like a man suddenly realising that his retreat is cut off by the tide, Knarf thought “I belong as much with them as with today, with the Australians as with my own generation of a people who have no name.”

Heller writes of the social actor irretrievably involved in his chosen commitments. For Knarf, there is no ‘retreat’ from his task, or the feelings associated with it. In this scene, Knarf exemplifies a social actor obliged to honour and do justice to his deep feelings, i.e. those feelings expressive of his personality.

**Turning Points: The Seeds of Knarf’s Artistic Involvement**

Knarf’s sense of identification with the Australians had begun with one man, a figure hewn in stone. Seven years earlier, Knarf had encountered vestiges of stone art reclaimed during earthworks in the large coastal centre where Sydney once stood. That experience, one shared by Ord, had been the beginning point of his latest novel.

The visit had begun inauspiciously enough. Knarf had then been enduring ‘the constipated and dreary state of a writer temporarily deserted by his desire to write.’ At Ord’s invitation, Knarf had joined him and a group of other archaeologists to view the uncovered remains. For Knarf, the initial decision to go had been fuelled by a perverse satisfaction in anticipating ‘pinning on Ord the responsibility for the tedium in which he was becalmed.’

Upon arrival, the sight of the sea – always a source of pleasure for Knarf – had lifted his spirits:

From the first glimpse of it from the air, a dark blue band on the horizon, his heart had lifted, he had been stirred by the drama of its immensity and his sealed mind had become receptive again.

This receptiveness on Knarf’s part had been further deepened upon seeing the panoramic contours of the coastline, with its ‘great procession of treeless headlands’, the scalloped sand

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and cresting surf of the beaches fronting a ‘voluminous blue’ ocean, the ‘jewel-like harbour’, and, finally, the compact Centre itself, built on the site of a once great, sprawling city. These sights, and the sensations and associations accompanying them, had ‘invaded his brain like an intoxication of light.’ After he had landed, the experience of once again ‘performing the common routine’ had felt curiously unreal to Knarf, his mind having been ‘washed clear in that great draught of light’.

The unanticipated rewards continue for Knarf in the enclosure where the excavations, chief among them a statue recovered from a war memorial, are on view. Knarf and the others first witness the artwork ‘as a dark shape against the sky’. It is positioned high on a plinth, in keeping with the original mode of display, as the archaeological curator informs them. Ord, who is in a vile temper, objects that ‘headquarters took too much on itself’, faulting the curator as arrogant and insolent not only for pre-arranging the display without consulting the others, but also for having the audacity to lecture them about it. Knarf, meanwhile, has eyes only for the stone figure towering above him:

The colossus sat, looking straight before him, his stone arms resting on his stone knees, a soldier after battle, accoutred, his battle dress a rough swaddling on his tired limbs, an infantryman in a slouch hat, hard, lean, far-sighted, one who had covered great distances, a man worn down to bedrock, an immortal ghost in stone.43

Knarf is instantly and powerfully struck by the properties of fortitude and constancy embodied in the figure above him, with his direct gaze, battle dress and resting pose. Looking up at the statue, and dismissing Ord’s complaints from his mind ‘as something accustomed and meaningless’, Knarf is gripped by an ‘irrational’ conviction that:

this stone figure had survived holocaust and time, not by chance, but because of some inherent quality in itself. The stone was charged with life.44

43 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 14.
44 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 15.
Not only is the stone figure a true representation of strength and the overcoming of trials, to Knarf it somehow distils these human qualities in its very essence.

Just as its substance was harder and more enduring than the flesh of man whose likeness it held, so too the spirit that had been in him, dogged, enduring, obstinate, unfailing was transmitted unchanged into stone. It endured because it embodied endurance.45

In the ‘colossus’, it seems to Knarf, the very distance between art and life has been effaced:

This was the thing itself, the surviving principle of man, grasped by the sculptor and set down in stone. As the stone preserved the life it copied, so the tension of the artist’s imagination preserved the stone. This brooding, unheroic figure was immortal man.

In this scene, the reader sees Knarf filled with feeling, transfixed by an artwork that has, as he sees it, captured something essential to humanity, something of human suffering. For Knarf this is a moment of profound insight and connection. His sense of heightened awareness, of his own consciousness and of the stone figure above him, is described as follows:

Knarf had one of those moments when his mind made what seemed to him a direct contact with reality, dead knowledge came to life in him, a world co-ordinated about this focal point.

This passage echoes the reference, cited above, to the way apparently ‘dead’ knowledge may suddenly quicken so as to become a living and productive part of Knarf’s mind: in that split second, a spark of awareness and intuition demands to be transformed into action. The experience described above is inherently emotional: this flickering into life constitutes the power of inspiration to awaken and actualise Knarf’s creative mind. In thus capturing the beginnings of Knarf’s artistic involvement – and the passion central to that involvement – the text inherently records the seeding of a distinct emotional household, such as will see him bring that artistic quest to fruition.

The insight Knarf gleans from the artwork before him has to do with a ‘truism’ which his mind ‘had never doubted and his imagination had never before accepted.’ That truism relates

to questions of history and humanity, particularly the expressions of human spirit and endeavour connecting past and present:

The men of the lost world, four centuries sunk in time, were as fully matured in their humanity as any man living, cut from the same living, continuous tree of life – only their circumstances had been different. Trapped in a failing world they had still had the strength and temerity to beget a new world, or there would be no new world, no now.46

For Knarf, the stone figure, which they have come to call the Brooding Anzac, unlocks the puzzle of human existence and drives at the heart of a continuity and connection between his own society and previous inhabitants of the land. His imagination is infused with a sense of the unity and wholeness of the human universe, what he calls the ‘living continuous tree of life’. The story of the ‘men of the lost world’ is also his story, their strength and temerity elements in the making of his world. This revelatory moment sets his artistic imagination alight, inspiring him to bring to life not only the weary infantryman carved in stone, but also the world he inhabited. Knarf’s newly completed book ‘was not obviously related to its source and yet it was rooted there and the Brooding Anzac had been its touchstone’.47

The very power of Knarf’s emotions as he stands in the archaeological enclosure amid the excavated remains sounds a warning in his mind. As Ord speculates with another archaeologist as to the likely creator of the statue, Knarf reflects on the forces that move him as a writer:

It moved him enormously – because, he warned himself with the residuum of his mind, I am a romantic which is the synonym for an untrustworthy person, one who is emotionally avaricious, as Ord would say. He hid everything that was in his mind from Ord.48

The question of Knarf’s emotions here comes suddenly to the fore. Knarf’s reflections on being deeply moved, and on his standing as a ‘romantic’ open to the charge of emotional avarice, make explicit the sentiments and dispositions that lie just below the surface of his soliloquy as a

46 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 15.
47 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 18.
48 Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow, 15.
whole. His words reveal his habit of masking his expression of his emotions around Ord, and also more generally. The implication is that this masking takes the form not of repression, but rather of channelling of his feelings. At stake here is how Knarf reconciles within himself the competing demands of emotion and reason in his creative role. There are echoes of the passage outlined above in which Knarf likens himself to a man whose retreat is cut off by the tide: his emotions evidently constitute a potentially disruptive, even dangerous, force. At the same time, in that case as well as the present one, the depth and power of those emotions, and their personal and creative significance for Knarf, is also unmistakeable. In such ways, the text illuminates ideas explored by Heller about how our emotional households are worked out in the reconciling of inwardness and rationality.

After a time, Knarf follows Ord to the viewing platform to take a closer look at the ‘colossus’. But he is left cold when he views the work up close, ‘aware only of the roughness of the stone and of a certain disproportion introduced to counteract the height’. He wonders at how the sculptor ‘could work in the close disillusion of proximity and yet achieve the compelling long-distance effect’. (By contrast, proximity to the artwork offers Ord the chance to see it in more detail, and he comes away impressed by the artist’s accuracy.) Disturbed by the height, Knarf returns to ground level where he walks among the ‘scattered blacks of stone’ on the ground, ‘stooping now and again to see if his awakened imagination could force any secret from them, and letting the images that had assailed him seep into his mind.’

He returns to the enclosure later in the day on his own. Rays of blue-white light emanate from the nearby wooden shed where the curator continues working, ‘piecing together the dust’. Knarf stands gazing at the figure above him, the outline of which seems larger and more fluent in the fading sky of dusk. Knarf’s heart is shaken by the thought of ‘flesh imprisoned beneath stone.’ He makes further visits over the coming days, sometimes alone and other times with Ord.

Knarf’s openness to the beauty of the statue, and the effects of that encounter upon him, both inwardly and in his ensuing actions, is configured in terms consistent with those outlined in Heller’s essay on emotions and the reception of artworks. Heller writes of the way

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49 Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 16.
artworks may lift their recipients above their immediate everyday concerns, fostering a form of involvement in which ‘pragmatic and practical interests’ are suspended.\textsuperscript{50} She refers to the ‘mutual love between recipient and work’, the love generated in the former attesting to its reciprocity. Unlike most feelings and emotions, this love is not ‘ego-related’, but rather reflects an abstraction from our ‘everyday situation. We abandon ourselves. Self-abandon is an erotic gesture.’ She describes a contemplative attitude characteristic of such a recipient:

I am all eyes or all ears and I expose myself to the provocation of erotic attraction – so to speak, naked, without reservations. This means that I let myself be provoked by the work and this is what we call Beauty.\textsuperscript{51}

The kind of artistic reception at issue in this passage arouses feelings which are undetermined and free of interests and concepts, though still self-furthering (‘Without self-furthering there is no delight’). Heller accents the non-egocentric nature of the feelings in question: ‘Delight felt in experiencing a work of art is not a kind of moral praxis and has nothing to do with the egoism of altruism’.\textsuperscript{52} Heller describes such feelings as ‘totally innocent feeling-mosaics’, i.e. they are uncoupled from particularistic interests and needs.\textsuperscript{53} Heller advocates that a person neither censures, nor entirely identifies with, his own ‘love relationship’ with an artwork and the feelings inherent to that relationship.\textsuperscript{54} Of the potentially cathartic effects of artworks, Heller writes that, under their influence, someone may ‘change her attitude and lifestyle radically for the better’.\textsuperscript{55}

Knarf’s imagination is shown to be ignited by his encounter with the Brooding Anzac in the way Heller describes. His own particular needs and situation in life play no part in that encounter. Standing in the grassy enclosure looking up at the brooding, unheroic figure, his mind is infused with awe and reverence, and he is filled with utter conviction that this ‘immortal ghost in stone’ embodies the dogged, obstinate and unfailing spirit of its creator.

\textsuperscript{50} Agnes Heller, ‘The Role of Emotions in the Reception of Artworks’ in \textit{Aesthetics and Modernity}, 68. (Hereafter ‘Reception of Artworks’.)
\textsuperscript{51} Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 68.
\textsuperscript{52} Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 69.
\textsuperscript{53} Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 78.
\textsuperscript{54} Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 78.
\textsuperscript{55} Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 78.
There is a rapturous quality to his experience, which is encompassing and, in certain respects, outward-looking in nature, centred in human ideals and possibilities. This feeling of affinity encompasses the way the sights of the ocean and city go to work on Knarf’s previously sealed mind and imagination. Also salient is his urge to deepen his experience of the artwork by returning for a second viewing, and a third and a fourth. Heller writes that the ‘first repetition, especially if it results from a strong desire for a second encounter, is the confirmation of love’. Such a longing for ‘a renewed encounter with the beloved work’ does not belong to the faculty of pleasure/displeasure, but rather constitutes a kind of desire (here she follows Kant). It is, moreover, an ‘objectless longing’, and more specifically, ‘the longing for the repetition of a receptive experience, a longing for contemplation, a contemplative longing.’\textsuperscript{56} It is this emotional state, she concludes, that typically precedes and follows the reception of artworks, in the terms she writes of.

At the same time, a ‘rational’ voice eventually cuts in on Knarf’s heightened emotional state. It is as if the intensity of his contemplation is modulated by this element of circumspection, both reverie and attachment being essential to his creative impulses. The two explicit references in the text to Knarf’s emotions each suggest the kind of dialogue he conducts with his feelings in the course of his writing. It is those feelings which have inspired and sustained Knarf’s creative pursuits over the last seven years, centrally an identification with the Australians which had ensued from his ‘awakened imagination’ after viewing the Brooding Anzac.

In addition to the aesthetic impact on Knarf of the form and contours of the Brooding Anzac, another dynamic at play here concerns its power as a symbol of a life and world long vanished. This is conveyed in the evocative power of the battle-weary foot-solider, ‘one who had covered great distances, a man worn down to bedrock’. Knarf sees in the artwork an embodiment of a ‘failing world’ as well as the ‘strength and temerity’ of the inhabitants of that

\textsuperscript{56} Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 77.
world. The beauty and significance Knarf sees in the Brooding Anzac recalls observations made by Heller regarding the reception of fine art (paintings). Heller writes:

Sensuality impresses the recipient in an almost immediate manner. It is in fine arts that Plato’s thoughts sound most true: it is beauty that we love, and what we do love is beautiful.\(^{57}\)

The feelings in question, as stated above, are interest-free and concept-free, and thus ‘free floating’.\(^{58}\) Heller goes on to discuss the ‘relatively undetermined’ nature of the reception of artworks, in the case of works in which one or other way of life is represented:

For example, it is not just beauty that is presented, but a specific kind of beauty, the beauty of a form of life or way of life. Something is suggested by a way of life which hits the recipient in her emotional epi-centre. Incipient in the emotional judgment is the relation of the recipient to the way of life on canvas, in marble or in stone. The way of life presented can be one long gone, yet it can also be ours.\(^{59}\)

The emotional impact on Knarf of his encounter with the world of the Australians is directly in line with this description by Heller of the cathartic effects of art. The way of life embodied in the Brooding Anzac has long vanished in Knarf’s time, yet it has become as, if not more, real to him than his own social and historical moment. This is the past of his present, and in his paean to that lost and failing world, and to those who had held out to the end, thus planting the seeds for the social order of the future, there is a tone of nostalgic longing. Nostalgia, Heller writes, is characteristically present in our reception of artworks which depict ‘a way of life of a bygone age’, in cases where the viewer identifies with the artwork. Knarf’s discourse also has a redemptive aspect to do with the possibility that regeneration may follow destruction. Thus he thinks of the ‘new world’ that has, centuries later, sprung from the ashes of the Australians’ demise; likewise, he envisages the ‘stone men up on their rampart’, seeking to defend ‘the symbol of death and sacrifice’ over against ‘death and destruction’. Such statements can be

\(^{57}\) Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 73.
\(^{58}\) Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 69.
\(^{59}\) Heller, ‘Reception of Artworks’, 74.
read as part of the story Knarf has set out to tell – a tale of that ‘living continuous tree of life’ in which human destinies are woven.

**Emotional Masks & A Meeting of Minds: Knarf and Ord**

A further significant dimension of Knarf’s world of feeling pertains to the marriage of minds involved in his collaboration with Ord. Knarf’s feelings of sympathy and affinity with the unearthed remnant of an earlier time have no equivalent in Ord, or at least any such feelings on the latter’s part are not expressed outwardly. During their first visit to the archaeological site, Knarf is mystified as to why Ord engages in ‘examining and measuring’ the statue: its secret and mystery seem to Knarf to be entirely intangible, and to lie in the ‘imagination that had informed its making’, something graspable only by ‘another imagination of the same quality’. It is common for Knarf to feel such momentary irritation, and a certain incomprehension, with Ord, and the same is also true of Ord’s response to Knarf. Ord’s discipline and analytic concision, with a mind ‘dry and sharp like herbs rubbed between the hands’, often stimulates Knarf’s highly fertile, innovative imagination. In his exchanges with Ord, who is by nature ‘[s]ardonic and combative’ yet at the same time ‘comforting’, Knarf has been pushed again and again to ‘defend and justify himself. Many an idea he’d beaten out in the heat of opposition’.  

As we have seen, there is a central and complex emotional dimension to Knarf and Ords’ shared goals as writers. Effacing that closeness is key to their partnership, as is apparent in the following passage, taken from the account of viewing the Brooding Anzac.

> Knarf was developing some of the fetichism of a man in love. Between him and Ord there had developed a competition in vanities which masked the deep feeling to which one, if not both, was a prey. It was, in its very pettiness, a relief.

Bluster and a rhetoric of competition and rivalry have become the outward face of Knarf and Ords’ relationship, a subterfuge made necessary by the deep emotion both are ‘prey’ to, though such emotion must be taken on faith in Ord’s case, such is his erudite, scientific

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60 Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow*, 22.
demeanour. Knarf has come to his own conclusions about the tendencies of Ord’s rationalism. During a debate with another colleague, Lunda, about the identity of the artist who created the Brooding Anzac, Ord momentarily comes ‘out of character’ to observe the artist’s good fortune at having died prior to the Second World War, a reference to the scale of devastation to come. In the empirical outlook Ord advances, the vagaries of imagination, memory and emotion are factors to be accounted for and, if possible, eradicated. Knarf conjectures that, to his friend, the construction of historical explanations based on material evidence and facts ultimately amounts to a game in which the participants shape ‘such patterns as they could conceive out of the fragments of evidence they had.’ In the following passage, Knarf articulates something of Ord’s viewpoint on the subjective workings of the human mind, through which ‘history’ is inevitably woven, and, according to this interpretation, entangled:

History is a creative art, a putty nose. You can make what you like of it. Event, immediately it is past, becomes a changing simulacrum at the mercy of all the minds through which it must seep if it is to live, memory passed from hand to hand, coloured with prejudice, embroidered with fantasy, flattened with pedantry, and finally served up in all seriousness as history. Ord made him think these things.\textsuperscript{62}

Knarf is unsure how to take Ord’s thesis: does he believe it himself, or is he perhaps making light of the issue? Is this further evidence of the irony and skepticism that compliment Ord’s materialism? For Knarf, such questions can only be academic ones: he himself, having witnessed the Brooding Anzac, had ‘trodden in another man’s imagination and it did not matter at all that there were four centuries of time between them.’\textsuperscript{63} His ‘unattached imagination had found his host’, and in the ensuing years he had ‘beaten that moment into shape and fashioned from it something that was his own.’\textsuperscript{64} Each of the two men knows a very different path to the human experience which is for both of them their essential subject matter as writers and intellectuals.

\textsuperscript{62} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 17.
\textsuperscript{63} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 17.
\textsuperscript{64} Barnard Eldershaw, \textit{Tomorrow}, 17-18.
Ord’s capacity for dispassionate reasoning and objectivity is linked to a distance he keeps from others. He is a man with a ‘watertight’ mind, a mind without ‘leaks’, ‘as strong, unsentimental, impersonal as an anvil; as an anvil he [Knarf] would use it.’ As well as evoking Ord’s intellectual gifts and qualities of resoluteness and constancy, this metaphor also gets at something enigmatic and possibly unknowable in his character. At the same time, Knarf also recognises another aspect of Ord’s personality:

Knarf knew that under this pose of stubborn rationality there quickened a strong imagination, that Ord could not have held to his task without this secret nourishment of the spirit, yet that it was so hidden made their friendship easier. There was no competition and yet it was open to each to mask his strongest feelings under an assumption of hostility or even contempt.65

Both the presence of strong feeling, and its effacing and relegating, are apparent in this passage, which suggests a relationship with little outward emotional expression. Yet even though the feelings in question go mostly unexpressed, they remain essential parts of Knarf and Ord’s characters. Deep feeling anchors Knarf’s artistic talent, and by implication it plays a similar role in Ord’s habits of mind and reasoning. Controlling, or trying to control, what they show to the other in this way is part of the continuing process by which they meld their artistic talents, reconciling their different approaches to and perspectives on the past and their enquiries into it. It seems self-evident to Knarf, in light of his own richly imaginative world, that a ‘strong imagination’ would quicken beneath Ord’s ‘pose of stubborn rationality’, thereby nourishing his ‘spirit.’ The scene plays with what each man takes on faith about the other in the course of working together, and the way the relationship calls on their knowledge of each other, and of themselves. Like the account of Knarf’s so-called avaricious emotions, such images of the two men’s inner worlds show feelings to be in the service of the will and imagination. Certain basic ideals and aims are primary, for both of them, chiefly the commitment to their shared intellectual project, and the adherence to truth informing that project. Beyond that, they rub along together, suppressing the emotions associated with their

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collaboration and friendship, and the sense of Self invested in that emotion, in this case through an outward display of ‘hostility or even contempt’.

**Conclusion**

Heller’s concept of emotional households turns on an idea of subjectivity understood in terms of the continuous interplay of feelings, tasks and norms, framed relative to the person as a whole, with her own capacities, circumstances, needs and point of view. On first glance, it might appear that Knarf’s character, and his highly specialised world, is an odd choice to explore Heller’s work in this area. Knarf’s everyday life, including his ties with Ord and Ren, does feature in the story, but this life is not where his art has its roots.

Yet in many ways, Knarf’s character speaks to the essence of Heller’s model of the self-narrating subject, whose feelings are as salient as his thoughts to his existence as a reasoning, morally reflexive being. The deep, steady emotions guiding Knarf as a writer are referenced in different ways throughout the extracts of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* discussed above, most often indirectly. That emotion infuses his perspective from his roof-top pavilion, informing the imaginative spectacle he reveals of the way of life of the Australians. What is demonstrated is a sensibility informed by an openness to human cultures and human experience, and by a belief in individual freedom and truth. The fecundity of Knarf’s imagination is conveyed in his elation in the wake of completing his latest novel, and it pertains to the imaginative conviction that sees knowledge come to life in his mind. The catalyst here, as is also apparent in his response to the Brooding Anzac, is empathy, a readiness to see through the eyes of the men and women of the past, and to understand the world as they experienced it. That identification moves him to try to grasp what to him is the irrational mix of values and beliefs that was at work in their social and economic order. Among the Australians, enduring courage and resilience seem to have co-existed with unchecked greed and adherence to economic policies which were comprehensively destructive in their effects, for all that they generated vast amounts of wealth. In this human tragedy, as embodied in the Brooding Anzac, Knarf sees a timeless dilemma of people bound to a system that ultimately proved indifferent and in some cases actively inimical to their needs and interests. This tragedy has inspired
Knarf’s latest work, its central motif that of the ‘living continuous tree of life’, in which differences of temporal and spatial horizons are effaced.

In terms of Knarf’s emotional household, the above extracts can be seen to fall in two sections, with Knarf’s encounter with the Brooding Anzac the turning point between them. In that scene, the focus shifts away from Knarf’s consciousness, with his ‘unattached imagination’ said to have ‘found its host’. (This transition is carried by means of an inversion of the narrative plot, in which the reader comes to this first encounter after having read Knarf’s soliloquy about the Australians.) His mind and imagination thus ‘awakened’ to certain aspects of the human condition, to do with the continuous thread of humanity over different historical periods and, more specifically, the ‘maturity’ of the humanity of the Australians, Knarf sets about articulating his insight in writing. In particular, the encounter with the Brooding Anzac mobilises Knarf’s feelings for the individual living amid unconducive conditions, struggling against the inertia of vested interests. Knarf demonstrates a receptiveness to the artwork which serves to lift him above particularistic interests and concerns; moreover, this love proves cathartic in its effects on him thereafter. On these topics, Knarf’s world resonates with the core themes of Heller’s article on emotions and the reception of artworks.

Knarf’s reflections on the novel he has just completed make apparent a need to realise certain feelings, even while curtailing their outward expression. They thus signal a key dimension of the emotional household fostered by his experience seven years earlier, and the concrete task that had issued from it. This is central to two significant references in the text to his emotion: first, the idea that as a romantic and an artist, emotions are integral to his task, and second, that the power of his identification with the Australians has, in effect, made impossible any retreat from those feelings. The tenor of both comments is to the effect that he guides and channels the deep feelings associated with his latest novel, and that such emotional sublimation critically sustains his writing. Such comments establish emotion as the well-spring of his artistic role, though not unproblematically. Within the novel as a whole, the singular nature of Knarf’s artistic commitment is shown to have come at the cost of his everyday life and community ties. His artistic commitment is in no way diminished by this fact, though it can
cause him guilt and regret, most notably in relation to the consequences for his relationship with Ren.

In this respect, and also in other ways, the reader is shown that Knarf is not immune to the expectations and values of his society. Ideas and expectations about reason and rationality surface in relation to Knarf’s creative role. It is when he reflects on the nature of his experiences that he is struck by self-recrimination, or something very like it, specifically to do with his emotional capacity. To a more purportedly objective eye, of which Ord is the chief spokesperson so far as Knarf is concerned, the latter’s impassioned standpoint equates to emotional avarice. Yet for Knarf too, there is a need for detachment from his emotions. In such ways his world of feelings is shown to intersect with, and be mediated by, certain social norms governing his creative task. On the one hand, he abandons himself to and honours his feelings – something exemplified in his response to the Brooding Anzac – and on the other hand, he maintains a distance from them. His articulation of human endeavours and experience in his latest book is thus shown to issue from relegation of his deepest feelings about his subject, with the relegated feelings, as background feelings, remaining essential to the task at hand. This is orchestrated around questions of Knarf’s will and consciousness in ways consistent with Heller’s concept of the individual personality.

Thus, emotions are shown to occupy a decisive, and subliminal place in Knarf’s creative task. Knarf demonstrates an openness and receptivity of personality that is central to Heller’s model of reflexive subjectivity. For Heller, the opposite of subjectivity is not objectivity, but particularity, involving a state of being closed to dialogue and argument.66 The character of Knarf illustrates this point. As Heller writes:

> The alternative is not between difference and universality, between internal and external, but between closure and openness, between fundamentalism and an invitation to a voyage where we never know ahead whom we are going to meet

during our journey, whether we will recognise – as once Iphigenia and Orestes did – our brothers and sisters among the strangers.\textsuperscript{67}

For Knarf, bringing the past to life is a means of unveiling the human condition, and in this respect, his latest work serves as an invitation to a voyage of the kind Heller envisages above. That journey is shown to have begun from his response to his feelings of affinity for the previous inhabitants of the land where he lives.

\textsuperscript{67} Agnes Heller, ‘Self-Representation and the Representation of The Other’ in \textit{Aesthetics and Modernity}, 173.
CONCLUSION: NARRATIVISING THE EVERYDAY

Heller’s concept of emotional households, as explored in this thesis, invites the reader to consider the relationship of feelings to subjectivity, positing a concept of the Self as forged in social relationships, and centred in a capacity to make meaning out of experience. As we saw in Chapter Two, Heller accents the ‘personal, individual and unique relation’ of the subject to intersubjectivity. The emotional housekeeper, for Heller, is the person involved in the world, and in his own being and personality. The top note, as it were, of his world of feelings is likely to reflect the influence of certain characteristic emotional dispositions and emotional habits. His deep feelings, and especially the palette of feelings associated with his personality, are vital to the ‘soil’ from which his judgment and reasoning spring.

Heller’s ideas about subjectivity formation are infused with ideals regarding self-creation and living a meaningful life in the conditions opened up by modernity. She envisages the human being 'thrown' into the world at birth, making her way in the normative framework of one or other concrete way of life. In important respects, it is in the everyday sphere that individuality is forged. The contingency of modernity offers a freedom from traditions and customs that have otherwise served effectively as a determining force in peoples' lives. The possibilities and pitfalls of this unfounding freedom are a core motif in Heller's work. She prioritises a type of personality which is self-aware and morally autonomous. This individual plumbs the depth and breadth of his emotional sentiments and dispositions, and maintains a conscious, active engagement with his affective feelings and emotional habits as part of his emotional world.

Boros identifies an affinity between Heller's work and that of Ricoeur, particularly his idea ‘that who one is, is the story one is telling’. As Boros observes, Heller's philosophy of subjectivity, ethics and history can be seen to begin from the stance Ricoeur outlines. For Heller, we are beings whose self-narrativising and subjective hermeneutics occur as part of our evaluating, interpreting capacity, and particularly, a capacity for ethical judgement. This is essential context to Heller’s exploration of the many essential functions performed by feeling and emotions in human judgment and social action, and her underlining of the importance of cultivating those deep emotions which embody our personality and

1 Boros, ‘Narrative Philosophy’, 107.
sensibility in essential ways. Her exemplar is the individual personality - a standard bearer for a humane, fair society, one who takes responsibility for the world she lives in, as well as for herself and her own needs and perspective.

This thesis has brought together Heller’s model of emotional households, with its central moral and ethical component, with case studies mapping significant trends in the patterns of involvement of Marty Ransom and Gilbert Massey, together with Harry Munster, Ally Munster and Knarf. The stories of these fictional characters, living through times of crisis and change, are replete with material to explore the dialogical, self-reflexive form of subjectivity and idea of emotional households advanced by Heller. The case studies depict characters facing moments of choice (among other experiences), often in the context of personal trials, or perhaps their words and actions make apparent choices laid down in the (usually distant) past. Decisive turning points include Ally Munster’s encounter with the other passengers on a busy commuter train, as well as the encounter between Knarf and a stone sculpture recovered from an earlier time. Additionally, we saw Marty Ransom contemplate and re-assess her relationship with her sister-in-law, and the hatred Phyllis Massey has aroused in her. The account of each character’s experiences forms part of a larger sketch of the palette of emotional habits and patterns of thought and judgment distinct to him or her, and of salient aspects of his/her background and environment. Thus, we may think of Ally Munster’s smouldering rage, and its connection to the scarce material resources she and her family get by on. The distinctive tenor of Knarf’s world of feelings, conversely, is closely connected to his characteristic openness of spirit, and his aims and talents as a writer.

Additionally, curiosity about human motivations is conveyed in Marty’s deliberations, as are her typically direct and frank habits of self-expression. Similarly, Gilbert Massey’s emotional palette is revealed in important ways in the transforming impact upon his consciousness of the prevailing socio-political crisis. Industriousness, channelled into Gilbert’s creative role, forms a key note in his emotional palette. The world of feelings of Harry Munster, on the other hand, is demonstrated in the response that his urban surrounds draw from him: while he and Ally inhabit the same household, in Harry’s case, unlike with Ally, a need to grasp this new world to which he has brought his family, and perhaps find a place for himself therein, comes to the fore.
Thus, different kinds of emotional household, as well as different orders of individuality, have taken shape in my readings of these characters. The orientation of any household around a certain ‘series’ of feelings, tasks and norms is especially richly articulated in relation to the role of the writer, the main characters in this respect being Gilbert and Marty, as well as Knarf, and through him also Ord.

Each protagonist's individuality is forged partly through the interaction between the emotional palette and the reflexive habits which are singular to him or her. In the case of Marty and Gilbert, this emerges in the context of the breakdown of their creative abilities, at a time when the pressure of world events is keenly felt. Gilbert's navigation of these difficulties is guided centrally by his essential steadiness and his deep convictions, while Marty's sensibility is centrally shaped by her forthright scepticism and impatience of discipline. Both demonstrate a self-reflexive quality, for instance in relation to how the narrow, traditional world in which they grew up has shaped their characters and experiences. Marty's free-thinking stance, and her utter rejection of hypocrisy, are linked to that childhood environment, including the roles and norms that had held sway about femininity. In Gilbert's case, a connection is subtly traced between, on the one hand, his self-discipline and the sense of duty and obligation that weighs heavily on his temperament, and on the other, the influence of his early years, especially his father, Walter Massey. In coming to terms with developments in World Affairs, Gilbert also confronts roles and expectations he has hitherto taken for granted. In their contrasting relationships to their own past, on the level of the structure of their personalities, Gilbert and Marty represent two distinct types of individuality.

While there are basic differences between Gilbert and Marty's worlds of feeling, there is also an essential similarity in relation to the kind of dialogue each maintains with him or herself, therein demonstrating a capacity for critical, detached self-reflection. This reflexive capacity is in evidence in their daily lives as a whole, and also at critical junctures in their lives, such as Gilbert's awakening, and Marty's contemplation of her attitude towards Phyllis. A capacity to temper one or other emotion or the response associated with it, and, in turn, to cultivate certain emotions and emotional habits, is an important element of Heller's concept of emotional households. In Gilbert's case, this is salient to his confronting of his own values and personality, as he struggles to grasp the crises they are living through:
actualising his own fully formed emotions is a significant, if mostly implicit, part of that process. Marty’s emotional housekeeping, in the passage of the text concerning her rancorous relationship with Phyllis, while less self-critical than Gilbert’s, involves a shift in her standpoint on the moral aspects of her response to Phyllis, one that results in a changed pattern of expression and action on Marty's part.

The channelling of feelings and emotions takes a different form again in the character of Knarf, and specifically in his creative goal of bringing to life a society, and a people, four centuries removed from his own time. The account of Knarf's highly specialised world reveals his empathy and receptiveness to be the moving force of his creative role. The imaginative vision Knarf brings to that goal is intimately connected to his identification with his subject matter – the former inhabitants of the land he lives on, the Australians. Knarf recognises that the Australians' love for the country had matched his own love for it, while the way they had sought to live on the land, ultimately at great cost to themselves, excites in him a mix of baffled wonder and, ultimately, respect. The origins of his latest work are traced to his experience of witnessing a statue of a soldier after battle which had been recovered from the epoch depicted in his novel. The mobilising power of Knarf’s emotions is in tune with Heller’s writing on the powerful experience of self-abandonment and catharsis possible in the reception of an artwork. Knarf’s emotional judgment constitutes a response not just to the 'Brooding Anzac' itself, but also to the way of life embodied in its artistic form. The artwork, for Knarf, represents an idea of freedom, and the resilience of the human spirit.

This actualising of feelings on Knarf’s part is shown to occur as part of his realising of his sensibility as a whole through his writing. A circumspect note apparent in Knarf’s dawn reflections on the morning of completing his novel demonstrate the complex place which the deep emotions aroused by his encounter with the ‘living continuous tree of life’ occupy in his personality. The very depth and power of his emotions – conveyed in Knarf’s wry description of himself as an emotionally avaricious romantic – elicit his cautious response. A normative dimension is evident in the way he stands back from those emotions and what they represent. Salient in this respect are the ideas of rationality and reason which are present in the text, and which are associated in important ways with Ord, Knarf's archaeologist friend and collaborator. Their relationship recalls Heller's ideas about the
language of feelings through which we communicate our emotions to each other. As collaborators on a shared project, the emotions Knarf and Ord do not express to each other, through a judicious wearing of emotional masks, are as important as those they do. The way Knarf both abandons himself to his feelings, and also keeps a distance from them, is expressive of his individuality, as Heller understands the latter term.

In contrast to the characters outlined above, Harry Munster's individuality takes shape in relation to tasks which are closely tied to his means of existence. Harry's is a materially demanding life, shaped by the knowledge that in the scheme of things his trials are relatively minor, but also by a belief that his own steady labours, and the efforts of all decent, ordinary people, ultimately matter. In Chapter Seven, I explored Harry's dispositions towards stoicism and pragmatism, as well as his thoughtful engagement with the family's altered circumstances, as newcomers to the city. The spirit of forbearance in which Harry generally approaches life is complemented by a fellow feeling, and understated sense of affinity with those around him, which subtly and decisively shape his judgment and point of view. He struggles to reconcile himself to what he experiences as a depersonalising urban environment, as in the day the family first arrive in town, when Harry is conscious of neighbours who stay on their verandahs, saying nothing, just as he does, while the thought that he may be unwittingly breaking some social code or convention in play in this new place excites both his anxiety and an angry indignation. He almost as swiftly suppresses those 'bad' feelings, just as he over-rides his fondness for open spaces at lunchtime on the day after Ben is born. Such feelings remain firmly in the background of Harry's consciousness, for all that they are emphatically felt. Harry's sense of powerlessness in the city is most acute in the wake of his son Jackie's sudden turn and unexpected death. In the bleak moments that follow, out on the street, his intense grief and shock surface as a passing policeman goes to issue him a parking ticket. This meeting of the perfunctory and the tragic is revealing of the way the Munsters live with a constant exposure to vicissitudes and the flux of external forces. Grounded by both humility and self-respect, Harry bears this trial, as he does the anxieties and fears bound up with the family's precarious circumstances and uncertain future. Harry's strong sense of responsibility, which cuts across private and public life, is evident as he grapples with the disillusionment his new life excites in him, and
strives to reach an understanding of the forces shaping his and his family's existence. In this quest for comprehension and insight, Harry's individuality becomes apparent.

In relation to Ally Munster, it is Heller’s model of the particularistic personality which holds most relevance. The text reveals a divergence of viewpoints between Ally and Harry regarding their life on the farm. The family's straitened financial position, and more specifically the limitations imposed on her domestic roles by those constraints, had already come to seem to Ally like an onerous burden. Then she learns she is pregnant for a fourth time, and on the same day experiences an unforeseen and overwhelming trial on a busy commuter train – one she herself is partly responsible for. Unilluminated by reflection or evaluation, the humiliation and shock of her experience on the train tips the scales decisively in her mind. Ally’s character reveals an atrophied emotional household, fixed as it is on the resentments she has suffered, and her grievance against Harry for her disappointments and failed expectations. This is made manifest in the invective she directs at Harry about their life on the farm, an attack fuelled by her sense of grievance and injury.

In the closing-off that is apparent in Ally’s habits of judgment, and her preoccupation with personal and material gain – objectives which, being socially endorsed, in Ally’s mind have come to be unassailable – Ally is shown to be bound within her own particularistic world.

This thesis has considered from many angles the common element to our emotional lives, including how social and moral norms shape the worlds of feeling of those subject to them. These ideas are central to Heller’s work on feelings. The incident involving Ally and Jackie on the train, in which events crack open public judgment and condemnation, offered food for thought in this respect. When a well-meant overture from one of the passengers unwittingly provokes howls of rage from Jackie, Ally loses her temper and strikes her sick baby. Her actions invite condemnation from the others, who recoil in horror and shock, so that Ally finds herself ‘in the dock’ before a jury of her peers. At that point, her strain and discontent colonise her train of thought, as it were, shifting dramatically from the background to the forefront of her mind. The experience piles ignominious shock and isolation – a shame she hides her face to try to escape – upon an already burdensome weight of resentment at unmet expectations. Put beyond her usual precepts, reaching desperately for some explanation of what has happened, her mind ‘reached its dead end, ran into the buffers’: it is Harry’s fault she has ‘disgraced herself in public, everything was his
fault’. She is confronted in those fateful moments by ‘darkness’, the term suggesting a collapse of her judgment and perspective. A refusal to take responsibility for her actions, or to recognise the distressing nature of the experience and its impact, most consequentially for her own state of mind, is key to what happens next. The ‘wound’ inflicted by her experience on the train will prove to be a turning point for her – the resulting diminution of her world of feelings is articulated in terms of what Heller calls emotional impoverishment – and her family.

This depiction of a rent in the social fabric illuminates the situated nature of feelings, and how emotions serve to mediate values which in their essence transcend any single social actor. It forms part of the critique present throughout *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* of the fragmenting, alienating effects of capitalism and consumerism. When conflict surfaces within this group, i.e. Ally’s transgression, there is an instantaneous unity, of sorts, among its members in the form of their strong feelings about what has just happened. Those around her are left mostly in stunned silence, many among them predisposed to think the worst of Ally and not to question their judgments. Yet the outrage and disapproval Ally’s actions trigger, the text suggests, go uninformed by the reflection which might illuminate what happened, and otherwise move the situation on from the intense emotions stirred by the event itself. The act of condemnation itself comes to stand in the way of such insight and comprehension: ‘By abhorring they had not freed themselves; in whatever had happened they had participated.’ The relative absence of self-expression, of the kind displayed by the Co-op farmer who intervenes in Ally’s show of rage, here attests to the breakdown in social cohesion among this crowd: their feelings carry them only so far, and before long they confront in themselves a sense of commonality with Ally – her shame is also their shame – which they are unable or unwilling to acknowledge or express. At stake is a creed of individualism and a social world built largely on consumption and amassing material goods, goods which in reality lie mostly beyond the reach of many of those on the train, including Ally. The ability to identify with another in such heightened emotional and moral circumstances, and to recognise a fellow traveller, even in someone who has acted disgracefully by letting out her aggression on a child, is in short supply among this group. Hence, the text concludes ‘They would deny the sharing that denial was killing everywhere.’
The Little Company, like Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, also calls attention to the play of personalities among the characters, probing beneath the surface of characters’ lives in its tale of people living amid turmoil. The ways it does so casts light on themes Heller explores to do with the Self, and the self-narrativising subject. In their reflections upon paths taken and not taken in their own past, both Gilbert Massey and Marty Ransom reveal something of the nature and experience of self-choice and self-understanding. In Gilbert’s case, this is encapsulated in his sense of having been a lodging house boarder in his own home, suggesting a lack of intimacy with himself – an inability to be a Self to himself – that has shaped his entire life. For Marty, the recognition that she too is living in history has involved understanding and reckoning with herself as an interpreter, as well as a participant, in the events and developments they are living through. Gilbert and Marty’s insights come at the relationship between Self and society from diametrically opposed vantage points, as it were, yet both serve to highlight how important beliefs and pre-conceptions may critically shape the structure of the Self and of consciousness, and thus also the person’s orientation to the world at large. These reflections and standpoints evinced by Marty and Gilbert demonstrate the self-aware, critical order of involvement and individuality associated with both of their characters.

These are some of the main narratives of feeling investigated in this thesis among Knarf, Ord, Harry, Ally, Marty and Gilbert. These narratives illuminate the characters' understanding of and insight into their lived emotions, within the wider context of their decisions, actions, lives and personalities. Further, they reveal the kinds of meanings each character derives from his or her feelings, and the various ways their emotions inform their perspective, choices and experience. The case studies include instances of feelings being mobilised, realised and acted on, for example, in the passion which inspired and animates Knarf’s latest novel. Additionally, feelings are contained, controlled and relegated: one thinks of Knarf deliberately downplaying his empathy and identification with the subject matter of his latest book in his interactions with Ord, or of the fear and panic which Harry Munster suppresses in order to get help for his sick child. Additionally, emotions may become the subject of active deliberation, such as Marty Ransom’s engagement with her feelings about Phyllis; her understanding of the nature and significance of her feelings, and the judgments and circumstances bound up with them, is deepened in those moments of
reflection, and the issue becomes, for Marty, a moral one in ways it was not before. The core expressive dimension of emotions has been illustrated throughout the case studies. One example of this is the hostile, acrimonious feelings silently communicated between Harry and Ally Munster, via facial features, gaze and gestures, on the day the family arrive in town. Another example is the distinctly narrow emotional range characteristic of Gilbert Massey, with his typically muted, undemonstrative manner, of which his sister Marty is a seasoned interpreter.

Observing the convergence in Heller's work of themes to do with 'the incorporation of feeling in the active life', a self-reflexive capacity and the historical conditions of self-creation, Terezakis characterises Heller as 'a theorist of practical reason'. My reading in this thesis of Heller's concept of emotional households resonates with this statement by Terezakis: emotional housekeeping is centrally to do with the social actor's capacity to recognise, and reconcile, her emotions, needs, capacities and values, in relation to particular circumstances, situations and tasks, and to reckon with the potentialities as well as the concrete particulars of one's existence and character. It is about what we do with feelings, and what feelings do with us. Feelings and emotions are essential to the interpretive frame which is engaged and enacted in self-narrativising, and thus also to the reflexive subjectivity which is at the heart of modern individuality as defined by Heller. That spectrum of human feelings – the palette of light and shadow – which is inherent in the human personality, and is invoked in Heller’s work on feelings and emotions, is explored in the range of dispositions and sensibilities demonstrated among the fictional characters who form the case studies in this thesis.

Heller’s multi-dimensional concept of emotional households offers an approach by which we may interpret fictional characters, with the focus on their feelings and emotional lives. Heller’s aim with this concept is evidently not to provide a final definitive answer to emotions, or to solve the ‘problem’ of feelings, as feelings are far from being a problem, in Heller’s work. Rather it is to understand feelings and emotions as an essential part of a life well lived, which perform a host of vital functions therein. Heller reminds us that the personality, and therefore also emotions, are shaped in many ways by social and historical

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forces, yet ultimately the ‘I’ and the Self are not synonymous with the being borne of conditioning and genetic endowment. Shaping one’s world of feelings – honouring and cultivating deep feelings, and at the same time keeping a critical distance from one’s emotions – is shown to be essential to self-creation and individuality. Heller’s concept of emotional households forms part of her philosophical model of the person in his/her world, a person seeking to realise – in the ideal case – goals of flourishing and also of living a good life, a morally accountable life. To choose oneself, as Heller writes of, involves taking a stand as an individual in one’s own right, engaging with and balancing the tensions and nuances of one’s being, and of all beings, including through continuing hermeneutic reflection on oneself and the world.
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