



## “Dissociation” in Desmond Stewart’s Leopard in the Grass

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### ABSTRACT

This paper intends to explore ‘dissociation’ as the literary idea structuring Stewart’s novel.<sup>(1)</sup> The paper discusses this organizing idea on both structural and thematic levels. Some allusions to parallel instances in contemporary fiction are worked out to enhance the narrative conclusions of the study.

In a strangely unique sense, Stewart’s novel strikes a historical note in as much as the narrative events occur within the temporal span of the 1950s and a topographical reality in as much as the events and characters move on the soil of Cyropolis and Media, names that respectively stand for Baghdad and Iraq.

It may be noted that the imperial ideology is a sophisticated act. It has worked and flourished under the guises and assurances that the British are not striving for so degrading thing as money.<sup>(2)</sup> Yet, this is one aspect of imperial reality. Another one is a sense of some painfully sought technical superiority that suffers when the intruders confront the alien. That some enlightened and non-prejudiced British individuals are disturbed by the devious workings of their own culture-patterns ultimately substantiates that dismaying destructiveness which damages the pretended uniformity of the group. But when the concept of cultural relativity is totally absent, we will have that dissociative act of racial conflict which is more damaging in its disruptive reality.

The Kind of analysis being shown here requires a thoroughly different approach from that of the model adopted in Barthes's "Textual Analysis" of Poe's tale: "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar".<sup>(3)</sup>

### Keywords:

dissociation, imperial ideology, the alien, non-prejudiced, disaffection, vertical level, the Club, racial prejudice, incomprehension, justice.

### Academic Discipline And Sub-Disciplines

Literature

### SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION

Thematic Classification

### TYPE (METHOD/APPROACH)

Literary Analysis

### STRUCTURAL AND THEMATIC BURDEN

The deconstructive idea of ‘dissociation’ in **Leopard in the Grass** structurally articulates itself in the “Diary” which John Stirling, a central character in the book, keeps for his comments. “The sturdy blue notebook” registers a structural narrative device in the sense of intercepting the main narrative stream of Stewart’s book. Thus, on a *horizontal* level, through the eyes of Sophie, a fellow traveler and a woman of easy virtue, we glimpse, in the main narrative, the “Sargon-luxe” hotel as a relic of a glowing past. It is also realized as an emblem of an expanding reality;

**The Sargon was not one of the really good hotels; but it had a modest character of its own. For one thing, it had been the first European hotel to go up in Cyropolis. It had since been outdistanced, but its name retained a fragment of the glamour that had attached itself fifteen years ago (pp. 17-18).**

On a *vertical* level, the structural device of “the diary” intercepts the main narrative stream, interrupting it at a point that formally announces itself as a dissociative axis. The language of the following extract is not only that of an exaggerated idiom conveying a sense of moral dereliction but also that of a discoverer surveying new territories. Here is, for instance, how the mixed metaphors of the extract work out the formal rupture:



**A man without morals, without aim, a man who drifts in a surf of sensations most of which have become too tasted, most of whose colours have been bleached away, soon finds that the one pleasure left to him is the arrival in a new city, and the passive imbibing of the new community of sights and sounds (p.20).**

It is quite formally interesting that the interrupting part occurs in *the third person narration*, an unfamiliar mode for realising a personal viewpoint. This mode of narration is different from that adopted by Farrell in **A Girl in the Head** where the first person narration operates the relevant sections<sup>(4)</sup>.

Percy Lubbock, talking of Tolstoy's **War and Peace**, suggests that "[the novel] is a panoramic vision of people and places...."<sup>(5)</sup> Stewart's book, however, having a slower pace, moves on a rather limited space because it essentially sets itself to deal with ethical issues, those of justice and alien ideology.

The technique, which isolates Stirling's inner thoughts for our non-ironic inspection, serves to cancel out the character's sentimentalism and effects that narrative distance which objectifies his encoded assumptions.

Thematically, the character's sense of moral bankruptcy dissociates him not only from the historical reality of the hotel described in the main stream of the narrative but also from the only source of pleasure left to him in the form of confronting the alien.

The literary parallels to Stewart's narrative behaviour are quite stunning and, a propos, the importance of the vertical and horizontal voices in contemporary fiction is precisely to intensify, through the amalgamation of the personal and impersonal, what Picasso, who speaks of Art, phrases as "the truthfulness of the artist's lies".<sup>(6)</sup> In an emphatic sense, these disjointed structural and thematic elaborations remind us, to give a highly illuminating example, of what J.G. Farrell does, later, even more emphatically, in **A Girl in the Head**, a book that is similarly serious in its import but that is, unlike Stewart's book, extremely funny. Here what cuts across the main narrative stream is what Boris ironically confides to a tape-recorder. The commenting function of this personal section is obvious, resembling, in a sense, that of the chorus in Sophocles's **The Theban Plays**.<sup>(7)</sup> This is how an extract from the main narrative stream works out to describe the oddity of place and character in **A Girl in the Head**:

**The kitchen terrified him. Everything in it was painted blue or acid yellow with the exception of the floor which was tiled in black and white squares (and gave you a headache if you looked at it for long)...On the kitchen table (pale-blue Formica) he found a biology text-book, abandoned there by Alessandro, who was preparing himself without enthusiasm for his new school at the end of September. There was also an exercise book with an elaborate inscription 'Biology' inked on the cover. The word was repeated on the first page of the book together with the three lines of an unfinished sentence about osmosis and the drawing of a dagger dripping spots of blood down the page. Boris rather liked the dagger.**<sup>(8)</sup>

On a *vertical* plane, Boris's personal account which interestingly occurs in *the first person narration*, hence a lessened degree of objectivity, formally interrupts the relevant episodes in the main narrative stream. Here is an instance that serves as an illustrative example:

**... After all, that is what life is about ... if it is about anything, which it probably isn't. I won't bother you with further speculation on this subject. Perhaps I should mention that I habitually respond to life's ups and downs with no greater sign of concern than a raised eyebrow and bitter finger nails. I don't pretend to have remained unaffected by all the shattering events of life. They have clearly left their marks on me, like footprints in wet concrete.**<sup>(9)</sup>

Boris's personal confessions in **A Girl in the Head** are shown as *cathartic* acts. So are Stirling's in **Leopard in the Grass**. This is how the 'implicit author', to borrow a phrase from Booth<sup>(10)</sup>, registers, in his reflective comment, the language of isolation that punctuates the character's inner reactions:

**John kept his diary with a regular irregularity, storing up within it details whose discovery after his death he imagined with delight. But it was not wholly with this motive. It was also a confessional where he could converse with himself (p. 21).**

It can safely be established that Stirling's sense of disaffection echoes that of Boris as articulated by their relevant personal accounts. Thus, before he leaves for Cairo, Stirling writes in his diary that which suggests time as a destructive agent: **"And the only pattern which is at all clear is that of passing time, the pattern which shows how we grow old and do not stomach this year what we liked ten years ago. This is our slavery" (p. 140).**

Boris, to underline an isolated human parallel, in a fatalistically impulsive act, alights from a train to spend the rest of his life at Maidenhair, a disconnected reality. This is how a disillusioned Boris speaks of an irrational act:



**I have no idea why I got off the train. In retrospect it appears to have been a mammoth mistake. There was, however, no way I could have known that at the time ... We crept past a signal box. MAIDENHAIR BAY. With a prolonged creaking and a slight shudder the train stopped. The silence came down like a heavy mist. I was bored stiff and I had run out of cigarettes. In fact, perhaps that was why I got off the train.**<sup>(11)</sup>

On the level of the main narrative stream, the whole of Stewart's book seems to work in terms of "dissociation". A highly suggestive lengthy example may serve to show how John Stirling adeptly registers his disaffection with his own world:

**As a man of twenty-six, perceptive, but none the less lustful and no less amorous than the average human animal, this was the inherent defect: he yearned to love, with a desperate longing so much stronger because his other interests, in literature and art, seemed progressively, weaker and less in touch with the age; but so far he could only find a person to love whom on every point except the physical he rejected as repulsive; and even on the physical level her merits seemed more and more in the past tense; and anyway, to a man with even a trivial sensitivity, physical attraction is to a great extent sketched in by the admiring mind; when there is nothing else, ... no orgasm of emotion, then a Venus would be examined too objectively, and even in her marble flesh faults would be found; for love, her perfection would be an obstacle, not a help. Sophie was in every way mediocre and, as such, disgusting; she was in every way a symbol of the women he had known before. (pp.62-63).**

These contemplative details show, among other things, that "physical attraction" is envisaged by Stirling as a mental reality, a thing which stands in opposition to Sophie's sensual tendencies. As it is, "**Sophie was a woman to whom the physical performance of love had become a pleasurable necessity**" (p. 120). Fourteen lines later, Sophie seems to be physically attracted by the "erotic" poem entitled "To Sophie". The poem, supposedly composed by Stirling, has a hypnotizing, dislodging effect on her:

**It was erotic in a way almost new to her. A romantic glow forced her to stand still, and not to sit down, or to remove her hat, or run a comb through her hair, until her eye had passed through every word. (p.120)**

Likewise, the main narrative stream of Farrell's book suggests a disengagingly disconnected reality. There is a kind of insistent interest in the psyche of the narrator<sup>(12)</sup> in Farrell's book. Now if we thematically confine ourselves to the relevant part from which we have already quoted the personal reference, we will notice that 'dissociation' punctuates itself in the very details described. Thus, the paintings in the dining-room have their own disruptive effect. 'The Rewards of Luxury' suggests its dissociative aspect in the sense of the head of John, the Baptist, being offered on a platter by Herod. The smaller painting, 'A Maiden's Honour' depicts an evil, wrinkled gentleman emptying a purse of gold coins onto a table. A bracketed Farrellian comic enlargement testifies to the commercial implication of a voluptuous act: "**Boris assumed that the wrinkled man had insisted on a preliminary look at the merchandise**".<sup>(13)</sup>

The vivid description of the lustful, frivolous Maurice Dongoon, the forgetful and deaf Granny Dongoon, and the class-conscious old Dongoon, the inhibited Flower, Boris's wife and the sensitive Alessandro realises revealing states of social dissociation. The 'biology' book on the kitchen table may also be taken as a metaphor for a disruptive reality.

In Stewart's book, 'Dissociation' could also be felt in connection with an unforgettable moment, with an experience that has singled itself out:

**and amidst all the fragments, like wood and dried grass and fishbones on a beach, one hour out of all the others gleamed like something unexpected, an orange on the beach, bright and round and uncut. (p. 153)**

The "memorable" evening which "**obscured all the other memories of Cairo, or absorbed them into its own lineaments**" (p. 154) starts when Stirling and Rasul, a young fellow with "frightening" eyes, "arrange" themselves with other figures in a dark room upstairs and begin smoking *hashish* [a kind of opium], swiftly exchanging the pipe of the hubble-bubble, with the charcoal continually being fostered.

Later, we glimpse a group that derives its pleasurable cohesiveness from being *dissociated* from the large community that lies outside its momentary intimacy.

**time was an exile from their company.... It was almost a religious ceremony. It was certainly a rite. The...faces which would be forgotten tomorrow, seemed here, in this low hut, to have entered a companionship of complete equality, of complete peace. (p.162)**



Allen Tate suggests that it has been through Flaubert that the novel has at last caught up with poetry<sup>14)</sup>. Tate's remark could be extended to Stewart's text. One is apt to be intrigued by its poetic texture. Here we have a text that argues for its intensity, a text that hypnotisingly attracts the reader towards what Derrida phrases as the 'violent truth' of its 'reading'. Such a text disengagingly pleases one in the sense of its power and spontaneity. Derrida's words on *Border Lines* seem to fit in well with Stewart's text which elegantly announces its merits:

**We should neither comment, nor underscore a single word, nor extract anything, nor draw a lesson from it ... - such would be the law of the text that gives itself, gives itself up, to be read<sup>(15)</sup>**

'Dissociation' may work in terms of the character's attitude to foreign cultures. Thus, Cordington in Stewart's book knows where he *racially* stands. This is how he tries to convince Stirling of his Englishness:

**You will, of course, put your name down for the Club. That's essential. You need two sponsors. Pete Chetworth, who drank with us last night will be one. I'll be the other. It's a simple affair, so long as you seem the right sort. The notice goes up, and unless anyone knows something discreditable and blackballs you, ha! ha! your election will go through like a bird, old boy... Here's luck in Cyropolis's High Life, Stirling. Or oil in your geyser, as we lads on the oil job say. (p.65)**

Here, we have an instance of the *implied author's* irony, an instance that insightful readers would easily capture. The emotional appeal of these ironic instances is quite intriguing but they require a reader who knows how to isolate the subversive layer of meaning realised at intense textual moments. This could explain Booth's cautious remarks which warn us in *A Rhetoric of Irony* against readers who "**disqualify themselves by being either too ready to emote or too resistant to emotional appeals**".<sup>(16)</sup>

Cordington's imperial confidence at the Club is itself an emblem of a negative, dissociative act: "**And not only that, it's good to get among your own folk out here. You can relax**" (p. 66). In a sense, he reminds us of a character whose imperialist racial convictions pervade the narrative scene in *A Passage to India*.<sup>(17)</sup> Thus, we see in Ronny what Sandison, who attempts in the *Wheel of Empire* to explore "**the nature and function of the imperial idea in the work of some late Victorian novelists and short story writers**"<sup>(18)</sup>, recognises as "**those self-gratifying national convictions which are virtually imperishable**".<sup>(19)</sup> Apropos, in his irreversible dissociative

tendencies, Ronny seems to reveal his own imperial racialism. This is how he formulates his unequivocal position to Adela and his mother:

**I am out here to work, mind, to hold this wretched country by force. I'm not a missionary or a Labour Member or a vague sentimental sympathetic literary man. I'm just a servant of the Government; it's the profession you wanted me to choose myself, and that's that. We're not pleasant in India, and we don't intend to be pleasant. We've something more important to do.**<sup>(20)</sup>

Such characters as Cordington and Ronny appear to draw on the ethic of imperial ideology, an ethic suggested by Lord Rosebery as drawing on the divine:

**How marvelous it all is! Built not by saints and angels but the work of men's hands; cemented with men's honest blood and with a world of tears, welded by the best brains of centuries past; not without the taint and reproach incidental to all human work, but constructed on the whole with pure and splendid purpose. Human and yet not wholly human, for the most heedless and the most cynical must see the finger of the divine. Growing as trees grow, while others slept; fed by the faults of others; reaching with the ripple of a resistless tide over tracts and islands and continents, until our little Britain woke up to find herself the foster-mother of nations and the source of united empires. Do we not hail in this less the energy and fortune of a race than the supreme direction of the Almighty.**<sup>(21)</sup>

Categorically, these imperial conclusions will narratively be frowned by modern novelists who are acutely conscious of the decline of the old imperial faith. Bulteel, in Joyce Cary's novel *Mister Johnson*, articulates this by advising his subordinates to adjust themselves to new realities: "**No long views-the age for long views ended twenty years ago – and above all, not too much zeal**".<sup>(22)</sup>

'Dissociation' in *Leopard in the Grass* may work in terms of the character's *rigidity*. John Stirling, thus, envisions the problem of his race in the latter being impervious to change and in failing to adjust itself to a different culture-pattern, a conclusion that reverberates in Stewart's book:



**The culture-patterns of the English remain unchanged; the century has not fundamentally affected them; they have only become a little vulgarized.(p.64)**

It is through Stirling's eyes that we observe the English in Cyropolis irritatingly as a tightly closed community. Taking a dim view of his own people, he, thus, sums up the defects of an arrogant race:

**But the Englishman's own arid superiority still obsesses him; his inhibited sexuality still provides the tape-measure his ready mind will hold up to the more impetuous and the less stony; his contempt for intellect still protects him; his utter indifference to older and different civilizations is as much part of him as his confidence; his stuffiness, like the stuffiness of the Congo jungle, will take centuries to blow away; not in our time, now while he still has some rags with which to cover his nakedness, will the Englishman become again the hard, witty, unscrupulous singing-bird he was once. (p.65)**

Antithetic to that of his race, Stirling's vision is shown to endorse the Median culture-patterns: **"The Medians had had a great civilisation; to be precise, they had had several civilisations. But now, they were not reviving either the Sumerian or the Islamic one". (pp.67-68)**

It is Ricardou, who in "Composition Discomposed", a perceptive article, suggests that **"realism compels form to resemble content and thereby to signal its derivation from the latter"**.<sup>(23)</sup> The statement is suggestive in defining a realism that works creatively in Stewart's book, a realism that seems to take its force, in a sense, from the antithetic elaborations of his vigorous language. It is a realism where the form dovetails with the writer's gluttonous eye for detail to effect a comfortable state of balance that immensely articulates the uniqueness of Stewart's literary act.

But Stewart's is a realism where the metonymic<sup>(24)</sup> details become metaphoric. His text in this respect, is antithetic, for example, to that of Dickens. In **Great Expectations**, Dickens style is fundamentally metonymic. His characters are suggested to be "virtually defined by parts of them: Mr. Wopsle is a Roman nose, a bald forehead and a deep voice; old Barley is gout, rheum and growl".<sup>(25)</sup>

In **A Passage to India**, the Club, as a social reality, punctuates man's position on an alien soil. Thus, to Fielding, the Club articulates an act of disconnection: **"... and though he came to the Club it was only to get his tennis or billiards, and to go. This was true. He had found it convenient and pleasant to associate with Indians and he must pay the price"**.<sup>(26)</sup>

To the non-prejudiced Stirling, whose unorthodox attitude to the ways of the natives ultimately renders him 'unsuitable', the Club has also become a symbol of dissociation. This is how he reacts to his first evening at the Club:

**John was not surprised to find that he loathed his evening at the English club. Indeed, only if he had found one thought, one response to beauty or danger or life among the herd of Englishmen and Scots whom oil or haberdashery or the importing of cars had lured to Media would he have been surprised. Even a cliché less than ten years old would have astonished him. But he was not fated to be astonished or even surprised. (p. 68)**

Away from *explicative* interpretation, we have, an instance where the text deconstructs itself, where to affirm things is a way of rejecting them and where every word carries traces of other words in the language system or as Derrida has put it: **"every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts"**.<sup>(27)</sup> The instance, like other electrifying textual instances in Stewart's book, is an emblem of how language works here, of how the indeterminacy of signification prevails. In this instance, the Romantic ['response to beauty or danger or life'] clashes with the Mundane [the world of 'oil or haberdashery or the importing of cars']. The linguistic jolt here has precisely that destabilishing effect which is apt to hypnotise the reader.

John Stirling's intellectual position is unequivocally anti-racial. He does not adopt a *neutral* stand as does, for example, the Major in Farrell's **Troubles**. A memorable character with a high sense of justice, the Major is vexed by the troubles in Ireland: **"By this time the Major was perfectly numb to the daily horrors printed by the newspaper.... He supposed that one day it would all come to an end, some how or other..."**<sup>(28)</sup> His attempts to reconcile the opposing factions in Ireland end with total failure.

Stirling, on the other hand, adopts an intellectual stand similar to that adopted by Fielding in **A Passage to India**. Like Stirling, Fielding is free from racial prejudice: **"He had no racial feeling not because he was superior to his brother civilians but because he had matured in a different atmosphere where the herd instinct does not flourish."**<sup>(29)</sup>

In the same way as Stirling realises in the Medians that which assures him of their human qualifications, Fielding realises races as analogous:

**To regard an Indian as if he were an Italian is not, for instance, a common error, nor perhaps a fatal one, and Fielding often attempted analogies between this peninsula and that other, smaller and more exquisitely shaped, that stretches into the classic waters of the Mediterranean.**<sup>(30)</sup>



Here we have, as in the case with John Stirling, 'dissociation' at work within the same group. Again, the literary examples of Stirling and Fielding do emphatically suggest Haggard's Quatermain, who in his outburst against his own kinsmen, only projects races as being culturally comparable:

**...by what exact right we do call people like the Zulus savages? ...They have, or had, their king, their nobles, and their commons. They have an ancient and elaborate law, and a system of morality in some ways as high as our own, and certainly more generally obeyed. They have their priests and their doctors; they are strictly upright, and observe the rites of hospitality.**

**Where they differ from us mainly is that they do not get drunk until the white man teaches them so to do, they wear less clothing, the climate being more genial, their towns at night are not disgraced by the sights that distinguish hours, they cherish and are never cruel to their children, although they may occasionally put a deformed infant or a twin out of the way, and when they go to war, which is often, they carry out the business with a terrible thoroughness, almost as terrible as that which prevailed in every nation in Europe a few generations ago.**<sup>(31)</sup>

To refine things, 'dissociation' is thus suggested to be the main thematic burden of Stewart's book. On a certain level, the theme elegantly reminds us of a classic example, that of Conrad, where *racial dissociation* pervades the narrative scene in *An Outcast of the Islands*. Conrad's narrator seems to be appalled by incommunication between the races. Here is an illustrative example that shows how complete absence of understanding operates in Conrad's book: **"Where do you come from?" she said, impulsive and inconsequent, in a passionate whisper. "What is that land beyond the great sea ... from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us—who are not white..."**<sup>(32)</sup>

Interestingly enough, this issue of *incomprehension* between the races seems to be a Conradian preoccupation. In *Nostromo*, materialistic corruption projects that which dissociates<sup>(33)</sup> and a suggestive passage in *An Outcast of the Islands* reveals how destructive dissociation reciprocally works between races, Lingard's sympathetic proposal to speak to Patalolo is thus shown to be frowned at:

**This is white man's talk,' exclaimed Babalatchi with bitter exultation, 'I know you.' That is how you all talk while you load your guns and sharpen your swords; and when you are ready, then to those who are weak you say: "Obey me and be happy, or die!" You are strange you white men. You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true. You are stronger than the white beasts, but not so wise. A black tiger knows when he is not hungry—you do not. He knows the difference between himself and those that can speak; you do not understand the difference between yourselves and us—who are men. You are wise and great – and you shall always be fools.**<sup>(34)</sup>

That which alienates Lingard from Babalatchi alludes, in a sense, to the ambivalences of a writer who, in his attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable, tries to come to terms with his own conflicting doubts. In deconstructive interpretation such an ambivalent attitude may be extended to the critic whose friendly hostility is immaculately established: **"If the host is both eater and eaten, he also contains in himself the double antithetical relation of host and guest in the bifold sense of friendly presence and alien invader"**.<sup>(35)</sup>

It is this dissociative act between the opposite groups that overwhelmingly informs *Leopard in the Grass* and that ultimately urges the main character, i.e. Nimr, who gives his name to Stewart's book [Nimr is the Arabic word for leopard], to make a clean break with all that represents the enemy at the gate.

Nimr, a firm believer in 'the union of the Arab countries' rebels first against his own folk. His disgust with a merchant of shower baths and toilets, a fellow Lebanese, who criticizes the Arabs, shapes his repellent consciousness. Nimr is shown to be driving, at this narrative junction, through the streets of Hama which is crowded with ordinary Arab people who part slowly before the car. Suddenly the Lebanese turns to the Swiss, who is sitting in the car, and starts abusing his own culture: **"And you want to put us under the rule of people like that. While our culture is French the same as yours"**. (p.261)

This, in fact, strikes the moment of illumination in Nimr's life, a moment that irrevocably divorces him from the culture-patterns of the antithetic group: **"It was the moment when he had ceased to absorb more of the West. He had read nothing more, unless to despise, to dissect, and to dismiss"** (p.262). Nimr, thus, proclaims his identity by asserting his *right to hate*. His intolerance unifies him with Stirling, an understanding member of the conflicting party. Stirling, an attentive listener in Nimr's own tent, thus expresses the sympathetic logic of the dissociative act:

**All that is good, all that is gentle, is only the obverse of what is harsh. To have gentleness and kindness, we must have cruelty and belief. To have love, we must have hate. And without God, there is no man.** (p. 263)

That Nimr ultimately has to pay for believing in his own people's creative endeavour is shown to be an *act of faith*. He undergoes a sham trial where he is wrongly accused of attempting to kidnap and kill an unarmed civilian in his desert tent. Stirling, who asks for the judge's help to see Nimr in prison, is finally allowed to do so, only to discover the judge's devious trick: he has made it easy for Stirling to see Nimr's corpse. Stirling now realises that **"justice here is like**



*something in a Kafka novel*'(p.296). Later, the act of pain which accentuates the violent tempo of the narrative scene sums up the tragedy of a noble attempt:

**On a table, still in his grey suit, lay Nimr. His eyes were closed, but everything else in his corpse suggested violence and pain: the colour of his light skin was purple as squashed loganberries. In one corner of the room, coiled horribly, was the rope that had strangled him, put there hardly out of malice, but as though it were his most intimate property. (p.304)**

The tormenting moment upsets the man who “seems almost laconic”:

**... And he felt in his pocket the bag of dried figs he had brought to give Nimr. He had debated what to bring for someone who did not smoke, for someone who despised gifts. And now they would be uneaten. This, more than the sight of Nimr's shabby corpse, more than the sight of the cropped cranium, the contused neck, the torn tennis shoes, made emotion erupt within him, and turning from the room, he began to weep. (pp.304-305)**

At the heart of the issue is, of course, Nimr's rejection of a treacherously imposed alien ideology. The judge's enigmatic silence registers, for Stirling, the magnitude of the dissociative act. This is how Stirling looks at Nimr's creative denial:

**He has learnt our tricks. He has read our books. And now he comes back to say to us, this civilisation you are bringing us is useless; it is worse than useless; it is poisonous. He believes that his people have a special purpose, not just to share in a uniform cosmopolitan machine world, but to witness to the truth of God, and following from that, the truth about Man (pp.298-299).**

The concluding narrative episode has the urgency of a prophetic act. It enacts the revolt of a man who is “untroubled by doubt, unsplit by a sneering internal on looker who was himself...”(p.317) and as Stirling heads for an aesthete's palace (that of the treacherous Q.), we ultimately, see in him a man who is ready to inflict retribution, a negative act that implicitly asserts a positive human concern:

**In his jacket pocket he felt the hard shape of the revolver. And in the dusty haze of morning he felt that beside him walked the cowed figure of a man more alive than those who live. He quickened his pace, and as the minarets stilled, as the first flight of pigeons returned to hover round the amplifiers that diffused the message, he turned towards the gate of the house, and prepared to carry out what he had willed (p.318).**

## CONCLUSION

To recapture things, 'dissociation' appears to be crucial to any criticism of Stewart's book. It gestures at man's predicament in this equivocal century. Its insistence in contemporary novels attests to the truth of man's division. That 'dissociation' works on social, psychological and ideological levels registers the tragedy of the non-prejudiced: Stirling in our case and his tormented examples in modern narrative writings.

Desmond Stewart subtly succeeds in suggesting that, as human beings, we can, if we try, eradicate the barriers standing between man and man and effect a simple yet humanely rewarding philosophy based on tolerance, love and understanding. Both Stirling and Nimr, in Stewart's book, cross those barriers and unite in an act of reciprocal solidarity.

The importance of **Leopard in the Grass** is that it punctuates a specific period in Arabs' evolution. The descriptive act cements a historical period that still survives in some of its physical remains. The names of the hotels in Cyropolis may have changed. The European hotels mentioned in Stewart's book may have perished and some others may have risen in their stead but the historical act is there, narratively registered: the magnificent and memorable pillars of South Street (Rashid Street as it is known now) then dimly lit in the fifties, evidence that which has the touch of a perpetual oriental dream.<sup>(36)</sup>

The historical camouflage realising names of cities in Iraq's ancient civilizations -Cyropolis obviously stands for Baghdad although the author sometimes blurs the issue by suggesting the one as two separate entities – is so overwhelmingly submerged by the narrative events in Stewart's book that we are made to realise the triumph of the narrative reality over the historical one.



Stewart's is a book with a serious message and only a non-ironic reading may obtain with it. Relevantly, "the right to hate", in its negativity, eventually elaborates a positive precept, allowing man to break with the cynicism of a brutal age and to declare himself a free being creatively conscious of the enhancing power of his own culture-patterns. Nimr, in **Leopard in the Grass**, thus, becomes an emblem of that hard-gained, well-deserved creative freedom. The purifying act that realises this emancipating state implies a break with the alien that threatens one's own integrity.

Bressler shows that, for Lacan, texts "**hold the possibility of capturing, at least for a moment, our desire to return to the imaginary order and to regain that sense of pure joy when we were once whole.**"<sup>(37)</sup> The revel in a language that pleasurable yields itself as shown in the fully described event of smoking *hashish* in a low hut in Cairo, and the poem whose intertextualised dimension is evocative and whose 'honeyed' words delight Sophie, Stirling's mistress (pp. 120-121) are apt to fill us with a sense of intriguing comfort.

Stewart's book has rhythm in the *thematic* sense elaborated by Brown and in a *structural* sense as well. Brown speaks of the connecting force that binds three sections of Forster's **A Passage to India**, namely 'Mosque', 'Caves' and 'People'. He argues that when 'Mosque' matched thematically with the other two, it yields successive levels of meanings about the lives of races meeting each other at a memorable scenic moment, without which the novel cannot be envisaged.<sup>(38)</sup> Likewise, the 75, Latin- numbered sections of Stewart's novel have precisely that thematic value which enunciates the conflicting reality of two races and that within each race. *Structurally*, the vertical axis of Stewart's book [i.e. Stirling's diary] cuts across the horizontal one of the main narrative stream and they together unleash meanings that announce their nuances.

Desmond Stewart's validity as a writer is to turn that which is political into something that reveals its literariness.<sup>(39)</sup> The thematic burden of the writer's book testifies to this conclusion of reconciling the irreconcilable by observing the interdependent relation of the hostile, a conclusion which Irving Howe in **Politics and the Novel.**<sup>(40)</sup> suggests to be the difficult task of what he terms as the 'political' novelist. Desmond Stewart, however, is not a political writer but a writer who is true to his unbiased, humane and understanding nature. That Desmond Stewart assures us of a painfully realised literary act emphatically singles out his unique literary achievement.

## NOTES

1. After completing classical studies at Trinity College, Oxford, Desmond Stewart, the author of this novel, came to Baghdad in 1948 to teach Shakespeare and Victorian novelists at the College of Arts and what was then known as Higher Teachers' Training College (now College of Education). His contract was terminated in 1956 after the publication of **New Babylon: A Portrait of Iraq**, a book he wrote with his colleague John Haylock. He spent much of his time writing fiction as well as translating Arabic prose and poetry. He also wrote extensively on the Arab world and Turkey and published a work on early Islam. He died in 1982. It is, perhaps, significant that the author has dedicated **Leopard in the Grass** to his friend, John Haylock. Most likely, Stewart's friend has become the John Stirling of the novel.
2. Sandison, p.1
3. Barthes, pp.317-347
4. Farrell, **A Girl in the Head**, Boris's recorded diary, passim.
5. Lubbock, pp.26-27
6. Statement by Picasso: 1923 in Barr's, p.270
7. See Sophocles's **The Theban plays**, passim
8. Farrell, **A Girl in the Head**, p.22
9. Farrell, **A Girl in the Head**, p. 23
10. Booth, p.72
11. Farrell, **A Girl in the Head**, p. 13
12. Mitchell, p.389
13. Farrell, **A Girl in the Head**, p. 17
14. Tate, p.210
15. Derrida, p.152
16. Booth, p.227
17. Speaking of Forster, Martin suggests that Forster's "acute sense of division between public and private life is probably shared by the most major writers" of the Twentieth Century. Stewart, of course, must have been one of them. (Martin, p.8).
18. Sandison, p. vii. Sandison in this highly remarkable book contradicts the traditional assumption that action in the



works of writers like Conrad, Kipling and Buchan “was principally directed towards promulgating an imperial ideal.” In unequivocal terms, he suggests that the action in the works of these writers is concerned with the moral issue: **“Almost the exact opposite is, in fact, the case. With the altogether significant exception of Haggard, the basis of action in these writers’ work is not primarily political but moral”** (Sandison, p.viii).

19. Sandison, p.1
20. Forster, p.69
21. Lord Rosebery, 16 Nov., 1910
22. Cary, p.231
23. Ricardou, p.9
24. **“Metonymy [in the Lacanian sense] occurs in Language when an object associated with or part of another object is used as a stand-in for the whole object”** (Tyson, p.30) [*the crown* is exemplified to stand for *the king*].
25. Selden, p70
26. Forster, pp.80-81. Apropos, John Sayre Martin Suggests two opposing orders operative on a higher plane in **A Passage to India: “A Passage to India presents two antithetically opposed social orders: that which the English try to impose on India and that which Indians have evolved themselves”** (Martin, p. 157).
27. Derrida, p. 30
28. Farrell, **Troubles**, p. 291
29. Forster, p.80
30. Forster, p.79
31. Haggard, p.74
32. Conrad, p.144
33. Conrad, p.481
34. Conrad, p.226
35. Miller, p.442
36. This is how the author’s description presents the white sea-pile-like pillars of South Street as touching on the mysterious and the unsophisticated:

**The pillars are the things that matter. They give the one element of form in the eastern chaos and even the pillars are formally chaotic. They vary from plaster attempts at the Cornithian to mere cylinders of white cement: some of them are square: some taper towards the overhanging balconies which they uphold... At night the pillars are mysterious, with only enough primitive electricity to show the interstices between each of them; for here there is no western sophistication as to the covering of bulbs or the concealment of illuminated bars. From some points one can see a long vista of these straight colonnades stretching for as much as three-quarters of a mile. Such a street could easily weave itself into a nightmare (pp.28-29).**

37. Bressler, p.155
38. Brown, p.107
39. Not in the sense of Russian Formalism
40. **“Like a nimble dialectician, the political novelist must be able to handle several ideas at once, to see them in their hostile yet interdependent relations and to grasp the way in which ideas in the novel are transformed into something other than the ideas of a political programme”** (Howe, p.21).

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Now Head of the English Department at AL-Mansour University College , Aziz Yousif AL-Muttalibi , graduated from Higher Teacher's Training College in Baghdad and became a secondary school teacher .After serving as a teacher for years , he became Head of the Translation Department and Acting Director General of Cultural Relations at the Ministry of Education in Iraq.He worked , later, in IDELTI (Institue for the Development of English Language Teaching in Iraq) as a member of the committee charged with the responsibility for producing textbooks throughout the school system in Iraq. He was also the secretary of the Editorial Board of the IDELTI Journal and the Literary Editor of the daily Baghdad Observer. In 1976 , he obtained his M.A from the Linguistics Department at University of Wales , U.K. and in 1984, his Ph.D. (in Modern Novel) from the Department of English Studies at the University of Strathclyde, U.K.

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