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THE INTELLECTUAL IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL, 1792-1860
A STUDY IN THE SEARCH FOR REALITY AND FORM

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By
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The Ohio State University
1961

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CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF THE INTELLECTUAL

In his essay, "The Cult of Experience in American Writing," Philip Rahv flays "late" American authors for their intoxication with "experience" and "classic" American writers for their indifference to it. He then goes on to maintain that "the one character missing in the American novel is the intellectual," though he qualifies this by saying, "He [the intellectual] may appear in it [the American novel] in his professional capacity— as artist, teacher, or scientist— but very rarely as a person who thinks with his entire being, that is to say, as a person who transforms ideas into actual dramatic motives instead of merely using them as ideological conventions or as theories so externally applied that they can be dispensed with at will." But the accusation, in spite of Rahv's qualification, remains a damming one, for it leads him very logically to the conclusion that "Everything is contained in the American novel but ideas," ideas being defined as "at best judgments of reality, at worst substitutes for it."\(^1\)

Crucial to Rahv's argument, of course, is his definition of the word "intellectual." Certainly, the definition is an interesting one, but it is obviously too vague to cope adequately with a word that in the twentieth century has come in for so much abuse and has become so emotionally surcharged. Furthermore, this attempt to frame a definition that is static has resulted in a great deal of confusion in the criticism of the American novel, especially with respect to the novel's relation to "ideas," "reality," and "experience." The American novel has been considered on the one hand too preoccupied with ideas, and on the other too indifferent to them; obsessed with experience, or oblivious to it; hostile to reality or infatuated with it.

Some of this confusion can, I think, be dispelled by approaching the word "intellectual" as an open concept. For if we forget about finding an ironclad definition of the intellectual, and concentrate rather on providing a basis for identifying him, it becomes possible to discuss his appearance in the American novel meaningfully. The way in which this can be done is hinted at by Morris Weitz in his article "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics":

If I may paraphrase Wittgenstein, we must not ask, What is the nature of any philosophical x?, or even, according to the semanticist, "What does 'x' mean?" a transformation that leads to the disastrous interpretation of "art" as a name for some specifiable class of objects; but rather, what is
the use or employment of "x"? What does "x" do in the language?2

In the same way, the question that concerns me primarily is not What is the intellectual? but What does the intellectual do, what purpose does he serve in the American novel? When and why and how does he enter the novel as a character, and what is his function in it? How does his presence (whether he is portrayed successfully or not) modify the genre to make it one thing rather than another? At this juncture it should be clear that this dissertation will endeavor not to elucidate the status and role of the intellectual as such, but, by considering the role given him in fiction, to illuminate the novels studied.

In the first section of this chapter, then, I will limit the subject by tracing the development of the modern intellectual, thereby hoping to discover some of the qualities which distinguish him. In the second section, I undertake to clarify the intellectual's position and importance in the American novel, considering the literary form in relation to some of the social and philosophical problems which refuse to detach themselves from any consideration of the novel.

One's first impulse in trying to describe the intellectual is to make some sort of class identification.

2The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XV (September, 1956), 30.
Raymond Aron, in *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, speaks of the intellectuals as "scribes, men of letters, and experts."\(^3\) This presumably includes more definable social classes such as artists, writers, teachers, scholars, lawyers, doctors, and clergymen. The problem that an attempted class distinction give rise to is discussed by Karl Mannheim in his *Ideology and Utopia*:

One of the most impressive facts about modern life is that in it, unlike preceding cultures, intellectual activity is not carried on exclusively by a socially rigidly defined class, such as a priesthood, but rather by a social stratum which is recruited from an increasingly inclusive area of social life. This sociological fact determines essentially the uniqueness of the modern mind, which is characteristically not based upon the authority of a priesthood, which is not closed and finished, but which is rather dynamic, elastic, in a constant state of flux, and perpetually confronted by new problems. Even humanism was already largely the expression of such a more or less socially emancipated stratum, and where the nobility became the bearer of culture it broke through the fixedness of a class-bound mentality in many respects. But not until we come to the period of bourgeois ascendancy does the level of cultural life become increasingly detached from a given class.

What we seek, then, in looking for the modern (not necessarily contemporary) intellectual is more a particular type of man than a member of a sociologically well-defined class. But what is the nature of this type? I believe


that we may best approach a description of the intellectual
by trying to trace his emergence in history.

As the subsequent discussion will make clear, I am
not, at this point, primarily concerned with the history
of a word, but with the development of a concept. Etymolog-
ically, the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the first
English usage of "intellectual" as a noun in 1652: Benlowes
Theoph. 11v, "First race of intellectuals." The next
instance cited is 1813, when Byron comments in his *Journal*,
"Canning is to be here, Frere & Sharpe,—perhaps Gifford.
... I wish I may be well enough to listen to these intel-
lectuals." Barzun claims that "As we use them today, the
words 'intellectual' and 'anti-intellectual' are scarcely
more than sixty years old. Their continual use in praise
and blame goes back to the Dreyfus Affair."\(^5\) However, in
*Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Raymond Williams finds in
Adam Smith "a significant ... description of that special
class of persons who from the 1820s were to be called
'intellectuals.'" And he then goes on to cite a passage
written by Sir Egerton Brydges in the 1820s: "It is a vile
evil that literature is become so much a trade all over
Europe. Nothing has gone so far to nurture a corrupt
taste, and to give the unintellectual power over the
intellectual."\(^6\)


In any case, the actuality considerably antedates the word, for historically, the type of the modern intellectual seems to have led its origin in the second half of the eighteenth century. Mannheim, as we have already seen, locates the distinction between the modern and pre-modern intellectual in the former's having grown out of the historical phenomenon of "bourgeois ascendancy." The focal point of this ascendancy (which was ideological as well as sociological and political) was the French Revolution.

Bronowski and Mazlish, in *The Western Intellectual Tradition,* describe the third "swath" (1790-1830) of their history as follows:

We have given the title *The Great Revolutions* to the period which we are now to discuss, because it includes three revolutions: the Industrial Revolution, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution. To use the word "revolution" to describe all three of these events is not wholly an artifice of language, because these revolutions form an historical unity. About 1760 there occurred the explosive moment in European and world history in which the central features of contemporary life were created in a remarkably short time. One essential feature of contemporary life is large-scale, mechanized industry: this was created in the Industrial Revolution in England. A second feature of contemporary life is that the center of gravity of the Western World today lies somewhere between Europe and North America; and the shift westward to this imaginary point in the Atlantic begins with the American Revolution. And third, the substitution of democratic, elected governments for the traditional and absolute monarchies of Europe took its momentum, outside of England, from the French Revolution, which set off a chain of revolutions of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.7

To this it may perhaps be added that the American Revolution did more than merely shift the "center of gravity" westward. By appearing to bring to fruition and convert into actuality the cerebrations of the eighteenth-century philosophers it lent further impetus to the upheavals in France which resulted in the triumph of the middle class. Alexis de Tocqueville remarked that,

To the rest of Europe the American Revolution seemed merely a novel and remarkable historical event; whereas the French saw in it a brilliant confirmation of theories already familiar to them. Elsewhere it merely shocked and startled; for the French it was conclusive proof that they were in the right. Indeed, the American seemed only to be putting into practice ideas which had been sponsored by our writers, and to be making our dreams their realities. 8

Furthermore, in the crucible of these revolutions was forged the modern intellectual, as well as our modern "mass society." Albert Salomon, who calls "the age of revolution the true epoch of the intellectuals," writes:

The intellectuals who burst upon the scene in the years after the Revolution were genuinely different from those who had preceded it. Two historical experiences had preceded the full development of the type. The first was the tremendous advance that took place in the sciences between the years 1793 and 1799. . . . The second historical event of which we must take note was the creation of the Cult of Reason. It will be remembered that the revolutionaires had deified reason, crowning her as a goddess. The alliance between this secularized religion and ascendent science gave impetus to the creation of a new type of intellectual. The first sociologists held the conviction that life

was historical because the mind of man unfolded itself in the process of time. The implications of this were that the historical past was collective and that, at the same time, history had a specific goal. It was this goal that added an element of eschatological finality to eighteenth century rationalism. The merging of these two ideas—which previously in Western history had been conspicuously separate—gave the intellectuals the opportunity of being both scientists and priests.9

The contradictions in the new position of the intellectual are patent. On the one hand he is flushed with new freedom. The emancipation from old superstitions is now complemented by liberation from the old patrons. More than a century ago, Tocqueville had observed that "A powerful aristocracy does not merely shape the course of public affairs, it also guides opinion, sets the tone for writers, and lends authority to new ideas. By the [end of] the eighteenth century the French nobility had wholly lost this form of ascendancy, its prestige had dwindled with its power, and since the place it had occupied in the direction of public opinion was vacant, writers could usurp it with the greatest ease and keep it without fear of being dislodged."10

But even at the height of his euphoria the intellectual is already becoming subject to new masters: philosophically to empiricism and sociologically to a public which is growing increasingly literate (at least quantitatively). In his Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, Joseph Schumpeter

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10The Intellectuals, p. 17.
asserts that "in the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century the individual patron was slow to lose the paramount importance in the intellectual's career that he had held at the beginning. But in the peak successes at least, we clearly discern the growing importance of the new element--the support of the collective patron, the bourgeois public."\textsuperscript{11}

Moreover, while his assumption of the priestly office tends to set the intellectual above the mass, it paradoxically intensifies his obligation to his new masters. This process is described by Levin L. Schucking:

Gradually, the ideal of personality changed. The ideal cavalier of the eighteenth century was the man of society with exquisite manners. The upper middle class brought art and science into the place of honor; it regarded the deepening of the intellectual life and the artistic elevation of spiritual life as important objects of existence. Art had played in the life of the aristocracy the part of a decorative element; in the life of the independent-minded middle class it had the more exalted task of serving as herald and prophet of the highest and the profoundest thought of mankind. Under these circumstances its representatives also were accorded a higher place than formerly.\textsuperscript{12}

Ironically, then, the secularized intellectual becomes the spiritual shepherd of the middle class. It is the consequent carrying of religious zeal into secular thought that is responsible for the most remarkable aspect of the modern

\textsuperscript{11}(New York, 1947), p. 149.

\textsuperscript{12}The Sociology of Literary Taste (London, 1944), p. 20.
intellectual—his attachment to "ideologies" and political movements. Not only is he the child of an age of revolutions, he is the child of "The Age of Ideology." Michael Polanyi, in an article called "Beyond Nihilism," writes:

I have said that the situation in which the modern mind finds itself to-day has emerged in two stages from the mentality of a static society. The first stage was the process of intellectual secularisation, spreading the new scientific outlook of the universe and yet evoking no profound emotions and calling for no vast political actions; the second was the dynamic process which released these emotions and actions. At this point the thoughts of philosophers were transformed into ideologies. Ideologies are fighting creeds. They fought against each other as rivals.  

As Polanyi indicates here, and later in the same article, there is more to the phenomenon of ideologies than a mere transmogrification of thoughts into political creeds. The zeal and passion with which the modern intellectual attaches himself to political causes represents not only a transference of thought, but a transference, as well, of the cleric-intellectual's religious passion to the secular world. In other words, the intensity of the commitment of the whole man, which was once capable of absorption in religious ritual, now demands an outlet in secular action.

It was this intellectual obsession with action that led Julian Benda to speak of the "treason of the intellectuals." Whereas in the past, Benda asserts, "The clerks" had served as a check upon "the laymen, . . ." whose whole function consists

13Encounter, XIV (March, 1960), 37.
essentially in the pursuit of material interests... today... we have to admit that the "clerks" now exercise political passions with all the characteristics of passion—the tendency to action, the thirst for immediate results, the exclusive preoccupation with the desired end, the scorn for argument, the excess, the hatred, the fixed ideas. The modern "clerk" has entirely ceased to let the layman alone descend to the market place. The modern clerk is determined to have the soul of a citizen and to make vigorous use of it; he is proud of that soul; his literature is filled with his contempt for the man who shuts himself up with art or science and takes no interest in the passions of the state.\(^{14}\)

The interaction between logic and political passion which results in the triumph of the latter is described by Polanyi as having originated in the French Revolution.

... In 1789, France broke away [from the systems of compromise possible in enlightenment liberalism] and led the world towards a revolutionary consummation of the contradiction inherent in a post-Christian rationalism. The ideology of total revolution is a variant of the derivation of absolutism from absolute individualism. Its argument is simple and has yet to be answered. If society is not a divine institution, it is made by man, and man is free to do with society what he likes. There is then no excuse for having a bad society, and we must make a good one without delay. For this purpose you must take power and you can take power over a bad society only by a revolution; so you must go ahead and make a revolution. Moreover, to achieve a comprehensive improvement of society you need comprehensive powers; so you must regard all resistance to yourself as high treason and must put it down mercilessly.

The logic is, alas, familiar to us, and we can readily identify its more or less complete fulfilment from Robespierre and St. Just to Lenin, Bela Kun, Hitler, and Mao Tse-tung. But there is a progression from Robespierre to his successors which transforms

Messianic violence from a means to an end into an aim in itself. Such is the final position reached by moral passions in their modern embodiments, whether in personal nihilism or in totalitarian violence. I call this transformation a process of moral inversion.15

It is this obsessive, feverish drive to experience thought in action that, historically, seems to constitute a betrayal for Benda. But it is precisely this propensity to become obsessed that makes the intellectual a viable character in nineteenth-century fiction. Insofar as he is not like "the so-called intellectuals of Constantinople, who were engaged in discussion while the Turks were taking possession of the city,"16 he has dramatic possibilities.

Polanyi's statement, further, suggests what is probably the primary distinction between the English and American as opposed to the Continental intellectual up to the 1920s (when the Lost Generation begins a new process of Western intellectual consolidation). It is that the passion of the intellectuals which continued to ravage Europe through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was spent, in England by 1688 and in America by 1783. And in both instances the drive to self destruction was avoided by the ability to resolve rationally irresolvable contradictions in practical compromise. "England," writes Polanyi, "--like America--had

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16Oxford English Dictionary, under "Intellectual."
effectively relaxed the internal contradictions inherent in any Christian or post-Christian society, by gradually humanising society, while strengthening the affection between fellow citizens for the sake of which they may forgive mutual injustices. It was this achievement that has preserved the eighteenth-century framework of thought almost intact in these countries up to this day.\textsuperscript{17} It is but adding a commonplace to note that in America and England from about 1850 to the 1880s, idealistic zeal was channeled into social reform rather than revolutionary activity.

Clearly, to the intellectuals of England and America, the French Revolution and its aftermath were an anticlimax and a lesson in disillusion as well. In America, it is true, Thomas Paine remained a steadfast (and not wholly welcome) insurrectionist, but in England the residue of political passion moved almost completely to the right, and the voice of frenzy belonged not to any wild-eyed radicals, but to the most wild-eyed of all conservatives, Edmund Burke. Even at the peak of their passion (let us say 1776 to 1783) the revolutionary and post-revolutionary intellectuals in England and America were moved not so much by the ideal of messianic violence as by the ideal of the Ciceronian gentleman.

The development of this concept and its adaptation to American life is painstakingly traced in Edwin Harrison \textsuperscript{17Page 38.}
Cady's study, *The Gentleman in America*. In brief, the gentleman is a "natural aristocrat" who combines certain native gifts (principally mental ability) with education, breeding, and duty—his duty being essentially leadership. Informative about the role, function, and status of the gentleman is a statement made by John Adams in one of his letters to Thomas Jefferson:

> The people in all nations are naturally divided into two sorts, the gentlemen and the simplemen, a word which is here chosen to signify the common people. By gentlemen are not meant the rich or the poor, the high-born or the low-born, the industrious or the idle; but all those who have received a liberal education, an ordinary degree of erudition in liberal arts and sciences, whether by birth they be descended from magistrates and officers of government, or from husbandmen, merchants, mechanics, or laborers; or whether they be rich or poor. We must, nevertheless, remember that generally those who are rich, and descended from families in public life, will have the best education in arts and sciences, and therefore the gentlemen will ordinarily, notwithstanding some exceptions to the rule, be the richer, and born of more noted families. By the common people we mean laborers, husbandmen, mechanics, and merchants in general, who pursue their occupations and industry without any knowledge in liberal arts or sciences, or in any thing but their own trades or pursuits; though there may be exceptions to this rule and individuals may be found in each of these classes who may really be gentlemen.\(^{18}\)

The confusion arising out of the attempt to put Enlightenment democratic principles into practice is already evident in Adams' letter. There are two classes, Adams states, and these classes are rooted in natural law.

Subsequently, however, he names several societal classes (which can all be grouped under the natural class of simplemen). But the natural gentleman cuts across all of these classes. In other words, the gentleman (like the intellectual as Mannheim describes him a century later) is a member of a very vaguely defined class.

Explicitly, the description of the gentleman which Adams gives quite neatly fits his own generation of intellectuals—Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, Franklin, Adams himself, and so on. But Adams' statement is prophetic as well as descriptive. He depicts the eighteenth-century gentleman as a learned man who is a member of a class (albeit a rather nebulous one), and who has both status and role. Take away the status and role, and what is left is a man who has "received a liberal education, an ordinary degree of erudition in liberal arts and sciences. . . ." Now let this man, in the absence of any defined and approved role in society, turn to ideas as an élan vital, let him cling to ideas as ends in themselves, and the modern non-revolutionary intellectual emerges.

Of course, this is just what did happen, as Adams' great grandson Henry was so bitterly to observe. As the old generation of Jefferson and Adams relinquished political power, the slack was taken up by a new breed--the common man, the Jacksonian democrat. And the next generation of intellectuals formed in the cultural hiatus of the late 20s
and early 30s (Emerson had written in "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England" that men grew intellectual and aware in the 1830s and 40s) found themselves without power and without specific duties.

Perhaps this is only to say, after all, that the romanticization of the secular intellectuals which was so important and so lasting on the Continent was relatively insignificant and brief in England, and a late but momentous development in America. Polanyi, again, provides some illumination on this point. "Byron," he writes,

had spread the image of the noble romantic immoralist through European literature as far as the Russian steppes. The poet Lenski in Pushkin's Onegin (1833) has a portrait of Byron in his remote country house. But England itself got rid of Byron without a trace. The problem of evil, the possibility that evil may be morally superior to good, which affected all 19th-century thought on the Continent, was never raised in England.19

It is at this point that American thought and the American intellectual seem to separate from the English tradition, and close with what is occurring on the Continent. At least in the American novel of the mid-century, the problem of good and evil became crucial, as has been amply demonstrated by R. W. B. Lewis and Harry Levin, among others.

Let us now look at the characteristics which distinguish the modern intellectual, remembering that these are not essences, but what Wittgenstein calls "family

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resemblances." In point of time, the intellectual emerges out of the social, philosophical, and historical forces that reach a climax toward the end of the eighteenth century. Socially, he is a product of "bourgeoisie ascendancy," but he cannot be said to "belong" to any specific social class. Philosophically, he is oriented toward a secular rather than a religious scheme of thought. But in spite of this, his thought in America and his actions on the Continent generally display the zeal of a man who has the deepest moral commitment. Implicit in this historical portrait are such qualities as superior mental capacity; dedication to the search for knowledge and truth; a belief in the efficacy of ideas; a desire to strive for the clarification of cultural issues and human problems; and finally, an awareness of all these tendencies in oneself.

If we return now to the definition of the intellectual given by Rahv—that is, "a person who thinks with his entire being, . . . a person who transforms ideas into actual dramatic motives instead of merely using them as ideological conventions. . ."—we can perhaps better perceive the source of his confusion. First, his concept of the intellectual is limited to the Continental revolutionary and post-revolutionary intellectual described by Polanyi and denounced by Benda. And secondly, without being aware of it, Rahv mixes two concepts: the intellectual as a historical entity and the intellectual as a dramatic character.
Although it is true that the way in which the intellectual as a dramatic character "transforms ideas into dramatic matter" may be revealing, nevertheless, to say that a man who does not think with his entire being, and so on, cannot be an intellectual is to shut the door just as we approach the threshold of knowledge. For it is precisely at this point that our questions should begin. What does it mean if the intellectual does not act as Rahv says he must? Indeed, how do we know when a man is thinking with his entire being and when he is converting ideas into "actual dramatic motives"? These questions, as is usually the case, raise a number of new ones.

For example, do ideas, in the intellectual, become substitutes for emotion or are they subordinate to it? Is one or the other preferable? Is it possible to trace any interaction between a character's depth of sensitivity and the nature of his ideas? Is the intellectual merely an absorber of ideas, or a disseminator as well? Is it his tendency just to "hold" ideas or does he try to convert them into action? What does one or the other lead to? What is the intellectual's commitment to his ideas? Does he dabble in them as an objective observer or is he obsessed by them, so that at last he must work them out in his own being? How far is the man separable from his ideas? Is it possible to determine to what extent the "whole man" has molded his ideas, and to what extent the ideas have made
the man? If the two are easily separated, what does this indicate about the character? What does it indicate about the novel?

Finally, what about the ideas themselves? What relationship, if any, is there between a character's ideas and a systematic philosophy? If the intellectual adheres to or is haunted by a definable philosophy, where has it come from? If, on the other hand, he is possessed by ideas as a series of fragments—separate and relatively independent reactions to life and reality—what does this intellectual attitude indicate? In either case, what insights can we gain into the American novel and what it is?

Before considering the intellectual in relation to the American novel, however, it is necessary to clarify some aspects of the development of the genre and of its acknowledged predecessor, the English novel. In speaking of the latter, I shall follow fairly closely the line worked out by Ian Watt in his study, *The Rise of the English Novel*.

Watt demonstrates that the novel grows out of the triumph of the middle class. It owes its rise to the expansion of the reading public and the consequent rupture between writers and private aristocratic patrons. Of the two writers Watt seems to feel the great innovators in the novel, he asserts:

Ultimately, however, the supercession of patronage by the booksellers, and the consequent independence of Defoe and Richardson from the literary
past, are merely reflections of a larger and even more important feature of the life of their time -- the great power and self-confidence of the middle class as a whole. By virtue of their multifarious contacts with printing, bookselling and journalism, Defoe and Richardson were in very direct contact with the new interests and capacities of the reading public; but it is even more important that they themselves were wholly representative of the new centre of gravity of that public. As middle-class London tradesmen they had only to consult their own standards of form and content to be sure that what they wrote would appeal to a large audience. This is probably the supremely important effect of the changed composition of the reading public and the new dominance of the booksellers upon the rise of the novel; not so much that Defoe and Richardson responded to the new needs of their audience, but that they were able to express those needs from the inside much more freely than would previously have been possible.20

Two aspects of the English eighteenth-century novel stand out in Watt's statement. First, it is apparent that the author is under obligation to entertain, and that his audience is limited in education and sophistication. More important, however, is Watt's assertion that the two great innovators in the form identified themselves so much as with that audience. It is not a matter of fabricating tales that will titillate middle-class taste, but of the author's believing in his own tales. For both Richardson and Defoe, their perception of reality was the same as that of the ordinary bourgeois, and they were able to fill the needs of the public because their vision coincided with the vision of the middle-class man.

But what was that vision? Essentially, Watt says, it was the vision of common sense, a vision dominated by the empiricist philosophers. It was not, he stresses, a question of influences, but of a dominant world-view. This world-view is principally manifested in the novel in three ways: original plots; concentration on particularized characters through careful attention to details of personal identity, time, and place; and a diction painfully non-ornamental. All this is what Watt calls the novel's "formal realism," a narrative method that he describes as the embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general; the premise or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.21

The empiricist belief underlying this premise is quite clear. All knowledge is obtainable through experience, through contact with the physical world. What is more, this world is "real," and time, as a measurable function of motion and space, is an entity in it. Reality resides in objects and in what is susceptible of measurement, and identity becomes a set of coordinates located in space and time. Such a belief obviously would discourage exploration of the

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"problem" of "reality," and indeed it is a "problem" virtually ignored by the English novelists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As a matter of fact, all ultimate questions are abandoned because of a refusal or inability to transcend the finite. For the philosopher (and novelist) of the Enlightenment, as Ernest Cassirer puts it, "Nature and knowledge are to be placed on their own foundations and explained in terms of their own conditions. In both cases flights into transcendent worlds must be avoided. No foreign element may be permitted to come between knowledge and reality, between subject and object. The problem must be placed on the ground of experience and solved there, for any step beyond experience would signify a mock solution, an explanation of the unknown in terms of that which is still less known."22 The esthetic result is that the novelist becomes a kind of sociologist who does for manners what the chemist does for matter, closely observing minutiae, classifying them, and generalizing and predicting from his classifications.

This empirical orientation becomes especially evident when we consider the characters in eighteenth-century novels. The empiricist presupposition that collection of sufficient data leads inevitably to the ability to formulate general

laws applies to man as well as matter. Thus, if we look at a character like Tom Jones we see that he is good (in the sense of kind and gentle, not chaste), and that he never deviates from this goodness in any important way. Blifil, on the other hand, is bad, and his behavior is always consistent with his "badness." Pamela and Clarissa, who are good girls (in the sense that they value chastity), do nothing to betray their "goodness." Robinson Crusoe constantly acts out the part of "economic man." Always one thing remains fairly certain: behavior is predictable from accumulated evidence arranged according to a preconceived schema.

The flatness of character ensuing from such a belief is extended into the thought substance of the novels involved. Not only is it impossible for character to break out of the straitjacket of temporal identity and the pre-determinism of accumulated fact, thought itself becomes paralyzed by the passion for and belief in analysis. This is the more readily perceivable if we consider for a moment the Lockean contention that abstract ideas are merely collections of simple ideas.23 The point is that the way to acquire knowledge is by trying to analyze phenomena rather than trying to penetrate them. And in the same way that abstractions are susceptible to analysis, character and

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behavior are. Man himself is not conceived as a whole but as a combination of parts. The empiricist failure to encompass man and all his problems is described by Karl Jaspers: "As a living being among others, man is the subject of anthropology. In his inner aspect he is a subject for psychology, in his objective structures, that is in communal life, a subject for sociology. Man in his empirical reality, can be a subject of research in many directions; but man is always more than he knows or can know about himself,"24 (an observation which would not have surprised Hawthorne and Melville in the least).

The English novel, then, is not only a response to the rise of the middle class and the expansion of the reading public, it is the embodiment of the English middle-class mind. Dominated by empiricist philosophy, the English novelist attempted to project the illusion of mirroring external reality by enumerating particulars (fictional or not) in great amplitude. But this very technique limits the novel as a form to the reflection of phenomena, and prevents it from probing the nature of "reality," and from exploring the transcendent and infinite.25


25 Worthy of note is the observation that the romantic influence in the English novel reaches its peak in Scott's return to the historic past, while the more idealistic and Platonic aspects of Romanticism are to be located in the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats.
That the English novel is the direct ancestor of the American novel has been, and is, generally agreed on by scholars and critics. However, the question of how the two happened to part company has always been rather perplexing. F. R. Leavis and Marius Bewley, refusing even to acknowledge a break, prefer to maintain a "great tradition" which includes Jane Austen, George Eliot, Joseph Conrad, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Henry James. But those critics who refuse to accept "the great tradition" can by no means agree on the nature of the rupture. To Leslie Fiedler the divergence is to be explained by the American attitude toward sex; to Van Wyck Brooks by the attitude toward the artist. R. W. B. Lewis feels that the American novel is distinguished by its recurring archetypal Adamic hero. Harry Levin identifies the American novel by its power of blackness, and Charles Feidelson by the American writer's concept of language as symbol.

A most fruitful and far-reaching distinction, however, has been made by Lionel Trilling in his essay, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel." The brunt of his thesis is that "the novel in America diverges from its classic intention, which . . . is the investigation of the problem of reality beginning in the social field." It is obvious that the crux of the argument centers around Mr. Trilling's

concept of "the problem of reality," and it is into this that we must now look.

"All literature," Trilling advises us, "tends to be concerned with the question of reality--I mean quite simply the old opposition between what really is and what merely seems."27 The statement is very clear. There is "reality" and there is "appearance," "what is," and "what seems," and the two are always opposed. But if this were the case there would be no problem, for all we would have to do would be to accept everything as the opposite of what it seems, an obvious absurdity. The confusion, of course, stems initially from the tautological statement that reality "really is." This leads Trilling to limit "reality" by positing a "what" that "really is." The difficulty in making such a supposition is beautifully expressed by George E. Moore, who defines reality as "Determined being, and not being determined as 'what.'" For to determine being as 'what' is to circumscribe and relate it in a universe of existence which denies its universality."28 On the other side of the coin, Trilling, by denying the possibility that appearance and reality may coincide, seems to be depriving appearance of any claim to existence. Even so adamant a dualist as Francis


H. Bradley, in his book-length study of the problem, must concede that "reality, set on one side and apart from all appearance, would assuredly be nothing." 29

That Trilling does not recognize the "problem of reality" becomes perfectly obvious the moment we look at his concrete illustrations:

"Don't you see?" is the question we want to shout at Oedipus as he stands before us and before fate in the pride of his rationalism. And at the end of Oedipus Rex he demonstrates in a particularly direct way that he now sees what he did not see before. "Don't you see?" we want to shout again at Lear and Gloucester, the two deceived, self-deceiving fathers: blindness again, resistance to the clear claims of reality, the seduction by mere appearance. The same with Othello--reality is right under your stupid nose, how dare you be such a gull? So with Moliere's Orgon--my good man, my honest citizen, merely look at Tartuffe and you will know what's what. So with Milton's Eve--"Woman, watch out! Don't you see--any one can see--that's a snake!" 30

The quotation is an excellent example of what does not constitute exploring the question of reality. Not that Shakespeare, Cervantes, Moliere, et al. ignore the problem, but their concern with it is not what Trilling takes it to be. For example, Mr. Trilling conceives that in all the instances he cites, the problem is one of seeing. But this is not the case at all. It is not sight that is defective in Gloucester, Othello, Lear, Orgon, Oedipus, and Eve, it is


judgment. Moreover, the recognition that reality is not being explored is implicit in Trilling's construction of the case (though he himself does not see this), for he assumes that the auditor or reader, and, by implication, the author, know at all times precisely what is "real" and what is "apparent." If this is so, if "reality" is always palpably "there," open to the view of all who can penetrate sham and pretense, then the question that Trilling raises in all these works is not one of "reality," but of human hypocrisy and the fallibility of human judgment.31

Trilling's problem is that without realizing it, he cannot make up his mind whether to locate reality in the subject or in the object. Sometimes he does one, sometimes the other, but at no time does he show any signs that he is

31 What constitutes the "problem of reality" in literature is to some extent clarified by Erich Auerbach in the following passage: "The realism of the siglo de oro . . . turns the world into a magic stage. And on that magic stage--this again is very significant for its relation to modern realism--a fixed order reigns, despite all the elements of adventure and miracle. In the world, it is true, everything is a dream, but nothing is a riddle demanding to be solved. There are passions and conflicts but there are no problems. God, King, honor and love, class and class decorum are immutable and undoubted, and the figures neither of tragedy nor comedy present us with questions difficult to answer. Among the Spanish authors of the golden age whom I know, Cervantes is certainly the one whose characters come nearest to being problematic. But if we want to understand the difference, we need only compare the bewildered, easily interpreted, and ultimately curable madness of Don Quixote with Hamlet's fundamental and many-faceted insanity which can never be cured in this world." Mimesis (New York, 1957), p. 292.
conscious of what he is doing. He states, for example, that

there are two movements of thought in *Don Quixote*, two different and opposed notions of reality. One is the movement which leads toward saying that the world of ordinary practicality is reality in its fullness. It is the reality of the present moment in all its powerful immediacy of hunger, cold, and pain, making the past and the future, and all ideas of no account. When the conceptual, the ideal, and the fanciful come into conflict with this, bringing their notions of the past and the future, then disaster results. . . .

Thus one movement of the novel. But Cervantes changed horses in midstream and found that he was riding Rosinante. . . . Cervantes begins to show that the world of tangible reality is not the real reality after all. The real reality is rather the wildly conceiving, the madly fantasying mind of the Don: people change, practical reality changes, when they come into its presence.32

We have seen that on the one hand (Othello, Lear, Orgon, etc.) Trilling conceives reality as "what is" rather than "what merely seems," that is, as the phenomenon opposed to the idea, the object opposed to the subject. But now he goes on to say that the two opposed realities of *Don Quixote* are: (1) "the powerful immediacy of hunger, pain, and cold" and (2) "the wildly conceiving, the madly fantasying mind of the Don." It is quite obvious that neither of these "realities" is identical with the "reality" Trilling mentions in the previous citation, but that both are identical with each other. Both the "realities" of *Don Quixote*, as Trilling expresses, them, are Subjective. Pain, especially, but

32Ibid., pp. 202-203.
hunger and cold as well, may be delusions, may be present in the mind only, and therefore no more "real" than any of the Don's fantasies. But real or not, the point is that what Trilling conceives as "opposed notions of reality" are not opposed at all. The opposition is actually between Trilling's first tautological definition of reality as "what really is" and his later concept that all reality is in the mind.

Out of all this chaos, Trilling finally concludes that

the novel . . . has never really established itself in America. Not that we have not had very great novels but that the novel in America diverges from its classic intention, which, as I have said, is the investigation of the problem of reality beginning in the social field. The fact is that American writers of genius have not turned their minds to society. Poe and Melville were quite apart from it; the reality they sought was only tangential to society. Hawthorne was acute when he insisted that he did not write novels but romances—he thus expressed his awareness of the lack of social texture in his work.33

Enough, I think, has been said of the confusion inherent in Trilling's concept of "reality" to give us pause when we see a phrase as puzzling as "the investigation of reality beginning in the social field." In question at the moment, however, is the dichotomy between novel and romance to which this statement of Trilling's has given rise.

33Ibid., p. 206.
Nowhere is the distinction between these two genres more laboriously and engagingly elaborated than in Richard Chase's fine book, *The American Novel and its Tradition*. After demonstrating the need for a non-essential approach to definition, he states that "the main difference between the novel and the romance is in the way in which they view reality. The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. . . . By contrast the romance, following distantly the medieval example, feels free to render reality in less volume and detail." The dazzling footwork here is, I must confess, somewhat bewildering. On the one hand Chase claims that the novel and romance are distinguished by the fact that each has a different view of "reality." But then he goes on to say that the distinction lies not in the way in which the two forms view "reality," but in the way they render it. And then it turns out that the distinction is not in the way they render "reality," but in the volume of "reality" they render.

One wonders, to begin with, how it is possible to measure "reality" quantitatively, and further, whether it is possible to establish a simple relationship between reality and sheer volume of detail. For example, can one say of the two statements which follow that the first is more "realistic" than the second? (1) I saw a five-legged creature with one

eye on each of its two arms, and a nose 5.1 inches long on its left thin. (2) I saw a horse.

But this is not the only problem raised by Chase's distinction. The dichotomy is further blurred by his careless shifting of terms, which has already been alluded to. The way in which one "views" and the way in which one "renders" are not necessarily the same. Viewing is a relatively passive state very largely dependent on sensitivity of a physical organ, mental alertness, and to some unknown extent, social conditioning. Rendering, on the other hand, is almost completely a matter of social and literary convention. For example, a man who is color blind may see everything as gray, and as a consequence he will not be able to "view" the "reality" that grass is green. Nevertheless, if he has absorbed the social convention of calling grass green, to that extent he is still capable of "rendering" "reality" in a way that is meaningful. We cannot, then, know whether Chase means that novelists and romancers have different concepts of "reality" or whether he means that their concepts of "reality" are the same but that their conventions for presenting it are different.

A graver flaw in Chase's presentation of the dichotomy is the fact that his categories are not mutually exclusive. What he says about the novel can be applied with equal (sometimes with more) cogency to the romance, and what
he says about the romance can likewise be applied to the novel. Let us see. Chase writes, "The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail," while "the romance . . . feels free to render reality in less volume and detail." Is it possible, by this criterion, reasonably to say that Clarissa is a novel and Moby Dick a romance? Quite the contrary. Moby Dick is crammed to the point of super-saturation with "real," verifiable details, whereas Clarissa is "pure fabrication." Mr. Chase continues: "[The novel] . . . takes a group of people and sets them going about the business of life. We come to see these people in their real [sic] complexity of temperament and motive." Certainly, in The Scarlet Letter we have a group of people who "go about the business of life." The same is true of The House of the Seven Gables, Moby Dick, and Billy Budd. But unless the business of life is considered to be the incessant titillation of the libido, the same thing can hardly be said for Pamela or Tom Jones. As to "complexity of temperament and motive," it has already been pointed out that this is generally absent from the English eighteenth century novel (which is, for Chase, the archetype of the novel). I postpone to a later chapter any discussion of the complexity of motive in the "Romance" (the American novel).

It is not necessary to deal with Chase's catalogue in its entirety, but at least one more point is crucial. In the novel, according to Chase, "Character is more important
than action and plot, and probably the tragic or comic actions of the narrative will have the primary purpose of enhancing our knowledge of and feeling for an important character, a group of characters, a way of life." On the other hand, the romance "tends to prefer action to character. . . . the characters, probably rather two-dimensional types, will not be complexity related to each other or to society or to the past." The briefest glance at some of those works Chase calls "novels" and "romances" suffices to show that this is simply not true. Remove, for instance, the action from Clarissa (a novel) and nothing is left. Take away Lovelace's duel with Clarissa's brother, Lovelace's courting of Clarissa, her rejection of his sexual advances, her running away from home, Lovelace's rape of her, and so on, and nothing remains but seven vacuous bindings. Or better yet, try to remove the plot from Tom Jones. Here, quite clearly, character is of secondary importance in the development of the novel. Suspense is sustained not by the reader's apprehension as to what Tom is going to do but by his perplexity as to what is going to happen to Tom, as is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the revelations and "surprises" that occur in the denouement, when all the hidden intricacies of the plot are unravelled.

Quite the opposite is true of works Chase would designate as "romances." The characters of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are absolutely central to the development of *The Scarlet Letter*. Without them there is no plot and no action. Substitute for adultery any other sin, but retain the character of Dimmesdale, and the book still stands. Keep the sin and change the character of either Dimmesdale or Chillingworth, and the book disappears. The same, of course, is true of Ahab in *Moby Dick*. If he were any man, or even any sea captain, if he were anyone but Ahab, there would be no novel.

But if the distinction between novel and romance is so easily obliterated, is it still possible to speak of the two as separate genres? For the answer we must return to Hawthorne's famous and oft-quoted elaboration of the problem in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*.

When a writer calls his work a romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospheric medium as to bring out or
mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows, or the picture.\(^3^6\)

This statement has generally been taken at face value to mean that the romance is a "looser" form than the novel. But if we bear in mind that Melville wrote about Hawthorne—that he loved to hoodwink the world—we may be pardoned for examining the statement more closely. To begin with, Hawthorne says that the romancer "wishes to claim a certain latitude as to ... fashion and material." If we translate this into the more modern "style and content" we instantly perceive that in these respects the romancer actually claims no more latitude than the novelist. Just think of the variety of styles found in such novels as *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Ambassadors*, *Finnegans Wake*. Certainly there are varying degrees of resemblance, but would anyone attempt to assert that all conform to a rigid standard of style? And no more can this be said of content.

Hawthorne's next sentence, which at first appears to elaborate his point (that is, that the romancer has more leeway than the novelist) really blurs it. The unsettling phrase is "presumed to aim at. . . ." The question inevitably arises, Presumed by whom? By the novelist, by the critic, by the public, by Hawthorne? Moreover, one wonders \(^3^6\) *The House of the Seven Gables* (Boston, 1913), p. 13.
why he says "presumed" at all? If the distinction is as clear as Hawthorne at first implies, why doesn't he simply say "aims at"? Or better yet, "achieves." The implication is that the "novel" not only does not achieve this "very minute fidelity . . .," but does not even aim at it. In addition, the distinction between the probable and the possible which Hawthorne draws is specious. In an article called "Evidence and Inference," Raymond Aron cites as one of the major problems of writing history the historian's inability to establish any valid laws of probability. Since a historical event occurs only once, it cannot be controlled in the same way as a laboratory experiment. The evidence is not cumulative. And, therefore, while it is possible to try to find causes a posteriori, no valid basis for prediction can be established.

The novelist's (or romancer's) problem is similar. In so far as he is not a statistician or a scientist, to that extent he is not bound by probability. In this sense, then, the events in Pamela are no more probable than those in The Scarlet Letter. Certainly it was not probable that in the eighteenth century in England a member of the gentry would marry a servant girl, and surely Richardson did not have to poll all the unmarried gentry in England before he 37Evidence and Inference, ed. Daniel Lerner (Chicago, 1959), pp. 19-47.
could start writing. What Richardson does so beautifully is to establish the probability of the improbable by stacking the evidence which he himself (and there should be no mistake about this) created. And this, of course, is what every writer of fiction does, be he "romancer" or "novelist."

Finally, Hawthorne says that the romancer must not "swerve from the truth of the human heart," and also that he "has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation."

Of the second assertion it need only be said that every writer (so far as he has any freedom) presents whatever he presents under circumstances of his own choosing. The first assertion, however, is more puzzling. First, we must ask what is unique about a truth "of the human heart" and secondly, how it is possible that the novelist should by implication be permitted to swerve from truth (of the human heart or otherwise).

The answer to question one breaks down into two parts. The truth of the human heart may refer either to emotional versus intellectual truth or to transcendent and intuitive versus scientific and empirical truth. If we limit ourselves to the first possibility we see that Hawthorne is hardly saying anything new or even unusual. Richardson was highly praised in his own day for his ability to draw tears, and even Dr. Johnson "declared Clarissa to be the first book in the world for the knowledge it displays of
the human heart. Further, if we go to Hawthorne's own work, it is obvious that he does not have in mind, when he speaks of truth of the heart, Richardsonian sentimentality.

The other alternative is that Hawthorne feels that the truth of the novel is transcendent—a truth revealed to the artist, and not one uncovered by the empiricist. When he talks about novel and romance, then, he seems to mean a literature of phenomena as against a literature of truth, a literature of matter-of-fact against a literature of speculation. And so, also, when he speaks of a literature of the possible it would appear that he has in mind not so much a literature that takes special license with "reality," but one that probes the profoundest possibilities of human existence. Hawthorne was clearly seeking to create a tolerance for fiction in an age in which critics demanded that fiction be history.

But whatever it may have meant to Hawthorne, in our own day the dichotomy between novel and romance seems to have outlived its usefulness. The questions it raises about the distinctions between probability and possibility, historical and ahistorical fact, detail and reality lead more to confusion than illumination.

When Lionel Trilling insists that the novel "is the investigation of reality beginning in the social field," and

so on, he is not making sense. His confusion is plain the moment we try to apply his dictum. It has often been pointed out, for example that Richardson (a writer of novels by the Trilling and Chase standard) knew little of the "real" life of the gentry. In what sense, then, was he qualified to "investigate" (the very diction betrays a naive empiricism) a "reality" not in the range of his experience? Yet, most of his fictional characters belong to that class. And as for beginning in "the social field," Robinson Crusoe, which Ian Watt calls a novel, deals with man solitary, not with man social.

Just as misleading is the contention that "the American novel diverges from [this] classic intention" by not venturing into the "social field." If the "social field" is one in which man deals with man and faces man, then does not The Scarlet Letter begin in it, and The House of the Seven Gables, and Moby-Dick, and Pierre, and so on? As a matter of fact, is it possible for any fiction, unless it deals only with vegetation, to avoid the "social field"? Finally, one must question Trilling's assertion that the reality sought by the classic American novelists is "tangential" to society. If anything, it is terribly central to it.

It is not surprising that Trilling, so at home in the gentle glow of Matthew Arnold's agnosticism, should turn away from the sombre yet vital reality of American literature.
For the American novelist, starting with social man, ends with man naked. If we may borrow terms from Martin Buber, the classic American novel is eminently a literature of the "I-Thou" and not of the "I-it." The novelist's passion is to set man "over against" man; to set him face to face with Nature and with God. It is not a question of ignoring "manners," of disliking, of fleeing, of misunderstanding them, but of trying to penetrate through them. And the irony in Trilling's position is that it is he who takes a completely "unrealistic" view of the question of "manners" and "reality" in America. For in their novels the classic American writers express a very real American aspiration to know God and Man, to realize the transcendent by piercing through phenomena. Emerson expressed this feeling as a social fact when he wrote in "Self-Reliance,"

The objection to conforming to usages that have become dead to you is that it scatters your force. It loses your time and blurs the impression of your character. If you maintain a dead church, contribute to a dead Bible-society, vote with a great party either for the government or against it, spread your table like base housekeepers,—under all these screens I have difficulty to detect the precise man you are: and of course so much force is withdrawn from your proper life. But do your work, and I shall know you. . . . Most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite true. . . . Meantime nature is not slow to equip us in the prison-uniform of the party to which we adhere. We come to wear one cut of face and figure, and acquire by degrees the gentlest asinine expression. There is a
mortifying experience in particular, which does not fail to wreak itself also in the general history; I mean "the foolish face of praise," the forced smile which we put on in company where we do not feel at ease, in answer to conversation which does not interest us. The muscles, not spontaneously moved but moved by a low usurping wilfulness, grow tight about the outline of the face, with the most disagreeable sensation. 39

Here, what Trilling refuses to look at is made abundantly clear—that the static manners of stable social classes are not the only manners, and that for the nineteenth century American, still living in the initial radiance of the dream of democracy, the individual was obscured, not defined, by such "manners." This may be a reality one does not like, but it nevertheless remains: for the nineteenth-century American the measure of man was man in his wholeness—man-devil and/or man-God. But he could never be sure when man was being one and when the other. And it was the drive to find out, to see man in his ultimate relation to the Universe, to God, to Nature, and to other men that made the classic American novel truly a literature of speculation.

If we return, now, to the English novel, it will be recalled that it was not only a response to middle-class taste, it embodied middle-class ideals and concretized middle-class vision. It assumed the cloak of empiricism and

wore it easily and comfortably. This was seldom true of the serious American novel. Caught between the burgeoning enlightenment image of rational man moving toward civil perfection and the hard-dying Puritan concept of man as a helpless, barely rational, and incorrigible sinner, the classic American novelist turned to speculation as salvation. Harry Levin asserts that "as in the Custom House, so in the Old Manse, Hawthorne imagined his forbears reproving him for being a mere fiction-monger; facing the heavy shelves of tracts and treatises, he promised himself 'at least to achieve a novel that should evolve some deep lesson.' Perhaps he could seek through imaginative fiction what they had sought through religious speculation, an awareness of some controlling pattern in human destiny."40 And William Charvat points out that "when . . . Melville began to generate ideas out of contradictions within himself, he shifted to a kind of internal dialectic which gave the reader no choice. He involved him in the very processes of thought, made him collaborate in exploratory, speculative thinking which is concerned not with commitment but with possibility. It is the one kind of thinking that the general reader will not tolerate, and the nineteenth century critic, when he detected it, declared it subversive."41

It is as a vehicle for speculation and as a battleground of this internal dialectic that the intellectual character assumes importance in American fiction. And this importance is not merely in verbalizing ideas and voicing intellectual conundrums, but in becoming the dramatic embodiment of modern man's crucial problems, of which, since the end of the eighteenth century, the intellectual has been so integral a part.
CHAPTER II

THE INTELLECTUAL AS MAN OF REASON

The last decade of the eighteenth century marked the acceptance, if not the triumph of the novel more specifically, of the sentimental romance in America. In spite of the fact that novels received little or no critical notice until the second decade of the nineteenth century,¹ the audience continued to grow for those writers, mostly women, who insisted that they were social historians, purveyors of truth, whose purpose was the edification of the young females who were their principal readers. Writing for a literate but unlearned audience, the authors themselves made no pretense to learning or to any interest in ideas. The most popular of them, Susanna Rowson, candidly asked, in the preface to Mentorla; or the Young Lady's Friend (1794), "Alas! What may not be my fate? whose education, as a female, was necessarily circumscribed, whose little knowledge has been simply gleaned from pure nature, and who, on a subject of such importance, write as I feel, with enthusiasm."

Mrs. Rowson, like the majority of her colleagues, felt called upon to fulfill the needs not of the cold intellect but of the tender heart. In this there was little departure from the contemporary novel in England, as is evident from a brief comparison of titles. Some English titles were *Felicia to Charlotte: being Letters from a Young Lady in the Country to her Friend in Town* (1744); *Ela: or the Delusions of the Heart. A tale founded on Facts* (1780); and *The Friend, a Sentimental History: describing love as a Virtue, as well as a Passion* (1754). They had as their American counterparts *Trials of the Human Heart* (1795), *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), *Amelia; or the Faithless Briton* (1798), and so on. As a matter of fact, the aforementioned Mrs. Rowson was born in England and there published her most popular and enduring (28 editions in 35 years) novel, *Charlotte Temple*. Much of the action of the novel, however, took place in America, as did, also, most of the sales.

\[2\text{ Other editions in 1755 and 1788.}\]

\[3\text{ Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, A Tale of Truth*, ed. Francis W. Halsey (New York, 1905), pp. xcvii-c. The years referred to are 1790 (the first English edition) to 1825. In all, Mr. Halsey found 104 editions up to 1905. Also, R. W. G. Vail, "Susanna Haswell Rowson, The Author of Charlotte Temple: a Bibliographical Study," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, n.s. ILIII, pt. 1 (Mass., 1933), pp. 62-68 and 91-130. Mr. Vail estimates over 200 editions, of which 160 are described. Of 161 known editions, only nine are not American.}\]
The picture at this point seems fairly clear. Available to the novelists of the late eighteenth century were the works of such great predecessors as Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Richardson. The productions of the last two, however, provided the ladies with models to work from. Sterne supplied a pure ore of sentimentality and feeling, while Richardson provided plot (about-to-be-seduced virgin, villainous would-be seducer, and all the embellishments derivable from a social system in which inter-class marriage was frowned upon), form (epistolary), and vision (the beauty, goodness, and truth of bourgeois morality). The history of how the sentimental novelists altered what they borrowed is recorded in H. R. Browne's *The Sentimental Novel in America*. For our purposes it is enough to know that while the men were busy trying to build a new nation, the indefatigable women were becoming the custodians of the novel in this country.

Among the builders, though by no means as prominently as he would have liked, was Hugh Henry Brackenridge. Unlike Mrs. Rowson, Brackenridge could not complain of a sketchy education. Born in Scotland in 1748, of poor parents, he showed an early disposition to learning, becoming sufficiently proficient in the classics at the age of fourteen to gain admittance to Princeton University. There he was a classmate of Philip Freneau and James Madison. After graduation in 1771, he tried his hand at pedagogy, theology, and letters,
before finally settling on the law. But in all his groping after a profession he never lost his interest in ideas and literature.

Neither by education nor temperament was Brackenridge suited to the novel of sentimentality. His early love of the classics suffered no diminution in later life, and he confessed, in Modern Chivalry, that "I have forgot almost all the reading of my middle age; and recollect chiefly my academic studies. Hence it is that the classics are more in my head, than Shakespeare; or Milton." But even when the classics were not in his head, it was certainly not Pamela which replaced them. "In the English language," he wrote, "that of Hume, Swift, and Fielding, is the only stile that I have coveted to possess." And in the matter of fiction, he maintained that "Except memoirs of person's own times, biographical sketches by contemporary writers: Voyages, and Travels, that have geographical exactness, there is little of the historical kind, in point of truth, before Roderick Random; or Gil Blas" (p. 406). But the book to which he was most indebted for his most significant literary work was Don Quixote.

No amount of critical legerdemain can make Modern Chivalry (1792-1815) out a great novel, for its flaws are

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too serious. For one thing, Brackenridge constantly intrudes to speak in his own person in such a way as to cause an unintended confusion between himself and the fictional character, Captain John Farrago. Albert Van Nostrand, in _The Denatured Novel_, comments on James Fenimore Cooper's practice of separating entertainment and instruction by writing". chapter for the reader, then a chapter for Cooper. The violent action would move the characters around for awhile, then they would all sit down and have a serious thought." Brackenridge indulges in a similar practice, except that he writes a chapter for the reader, then two for himself. The result is that the balance of the novel breaks down. Brackenridge originally seems to have conceived Farrago as a Quixote-like character—a man steeped in book learning who is ridiculously ignorant of the world around him, but certainly not "mad." Brackenridge's opening description shows him as

a man of about fifty-three years of age, of good natural sense, and considerable reading; but in some things whimsical, owing perhaps to his greater knowledge of books than of the world; but, in some degree, also, to his having never married, being what they call an old batchelor, a characteristic of which is, usually, singularity and whim. He had the advantage of having had in early life, an academic education; but having never applied himself to any of the learned professions, he had lived the greater part of his life on a small farm, which he cultivated with servants or hired hands, as he could conveniently supply himself with either. (p.7)

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A little later, Brackenridge confirms that "Captain Farrago was a good man, but unacquainted with the world. His ideas were drawn chiefly from what may be called the old school; the Greek and Roman notions of things" (p. 53).

What Brackenridge apparently had in mind was to create a series of absurd juxtapositions between a pedant and the ignorant masses. Both of these constituted a threat to a democratic system of government, the former because of an inability to cope with the practical problems of life, and the latter because of an inability to understand the history and tradition of a democratic society. But if Farrago is impractical and pedantic, his mind is not, like Quixote's, deranged by his reading. It may be interesting to note, also, that the reading which "afflicts" him is not, as with Quixote, chivalric romances but the classics.

At any rate, the Quixote concept is sustained only briefly.

A strange idea came into the head of Captain Farrago about this time. . . . The idea had come into his head, to saddle an old horse that he had, and ride about the world a little, with his man Teague at his heels, to see how things were going on here and there, and to observe human nature. For it is a mistake to suppose, that a man cannot learn man by reading him in a corner, as well as on the widest space of transaction. At any rate, it may yield amusement.

(p. 7)

(I take it, at this point, that the "cannot" is a textual or printing error. The statement makes more sense if it reads "It is a mistake to suppose that a man can learn man by
reading him in a corner. . . .") Farrago, then, like Quixote, decides to enter the world, taking a Sancho Panza with him. But the nature of his character seems to become blurred in his first encounter, which is with some jockeys about to bet on a horse race. They mistake Farrago's nag for a thoroughbred, and no amount of argument on his part can convince them of their error. The trouble with the scene is that for an impractical pedant Farrago is all too practical. It is he who recognizes what is actually the case, that his horse "is but a common palfrey, and by no means remarkable for speed or bottom; . . . a common plough horse which I have used on my farm for several years, and can scarce go beyond a trot" (p. 6). When the jockeys refuse to accept the empirical evidence, insisting that the nag must have been sired by a blooded steed, "the Captain . . . could not avoid answering."

Gentlemen, said he, it is a strange thing that you should suppose that it is of any consequence what may be the pedigree of a horse. For even in men it is of no avail. Do we not find that sages have had blockheads for their sons; and that blockheads have had sages? It is remarkable, that as estates have seldom lasted three generations, so understanding and ability have seldom been transmitted to the second. There never was a greater man, take him as an orator and philosopher, than Cicero: and never was there a man with greater opportunities than his son Marcus; and yet he proved of no account or reputation. This is an old instance, but there are a thousand others. . . . I will venture to say, that when the present John Adamses, and Lees, and Jeffersons, and Jays, and Henrys, and other great men, who figure upon the stage at this time, have gone to sleep with their fathers, it is an hundred to one if
there is any of their descendants who can fill their places. Was I to lay a bet for a great man, I would sooner pick up the brat of a tinker, than go into the great houses to choose a piece of stuff for a man of genius.

(p. 7)

At the conclusion of the speech, the jockeys merely think him a fool, "and gave themselves no more trouble about him" (p. 8). Farrago's problem is that for all the good sense of his speech he does not realize that there is no point in casting pearls before swine. Nothing in the speech is actually "foolish." He does not, as does Don Quixote on occasion, think he is addressing royalty or another knight. Nevertheless, it is unrealistic to exhibit such erudition before ignorant men.

The Captain's speech is revealing in other ways too. First, it affirms his faith, a faith similar to Jefferson's, in nature's ability to produce her own aristocrats. Secondly, his admiration for Cicero both as an orator and philosopher indicates an admiration as well as for the self-made Ciceronian gentleman. Finally, the speech shows the Captain himself to be a man of classical learning, albeit, at this point, one who does not quite know how to carry that learning before ignorant men.

Brackenridge expatiates on this flaw of Farrago's in a chapter of commentary which immediately follows. "The first reflection that arises, is, the good sense of the Captain; who was unwilling to impose his horse for a racer; not being
qualified for the course. . . . The second reflection that arises, is, the simplicity of the Captain; who was so unacquainted with the world, as to imagine that jockeys and men of the turf could be composed by reason and good sense. . ." (p. 11).

This strange combination of ingredients in *Farrago*, naivety mingled with learning and common sense, becomes a serious drawback. Brackenridge seems unable to decide whether to ridicule *Farrago*, or society through him, and the result is that the Captain never quite comes through as a character. He remains an odd mixture of literary conventions: Quixote, Uncle Toby, Parson Adams. But eventually, Brackenridge himself becomes the most important character in the novel. For before long, the fictional disguise becomes too burdensome to maintain, whereupon the author simply takes to expressing his ideas directly. The ideas, perhaps, press too hard. Brackenridge himself affirms, "I have taken courage to write on, and thought that if it did give offence, I might as well be hanged for an old sheep as a lamb. The truth is, I had not written myself out; but, many more ideas springing up in my brain, and crouding together in a narrow compass, wanted egress, and demanded to see the light" (p. 576).

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Brackenridge must have been aware of this, as the name, *Farrago*, indicates.
As Brackenridge's alter ego, Farrago becomes above all an eighteenth-century man of reason. "Force," he insists at one point, "proves nothing but the quantum of force. Reason is the only argument that belongs to man" (p. 88). His belief in reason, of course, is most salient in Farrago's attitude toward religion. "His ideas on the subject of religious toleration were correct; and though he disapproved of founding religion in passion, it being a thing of reason, judgment, and habit, yet he had seen that by directly opposing this error of the understanding, the pride of the multitude is enlisted in its service" (p. 609).

Farrago conceives reason, moreover, as an instrument of moderation. This is directly reflected in a belief in the values of compromise and in a distaste for extremes.

In a bedroom scene reminiscent of Restoration farce, Teague O'Regan, Farrago's servant, tries to rape a chambermaid in her quarters. Her screams bring several other lodgers including an innocent clergyman. O'Regan quick-wittedly manages to cast suspicion on the clergyman, whose mortification and temporary muteness convince the others, among them Farrago, of his guilt. The Captain's first instinct is to relieve the clergyman's embarrassment by taking the whole affair lightly.

The Captain, interrupting him, and wishing to save his feelings, began by excusing or extenuating the offence. It is no great affair, said he, after all that is said or done. The love of women is a natural sin, and the holiest men in all ages have
been propense to this indulgence. There was Abraham that got to bed to his maid Hagar, and had a bastard by her, whom he named Ishmael. Joshua, who took Jericho by the sound of ram's horns, saved a likely slut of the name of Rahab, under a pretence that she had been civil to spies he had sent out, but in reality because he himself took a fancy for her. I need say nothing about David, who wrote the Psalms, and set them to music; and yet in his old days had a girl to sleep with him. Human nature is human nature still; and it is not all the preaching and praying on earth can extinguish it.

Farrago takes the stance of a man of the world who can tolerate "minor" vices so long as they do not disrupt the order of the universe. But when the clergyman informs Farrago that the affair may wreck his clerical career, the Captain, because of "a real love of humanity and justice," proceeds to force O'Regan to assume the guilt.

Teague, said he, from what I know of your disposition, I have no more doubt than I have of my existence, that it was yourself who made that uproar with the girl at the tavern where we lodged; though I could not but give you credit for your presence of mind in throwing it upon the clergyman. But whether the matter lies with you or him is of no consequence. You can take it upon you, and lay up treasure in heaven. . . . It will be no harm to you, for your character in this respect is as bad as it can well be.

Teague said he did not care much; but thought the priest ought to pay a little smart money; for it was a thankless matter to do these things for nothing. Said the Captain, these people are not the most plenty of money; but I will advance half a crown towards the accommodation. Teague was satisfied, and ready to acknowledge whatever was demanded of him.

The arguments and actions of the Captain here are interesting. Certainly, he does not display any passion for
absolute justice, nor does he seem to be interested in righteousness for its own sake. These matters are not his business. He is concerned, rather, to see the world operate as smoothly and conveniently as possible. He cannot be positively, though he may be reasonably certain of Teague's guilt. But it does not matter to the Captain even if he is wrong. Since Teague has nothing to lose by confessing the crime, and the clergyman a great deal to gain, encouraging Teague to assume the guilt is obviously the most sensible course of action for the Captain to arrange. And when Teague holds out for his pound of flesh, the Captain does not rise in moral indignation to crush the monster, but instead, again takes the smoothest path. He cheerfully pays a nominal extortion fee in order to expedite a satisfactory conclusion of the episode.

Absent from the Captain's makeup is messianic zeal. Eminently a man of reason, he does not, like the French revolutionaires, make a goddess of it. Logic for him is not, as it is for the romantic intellectuals, a cup of gall to be drained to the last painful and bitter drop. It is a lubricant for the machinery of life. And the Captain, as a consequence, approaches most situations pragmatically. On one occasion, for example,

two men appeared, the one of a grave aspect, with a black coat; the other without the same clerical colour of garb; but with papers in his pocket which announced his authority to preach, and officiate as a clergyman. The man with the black coat, averred,
that coming over together, in a vessel from Ireland, they had been messmates; and while he was asleep one night, being drowsy after prayers, the other had stolen his credentials from his pocket. The man in possession of the papers, averred they were his own, and that the other had taken his coat, and by advantage of the cloth, thought to pass for what he was not.

(p. 99)

The Captain proposes to solve the problem by having both men preach a sermon. When the populace's preference is divided equally between the fraud and the genuine clergyman, the Captain, who had recognized the impostor immediately, speaks out:

Gentlemen, said he, the men seem both to have considerable gifts, and I see no harm in letting them both preach. There is work enough for them in this new country; the first [who is the genuine] appears to me, to be more qualified for the city, as a very methodical preacher; but the last is most practical; and each may answer a valuable purpose in their proper place.

(p. 104).

As in the abortive rape scene, principle is a minor consideration. The Captain seeks not an absolute answer to the problem but a functional solution. He is not hell-bent on purging the impostor and punishing him for his imposition. Instead, he is satisfied to settle the issue to everyone's satisfaction, if that is possible.

When, on another occasion, a mob tries to tear down a church because the preacher "is not an American republican, but quotes the English commentators in his sermons. . . ." (p. 369), the Captain replies:

Religion . . . is of no government. Wines are the better for being brought over seas, and our best
brandies are from monarchies. Where was the cloth of that coat made? Will you reject a good piece of stuff because it came through the hands of an aristocratic weaver: These are false ideas of what is right and useful to mankind. The common law is not the worse for having been the common law of England, and our property and birth right which our ancestors brought with them; nor is our Bible the worse for having been translated under James the first of England, which translation we still use, and from which we repeat all sentences of scripture. Nor are systems of theology, or harmonies of the evangelists the worse for having been written in another country. Why do we use the English language? Is it not because we cannot easily substitute another; or have no better to substitute.

(p. 370)

If we accept as the pragmatist position that "that is true which is best for us to believe," then Farrago clearly anticipates it. In theory, the product of evil is evil. We should not, if we are to remain pure, make bargains with the devil. But Farrago is not concerned with theory; only with product. If, as we can see by our reason and experience, the common law works, if it insures the maintenance of order and rational freedom, then by all means we must not reject it, no matter what its source. This anticipation of the pragmatic frame of mind is even more startling when Brackenridge drops Farrago. At one point, speaking in his own person, he says, "Even supposing the representations of our theologists to be an illusion, why dissipate the vision? Does it not constitute a great portion of our happiness? Are those men supposed to have done nothing for the world who have raised fabricks of this kind to the imagination even
Has it not contributed at least to amuse in this life? It is an opiate under pain, and eases the mind without affecting the nerves" (p. 573).

Diametrically opposed to this position is the denunciatory comment attributed to Karl Marx, religion is the opiate of the masses. For all its triteness now, the remark is none the less revealing. In its very fury, in its passion to see "truth" clearly, and establish it in all its purity on earth, the comment is characteristic of the revolutionary and romantic intellectual throughout the nineteenth century. It is also, one must add, what marks the intellectual in European fiction. Be he liberal or conservative, he is obsessed by an irresistible drive to convert intellectual ideals into physical realities, and there seems, as a consequence, no end to his capacity for or delight in picking intellectual scabs. This mental scab-picking is characteristic of one of the most powerfully portrayed intellectuals in all fiction, Raskolnikov. It is not enough for him to perceive intellectually that all great men are ruthless; he must experience the intellectual perception in action. And once the action has been performed it is not enough to let it go at that. He must torment himself in his little verbal game with the inspector, shamelessly regurgitating the foulest excrement from the bowels of his mind.
Such passion does not afflict Farrago. Though he is highly interested in matters of government and political power, he is as reasonable in them as in questions of religion. The right of revolution the Captain is quick to recognize. But he recognizes it only as an extreme measure to be undertaken as a last resort.

... Is it [revolution] conducive to an amelioration of the state of life, [he asks,] and likely to produce a greater sum of happiness, to innovate upon established forms, or to let them remain? It is true, indeed, that when we consider the throes and convulsions with which a change in government is usually attended, it ought not to be lightly attempted; and nothing but an extreme necessity for a reform can justify it. It is almost as impossible, comparing a physical with a moral difficulty, to change a government from despotism to liberty, without violence, as to dislodge a promontory from its base, by any other means, than mining and gunpowder.

(pp. 13-14)

Farrago's concept of revolution, then, is essentially conservative and utilitarian. In itself revolution is far from desirable, and is justifiable only insofar as it contributes to the greater happiness of the people. Therefore, though the Captain approves revolution when it is absolutely necessary, he does not revel in it for its own sake. He perceives and deplores the extremes to which it can be carried. Describing the stay of his "bog-trotter" in revolutionary France, he states:

He has seen the folly of the people of France. ... in reducing all things to the first elements instead of accommodating to existing establishments; of deracinating from the foundation church and state, and bandying the term liberty until ignorance and usurpation, terminated in despotism. For
though at the commencement of a revolution, active and uninformed spirits, are useful, or perhaps absolutely necessary, like the subterranean fire throwing up continents; yet as in this case, the fostering dews, and the breath of the atmosphere, are necessary to give soil and impregnate with vegetation; so after the stirrings of men's minds, with a political convulsion, deliberate reason, and prudent temperament are necessary, to preserve what is gained, and turn it to advantage.

(p. 348)

In this belief in controlled revolution, Farrago is certainly a man of his time. All men are created equal, but the masses are not to be trusted too much, for their tendency is to overthrow, rather than build on, the foundations of society. The people en masse are too susceptible to overflow of emotion, and it is this kind of extremism, passion unwatered by reason and prudence, that leads from tyranny right back into despotism. This is the lesson the Captain learns from the French Revolution: "Whence sprung the emperor that now affects the French? From the mountain of the national assembly. It is the madness of the people that makes emperors. They are not always aware when they are planting serpents teeth" (p. 449).

It is one of the functions of the intellectual in a democracy to be aware, to be alert to the dangers that beset a liberal form of government when a tendency arises to resolve the liberal tension into one of the extreme (right or left) of despotism. "Reflecting men," the Captain says, "saw the emperor, in the insurrections of Paris: in the
revolutionary tribunals; in the dominancy of the clubs; in the deportations to Cayenne. Whether it springs from the seed, or grows from the plant, ... despotism is not of a day; it is of gradual increase. Will not the people give him credit that can point out to men, where a germ of it exists" (p. 449).

The answer to this question is a resounding No! The people like to be courted by the demagogue, not chastised by the sage. They want to have their passions enflamed to further extravagance rather than cooled to rational compromise. In a tavern conversation overheard by Farrago, one of the speakers points out that "It is natural to distrust him who proposes to stop short of what seems a complete reform. The sovereign people is as liable to the impulse of passion, and as open to the insinuations of flatterers as the individual tyrant. The courtier devoid of principle, in the democratic hall, gets the ear of the populace, as he would that of a Prince, and abuses it" (p. 382). It is significant that though the speaker does not romanticize "the people" neither does he apotheosize the Prince. Both are corruptible, but it is the corruptibility of the former that is the special headache of a democracy.

The Captain himself, in one of his meditations, wonders,

How do you distinguish the demagogue from the patriot? The demagogue flatters the clown, and finds fault with the sage. The patriot, and the
sage, unless you mean the vain philosopher, [sic] mean the same thing. The Jewish prophets were all of them sages. They were seers, or men that saw far into things. You will find they were no slouches at blaming the people. "My people Israel, is destroyed for lack of knowledge." "I am wounded in the house of my friends." This may be said of liberty, when republicans give it a stab. The lamentations of Jeremiah are but the weepings of a patriot over the errors of the people. Yet the people are always right, say the demagogues. I doubt that. Tom fool, may laugh at the expression, "save the people from themselves." Nevertheless, there is something in it. It is a Scripture phrase, "go not with a multitude to do evil; which would seem to imply that the multitude will sometimes do wrong.

(p. 415)

The question raised in this meditation is crucial to democracy. How is it possible to find the equilibrium point between oppression of the people and false glorification of them for selfish ends. The great danger is that the demagogues who flatter the clown and berate the sage are many, while men with vision and the courage to denounce the people to themselves are few. And yet, there is as little merit in encouraging the people in their wrong as in encouraging princes in theirs. But what is most surprising in the meditation is Farrago's choice of sage. It is difficult to imagine any single group more different in spirit from the eighteenth-century man of reason than the Hebrew prophets. In their total commitment, their fiery denunciations of the things of this world, even in their concept of knowledge ("lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts. . . ." Isaiah 6:10), they are
far removed from the rationalism and classical restraint that are such admirable qualities in Farrago's eyes. But Cicero will not do as model here, for his denunciations are pretty much limited to the ruling class. The full force of the paradox implicit in Farrago's admiration for the nay-saying religious zeal of the prophets can be felt when it is set alongside his distrust of the passion and fervor of revolutionary zealots:

A journal was published in France, [Farrago recalls,] by Marat, under the direction, or, with the assistance of Robespierre, entitled "L'ami du peuple." There could not be a more seducing title; and yet this very journal was the foe of the people; I have no doubt, but that Marat meant well to the people; but he had not an understanding above the public, and judgment to correct the errors of occasional opinion. He was of the multitude himself, and did not overtop them by having higher ground from whence to observe. He had not been a sage before he became a journalist. Hence he denounced the Girondists, the philosophers of the republic; Condorcet, and others who had laid the foundation of the revolution. He denounced them because they suggested a confederate republic, such as Montesquieu projected, and America has realized. Marat took up with the simple, the one and indivisible; the populace understood this, but not the complication, and it prevailed; but the republic went down.

(pp. 423-24)

An even more perplexing problem, then, than distinguishing between demagogues and patriots is distinguishing true prophets from false. The difference is that the former are sages (though whether their sagacity is that of the Hebrew prophet or the eighteenth-century rationalist is not quite clear). The trouble with Marat, according to Farrago,
was not his lack of sincerity but his lack of judgment. And this zealous sincerity when it is attended by a lack of judgment can be disastrous. Brackenridge takes the problem up in more detail when he considers Robespierre and the Reign of Terror.

I never had a doubt with the Captain, but that the bulk of the Jacobins in France meant well; even Marat and Robespierre considered themselves as denouncing, and truncating only the enemies of the republic . . . Doubtless . . . both [Robespierre and his brother Peregrine] were innocent . . . of meaning ill. "The time shall come, when they that kill you, shall think they are doing God service." . . .

Marat the journalist and Robespierre were pushed gradually to blood; by the principle, which governed them, of taking it for granted that all who thought differently upon a subject were traitors; It is a truth in nature, and a maxim in philosophy "that from whence our greatest good springs, our greatest evils arise." . . . That activity which was useful in the first effort, is unwilling to be checked in further employment; and under the idea of a progressing reform, turns upon the establishment which it has produced, and intending good, does harm. . . . Fresh hands especially are ept to over-do the matter. . . . Prudent people do not like rash hands. States have been best built up, by the wise as well as the honest.

Farrago and Brackenridge are quite incisive at this point. They do not, as less reasonable observers might, question the good intentions of the revolutionary zealots. But it is the very sincerity of these intentions that is the source of danger. The process that Brackenridge describes subsequently bears a remarkable resemblance to the process that Polanyi calls "moral inversion" (see Chapter I): a growing willingness, and finally a conviction that it is absolutely
necessary, to shed rivers of blood indiscriminately for the sake of achieving absolute right. In this process, violence as a method of moral persuasion inevitably descends from a means to an end in itself. Furthermore, the passion for absolute right tends to culminate in the final conviction that only one man knows the right, and that therefore the revolution must be resolved into a totalitarian unit rather than into a republican pluralism which allows a margin of error.

This process of "moral inversion" is typical of the romantic intellectual who shifts eventually from the eighteenth-century belief in Reason to a belief in total Ego. In politics and religion as well as aesthetics, the lamp replaces the mirror, and the concept of the law-giver as the greatest of men becomes an obsession in the nineteenth-century mind. The movement is from God and Tradition to Reason to "I." Individual conscience becomes the final measure of human action, and by a final ironic twist, the man with the most sublime conscience becomes the "law-giver" who must impose his own will over every other man's. The image of the "law-giver" becomes a fixture in the European romantic consciousness.

\[7\]For a discussion of the transition from Tradition (Divine Law) to Reason (Natural Law) to Conscience (Ego), see Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Boston, 1955), pp. 234-74.\]
In his funeral oration on Benjamin Franklin, Abbé Fauchet soared to the heights of eulogy in declaring that Franklin was the "... foremost lawgiver of the world." It is difficult to believe that Franklin himself would have welcomed the apotheosis which took place in France after his death. Nor is it conceivable that he would have taken the title of "foremost lawgiver" as his due. But the words Fauchet chooses to indicate the highest praise are revealing. Almost fifteen years later, Napoleon was to take them for himself, first issuing the Napoleonic Code and then crowning himself emperor. This image of the law-maker, now embodied in Napoleon, persisted in the European imagination. Julien Sorel, Standhal's hero in The Red and the Black, is haunted by it. So is Raskolnikov. And Nietzsche has Zarathustra speak: "Behold the good and just! Whom do they hate most? Him who breaketh up their table of values, the breaker, the law-breaker:--he, however, is the creator. ... Companions, the creator seeketh, not corpses--and not herds of believers either. Fellow-creators the creator seeketh--those who grave new values on new tables."9

But the three thousand miles of salt water that turned Franklin into a god, served only to tarnish the

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glitter of Napoleon's reputation, and it is not the "law­
giver," but the law that Brackenridge respects. He con­
siders the question, which apparently had popular currency, Why can't we have the law "in a pocket-book, and let every man be his own lawyer?" He answers that "The law of nations forms a part of the municipal law of this state. This law is of great extent, and to be collected from many books. The common law, before the revolution, made a part of our law; and by an act of our legislature . . . it is recognized and established to be a part of our law, and such of the statute laws of England as have heretofore been in force. This law must be collected from commentaries, and decisions. It is of an immense extent. Because the relations of men, and the contracts of parties are of an infinite variety" (p. 446).

Again, we see both Brackenridge's conservatism and pragmatism. Since the law which has been accumulated through history serves a useful and constructive purpose, it would be folly to discard it. Yet, there is no insist­ence on the sanctity of law itself, but on the reasonableness of preserving it in order to maintain sanity and equity in human relations.

The reasonableness in this instance happens to be Brackenridge's. But it is the same quality that informs the character of Captain Farrago, and it is this quality that enalbes him to perceive the imperfections in democratic society. When he happens, on one occasion, to return to his
home village on a visit, he observes "that little attention had been paid, for some time, to public works; the pavements were neglected, and the ways and water-courses suffered to fill up. An aqueduct, begun, to bring a spring from the hill, was left unfinished" (p. 357). On inquiry, the Captain finds that the cause of all this neglect is that the elected officials do not want to antagonize the people by raising the taxes which would supply the revenue necessary to complete these highly important projects.

And does this please the people, said the Captain. No said the citizen who had taken upon him to reply; they have turned out one set for doing too much; and they will turn out the other next for doing nothing.

But why not hit a medium, said the Captain. A difficulty occurs, continued the speaker. In the works projected, the people insist that no man shall be consulted in his own occupation. The mason shall make out the bills of scantling; and the carpenter determine the arches of a stone bridge. . . . It is better to appeal to persons that know nothing about the matter, and trust them.

(pp. 357-58)

The Captain immediately announces that such foolishness is "republicanism run mad." But this is not to say that he condemns republicanism itself. When the citizen who has been his informant laments that "the sovereign people never had a good head upon their shoulders. . . .," the Captain replies, "You are an aristocrat. . . . I shall not go so far as that. The sovereign people act wisely, they act madly, just like other people." When the citizen then suggests that the people "might act wisely . . . were it not for
political divisions," the Captain refuses to accept that either. "Political divisions," he retorts, "will always exist. It is inseparable from the nature of a community. And it is not in the nature of things that the power can belong on one side. The duration depends upon the judgment of using it. The people will revolt from themselves when they find they have done wrong, and that side which was now the weakest will become the strongest" (p. 358).

Brackenridge's italics are significant, for they emphasize Farrago's belief that the essence of democracy lies in the capacity to combine universal suffrage with intelligent, informed judgment, and the exercise of power with rational restraint. As a consequence of this belief, Farrago is a staunch defender of both thought and learning. When the citizen alluded to in the previously cited scene concedes that "these matters I do not much understand. . . . You have the advantage of having seen more," the Captain rejoins, "I may have seen a little, but I have thought more. . . ."

As to higher learning, the Captain deplores the low esteem in which it is held in the new country. When a wild mob tries to burn down a college, he risks his life trying to divert them. He tells them that what they are about to do is useless. Since learning is already so despised, burning the college would be a mere superfluity. Moreover, the building may yet serve a useful purpose, adds the Captain:
"Politicians say; we have it from their own mouths on some occasions, that though they have no learning, they feel no want of it. Is it to be supposed that a workman does not know whether he wants tools? . . . When learning and law are put down, trial by battle must regulate society. We shall then want barracks and hospitals. This building will accommodate invalids" (p. 368).

In another scene, the Captain, a lawyer, and a Latin school master "were . . . entering the Lack-Learning settlement, where a great uproar had been made on account of their coming. It had been given out that the company consisted of Scholars and Lawyers. . . . A multitude had got together, with sticks and stones, to obstruct the march into their country" (p. 523). The Captain meets the mob's hostility by protesting that there are not really any scholars present. But then he goes on to inquire,

After all, what harm could learning do you, provided that you did not learn yourselves? . . . The raccoons, and the squirrels can crack nuts, maugre all our education and refinement. . . . If you do not find your account, or your amusement in literary studies, what matters it if others do? Learning is not a thing that will grow upon you all at once. . . . The boy feels the birch on his backside, to make him learned. The man gets a headache, pouring over books. In fact, it requires some resolution, and much perseverance to become learned. I acknowledge that men were at first like the beasts of the wood, and the fowls of the air, without grammars or dictionaries; and it took a great deal to bring them out of that state, and give them that is called education. At the revival of letters in Europe, after the dark ages, it was thought a great matter to get to be a
Peculiar privileges were attached. Hence what is called "the benefit of clergy." (pp. 523-24)

But though he is ready to defend learning and its right to exist unmolested, the Captain does not demand the transference from Europe of the "benefit of clergy." We have seen that he does not hold with "vain philosophers." At one point he goes so far as to insist that "a mere philosopher is but a fool, in matters of business. Even in speculation, he sometimes imagines nonsense" (p. 414). But this occurs only when "there is too much vision mixed with the fact. Want of information of what has been; the not examining the fitness and congruity of things, leads to this" (p. 414). It is not that thought and vision in themselves are undesirable, but they must be combined with a respect for fact and practical necessity. In his own voice, Brackenridge asserts that "it is not the want of learning that I consider as a defect; but the contempt of it" (p. 447).

The tendency, then, of the Captain's thought and personality is always toward the pragmatic. It is for this reason, perhaps, that he can conceive of power and intellect going hand in hand. Jacques Barzun, in The House of Intellect, expresses the fear that "the greatest danger to a democratic state is probably the contamination of its politics by Intellect. . . . Where . . . is the menace? It lies in the possibility that, for him [the intellectual] and others, ideas will come to seem more important than public service
and social peace. The scrimmage of politics is for the purpose of determining who shall transact the government's business. If in the struggle the desire to accomplish one's purpose turns into a desire to annihilate one's opponent, the outcome is civil war. Historically, this desire to annihilate finds its support and justification in Intellect, in ideas, for ideas are clear-cut and divided. Material interests can be compromised, principles cannot. \(^{10}\)

Barzun's statement is right in so far as it applies to the romantic, messianic intellectual, who is driven by the obsession to impose his will on those benighted souls who do not share his own illumination. The same danger need not exist, however, in the case of the pragmatically oriented intellectual. Where there is no faith in the possibility of achieving the absolute, even absolute earthly perfection, there is not likely to be a strong drive for absolute power. So, while Farrago would not have the intellectual dominate politics, neither would he exclude him from them completely. "There are but two characters," he asserts, "that can be respectable as representatives of the people. A plain man of good sense, whether farmer, mechanic, or merchant; or a man of education and literary talents" (p. 296).

The Captain, then, possesses common sense, a faculty which he applies to the clarification of social and political

\(^{10}\) (New York, 1960), p. 146.
problems. As a fictional portrait he is not powerful, but, then, he is not intended to be. Brackenridge comments at one point that the characters are intended to be caricatures. But the book, perhaps fortunately, is not exactly what Brackenridge intended it to be.

Brackenridge's concept of the novel form is puzzling, but for this very reason, also illuminating. He admired Swift, Smollett, and Fielding, though he was unable to match their achievement. He was also familiar with Don Quixote, but he considered it to be largely entertainment: it "contains a great deal of excellent moral sentiment. But, at the same time, has much that can serve only to amuse. Even in health, and with a flow of spirits, from prosperous affairs, it diversifies enjoyments, and adds to that happiness of which the mind is capable" (p. 406).

Yet, Brackenridge started his own book, apparently, in emulation of the picaresque form, and especially that of Don Quixote. He finally came to conceive the work as a means of promulgating ideas by presenting them, as much as possible, as entertainment—the old sugar-coated pill:

The vehicle which I have chosen of supposed travels, and conversations, affords great scope, and much freedom, and furnishes an opportunity to enliven with incident. Doubtless it is of the same nature, with many things in the novel way, written by philosophic men, who chose that form of writing, for the purpose merely of conveying sentiments, which in a didactic work, under the head of tract or dissertation, could not so easily gain attention, or procedure readers.

(p. 630)
But while Brackenridge was hardly a great craftsman, he was a conscious one. Working within the form developed by Cervantes, Fielding, and Smollett, he was bound to be influenced by their stylistic techniques. He was, of course, also influenced by his wide classical background. Both these influences would account for his concept of "high" and "low" styles. We see this classical and neo-classical influence especially in his attempt to manipulate "low" characters. He discusses the problem directly in one of the many asides (so similar to Fielding's in Tom Jones) that appear in the book:

It has been asked, why . . . have I taken my clown, from the Irish nation? The character of the English clown, I did not well understand; nor could I imitate the manner of speaking. That of the Scotch I have tried, as may be seen, in the character of Duncan. But I found it, in my hands, rather insipid. The character of the Irish clown, to use the language of Rousseau, "has more stuff in it." He will attempt anything.

The American has in fact, yet, no character; neither the clown, nor the gentleman. So that I could not take one from our own country; which I would much rather have done, as the scene lay there. But the midland states of America, and the western parts in general, being half Ireland, the character of the Irish clown, will not be wholly misunderstood. It is true the clown is taken from the aboriginal Irish; a character not so well known in the North of that country; nevertheless, it is still so much known, even there, and amongst the emigrants here, or their descendants, that it will not be wholly thrown away.

On the Irish stage, it is a standing character; and on the theatre in Britain, it is also introduced. I have not been able to do it justice, being but half an Irishman, myself, and not so well acquainted with the reversions and idiom, of the genuine Thady, as I could wish. However, the imitation at a distance from the original, will better pass than if it
had been written, and read, nearer home. Foreign­ers will not so readily distinguish the incon­gruities; or, as it is the best we can produce for the present, will more indulgently consider them. (p. 618)

It is interesting to watch Brackenridge fluctuate. On the one hand, he apologizes for the lack of verisimilitude between his character and one living, thus showing the influ­ence of English eighteenth-century "realism." On the other he states quite candidly that he is borrowing a literary stock character because such a character fits his purposes. And yet he is afraid that only Irishmen will be able to appreciate the character, though real Irishmen, he fears, will see that the character is incongruous. He is not sure whether the higher fidelity is to literary models or to actuality.

In another aside, he asserts that "the characters which we have introduced, are many of them low. That gives the greater relief to the mind. . . . Shakespeare has his Bardolph, Nymn, and Pistol, and the dialogue of these is a relief to the drama of the principal personages. It is so in nature; and why should it not be so represented in the images of her works. We have the sage and the fool, inter­spersed in society, and the fool gives occasion for the wise man to make his reflections. So in our book" (p. 630).

The insight is admirable, but in spite of it, Bracken­ridge failed in the execution. His own characters are never delineated with sufficient clarity. Especially Farrago, who
is surely the "wise man" in Modern Chivalry, wavers back and forth between the serious and the comic, between the ludicrousness and the sensible. Brackenridge seems to have recognized this, for Farrago finally asserts, "I cannot but acknowledge . . . that I have resembled Don Quixote . . . , but I hope I shall not be considered as resembling that Spaniard in taking a wind-mill for a giant; a common stone for a magnet that can attract, or transmute metals. It is you that are the Don Quixotes in this respect, madcaps, and some of you from the madcap settlement. . . ." (p. 733). As a result of this wavering, the contrast between the "high" and "low" characters is never quite clear.

Brackenridge's failure in this respect may stem partly from an ideological problem. At several points in the book, Brackenridge affirms his belief in democracy, and in equality of opportunity, though not in equality itself. The difficulty this would present is patent. The English novelist was able to use class differences with the greatest ease. The techniques for using such differences in literature had been established by long tradition—in Chaucer, Elizabethan drama, and the comedies of manners of the Restoration. Moreover, English writers could accept class distinctions as a fact, a natural phenomenon in a world in which every man was expected to know his place. Class differences were not as easily recognized and accepted in the colonies, and certainly not in the western
Pennsylvania of Brackenridge's time. But this is not quite the point that Lionel Trilling makes when he says that "In this country the real basis of the novel has never existed—that is, the tension between a middle class and an aristocracy which brings manners into observable relief as the living representation of ideals and the living comment on ideas."¹¹

For Brackenridge did not contest the fact that class differences and a perennial tension between classes did exist; though he did, however, deplore the suggestion that such differences should be inherited and perpetuated through rigidified social and political forms. As a matter of fact, a fortune teller advises Farrago that "there is in every government a patrician class, against whom the spirit of the multitude naturally militates: and hence, a perpetual war; the aristocrats endeavoring to detrude the people, and the people contending to obtrude themselves. And it is right that this should be so; for by this fermentation, the spirit of democracy is kept alive" (p. 19).

What made it impossible for Brackenridge to fully exploit "low" characters as a literary device was not that classes did not exist, but that they were not supposed to exist in theory. If every man carried the seed of nobility within him, then a "low" character could not be conceived of as being one in the nature of things. He was low only

because of lack of opportunity. And, conversely, a man with such advantages as education, social conscience, and an awareness of the world around him could aspire to "nobility" in spite of accidents of birth. A Mr. Partridge or a Parson Adams, both of whom Farrago resembles to some extent, could not remain a comic figure living in the shadow of a man who is his better only by an accident of birth.

At the same time, Brackenridge was sufficiently steeped in Anglo-Saxon and classical tradition to be incapable of treating "low" characters seriously. Although he, like Fielding, was a great admirer of Cervantes he did not fully understand him.\textsuperscript{12} He did not have that vision which Gili Gaya attributes to the sixteenth and seventeenth century picaresque novelists: "It is truly said that this type of novel [the picaresque] is genuinely Spanish. This does not mean that the life of vagabonds, beggars, and toughs is a theme exclusive to our literature. . . . [But] what in the foreigner was cause only for laughter, here inspired deep human compassion."\textsuperscript{13}

But if Brackenridge cannot approach the common man with this deep compassion, still he treats him with a touch

\textsuperscript{12} For a discussion of Fielding's misunderstanding of Cervantes, see A. A. Parker, "Field and the Structure of Don Quixote," \textit{Bulletin of Hispanic Studies}, XXXIII (1956), 1-16.

of genuine humility and respect. His position is beauti-
fully summed up by the editor of the 1846 edition of
Modern Chivalry:¹⁴

An enlightened democracy was looked upon by him
as the true nobility. He considered the true demo-
crat as the true gentleman, who ought to feel a
stain on his fair reputation, "as a wound." He
maintained "that democracy is not in its nature
coarse, and vulgar, or destitute of high integrity
and honor." The aim and end of his writings was
to raise the standard of democracy, and to elevate
"the noble of nature" to the same level with any
other noble, in those qualities which constitute
true nobility. The noble of nature, in his opinion,
ought not to yield to the noble of aristocracy or
monarchy, in strict integrity, in liberal and bene-
volent feelings, in propriety of manners and
general intelligence.
(p. iii).

It is this kind of intellectual, the liberal gentle-
man, an enlightened natural aristocrat, that Farrago became
in Brackenridge's hands. And as the author's alter ego, he
seems to embody the description that Parrington applies to
Brackenridge himself: He "was no truckler either to King
George or to his neighbors. Living in the midst of a coon-
skin democracy, he refused to believe that there was any
particular virtue in coonskin. It is not the cap but what
is under it that signifies. He was a vigorous individual-
ist, a confirmed democrat, a friend of all honest liberal-
isms, a man who honored his own counsels and went his own

¹⁴(Philadelphia, 1846), p. iii.
way." His intellectual position was always reasonable if not always logical. Never messianic, a thoroughgoing pragmatist, he avoided, whenever necessary, pushing logic to a destructive extreme. He tried to maintain a constant tension between the preservation of a viable tradition and the movement toward desirable social and intellectual goals.

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CHAPTER III

THE INTELLECTUAL AS REVOLUTIONARY

Bernard Fay observes "a curious phenomenon" in serious American literature of the late eighteenth century. "French writers roused American minds and created original reactions in them at a time when English writers were less interesting and stimulating, but afforded examples that could easily be utilized and imitated. French culture in America was a means of liberation, not a model to be copied. Indeed its great role seems to have been to aid hardy and simple minds, who might have lacked enterprise or imagination, to find themselves and adopt a new spirit that should lead them to create a new form for themselves."¹ This "curious phenomenon" of turning to France for ideas and to England for form was not as we have seen, entirely applicable to Brackenridge, who, though familiar with the English authors, was perhaps even more familiar with their models. And while he explicitly commended Smollett and Swift for style, he also paid tribute to Cervantes for form. Moreover, in the matter of ideas, he was neither completely taken with "french ideas" when they were at the peak of their popularity in the 80s,

nor was he utterly repelled by them when they were under heaviest attack in the 90s. In this, as in all things, Brackenridge remained his own man, seeking a balance between the excesses of new democratic ideas and the abuses of entrenched interests. He wanted order, but never at the expense of individual rights. In temperament and thought, he was thoroughly a liberal intellectual of the enlightenment, and this is reflected in his alter ego, Captain Farrago.

To Charles Brockden Brown, born in the year that Brackenridge was graduated from Princeton (1771), Fay's comment is more applicable. Reared in Philadelphia, "the cultural capital of, . . . and least provincial spot in America, . . .,"2 during the 1770s and 1780s, Brown "was exposed to all currents of thought, European and American, that were molding a new country and a new people."3

No less than Brackenridge, Brown was a man of ideas. David Lee Clark describes the variety of his intellectual interests (literature, geography, history, architecture, utopian thought), and adds that he was sufficiently committed to ideas that "even his novels bear witness to Brown's deep concern about the issues facing the new nation."4

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4Ibid., p. 6.
But Brown differed from Brackenridge in at least one very important particular. Brown, though familiar with the classics, was not educated in them with the same thoroughness as Brackenridge. Like the early English Romantics (Brown was born a year after Wordsworth), Brown was soon caught in the tide of French ideas. Clark states that "young Brown was an eager reader of French philosophy . . .," especially Montesquieu, Helvitius and Holbach. This association with French emigrés who apparently became quite numerous in Philadelphia in the 90s. Brown actually became the tutor of the daughter of one of them, and in a letter written while he was thus employed, he defended French ideas vigorously.

The situation confronting Brown, as an incipient novelist, was similar to that which had faced Brackenridge. Possessed of ideas, Brown was anxious to find some way to promulgate them and get them on the market-place. He tried a series of philosophical essays significantly called "The Rhapsodist," but these evidently were little read. As a result, it must have become quite obvious to Brown that as a writer of philosophical essays he had little hope either of bringing his ideas to a large audience or of becoming a professional man of letters. Nevertheless, there was a possibility of achieving both these goals at one stroke, and

5Ibid., p. 6.
that was by writing novels. More sensitive to public taste than Brackenridge, Brown chose to spread his ideas through the two forms which had proved their ability to captivate the American and English reading publics—the sentimental novel of seduction and the gothic romance.

The inspiration to write a novel was in Brown's mind by at least 1793. Clark states that Brown "had no notion before 1793 of undertaking a work of fiction. That he entertained such a notion in the summer of 1793 while in Hartford and New York may be seen in an unpublished letter to his brother James, dated October 25, 1796, from New York." The pertinent passage of the letter reads:

I was talking of the yellow fever, or rather of that plague... When I mentioned to you my treatment [of it] at Hartford in ninety-three, I was half disposed to instruct myself, and possibly amuse you, by recalling and putting [it] on the paper before me, during a residence of two or three days there.

"The important fact which this letter affirms," says Clark, "is that as early as 1793 Brown's mind was busied with plans for works of fiction, and that the subject then uppermost in his mind was the yellow fever..."7

Actually, Brown may have started experimenting with the novel even before 1793. In his Journal there is a series of letters addressed to a "Henrietta G." Clark insists that

6Ibid., p. 155.
7Ibid., p. 157.
the letters are autobiographical, but there remains, none­theless, a good possibility that they represent an early attempt to write an epistolary novel.®

Whatever the answer to the Henrietta riddle, it is certain that by 1797, Brown's notion of embodying ideas in the form of romance had jelled. He states in a journal entry of that year: "I commenced something in the form of a Romance. I had at first no definite conceptions of my design."9 The romance Brown had commenced was Skywalk, the advertisement to which is highly illuminating:

To the story-telling moralist, the United States is a new and untrodden field. He who shall examine objects with his own eyes, who shall employ the European models merely for the improvement of his taste, and adapt his fiction to all that is genuine and peculiar in the scene before him, will be entitled at least to the praise of originality.

The value of such works lies without doubt in their moral tendency. The popular tales have merit, but there is one thing in which they are deficient. They are generally adapted to one class of readers only. By a string of well-connected incidents, they amuse the idle and thoughtless; but are spurned at by those who are satisfied with nothing but strains of lofty eloquence, the exhibition of powerful motives, and a sort of audaciousness of character. The world is governed not by the simpleton, but by the man of soaring passions and intellectual energy. By the display of such only can we hope to enchain the attention and ravish the souls of those who study and reflect. To gain their homage it is not needful to forego the approbation of those whose circumstances have hindered them from making the same progress. A contexture of facts

8Ibid., pp. 54 ff.
9Ibid., p. 158.
capable of suspending the faculties of every soul in curiosity may be joined with depth of views into human nature and all the subtleties of reasoning. ¹⁰

Brown, in this preface, already perceives that while the novelist may work from European models, he must eventually shape these models to the exigencies of native materials. More striking, however, is the fact that, like Hawthorne and Melville after him, Brown deliberately plans to "hoodwink" the common reader by writing a fiction that will excite the passions of all men, but that will have an especial appeal to the mind of the intellectual. He will somehow revitalize moribund forms by transfusing them with the blood of new ideas. The sop to the common reader is "a string of well-connected incidents..." in a word, narrative. The main dish is the display of the hero with "soaring passions and intellectual energy." He will present ideas and speculation by presenting characters who are obsessed by ideas; characters who themselves are interested in speculation.

By 1798, when, in a fantastic burst of creative energy, he wrote his four important novels, Brown had essentially abandoned the notion of an epistolary romance. Both Wieland and Ormond, it is true, come to the reader in the form of an epistle. But both narratives are told in one long letter, rather than in a series of letters written by

different people. Brown, by this time, had also abandoned the notion of a sentimental novel of seduction. He had, instead, settled on a combination of this and the gothic romance.

Leslie Fiedler and Richard Chase have made a great deal of this decision. Chase, of course, sees in it unmistakable symptoms of the American author's irresistible attraction to "romance," his desire to flee from social reality, and so on. And Fiedler, after tormenting himself with the question ("But why, one is driven to ask, why has the tale of terror so special an appeal to Americans?")\(^{11}\) concludes that

The success of the tale of terror must be derived in part from the failure of love in our fiction; the death of love left a vacuum at the affective heart of the American novel into which there rushed the love of death. The triumph of the genteel sentimental incapacitated even our most talented writers, left them incapable of dealing with the relations of men and women as subtly and convincingly as the prose writers in the great novelistic tradition of France. Our novelists, deprived of the subject that sustained Stendhal or Constant, Flaubert or Proust, that seemed indeed to them the subject of the novel, turned to fables of loneliness and terror.\(^{12}\)

A more reasonable conclusion, however, is that Brown grasped at a ready-to-hand form that would insure a certain amount of popular acceptance and at the same time provide a vehicle for his ideas, thereby establishing him as both a


\(^{12}\)Ibid., pp. 126-27.
literary man and a philosopher. As the newest and most daring form, one which Godwin had used so successfully for didactic, if not speculative ends, the gothic novel would seem to have been the most natural choice. Fiedler himself, when not lost in the deepest recesses of the psyche perceives this:

To promulgate notions of social justice and to write novels, to revolutionize American life and to achieve literary fame: this double ambition he came to feel as a single impulse, not unlike certain young radical writers in the United States of the 1930's. The literary form which eminently suited both such political allegiances, and such literary aspirations was at the moment he began to write (the 1790's were almost gone) the 'new novel,' which is to say, the gothic romance in its doctrinaire Godwinian form. 'To equal Caleb Williams' was the best Brown could hope for himself.13

Brown apparently felt that some combination of the novel of seduction and the gothic romance would provide the best salable vehicle for both his ideas and the hero of "soaring passions and intellectual energy." But once committed to this mixture, Brown found himself unable to fuse the individual elements into a new, whole, and significant substance. And it is this that partly explains the chaos of his novels. Having adopted the structure of the gothic, and devices of the sentimental novel, Brown found himself stuck with their rhetoric as well, and he never did figure out quite what to do with it.

13Ibid., p. 132.
Brown's confusion is apparent in *Wieland*, his first important published work of fiction. Clark says of the preface to the novel that "Here Brown clearly goes beyond his formula as stated in the preface to *Skywalk*; he denounces the puerile Gothic novels, and the sentimental stories of love and seduction fathered by Richardson, and adopts the principles of the Novel of Purpose, made prominent by Holdcroft, Bage, and Godwin. Henceforth he will lay bare the hidden motives of men of soaring passions and raging wills; he will choose for his characters men and women who are under some horrid mental or moral delusions, some obsession or perversion of the mind." But far as Brown may go, he never manages to go far enough to break the shackles of the sentimental novel and its language. So, although *Wieland* is intended as the man of "soaring passions, etc.," he is instead cast inevitably into the mold reserved for characters in sentimental fiction, as is evident in the narrator's description of him:

His deportment was grave, considerate, and thoughtful I will not say whether he was indebted to sublimier views for his disposition. Human life, in his opinion, was made up of changeable elements, and the principles of duty were not easily unfolded. The future, either anterior or subsequent to death, was a scene that required some preparation and provision to be made for it. These positions we could not deny; but what distinguished him was a propensity to ruminate on these truths. The images that visited us were blithesome and gay, but

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Page 164-65.
those with which he was most familiar were of an opposite hue. They did not generate affliction and fear, but they diffused over his behaviour a certain air of forethought and sobriety. The principle effect of this temper was visible in his features and tones. These, in general, bespoke a sort of thrilling melancholy. I scarcely ever knew him to laugh. He never accompanied the lawless mirth of his companions with more than a smile, but his conduct was the same as ours.15

In his gravity, pensiveness, and melancholy Wieland is a bona fide hero of the gothic romance. But there is a significant difference between him and his forebears. Wieland's melancholy is not motivated, as in most seduction novels, by thwarted love or lust, but by an excessive preoccupation with the general problem of human mortality. Wieland, like Brown himself, would ruminate on the great truths of death and mortality, but the verbal structure of which he is composed will not permit him to.

It is interesting to note that Richard Chase has to say on this point:

In Wieland emotions are conventionalized. . . . The language too is highly formalized and often stilted. But whereas there is some sense in the complaint that Brown writes 'he had not escaped the amorous contagion' instead of 'he fell in love,' this is really to miss the point. A stately and elevated language, like the measures of a classic ballet, is as useful in the aesthetic economy of the book as is the tireless rationalism of the conversation. The related complaint that Brown's characters are not realistic may also becloud the fact that the melodramatic method demands characters of a somewhat abstract and conventionalized sort, so that

in the extremities of the action they become less human beings than loci of the clash of ideas and forces.16

That Chase begs the question is quite obvious. To be sure, no one will deny that "stately and elevated language" can be of use in the "aesthetic economy" of a novel. The question is whether it is so in Wieland and Brown's other novels. The answer is by no means simple, but there is sufficient reason to believe that the diction of eighteenth-century novels became a straitjacket which strangled Brown almost completely.

Brown's description of Wieland is one case in point. Another is his description of the situation of Constantia Dudley, the heroine of Ormond. Harry Warfel comments about her that "Emotions of normal love are alien to her nature, and there seems to be a homosexual tendency in her conduct."17 What Brown intended was to portray the "new" woman—strong in will, character, and intellect, and capable of entering into intellectual relationships with other women equally strong in these qualities. To some extent, Brown has succeeded in his intention. But at times he fails miserably, and when he does, it is generally because he


cannot avoid the excesses of what he conceives to be "high style" in the diction of the novel.\textsuperscript{18}

In the passage which follows, Constantia is thinking about Martinette, a woman still a stranger to her. Martinette had bought Mr. Dudley's lute when Constantia was forced to pawn it, and on finding out (through the pawnbroker) that Constantia now wants to buy the lute back, Martinette offers it (again through the pawnbroker) as a gift.

These transactions were reflected on by Constantia with considerable earnestness. The conduct of the stranger, her affluent and lonely state, her conjectural relationship to the actors in the great theatre of Europe, were mingled together in the fancy of Constantia, and embellished with the conceptions of her beauty, derived from their casual meeting at Rosewaldt's. She forgot not their similitude in age and sex, and delighted to prolong the dream of future confidence and friendship to take place between them. Her heart signed for a companion, fitted to partake in all her sympathies.

This strain, by being connected with the image of a being like herself, [Sophia, the narrator,] who had grown up with her from childhood, who had been entwined with her earliest affections, but from whom she had been severed from the period at which her father's misfortunes commenced, and of whose present condition she was wholly ignorant, was productive of the deepest melancholy. It filled her with excruciating, and for a time irremediable sadness. It formed a kind of paroxysm, which like some febrile affections, approach and retire without warning, and against the most vehement struggle.

In this mood her fancy was thronged with recollections of scenes, in which her friend had sustained a part. Their last interview was commonly

\textsuperscript{18}Two years later, Wordsworth, in the preface to the 1800 edition of the \textit{Lyrical Ballads}, was to attack some of these excesses in the diction of eighteenth century poetry.
revived in her remembrance so forcibly, as almost
to produce a lunatic conception of its reality. A
ditty which they sung together on the occasion,
flowed to her lips. If ever human tones were
qualified to convey the whole soul, they were those
of Constantia when she sung;--

The breeze awakes, the bark prepares,
    To waft me to a distant shore;
But far beyond this world of cares,
    We meet again to part no more.

These fits were accustomed to approach and van­
ish by degrees. They were transitory but not in­
frequent, and were pregnant with such agonizing
tenderness, such heart-breaking sighs, and a flow
of such bitter yet delicious tears, that it were
not easily decided whether the pleasure or the
pain surmounted. When the symptoms of their com­
ing were felt, she hastened into solitude, that
the progress of her feelings might endure no
restraint.19

It is no wonder that Warfel, even taking into account
the fact that we live in an age obsessed by Freud, should
find a "homosexual tendency" in Constantia's conduct. The
language which describes Constantia's mental state is that
which was generally used to describe lovesick swains or
maidens. She is a victim of "deepest melancholy" and
"irremediable sadness." Pleasure mingles with pain; bitter
tears are also sweet. At several points the lushness of
the borders on eroticism: paroxysms "which like some febrile
affections, approach and retire . . .," remembrances which
"produce a lunatic conception of reality," "fits . . .
accustomed to approach and vanish by degrees," "pregnant

19Ormond, or the Secret Witness, ed. Ernest Marchand
(New York, 1937), pp. 64-65. Page references in my text are
to this edition.
with . . . agonizing tenderness," "heart-breaking sighs.
It is not, one must emphasize, a matter of whether "ele-
vated style" is good or bad, but of whether it effectively
and meaningfully develops or grows out of character and
situation in the novel. In Brown's novels it too often
does not. Instead, it is largely responsible for the dif-
ficulty in creating character which Brown was never to
overcome.

But if Brown was never able to break out of the
language and stereotypes of sentimental and gothic fiction,
he nevertheless, tried manfully, and it is the effort,
albeit only partly successful, that is significant.

Brown's debt to Godwin for the "philosophical novel"
was recognized as early as 1830 in an article in the
American Quarterly Review. But Godwin, for all the radical-
ism of his social and political theories, was fairly conven-
tional as a novelist. He wrote Caleb Williams (1794) in
order to dramatize some of the views he had promulgated a
year earlier in Political Justice (1793). But he did not
project his utopian speculations into his fiction. Instead,
he exposed existing evils of society through characters who
were not novel or extraordinary. Certainly, the oppressed
servant was not new to the English novel (after all, Pamela
was one, and so was Joseph Andrews). But Godwin was able to
use the situation to emphasize the fact that oppression comes
not only from an occasional mean master but from a society
which sets a higher value on a man with property than on one without it.

No more unusual than the oppressed servant in the English novel is the cruel squire. But here again Godwin very skilfully and beautifully played a slight variation on an old theme. Falkland, Caleb's oppressor, turns out to be as much a victim of the social order as is his servant, since society has imbued him with the false sense of honor that, ironically, leads to his most dishonorable acts and eventually to his destruction. Godwin criticized the institutions that made a Squire Western, a Squire Allworthy, and a Tom Jones by showing that the same institutions could also make a Barnabas Tyrell, a Falkland, and a Caleb Williams. There was no need for Godwin to experiment in character. All that was necessary was to show the old stock characters in a new light.

Charles Brockden Brown's road was a little rougher. To begin with, many of the evils that Godwin had set out to criticize in the light of new equalitarian ideas had already been abolished, at least theoretically, in this country. There was no monarchy and no legally recognized hereditary aristocracy. In theory, all men were recognized as equal. But since, in actuality, men had still not progressed sufficiently to live by the rule of Reason, revolutionary ideas still seemed to be valid, and Brown found them still stimulating. He picked up where Godwin had left off, proceeding in some
respects to push beyond the master, and in others merely to confuse his teachings. Whereas Godwin had saved most of his speculation for Political Justice, contenting himself in Caleb Williams with exposing present evils, Brown, in his fiction, was at least as interested in the problematic nature of good and evil as in the evils that flourished before his eyes. The revolutionary ideas that for Godwin grew out of, and were intended to remedy, an immediate situation, for Brown always remained largely speculative. The acute American Quarterly Review critic of 1830 had recognized this. Explaining the public hostility to Brown, he asked, "To what end did philosophizing ever come? Who can set bounds to speculation; or limit the wandering of his thoughts when he has fairly embarked amidst the perplexing wilds and interminable labyrinths of metaphysics? It is this unfortunate propensity to prolixity in the philosophical novelist, together with his frequent and inevitable lapse into mysticism and obscurity, which renders his productions . . . less readable, and . . . less popular than those of the describer in fiction. . . ."20

It is not merely that Brown philosophizes while Godwin does not, but that Brown adds to Godwin's eighteenth-century rationalism an interest in the problematic and transcendental that involves him in the "interminable

labyrinths of metaphysics," in "lapses into . . . obscurity." It is in just such labyrinths that Brown becomes involved in Wieland. In it, he tries to test the possibilities of a kind of intellectual aristocracy whose members live a life of reason. So, Wieland, whose grandfather spent his life "in the composition of sonatas and dramatic pieces," which were "not unpopular, but merely afforded him scanty subsistence" (p. 26), and whose father was a fanatic who built his own temple on the Schuylkill, sets up his own little intellectual community, consisting of himself, his sister, his wife, and his brother-in-law, Henry Pleyel. The entire arrangement resembles a Godwinian Utopia in which the life of reason is finally realized. But the first thing that becomes evident is that the life of at least one member of the community is not founded on reason. This member is Wieland himself, who inherits not only his grandfather's interest in literature and his father's fanaticism, but also his father's sense of some sort of ineffable and undefinable guilt. Wieland père believed that "a command had been laid upon him, which he had delayed to perform. He felt as if a certain period of hesitation and reluctance had been allowed him, but that this period was passed. He was no longer permitted to obey. The duty assigned to him was transferred, in consequence of his disobedience, to another, and all that remained was to endure the penalty" (p. 32). A similar
sense of guilt becomes a crucial factor in his son's later behavior.

Wieland's inordinate gravity and concern with man's mortality has already been described. His sister elaborates further; stressing the relationship between his gravity and his father's fanaticism:

In his studies, he pursued an austere . . . and . . . arduous path. He was much conversant with the history of religious opinions, and took pains to ascertain their validity. He deemed it indispensable to examine the ground of his belief, to settle the relation between motives and actions, the criterion of merit, and the kinds and properties of evidence.

There was an obvious resemblance between him and my father in their conceptions of the importance of certain topics, and in the light in which the vicissitudes of human life were accustomed to be viewed. Their characters were similar; but the mind of the son was enriched by science and embellished with literature.

(p. 43)

The melancholy and fanaticism are further combined with an obsessive desire to plumb the depths of the human mind. "I said, This man is of an ardent and melancholy character. Those ideas which, in others, are casual or obscure, which are entertained in moments of abstraction and solitude and easily escape when the scene is changed have obtained an immovable hold upon his mind. . . . All his actions and practical sentiments are linked with long and abstruse deductions from the system of divine government and the laws of our intellectual constitution. He is in some respects an enthusiast, but is fortified in his belief by innumerable arguments and subtleties" (p. 55).
But strangely enough, in spite of his "enthusiasm," Wieland is strongly influenced by the Ciceronian image of the gentleman. To adorn his father's temple he purchases a bust of Cicero, and though he is "an indefatigable student . . . well versed in many authors, the chief object of his veneration was Cicero. He was never tired of coming and rehearsing his productions. . . . Not contented with this, he was diligent in settling and restoring the purity of the text. For this end, he collected all the editions and commentaries that could be procured, and employed months of severe study in exploring and comparing them. He never betrayed more satisfaction than when he made a discovery of this kind" (p. 44). All in all, Wieland is a baffling mixture of types: the religious fanatic, the man of science, the Ciceronian gentleman, the litterateur and dilettante.

The foil set against him is Henry Pleyel. They are alike in their admiration for Latin authors: "It was not till the addition of Henry Pleyel . . . to our society that this [Wieland's] passion for Roman eloquence was countenanced and fostered by a sympathy of tastes" (p. 44). And, too, Pleyel "was not behind his friend in his knowledge of the history and metaphysics of religion" (p. 45). But here the resemblance ends, for Pleyel does not usually (though he can when necessary) match the lugubriousness of Wieland. Pleyel's "conversation abounded with novelty. His gayety was almost boisterous, but was capable of yielding to a
grave deportment when the occasion required it. His dis- cernment was acute; but he was prone to view every object merely as supplying materials for mirth. His conceptions were ardent but ludicrous, and his memory, aided . . . by his invention, was an inexhaustible fund of entertainment" (pp. 44-45).

The difference in temperaments results in a difference in belief:

Their creeds . . . were in many respects opposite. Where one discovered only confirmations of his faith, the other could find nothing but reasons for doubt. Moral necessity and Calvinistic inspiration were the props on which my brother thought proper to repose. Pleyel was the champion of intellectual liberty, and rejected all guidance but that of his reason. Their discussions were frequent, but, being managed with candour as well as with skill, they were always listened to by us with avidity and benefit.

(p. 45)

Pleyel, then, is more the Godwinian, although precisely how much of a Godwinian is never made quite clear, since his discussions with Wieland are never dramatized. And as things turn out, Pleyel eventually finds happiness, while Wieland, spurred on by his fanaticism, plunges with great gusto to his destruction. Eventually another member is added to this intellectual group. Carwin appears from out of nowhere and for no particular reason. In appearance he is totally outlandish:

His pace was a careless and lingering one, and had none of that gracefulness and ease which distinguish a person with certain advantages of education from a clown. His gait was rustic and awkward.
His form was ungainly and disproportioned. Shoulders broad and square, breast sunken, his head drooping, his body of uniform breadth, supported by long and lank legs, were the ingredients of his frame. His garb was not ill adapted to such a figure. A slouched hat, tarnished by the weather, a coat of thick gray cloth cut and wrought, as it seemed, by a country tailor, blue worsted stockings, and shoes fastened by thongs and deeply discoloured by dust, which brush had never disturbed, constituted his dress.

(p. 72)

But this initial impression is misleading for "his forehead, his eyes lustrously black, and possessing, in the midst of haggardness, a radiance inexpressibly serene and potent, and something in the rest of his features which it would be in vain to describe, but which served to betoken a mind of the highest order, were essential ingredients in the portrait" (p. 73).

Carwin turns out to be "sparing in discourse . . . ." But "not withstanding the uncouthness of his garb, his manners were not unpolished. All topics were handled by him with skill, and without pedantry or affection. . . . His observations denoted a mind alive to every generous and heroic feeling. They were . . . accompanied with that degree of earnestness which indicates sincerity" (p. 90).

Because of his "indisputably great . . . intellectual endowments," Carwin is soon completely accepted by the group, though his past remains cloudy. Pleyel provides some enlightenment on this score. Some years before the action of the novel takes place, Pleyel had met Carwin in Spain,
where the latter "had embraced the Catholic religion, and adopted a Spanish name instead of his own, which was CARWIN, and devoted himself to the literature and religion of his new country. He pursued no profession, but subsisted on remittances from England" (p. 87).

Carwin's function in the book is somewhat puzzling. On the one hand, it seems as if Brown intended him as a diabolic character, as is indicated by his grotesque appearance, by the horror with which the narrator recalls his name, and finally by the fact that his sinister (and yet scientifically explainable) ability to project his voice, working on Wieland's fanaticism, initiates the series of actions that culminates in Wieland's total ruin. On the other hand, Carwin's diabolism is unwitting. Moreover, he is not totally evil. The narrator, as has been pointed out, admires his generous and heroic mind, and her attraction to him seems to imply that high minds are attracted to each other in spite of physical impediments. This inference is further encouraged when Pleyel, who is soft on Clara, becomes jealous of Carwin.

It is perhaps fitting that both the romantic contenders for Clara's affection should have European backgrounds. The fact that Pleyel has vague, mysterious ties in Germany, and Carwin in Spain, seems, in a sense, to anticipate the two veins of romanticism that Washington Irving was to exploit some twenty years later.
At any rate, these male characters (Pleyel, Carwin, and Wieland) form an interesting triumvirate. Pleyel is a man of reason and learning who is on the whole ineffectual. He thinks of himself as a moralist, and is indeed pompously self-righteous, but he seldom does anything which even remotely resembles a contribution to the good of mankind. He is, in the last analysis, a weak character who is dominated by women, but who eventually marries the right one, the heroine, and in so doing supplies the one pleasant note in an otherwise sordid situation.

Carwin is essentially amoral, but his amorality ends in unintended diabolism. He uses his talent of ventriloquism to benefit himself, but his unthinking egocentricity initiates a series of bloody events. As he rather lamentably confesses to Clara (the narrator), he never meant to harm anybody. He just did not foresee the consequences of his actions. It is not difficult to see operating in him the machinations of the modern technological mind.

Wieland, in his ardor, though not in his faith, resembles the new intellectual emerging out of the French Revolution. He is, in the fullest eighteenth-century meaning of the word, "an enthusiast." So possessed does he become by his ideas that he kills his wife and children, and later tries to murder his sister. Wieland's confession is excessively verbose and lengthy, but it is also very
revealing. He admits that he has done the killing, and then goes on:

It is needless to say that God is the object of my supreme passion. I have cherished in his presence a single and upright heart. I have thirsted for the knowledge of his will. I have burnt with ardour to approve my faith and my obedience.

My days have been spent in searching for the revelation of that will; but my days have been mournful, because my search failed. I solicited direction; I turned on every side where glimmerings of light could be discovered. I have not been wholly uninformed; but my knowledge has always stopped short of certainty. Dissatisfaction has insinuated itself into all my thoughts. My purposes have been pure, my wishes indefatigable; but not till lately were these purposes thoroughly accomplished and these wishes fully gratified.

I thank thee, my Father, for thy bounty; that thou didst not ask a less sacrifice than this; that thou placedst me in a condition to testify my submission to thy will. What have I withheld which it was thy pleasure to exact? Now may I, with dauntless and erect eye, claim my reward, since I have given thee the treasure of my soul.

(p. 184)

Wieland's is the absolutist mind. He demands certainty, and he demands it passionately. He demands it even at the cost of his own destruction. In this he is like Melville's Ahab, who must run down the white whale, no matter what the consequences. But ironically, when Wieland does find certainty he has only found a delusion, after all.

Wieland describes his state of mind immediately preceding the murders by saying that it "was contemplative and calm. . ." His contemplations, he says, "soared above earth and its inhabitants. . . ." He wanted "the supreme delight of knowing [God's] will, and of performing it."
His ardor is finally rewarded with a vision of "heaven," all "luminous and glowing." And then he hears "a shrill voice from behind. . . . As it spoke, the accents thrilled my heart:--'Thy prayers are heard. In proof of thy faith, render me thy wife! . . .!'" The request is not an easy one, even for a fanatic. "'Substitute some other victim.'" he begs. "'My own blood is cheap. This will I pour out before thee with a willing heart. . . .!'" This is the Abrahamic dilemma descended from the sublime to the melodramatic.

Then, recounting his emotions following the murder of his wife and children, he asserts,

This was a moment of triumph. Thus had I successfully subdued the stubbornness of human passions: the victim which had been demanded was given; the deed was done past recall. . . . I imagined I had set myself forever beyond the reach of selfishness.

You [the jury] say I am guilty. Impious and rash! thus to usurp the prerogatives of your Maker! to set up your bounded views and halting reason as the measure of truth!

(pp. 194-95)

There are many ironies here, and many questions raised, but one is never sure whether Brown was aware of them. To begin with, Wieland seems to think that he has acted very reasonably. He has subdued his human passions to perform a difficult task that was required of him. He somehow imagines that he has made a sacrifice to benefit the human race. And except for its violence, his act would appear to be in accord with Godwin's philosophy. Godwin had concluded that a reasonable man who had the choice between saving Archbishop Fenelon or Fenelon's butler should choose to save
the Archbishop because of his greater value to mankind.

Then Godwin added that it would be immaterial if the butler happened to be the brother or father of the individual who had to make the choice. Thus, for Wieland, an act of madness becomes an act of reason.

The questions raised by the situation could be disturbing. How is it possible to choose between natural affection and the demands of faith? Moreover, when does an act of faith become an act of madness, and who is capable of judging between the two? Where does one draw the line between faith and fanaticism? More disturbing yet, where does one draw the line between fanaticism and reason?

Brown does not push the questions or the ironies. Indeed, one tends to doubt that he saw them. But their presence, even by implication, tends to cast an air of uncertainty over all human actions, an uncertainty that Brown could not have gotten directly from his preceptor. Godwin had great confidence in man's ability to act constructively, and he believed "Human inventions susceptible of perpetual improvement." Godwin was firmly convinced that through Reason, which in itself was not problematic, man could define benevolence, and then proceed to act benevolently.

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But Wieland's situation casts doubt on both the capacity of human Reason and the efficacy of human benevolence. Wieland is convinced that his violent act was the very epitome of unselfishness, the very summit of benevolence. His own Reason, he feels, transcends the "halting" reason of ordinary men. And yet, in the eyes of other men, his behavior has been monstrous.

The full ambiguity of human action, however, occurs after Wieland, through the agency of Carwin's ventriloquism, is awakened from his state of delusion. Clara describes the scene:

Dallen from his lofty and heroic station; now finally restored to the perception of truth; weighed to earth by the recollection of his own deeds; consoled no longer by a consciousness of rectitude for the loss of offspring and wife,—a loss for which he was indebted to his own misguided hand,—Wieland was transformed at once into the man of sorrows!

He reflected not that credit should be as reasonably denied to the last [the voice he has just heard] as to any former intimation [the visionary voices]; that one might as justly be ascribed to erring or diseased senses as the other. He saw not that this discovery in no degree affected the integrity of his conduct; that his motives had lost none of their claims to the homage of mankind; that the preference of supreme good, and the boundless energy of duty, were undiminished in his bosom.

(p. 249)

Clara's attitude is somewhat peculiar. She shrewdly points out that there is no reason why Wieland should not consider the ventriloquized voice as illusory and continue to believe the hallucinated voice which had originally told him to make the sacrifice. But then she comes to the surprising
conclusion that even if he had been deluded and has com-
mitted horrible crimes as a result of his delusion, his
conduct is still noble, for in any case he has acted with
the intention of benefiting mankind.

In his portrait of Wieland, and in the narrator's
judgment of him, Brown seems to be moving toward the concept
of the secularized revolutionary intellectual show, in their
religious passion to establish the Just State as they see it,
are willing to offer any number of sacrifices on the altar
of absolute righteousness. It is true that Wieland shows no
political awareness whatever, but Brown's next hero, Ormond,
is steeped in the political upheavals of the eighteenth
century.

Like Wieland, Ormond occupies himself with "ultimate"
questions, and, also like Wieland, he is an "enthusiast." But while Wieland's meditations confirm him as a religious
enthusiast, Ormond's meditations intensify his religious
skepticism.

His disbelief was at once unchangeable and strenu-
ous. The universe was to him a series of events con-
ected by an undesigning and inscrutable necessity,
and an assemblage of forms to which no beginning or
end can be conceived. Instead of transient views
and vague ideas, his meditations, on religious
points, had been intense. Enthusiasm was added
to disbelief, and he not only dissented but
abhorred.22

As is typical of the revolutionary intellectual, Ormond
fills the emotional hiatus left by the absence of religious

22Ormond, p. 149.
belief with his fervid political involvement. "His political projects," the reader is informed, "are likely to possess an extensive influence on the future condition of this Western World" (p. 92). The political projects seems to be rooted principally in revolutionary activity, in which Ormond has become engaged at a young age.

He had embraced, when almost a child, the trade of arms; . . . had found service and promotion in the armies of Potemkin and Romanzow; . . . had executed secret and diplomatic functions at Constantinople and Berlin; . . . in the latter city . . . had met with schemers and reasoners who aimed at the new-modeling of the world, and the subversion of all that has hitherto been conceived elementary and fundamental in the constitution of man and of government. . . . Some of these reformers had secretly united to break down the military and monarchical fabric of German policy. . . . Others, more wisely, had devoted their secret efforts, not to overturn, but to build, . . . and for this end . . . embraced an exploring and colonizing project. [Ormond] . . . had allied himself to these, and for the promotion of their projects had spent six years of his life in journeys by sea and land, in tracts unexplored till then by any European.

What were the moral or political maxims which this adventurous and visionary sect had adopted, and what was the seat of their newborn empire—whether on the shore of an austral continent, or in the heart of desert America—he carefully concealed.

(pp. 208-09).

The secret society to which Ormond allied himself was apparently the Illuminati, a sect founded in Bavaria by Theodore Hauptmann, a renegade Jesuit, in 1776. At the time Ormond was published the sect was under heavy attack from conservative clergy as a fountainhead of world conspiracy. Though Ormond has managed to conceal from the narrator the maxims
of the society, nevertheless she is able to "explain the maxims by which he was accustomed to regulate his private department" (p. 92), and these give us at least some insight into Ormond's political beliefs and their influence on his actions.

No one could entertain loftier conceptions of human capacity than Ormond. But he carefully distinguished between men in the abstract, and men as they are. The former were beings to be impelled, by the breath of accident, in a right or a wrong road; but whatever direction they should receive, it was the property of their nature to persist in it. Now, this impulse had been given. No single being could rectify the error. It was the business of the wise man to form a just estimate of things, but not to attempt, by individual efforts, so chimerical an enterprise as that of promoting the happiness of mankind. Their condition was out of the reach of a member of a corrupt society to control. A mortal poison pervaded the whole system, by means of which everything received was converted into bane and purulence. Efforts designed to ameliorate the condition of an individual were sure of answering a contrary purpose. The principles of the social machine must be rectified, before men, can be beneficially active. Our motives may be neutral or beneficient, but our actions tend merely to the production of evil. (pp. 92-93)

This initial set of tenets, apparently the result of a misunderstanding of Godwin's then revolutionary theory of ethics, puts man in an impossible position. Man (as he is) cannot improve his lot without first rectifying "the principles of the social machine." But as a product of the machine and a part of it, there is little he can do to rectify it. Wieland had experienced, to his sorrow, the knowledge that actions performed out of the noblest motivation could have not only disastrous but meaningless results.
Ormond has already perceived this intellectually, and so he has reached the conclusion that man is faced with a horrible paradox: all human action, motives notwithstanding, ultimately produces evil.

But this is not the worst of the paradox, for man can not rely on inaction either. As far as Ormond is concerned, the idea of total forbearance was not less delusive. Man could not be otherwise than a cause of perpetual operation and efficacy. He was part of a machine, and as such had not power to withhold his agency. Contiguousness to other parts—that is, to other men—was all that was necessary to render him a powerful concurrent.

(p. 93)

Still, Ormond unaccountably continues to believe that "a man may reasonably hope to accomplish his end, when he proposes nothing but his own good. Any other point is inaccessible." Oddly enough, Ormond also believes that a man "must not part with benevolent desire; this is a constituent of happiness. . . . A wise man will relinquish the pursuit of general benefit, but not the desire of that benefit, or the perception of that in which this benefit consists, because these are among the ingredients of virtue and the sources of his happiness" (p. 93).

Ormond's ethics seem to resolve as follows: All human action eventually produces evil, and yet all men must act. Since a man can achieve happiness only for himself, he must live selfishly. But in pursuing happiness for himself, he must also retain a sense of universal benevolence. This universal benevolence a man must continue to desire as a
goal even though he must restrain from trying to achieve it, and even though it is not quite clear what the desire is intended to accomplish.\textsuperscript{23}

In the face of this belief in the futility of all individual action, it is not surprising that Ormond uses his wealth principally to gratify his own pleasures rather than to promote the betterment of man.

He thought himself entitled to all the splendor and ease which it [his wealth] would purchase, but his taste was elaborate and correct. He gratified his love of the beautiful, because the sensations it afforded were pleasing, but made no sacrifices to the love of distinction.

(p. 94).

To spend his money for philanthropic ends would, of course, have been ridiculous, since "The use of money was a science, like every other branch of benevolence, not reducible to any fixed principles. No man, in the disbursement of money, could say whether he was conferring to benefit or injury. The visible and immediate effects might be good, but evil was its ultimate and general tendency" (p. 110).

Neither, however, does Ormond squander his money on the trappings of aristocracy. Though a man of "elaborate and correct" taste, in dress, manners, equipage, and human relationships he is a democrat.

Pompous equipage and retinue were modes of appropriating the esteem of mankind which he held in profound contempt. The garb of his attendants was

\textsuperscript{23}To say that there is an ethic here is probably an overstatement. Rather, the entire passage seems to be a botching of Godwin\textquotesingle s implicit utilitarianism.
fashioned after the model suggested by his imagination, and not in compliance with the dictates of custom.

He treated with systematic negligence the etiquette that regulates the intercourse of persons of certain class. He everywhere acted, in this respect, as if he were alone, or among familiar associates. The very appellations of Sir, and Madam, and Mister, were, in his apprehension, servile and rediculous; and as custom or law had annexed no penalty to the neglect of these, he conformed to his own opinions. It was easier for him to reduce his notions of equality to practice than for most others.

(p. 94)

But in spite of his democratic manners and in spite of his belief in the futility of individual human action, Ormond never overcomes the drive to violence which characterized his early revolutionary career. In order to expedite his seduction of the heroine of the novel, Constantia Dudley, he kills her father. For the same reason he kills a character named Craig. And finally, when the fortress of Constantia's virtue turns out to be invulnerable to deception, he tries to rape her. By this time, however, he has degenerated into a madman. It has been part of his creed that "Love, in itself, was . . . of little worth, and only of importance as the source of the most terrible of intellectual maladies. Sexual sensations associating themselves, in a certain way, with our ideas, beget a disease which has, indeed, found no place in the catalogue, but is a case of more entire subversion and confusion of mind than any other" (p. 132). He himself contracts the malady, and it does indeed prove fatal.
Ormond is not the only intellectual on the scene. In this novel, as in *Wieland*, Brown tries to experiment with the possibilities of a group of intellectuals. Constantia herself is the most intellectual of women. She is "thoroughly conversant with Tacitus and Milton," and familiar with Newton and Hartley. Her father has "unveiled to her the mathematical properties of light and sound, taught her, as a metaphysician and anatomist, the structure and power of the senses, and discussed with her the principles and progress of human society" (p. 123). She has "always been solicitous for mental improvement" (p. 146), and her beauty is "animated by . . . intelligence" (p. 131). It is largely her mind that attracts Ormond: "Her discourse tended to rouse him from his lethargy, to furnish him with powerful excitements, and the time spent in her company seemed like a doubling of existence" (p. 131). Likewise, it is to Ormond's mind that Constantia is attracted. "The conversation of Ormond was an inexhaustible fund. By the variety of topics and the excitements to reflection it supplied, a more plenteous influx of knowledge was produced than could have flowed from any other source. There was no end to the detailing of facts, and the canvassing of theories" (p. 146). Furthermore, "The novelty and grandeur of his schemes could not fail to transport a mind ardent and capacious as that of Constantia" (p. 147).
This introduction to revolutionary ideas is supplemented by an introduction to revolutionary actualities when Constantia meets Martinette de Beauvais. Martinette is also an intellectual woman, and though her education has been similar to Constantia's, her life has been richer and more varied. Born in the middle eastern city of Aleppo, she has been exposed to a broad slice of life.

My father [she informs a wide-eyed Constantia] talked to me in Sclavonic. My mother and her maids talked to me in Greek. My neighbors talked to me in medley of Arabic, Syriac, and Turkish. My father's secretary was a scholar. He was as well versed in Lysias and Xenophon as any of their contemporaries. He labored for ten years to enable me to read a language essentially the same with that I used daily to my nurse and mother. . . . To have refrained from learning was impossible. Suppose a girl, prompt, diligent, inquisitive, to spend ten years of her life partly in Spain, partly in Tuscany, partly in France, and partly in England. . . . Would it be possible for her to remain ignorant of each of these languages?

(p. 159)

Martinette's chief attraction is not the quality and breadth of her formal education, but

a knowledge of political and military transactions in Europe during the present age, which implied the possession of better means of information than books. She depicted scenes and characters with the accuracy of one who had partaken and witnessed them herself.

Constantia's attention had been chiefly occupied by personal concerns. Her youth had passed in contention with misfortune, or in the quietudes of study. She could not be unapprised of contemporary revolutions and war, but her ideas respecting them were indefinite and vague. Her views and her inferences on this head were general and speculative. Her acquaintance with history was exact and circumstantial in proportion as she retired backward from her own age. She knew more of the siege of
Mutina than of that of Lille; more of the machination of Catiline and the tumults of Clodius, than of the prostration of the Bastile and the proscissions of Marat.

She listened, therefore, with unspeakable eagerness to this reciter, who detailed to her, as the occasion suggested, the progress of action and opinion on the theater of France and Poland.

But, while this historian described the features, personal deportment, and domestic character of Antoinette, Mirabeau, and Robespierre, an impervious veil was drawn over her own condition.

(p. 158)

Indeed, as it turns out, Martinette has been an intimate participant in the events of the French Revolution, and has been motivated by true revolutionary zeal. When Constantia, at one point, naively asks, "Does not your heart shrink from the view of a scene of massacre and tumult, such as Paris has lately exhibited and will probably continue to exhibit?"

Martinette coolly answers:

"Though talkest, Constantia, in a way scarcely worthy of thy good sense. Have I not been three years in a camp? What are bleeding wounds and mangled corpses, when accustomed to the daily sight of them for years? Am I not a lover of liberty? and must I not exult in the fall of tyrants, and regret only that my hand had no share in their destruction?"

(pp. 170-71)

And exult in the sight of blood she does. When "she communicated the tidings of the fall of the sanguinary tyranny of Robespierre, her eyes sparkled, and every feature was pregnant with delight, while she unfolded, with her accustomed energy, the particulars of this tremendous revolution. The blood which it occasioned to flow was mentioned without any symptoms of disgust or horror" (p. 170).
It is only natural that in her wide experience Martinette should have encountered other intellectuals and revolutionaries. One is a priest whose "passion for science," Martinette tells Constantia, "was at least equal to that which he entertained for me, and both these passions combined to make him a sedulous instructor. He was a disciple of the newest doctrines respecting matter and mind. He denied the impenetrability of the first, and the immateriality of the second. These he endeavored to inculcate upon me, as well as to subvert my religious tenets. . . ." (p. 162). It is on these startling ideas that Martinette has been nurtured.

But she is initiated into first-hand revolutionary activity through love of a young, idealistic Englishman named Wentworth, who is remarkably anticipatory of the Byronic hero, and actually of Byron himself. He changes the entire orientation of Martinette's previous education: "From the computation of eclipses I now betook myself to the study of man. . . . Instead of adulation and gallantry, I was engaged in watching the conduct of states and revolving the theories of politicians" (p. 166). Wentworth himself, in his youth, "proposed no other end of his existence than the acquisition of virtue and knowledge" (p. 164). He is a member of the nobility, and his character is one "not frequently met with in the world. He was a political enthusiast, who esteemed nothing more graceful or glorious than to die for the liberties of mankind. He had traversed Greece with an
imagination full of the exploits of ancient times, and derived from contemplating Thermopylae and Marathon, an enthusiasm that bordered upon frenzy" (pp. 166-67). In search of a cause, he joins the Colonists in the American Revolutionary War. He is wounded in the fighting, and eventually his wounds prove fatal.

These vignettes of subordinate characters are typical of Brown's method. But at least in Ormond they are understandable. Brown seems to be trying to encompass the character of the new intellectual, but he is never in sufficient command of his material to achieve his end within the dramatic framework of the novel.

This weakness in development of character extends into his attempts to deal with ideas. Never does he appear able to control ideas within the context of the materials and language of fiction. He sets out to portray men and women of ideas, who are apparently supposed to be eloquent, but they wind up mute. When they do speak, it is in the conventions of the heroes and heroines of sentimental and gothic fiction. Brown plunges courageously into Godwinian and French ideas only to become hopelessly entangled in them. Without reason or motivation characters contradict themselves, and frequently their actions seem to contradict their ideas. In many cases, moreover, the very ability to articulate ideas, which was ostensibly intended to make them heroes, turns them into incorrigible villains.
And yet Brown's very confusion is revealing. Like many an American author after him, he wanted the approval of both the public and the intelligentia. He had said as much in the "Advertisement" to Skywalk. Nor was it an accident that he sent a copy of Wieland to one of the outstanding intellectuals of the day, Thomas Jefferson, in the hope that "an artful display of incidents, the powerful delineation of characters and the train of eloquent and judicious reasoning which may be combined in a fictitious work, will be regarded by Thomas Jefferson with as much respect as they are regarded by me."  

But there is no evidence that Jefferson was impressed. To satisfy the public, Brown had to provide entertainment in accepted fashion and at the same time avoid the open expression of unpopular ideas; to satisfy "those who study and reflect" he had to provide intellectual substance. He succeeded in satisfying neither.

Perhaps Jefferson's silence is as meaningful as anything he could have said. Most likely, he was baffled. For though many of Brown's insights were sound, he never seemed fully able to comprehend them intellectually, nor to articulate them meaningfully. He sensed the situation of the new intellectual--his derivation from the reasonable Ciceronian gentleman, his unreasoning impassioned elevation of reason

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24 Clark, p. 163.
into a goddess, his fatal political zeal—but he lacked the intellect or imagination that would have fused these elements into a consciously significant work of art. Probably Brown's most brilliant insight into his intellectual characters is his having conceived their violence against a European background, even though the main setting of the action is always American. Wieland, for example, is deeply involved in his Saxon ancestry. Ormond's past is mysterious, but he has been engaged in European revolutionary intrigue since boyhood. Martinette was born in Aleppo, has lived all over the continent, and has been involved in all the major revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Pleyel, when he arrives on the scene, has just returned from Europe. Achsa Fielding (in Arthur Mervyn) is a Jewess born and raised in England. Carwin was born in England and has lived a great deal on the Continent. Two lesser Falkland-like intellectual villains, Welbeck (in Arthur Mervyn) and Ludlow (in Carwin the Biloquist), are both of European origin. But Brown himself never seemed to know quite what to make of his own insights. He may inadvertently have found the key in his last novel, Jane Talbot.

The novel is an unadulterated sentimental epistolary romance. The form is conventional, a series of letters instead of the one long letter Brown had used in the 1798 novels. The minor characters are clichés: Jane's brother, for example, is a rake who squanders his father's modest
fortune on a French mistress, and then tries to relieve his sister of her small inheritance. The plot is also trite. William Colden and Jane Talbot want to marry each other, but Jane's guardian, who holds the purse strings, is of another mind. Consequently, "The problem is to unite on plausible grounds these two young intellectuals."

There is, however, an important deviation from the usual plot, and it stems from the fact that Colden is an intellectual. Mrs. Fielder, the guardian, finds that Colden is objectionable not because of his class, occupation, person, income, or status, but because of his ideology. Denouncing Colden to her ward, she deplores the fact that he "had imbibed that pernicious philosophy which is now so much in vogue [Godwinism]." Mrs. Fielder has discovered some letters which "showed Colden as the advocate of suicide; a scoffer at promises; the despiser of revelation, of Providence and a future state; an opponent of marriage, and as one who denied (shocking!) that any thing but mere habit and positive law stood in the way of marriage, nay, of intercourse without marriage, between brother and sister, parent and child." (p. 170).

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25Warfel, p. 198.

She is afraid, of course, that Jane will be contaminated. But she need not fear. Colden, unlike Ormond, is at heart a clean-cut American boy, while Jane, like Constantia, is a strong-minded, morally rigid American woman. In short, he is no match for her, and instead of Colden's converting Jane to Godwinism, she converts him to God. She has listened it is true, to his outpourings of Godwinian ideas, but they have moved her to convert not herself but him. This she makes quite clear in a letter to Golden:

I cannot help remembering the time . . . when the belief of a Christian seemed essential to every human excellence. All qualities, without that belief, were not to be despised as useless, but to be abhorred as pernicious. There would be no virtue, not merit, divorced from religion. . . . I seldom trusted myself to inquire how it was my duty to act towards one whom I loved, but who was destitute of this grace; for of such moment was the question to me, that I imagined the decision would necessarily precede all others. I could not love till I had investigated this point, and no force could oblige me to hold communion with a soul whom this defect despoiled of all beauty and devoted to predition.

But what now is the change that time and passion have wrought! I have found a man without religion. What I supposed impossible has happened. I love the man. I cannot give him up. The mist that is before my eyes does not change what was once vice into virtue. I do not cease to regard unbelief as the blackest stain, as the most deplorable calamity that can befall a human creature; but still I love the man, and that fills me with unconquerable zeal to rescue him from this calamity.

(pp. 131-32)

This is an out-and-out case of Mohammed and the mountain. Since Jane cannot love a man without religion, she will bring religion to the man she loves.
Having given Colden fair warning, Jane immediately proceeds to the task at hand: to win him from his mistaken views. There is hope, for, as she tells him, "You err, but are not obstinate in error" (p. 133). Through the most vulnerable of human organs, she will win him to truth: "If your opinions be adverse to religion," she advises, "your affections are not wholly estranged from it. Your understanding dissents, but your heart is not yet persuaded to refuse" (p. 133). Far from being repelled by his disbelief, she seems to be attracted by his very delinquency. "Of what stuff must that heart be made," she asks ecstatically, "which can behold unmoved, genius and worth, destitute of the joys and energies of religion; wandering in a maze of passions and doubts; devoured by fantastic repinings and vague regrets; drearily conscious of wanting a foundation whereon to repose, a guide in whom to trust? What heart can gaze at such a spectacle without unspeakable compassion?" (p. 133).

Of course, Jane neither expects nor achieves complete compliance with her wishes. Her own views have been compromised, to some extent, in her relationship with Colden. "My knowledge of you," she informs him, "has put an end to this state of superstitious ignorance" (p. 135). And she is quick to assure him, "In no respect has your company made a worse—in every respect it has made me a better—woman. Not only my piety has become more rational and fervent, but
a new spring has been imparted to my languishing curiosity" (p. 136).

Such pressure is irresistible, and consequently, Colden eventually capitulates. Writing to Jane after a trick at sea, he confesses, "The incidents of a long voyage, the vicissitudes through which I have passed, have given strength to my frame, while the opportunities and occasions for wisdom which these have afforded me have made my mind whole. I have awakened from my dreams of doubt and misery, not to the cold and vague belief, but to the living and delightful consciousness, of every tie that can bind men to his Divine Parent and Judge" (p. 234). He concludes by asserting that "reflection has, at length, raised me to the tranquil and steadfast height of simple and true piety" (p. 235).

Colden, the only one of Brown's intellectuals who has no strong European ties, is also the weakest in character. At one point he describes himself to Jane:

I am not indolent, but my activity is vague, profitless, capricious. No lucrative or noble purpose impels me. I aim at nothing but selfish gratification. I have no relish, indeed, for sensual indulgences. It is the intellectual taste that calls for such banquets as imagination and science can furnish; but, though less sordid than the epicure, the voluptuary, or the sportsman, the principle that governs them and me is the same; equally limited to self; equally void of any basis in morals or religion.(p. 101)

Wieland, bearing a mysterious burden of guilt inherited from his Saxon ancestors, tries to convert his religious
principles into action, and in so doing destroys his family and finally himself. Ormond, a solid veteran of European revolutionary violence, trying to convert ethical principles into action, destroys himself in the process. Colden alone finds happiness, precisely, it appears, because his intellectual principles do not demand any action or moral commitment. Hence, he is free to subjugate himself and his principles to the practical piety of a "good" woman.

Jane Talbot ends on a happy note of impending marriage. But it is not till almost three quarters of a century later, in the persons of Basil and Isabel March, that an investigation of their post-marital relationship is undertaken.
CHAPTER IV

THE INTELLECTUAL AS OUTSIDER

Charles Brockden Brown wanted to soar. He wanted to combine morality, philosophy, and art so as to write novels with deep meaning and universal significance. But the time was not ripe, and his mind was not powerful enough to overcome the problems raised by his ambitions. Between the forces of eighteenth-century rationalism and nineteenth-century romanticism he could never quite choose. Alone he could not assimilate French ideas, English forms, and American experience. When he tried to create intellectual characters they turned out either sentimental heroes or melodramatic villains. Too often he never got off the ground, and when he did, he found, like Icarus, that his wings were not substantial enough to carry him very high without disastrous consequences.

The success that eluded Brown, Hawthorne managed to grasp, but only after almost a quarter of a century's apprenticeship at his craft, and only after Ralph Waldo Emerson had "made the first full examination of . . . [the] potentialities"\(^1\) of our literature. Hawthorne's first

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novel, *Fanshawe*, which was published anonymously in 1828, he quickly renounced. The following years he spent perfecting his art, achieving an unquestionable mastery of the short story by 1837. In 1849, after a twenty-one year hiatus, he returned to the novel. A year later, *The Scarlet Letter* was published, and "with that . . . novel, New World fiction arrived at its first fulfillment, and Hawthorne at his." In it Hawthorne managed to fuse all the elements that for Brown had always remained hopeless disparate. Just how, is not yet quite clear. Perhaps it is inevitable that a touch of mystery should always hover over the "how" of a great work of art.

But if mystery remains, it is not for any lack of attempts to solve it. Matthiessen writes, "Why Hawthorne came nearest to achieving [the] wholeness [of imaginative composition] in *The Scarlet Letter* may be accounted for in various ways." Trollope, according to Matthiessen, thought that "here Hawthorne had developed his most coherent plot." Matthiessen himself adds that "Hawthorne has also managed here his utmost approach to the inseparability of elements that James insisted on when he said that 'character, in any sense in which we can get at it, is action, and action is plot.' Of his four romances, this one grows most organically.

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3*American Renaissance*, p. 275.
out of the interactions between the characters. . . . Furthermore, his integrity of effect is due in part to the incisive contrasts among the human types he is presenting."4 More recently, R. H. Fogle has said that "The intensity of The Scarlet Letter, at which Hawthorne himself was dismayed, comes from the concentration, selection, and dramatic irony."5 And Hyatt H. Waggoner demonstrates convincingly that the greatness of the book is owing to Hawthorne's brilliant handling of symbols and images to develop both plot and theme.6

Since great works of art can never be reduced to one simple formula, there is no need to attempt to deny any of the foregoing explanations of the greatness of The Scarlet Letter. For my own purposes, however, I would like to explore an avenue which Matthiessen opens but does not fully investigate. He adds to what I have already quoted from American Renaissance that "beyond any interest in ordering of plot or in lucid discrimination between characters, Hawthorne's imaginative energy seems to have been called out to the full here by the continual correspondences that his theme allowed him to make between external events and inner

4Ibid.


significances."7 What Matthiessen has in mind is Hawthorne's use of such phenomena as the "A" that Dimmesdale sees blazoned in the sky, out of which Hawthorne "developed one of his most fertile resources, the device of multiple choice. . . ."8 That is, the reader can take the "A" in the sky as a supernatural portent or as a symptom of the disease in the "eye and heart" of Dimmesdale. Hence, the external event—a meteor "burning to waste"—becomes another means of probing the mind and heart of the minister.

In the section of his book called "Hawthorne and Milton," Matthiessen extends this idea of "continual correspondences . . . between external events and inner significances" to the correspondence between a character's inner being and his physical attributes, maintaining that the physical qualities and actions become emblematic of the psychic core. "Hawthorne's most valuable inheritance from the seventeenth century tradition," he asserts, "lay in his comprehension of the dependence of the body of the mind, especially of the power with which the ego can warp man's physical constitution to its own savage bent. In the degree of objective equivalence that he could devise to give external form to these inner workings, he was indebted to the greatest masters of allegory. . . ."9

7Page 276.
8Ibid.
9Page 305.
Matthiessen develops this idea with reference to Hawthorne's drawing upon Milton for his portrait of Chillingworth. "The physician's transformation," states Matthiessen, is handled with strictest accord to the Puritans' belief in how an erring mind could become so divorced from God that it lapsed into a state of diabolic possession.

However, the portrayal of Chillingworth's behavior at the moment of his discovery of the mark on the sleeping minister's breast draws upon a profounder moralist than any of the Mathers. His face is distorted with a mixed "look of wonder joy, and horror. With what a ghastly rapture, as it were, too mighty to be expressed only by the eye and features, and therefore bursting forth through the whole ugliness of his figure, and making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gestures with which he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor." Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom.

How integrally Hawthorne accepted Milton's analysis of the way the passions operate can be suggested by the passage where Uriel looked down upon the sudden unrestraint of Satan, and

Saw him disfigured, more than could befall Spirit of happy sort: his gestures fierce He mark'd, and mad demeanour, then alone, as he supposed, all unobserved, unseen.10

In all this Matthiessen seems to be saying that in characterizing Chillingworth Hawthorne discovered a set of recognizable, conventional behavioral patterns, already a respectable part of the literary tradition, which served as a kind of "objective correlative" to reveal the innermost

depths of Chillingworth's soul. What I wish to demonstrate at this point is that Hawthorne did almost the same thing in his characterization of Dimmesdale, but much more originally and brilliantly than with Chillingworth. Infusing new life into a worn but still useful set of literary clichés, Hawthorne created one of the great characters in world literature.

To gain an insight into the manner in which Hawthorne created the character of Dimmesdale, I would start at a most obvious point, but one generally neglected for its very obviousness, the original meaning of the letter "A." The tendency has been to overlook what the letter represents at the outset of the book, and to concentrate on its development as a symbol and on its ultimate significance. I do not wish to deny that this procedure is important nor that in the course of Hester's wearing the letter its meaning shifts, leaving the reader with a possibility of "multiple choice" from among such possibilities as "angel," "affection," and "able." Nevertheless, it is quite clear that initially the letter is intended to mean adulteress. And The Scarlet Letter is a novel about adultery. This, as has been recognized at great length, is not the only thing that it is about, for it focuses most painfully and acutely on human sin and guilt, the ineffable and not easily measurable concomitants of the devious act. But it is through the act of adultery that it focuses on them. And it is partly because
Hawthorne found here a literary convention embodying a human act to objectify his moral and philosophical speculation that *The Scarlet Letter* is the first great American novel.

The great literature of adultery (and chastity), is, of course, preserved in the medieval romances of courtly love. But how directly familiar Hawthorne was with the courtly-love tradition is something of a problem. A connection between Hawthorne and the courtly-love romances does not, however, seem far-fetched if we bear in mind two important facts: (1) that he consciously labeled his own works romances while many of his contemporaries called theirs "tales of truth," and (2) that he thought of himself as an allegorist. The intricate relationship between the romances and allegory, the way in which one developed into the other, has been traced by C. S. Lewis in his *Allegory of Love*. It does not seem likely that Hawthorne could have been aware of the fact that he was working in both these modes and yet have been totally unacquainted with the literature from which they had evolved. But even if this were the case, he would certainly have been familiar with elements of the courtly-love tradition through one of his favorite poets, Edmund Spenser.11

11 Matthiessen, p. 200 n., writes: "Hawthorne's final opinion on the subject of poetry was expressed in a letter to Longfellow in 1864: 'I take vast satisfaction in your poetry, and take very little in most other men's, except it be the grand old strains that have been sounding all through
Now, one of the most pervasive developments of the courtly-love romance, one reflected to some extent in Spenser's Red Cross Knight and Sir Guyon, was the lover both licentious and chaste: licentious in so far as he had to make love to a woman he could not hope to marry, and chaste in so far as he was expected to be faithful to the object of his love. The code of courtly love, and the ideal of behavior of the lover had been described in the twelfth century by Andreas Capellanus.

In The Art of Courtly Love, Andreas lays down thirty-one rules for lovers. Of these, five describe physical manifestations of the psychological condition of the lover. These are:

XV Every lover turns pale in the presence of his beloved.
XVI When a lover suddenly catches sight of his beloved his heart palpitates.
XX A man in love is always apprehensive.
XXX A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of love.
XXIII He whom the thought of love vexes, eats and sleeps very little.12

The physical condition described by these symptoms indicates a state of extreme neurasthenia. The lover is

alternately pale and flushed. He trembles in constant fear and apprehension. His mental state is one of constant abstraction, his physical state, one of gradual atrophy. In addition, a phenomenon Andreas does not mention, the lover is much given to sighing.

But there is also another rule which would seem to make it quite difficult to keep all those that have been mentioned so far. That is the thirteenth, which declares that "When made public love rarely endures." So, though the lover is "sick," though he must endure the pains of love, and show the physical symptoms of his malady, yet, at the same time, he must somehow contrive to conceal them from society, and especially must he conceal the identity of his beloved.

In English literature there is no more consummate courtly lover than Chaucer's Troilus. He shows all the symptoms. When he first sees Criseyde in the temple "his herte gan to sprede and rise,/ and softe sighed, lest men myghte him here,/ and caughte ayeyn his firste pleyinge chere." From this moment on, Troilus isolates himself so that he may suffer secretly. His health declines, and his misery eventually becomes so intense as to endanger his very life. Troilus's courtship, conquest, and betrayal is

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a long story containing, it is true, a few moments of joy, but essentially it is a tale of woe.

But the courtly lover refuses to die with the Middle Ages or even with the courtly-love romance. Even that foundling of eighteenth-century "realism," Tom Jones (with whom Hawthorne was acquainted) is not immune to the dread disease. When Tom first realizes that he loves Sophia, he knows, also, that he cannot have her. As an honorable English gentleman, he must repress his passion; consequently, he finds himself in a dilemma:

It may, perhaps, be a question, whether the art which he used to conceal his passion, or the means which honest nature employed to reveal it, betrayed him most: for while art made him more than ever reserved to Sophia, and forbad him to address any of his discourse to her, nay, to avoid meeting her eyes, with the utmost caution; nature was no less busy in counter-plotting him. Hence, at the approach of the young lady he grew pale; and if this was sudden, started. If his eyes accidentally met hers the blood rushed into his cheeks, and his countenance became all over scarlet. If common civility ever obliged him to speak to her, as to drink her health at table, his tongue was sure to falter. If he touched her, his hand, nay, his whole frame, trembled. And if any discourse tended, however, remotely, to raise the idea of love, an involuntary sigh seldom failed to steal from his bosom. Most of which accidents nature was wonderfully industrious to throw daily in his way.

The symptoms that identify Troilus and Tom as courtly lovers also identify Arthur Dimmesdale, but whether as a

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conventional courtly lover we shall see. He is first intro-
duced to us as "a pale young man." It is true that
Chillingworth is also introduced as pale. But his is a
mustier kind of pallor, that of "a man stricken in years, a
pale thin, scholar-like visage, with eyes dim and bleared
by the lamp-light that had served them to pore over many
onderous books" (p. 60). Dimmesdale's pallor is much more
romantic and much more neurotic.

He was a person of very striking aspect, with a
white, lofty, and impending brow, large, brown,
melancholy eyes, and a mouth which unless when he
forcibly compressed it, was apt to be tremulous,
expressing both nervous sensibility and a vast
power of self-restraint. Notwithstanding his high
native gifts and scholar-like attainments, there
was an air about this young minister,—an apprehen-
sive, a startled, a half-frightened look,—as of a
being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss
in the pathway of human existence, and could only
be at ease in some seclusion of his own. There-
fore, so far as his duties would permit, he trode
in the shadowy by-paths, and thus kept himself
simple and childlike; coming forth, when occasion
was, with a freshness, and fragrance, and dewy
purity of thought, which, as many people said,
affected them like the speech of an angel.
(p. 67)

Dimmesdale's pallor is owing not to scholarly seclusion but
to "nervous sensibility." "The trying nature of his posi-
tion drove the blood from his cheek, and made his lips
tremulous" (p. 67). The blood has not been drained from
his cheeks, as in the case of Chillingworth, it has been

16Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, ed. Harry
Levin (Boston, 1960), p. 66. Page references in my text
are to this edition.
driven from them. When Dimmesdale must exhort Hester to confess the name of her lover, he cannot speak. And when he does, "The young pastor's voice was tremulously sweet, rich, deep, and broken" (p. 63). When she resolutely refuses to confess, Dimmesdale reacts as follows: "'She will not speak!'" murmured Mr. Dimmesdale, who, leaning over the balcony, with his hand upon his heart, had awaited the result of his appeal. He now drew back, with a long respiration. "Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart. 'She will not speak!'" (p. 69). These symptoms—sighing, pallor, flushes, pain—are elaborated at great length, and intertwined with indications of a general physical decline. When Hester appeals to him to prevent the authorities from taking Pearl from her, "the young minister at once came forward, pale, and holding his hand over his heart, as was his custom whenever his peculiarly nervous temperament was thrown into agitation. He looked now more careworn and emaciated than as we described him at the scene of Hester's public ignominy; and whether it were his failing health, or whatever the cause be, his large dark eyes had a world of pain in their melancholy depth" (pp. 112-13). After defending Hester, he is "tremulous with the vehemence of his appeal" (p. 114).

As Dimmesdale continues to decline, his parishioners look for an explanation. "By those best acquainted with his habits, the paleness of the young minister's cheek was
accounted for by his too earnest devotion to study, his scrupulous fulfilment of parochial duty, and, more than all, by the fasts and vigils of which he made a frequent practice, in order to keep the grossness of his earthly state from clogging and obscuring his spiritual lamp" (p. 119). The irony is that all the phenomena cited as causes for his paleness are themselves part and parcel of it. Ultimately, his vigils and fasts and discipline are effects of the same thing that is causing his pallor and general physical decline. At one point, Hawthorne, with an almost Beethoven-like touch draws all these themes together: the emaciation, the sweet voice, the melancholy, the paleness, the apprehensiveness, the hand-over-heart, the pain.

With all this difference of opinion as to the cause of his decline, there could be no question of the fact. His form grew emaciated; his voice, though still rich and sweet, had a certain melancholy prophecy of decay in it; he was often observed, on any slight alarm or other sudden accident, to put his hand over his heart, with first a flush and then a paleness, indicative of pain.

(p. 119)

But the physical trait that receives the fullest development is Dimmesdale's compulsive covering of his heart. When Hester asks Pearl if she knows why her mother wears the scarlet letter, Pearl answers, "It is for the same reason that the minister keeps his hand over his heart" (p. 177). And then, a little later, Pearl asks, "Why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?" (p. 178). Several moments later, she repeats the question (p. 180). When Pearl and
Hester first sees the minister in the forest, he has his hand over his heart. Pearl now asks if he keeps his hand over his heart "because ... the Black Man [Chillingworth] set his mark in that place" (p. 186). Dimmesdale has been declining physically, but "to Hester's eye, the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale exhibited no symptom of positive and vivacious suffering, except that ... he kept his hand over his heart" (p. 187). It is not necessary to list every instance of Dimmesdale's performing this act (I have counted thirteen). What becomes apparent, however, in these instances, is that the act has two purposes. First, it marks Dimmesdale's attempt to conceal his guilt from the world, just as the courtly lover would conceal his love. And secondly, it is a way of both assuaging and savoring the ache of his guilt, in the same way that a man with a nagging pain in some part of his anatomy will perform the one physical act most likely to remind him of the pain.

Two objections may be made at this point. One is that Dimmesdale is no longer in love, that his foray into adultery is past, and that he is now merely paying for his sin. The other is that any guilty man might have acted the same way as Dimmesdale. The minister himself seems to rebut this second objection when he tells Hester, "Were I an atheist,—a man devoid of conscience,—a wretch with coarse and brutal instincts,—I might have found peace, long ere now. Nay, I never should have lost it! But, as matters
stand with my soul, whatever of good capacity there originally was in me, all of God's gifts that were the choicest have become the ministers of spiritual torment" (p. 190). Obviously, Dimmesdale's is a special guilt that requires a special set of symptoms.

Dimmesdale's sense of his special guilt may provide an answer to the first objection as well. It is true that Dimmesdale's situation is in many ways far from that of the courtly lover. My point, however, is not that Dimmesdale is the courtly lover, but that in the conventions of courtly love Hawthorne's genius found an objective correlative to communicate Dimmesdale's guilt. Q. D. Leavis, in a most incisive article on Hawthorne in the Sewanee Review, asserts that "Hawthorne has imaginatively recreated for the reader that Calvinist sense of sin, that theory which did in actuality shape the early social and spiritual history of New England. But in Hawthorne, by a wonderful feat of transmutation, it has no religious significance, it is as a psychological state that it is explored."17 It is perhaps an exaggeration to say that the "sense of sin" Hawthorne recreated has "no religious significance," but at any rate, the process that Mrs. Leavis describes seems to elucidate Hawthorne's art. Hawthorne used the same process in handling the conventions of courtly love. He recreated the

17 "Hawthorne as Poet," LIX (Spring, 1951), 197-98.
courtly lover's capacity for intense suffering as a psychological state, but the sexual significance of the tradition is minimized. He did not merely borrow a set of conventions, he transmuted them, tearing them out of their specifically Pagan and Catholic origins, and using them to portray a psychological condition growing out of a Protestant ethic.

Dimmesdale, "the young divine, whose scholar-like renown still lived in Oxford," is the Puritan embodiment of the courtly lover. He is highly sensitive, gentle, seemingly noble, passionate. But whereas the courtly lover lives only for love, Dimmesdale lives only for guilt. "Love," says Andreas, in the very first sentence of his first chapter, "is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex. . . ." Guilt, for Dimmesdale, is also an inborn suffering, derived, perhaps, from excessive meditation upon the human heart and the self, or perhaps, upon guilt itself.

This is one of the ironies of the courtly love situation, that the object of love becomes secondary, while the lover is transported by love itself. The passion (in the sense of suffering and "intense emotion" as well as lust) that the lover seeks is infinite and hence insatiable, and his love, as Denis de Rougement points out, ultimately

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18 The Art of Courtly Love, p. 2.
becomes an end in itself. "Tristan and Iseult," he says, do not love one another. They say they don't, and everything goes to prove it. What they love is love and being in love. They behave as if aware that whatever obstructs love must ensure and consolidate it in the heart of each and intensify it infinitely in the moment they reach the absolute obstacle, which is death. Tristan loves the awareness that he is loving far more than he loves Iseult the Fair. And Iseult does nothing to hold Tristan. All she needs is her passionate dream. Their need of one another is in order to be aflame, and they do not need one another as they are.19

Something of the same element is present in Dimmesdale's guilt and his morbid preoccupation with it. He lives in an ecstasy of guilt that eventually becomes a raison d'être. "The only real truth that continued to give Mr. Dimmesdale a real existence on this earth, was the anguish in his inmost soul, and the undissembled expression of it in his aspect. Had he once found power to smile, and wear a face of gayety, there would have been no such man!" (p. 144).

I have said that Dimmesdale lives in an ecstasy of guilt. I have chosen the world deliberately. Love is a suffering, and in the lover's suffering is his joy. Suffering is not merely an undesirable by-product of love, it is the essence of love. And the lover's greatest pleasure is the intensity and irremediability of his pain. As de Rougement puts it, "To love love more than the object of love, to love passion for its own sake, has been to love

to suffer and to court suffering all the way from Augus-
tine's *amabam amare* down to modern romanticism. Passionate
love, the longing for what sears us and annihilates us in
its triumph—there is the secret which Europe has never
allowed to be given away. . . ."^20 Not only does the lover
make no effort to avoid pain, he positively invites it.
Chrestien de Troyes writes, "My malady differs from all
others. It delights me: I rejoice at it; my ill is what I
want and my suffering is my health. . . . My ill comes to
me by my will; . . . but I am so pleased to want this that
I suffer agreeably, and have so much joy in my pain that I
am sick with delight."^21

Here is a light on Dimmesdale's character. He does
not suffer because he conceals his sin, he conceals his sin
partly because he wants to suffer. His suffering, like that
of the victim of love, seems to be an absolute delight. In
his pain is pleasure. Chase writes that "Dimmesdale is
intellect without will. He is passive; he is all eloquence,
sensitivity, refinement, and moral scruple. What violence
he has has long since been turned inward. He has preyed on
himself as Chillingworth preys on him."^22 Chase is not
entirely accurate. Dimmesdale is not intellect without will.

^20De Rougement, p. 41.

^21Quoted by De Rougement, p. 27.

^22The American Novel and its Traditions, p. 78.
He is the Puritan intellectual with the will to suffer, the Puritan intellectual in love with sin and the blackness of the human psyche. Perry Miller, in *The New England Mind*, points out that one manifestation of the Augustinian piety that dominated the Puritan consciousness was a desire to suffer. In Dimmesdale this desire becomes a monomania, as Hawthorne makes explicit on several occasions. At one point, Dimmesdale hears his illegitimate daughter, Pearl, laughing. He responds with "a thrill of the heart,—but he knew not whether of exquisite pain, or pleasure as acute" (p. 151). It is also revealed that

> in Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge. Oftentimes, this Protestant and Puritan divine had plied it on his own shoulders; laughing bitterly at himself the while, and smiting so much the more pitilessly, because of that bitter laugh. It was his custom, too, as it has been that of many other pious Puritans to fast,—not, however, like them in order to purify the body and render it the fitter medium of celestial illumination,—but rigorously, and until his knees trembled beneath him, as an act of penance. He kept vigils, likewise, night after night, sometimes in utter darkness; sometimes with a glimmering lamp.

Is it necessary to comment on the horror of this flagellation, of this picture of a man whipping himself, all the while convulsed by mad laughter, and then beating himself some more to scourge the laughter? Public confession, he

knows, will lift his burden. But that would be too easy, so he tortures himself instead by walking the ledge. He teases himself with the soul-balm of confession, but he cannot apply it. "He longed to speak out from his own pulpit, at the full height of his voice, and tell the people what he was" (p. 142). He wants to denounce himself as "utterly a pollution and a lie." He taunts himself with the possibility of ending his suffering: "More than once, Mr. Dimmesdale had gone into the pulpit, with a purpose never to come down its steps, until he should have spoken words. . ." of self-deprecation and confession. But he will not reveal "the black secret of his soul," for keeping it is too delicious. Nevertheless, "he had actually spoken. . . . He had told his hearers that he was altogether vile, a viler companion of the vilest, the worst of sinners, an abomination, a thing of unimaginable iniquity; and that the only wonder was, that they did not see his wretched body shrivelled up before their eyes, by the burning wrath of the Almighty!" (p. 142).

The denunciation is a masterpiece of ministerial rhetoric, but when Dimmesdale calls himself a viler companion of the vilest and the worst of sinners, this is not mere rhetoric. He means it. When he finally does make his public confession, knowing that he is about to die, he implores the "people of New England" to behold him, "the one sinner of the world!" (p. 252).
As a matter of fact, nothing will suffice Dimmesdale but to be recognized as the most loathsome of sinners. "Had I one friend," he tells Hester, "to whom . . . I could daily betake myself, and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby" (p. 191). When Hester tells him that he has atoned for his sin with penitence and good works, and that his "present life is not the less holy, in very truth, than it seems in people's eyes," he answers, "'No, Hester, no!' There is no substance in it [his own penitence]! It is cold and dead, and can do nothing for me! Of penance I have had enough! Of penitence there has been none! Else, I should long ago have thrown off these garments of mock holiness, and have shown myself to mankind as they will see me at the judgment-seat" (pp. 190-91).

"Sad indeed," to use Hawthorne's own words, "that an introspection so profound and acute as this poor minister's should be so miserably deceived!" (p. 214). Of neither penance nor penitence will there ever be enough for Dimmesdale. He is determined to wear sackcloth, if not for committing adultery with Hester, then surely for something else. There is a remarkable passage in Jonathan Edward's Personal Narrative, in which he describes what is actually
too magnitudinous to be describable--his sense of his own sinfulness. He writes:

I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness; very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, . . . so that I have often been forced to shut myself up. It has often appeared to me, that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of all mankind; . . . and I should have by far the lowest place in hell. When others . . . have expressed the sense they have had of their own wickedness, . . . I thought their expressions seemed exceeding faint and feeble to represent my wickedness.

My wickedness . . . has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable. . . . I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite and multiplying by infinite. . . . It appears to me, that were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fulness and glory of his sovereignty, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself. . . .

Extract that ray of hope, and it is not difficult to imagine Dimmesdale addressing his parishioners. But that minim of hope in Edwards is important. Edwards was still capable of being moved by the thought of "free grace," and by "the fulness and glory of the great Jehovah." It is true that his eye remains fixed fairly steadily on the blackness (He says, at one point, "I knew. . . my repentance was nothing to my sin."); nevertheless, it can still register light. And it is to the light that Edwards strives to ascend. He had become reconciled to God's ways through what seems to have been a mystic experience of the pleasantness

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24Works (New York, 1943), I, 22-23.
and sweetness of God. He describes the experience in the

**Personal Narrative:**

I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God, and his justice in thus eternally disposing of men, according to his sovereign pleasure. But never could give an account, how, or by what means, I was thus convinced. . . . God's absolute sovereignty and justice, with respect to salvation and damnation, is what my mind seems to rest assured of. . . . But I have often since that first conviction, had quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty than I had then. I have often since had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet. 25

Edwards, in this passage, seems to have achieved what Evelyn Underhill describes as "the great swing back into sunshine which is the reward of that painful descent into the 'cell of self-knowledge. . . ." 26 It is something that Dimmesdale never does achieve. His vision of God remains one of unrelieved blackness. There is no intimation that to him the doctrine of God's sovereignty has ever appeared pleasant, bright, or sweet. The two most penetrating modern critics of Hawthorne's work, R. H. Fogle and Hyatt Waggoner, both agree on the blackness of the book. Fogle avers that "the more cheerful readings" of *The Scarlet Letter* can be dismissed. 27 Waggoner writes that "The Scarlet Letter, . . .

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27 *Hawthorne's Fiction*, p. 104.
like the majority of the best tales, suggests that Hawthorne's vision of death was a good deal stronger and more constant than his vision of life. This is indeed, as Hawthorne calls it, a dark tale. . . . For in it there is perfect charity, and a real, though defective, faith, but almost no hope."28

This almost complete hopelessness stems partly from the fact that the purpose of the sum total of all the suffering in the lives of the characters is never really resolved. The promise of salvation through suffering, though not distinctly denied, is nonetheless never made quite explicit. As Fogle puts it:

Without doubt The Scarlet Letter pushes towards the limit of moral judgment, suggesting many possible conclusions. It is even relentless in its search in the depths of its characters. There is yet, however, a point beyond which Hawthorne will not go; ultimate solutions are not appropriate in the merely human world. His sympathy with Hester and Dimmesdale is clear enough, but he allows them only to escape the irrevocable spiritual ruin which befalls Chillingworth. Figuratively his good wishes pursue them beyond life, but he does not presume himself to absolve them.

(p. 107)

But if not salvation, then what? Especially about Dimmesdale, one is tempted to ask why it is that he courts suffering so ardently. De Rougement asks a similar question about Tristan:

Why does he yearn after this particular kind of love [insatiable passion] notwithstanding that

---28Hawthorne, p. 149.
its effulgence must coincide with his self-destruction? The answer is that he reaches self-awareness and tests himself only by risking his life—in suffering and on the verge of death. . . . Suffering and understanding are deeply connected; death and self-awareness are in league. 29

We must ask ourselves if to understand through suffering is not the capital feature as well as the daring element in our most self-conscious mysticism. 30

That the answer to De Rougement's question is at least a qualified yes, is indicated by Evelyn Underhill. Speaking about the mystic's "ecstasy," she asks, "What does the mystic claim that he attains in this abnormal condition—this irresistible trance? The price that he pays is heavy, involving much psycho-physical wear and tear. He declares that his rapture or ecstasy includes a moment—often a very short, and always an indescribable moment—in which he enjoys a supreme knowledge of or participation in Divine Reality." 31

Dimmesdale, like the mystic, seems to seek union with God through his agony. When Chillingworth asks Dimmesdale to lay open his soul, to confess and cast off his burden of guilt, he retorts with violent jealousy: "Who art thou who meddlest in this matter?—that dares thrust himself between the sufferer and his God?" (p. 136). In his mortification,

29 De Rougement, p. 42.
30 Ibid., p. 46.
31 Page 369.
too, Dimmesdale resembles the mystic (Rulman Merswin, for example, who, following a mystic transport, was "seized with a hatred of his body, and inflicted on himself such hard mortifications that he fell ill"), and Hawthorne, in describing Dimmesdale's secret closet and his "bloody scourge," comments that "his inward trouble drove him to practices, more in accordance with the old, corrupted faith of Rome, than with the better light of the church in which he had been born and bred" (p. 143).

Finally, Dimmesdale, like the mystic, tries to arrive at self-knowledge, and consequently union with the Divine, by sounding the deepest recesses of his psyche. He sometimes sits "viewing his own face in a looking-glass, by the most powerful light which he could throw upon it. He thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify himself" (p. 143). The horrible irony, of course, is that for Dimmesdale, the light burns without illuminating. He does not, like Edwards, find a "delightful conviction." Instead, he finds only more blackness. The soul of the "successful" mystic ascends to the Divine radiance. Through purgation and purification, the mystic achieves illumination and finally union with the Absolute, at which point his entire being seems suffused with the

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light of the "Divine Immanence." Dimmesdale, however, instead of ascending toward the light, tries to purify himself by focusing the light inward into his own blackness. When the "successful" mystic achieves purification "the Self . . . surrenders itself, its individuality, and its will completely. It desires nothing, asks nothing, is utterly passive, and is thus prepared for Union. . . ." But Dimmesdale never surrenders Self. And the result is that the blackness eventually envelops the light.

"To the true lover of the Absolute, " writes Miss Underhill, "Purgation no less than Illumination is a privilege, a dreadful joy." But Dimmesdale, perhaps because he is not a true lover of the absolute, experiences only the Purgation. Dimmesdale, as far as the reader knows, never finds union with God. One is at first tempted to attribute this inability to his Puritan individualism and love of blackness, and certainly this seems to be implied in the novel. Yet, as we have seen, Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the greatest of the Puritans, did manage to achieve the mystic's goal. The answer, then, to Dimmesdale's failure must lie elsewhere, as I shall try to show in my conclusion.

If Dimmesdale, though, never finds union with God, he does, nevertheless, find a measure of self-knowledge. It

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33See Underhill, pp. 167-75 et. seq.

34Underhill, p. 170.
comes to him, however, not while he is sitting in front of his lamp, but after his forest interview with Hester.

Returning to town after his interview with Hester, Dimmesdale meets several people. The first three are one of his own deacons, the "oldest female member of his church," and "the youngest sister of them . . ., a maiden newly won--and won by the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale's own sermon, on the Sabbath after his vigil." To the first he can hardly "refrain from uttering certain blasphemous suggestions that rose into his mind, respecting the communion supper" (p. 217). In his encounter with the old woman "Mr. Dimmesdale, as the great enemy of souls, would have it, could recall no text of Scripture, nor aught else, except a brief, pithy, and, as it then appeared to him, unanswerable argument against the immortality of the human soul" (pp. 217-18). Then, as the young girl approaches him, "the arch-fiend whispered him to condense into small compass and drop into her tender bosom a germ of evil that would be sure to blossom darkly soon, and bear black fruit betimes" (p. 218). He subsequently fights off a temptation to teach "some very wicked words to a knot of little Puritan children," and another to bandy bawdy jokes with a sailor. Finally, he turns down an invitation from "Mistress Hibbins, the reputed witch lady" (p. 219).

Eventually, he manages to get back to his chamber without any external mishap, but he realizes that "Another
man had returned out of the forest; a wiser one; with a knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former never could have reached. A bitter kind of knowledge that!" (p. 222). Precisely what this bitter knowledge is that Dimmesdale has found is never quite clear. Perhaps it is that his entire being has become infected with sin, and not only with sin, but with doubt. He wants to shake the faith of the old man and woman and plant the seed of evil in the children and the young girl. Perhaps he has at last seen that his obsessive love of the blackest corners of the human soul has finally delivered him into the powers of darkness. Whatever the knowledge, its bitterness is unmistakable. This bitterness is confirmed by Dimmesdale before he dies.

Hester, leaning over him, pleads with him for one word of affirmation.

"Shall we not meet again?" whispered she, bending her face down close to his. "Shall we not spend our immortal life together? Surely, surely, we have ransomed one another, with all this woe! Thou lookest far into eternity, with those bright dying eyes! Then tell me what thou seest?"

"Hush, Hester, hush!" said he, with tremulous solemnity. "The law we broke! --the sin here so awfully revealed! --let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! It may be, that, when we forgot our God, --when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul, --it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet e'reafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion."

That last ray of hope Dimmesdale refuses to grant Hester, perhaps out of honesty. But having dampened her last hope
that "we . . . spend our immortal life together," he con-
tinues: "I God knows; and He is merciful! He has proved
his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me
this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending
that dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always
at red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this death of
triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these
agonies been wanting, I had been lost for ever! Praised be
his name! His will be done! Farewell.'" (p. 254).

The implication seems to be that he may not be lost
forever. Yet, while Dimmesdale's last address to the world
reveals again his unconquerable love of suffering, it betrays
also his romantic sensibility and ego. God "hath proved his
mercy . . . in my afflictions!" He has given me this "burn-
ing torture to bear upon my breast!" He has brought me
hither. And has turned my ignominy into triumph. Nor is
this egocentricity a new twist in Dimmesdale's character.
Not only has he abandoned Hester to face her fate alone, but
when he finally meets her in the forest he commences to pour
his own burdens on her. When she asks if he has found peace,
he answers, "None!—nothing but despair!" (p. 189). And
when she asks if his work does not bring him comfort, he
replies that it brings "'More misery, Hester!—only the more
misery.'" Finally, he has the audacity to tell her, "'Happy
are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon
Not a word does Dimmesdale have to say, as he lies on the threshold of death, about the suffering of the others who have been involved. Worse, he assumes that Chillingworth has been expressly sent by God to effect his, Dimmesdale's, salvation. The questions this assumption raises are critical. Dimmesdale has told Hester at one point, "We are not, Hester, the worst sinners in the world. There is one worse than even the polluted priest! That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin. He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart. Thou and I, Hester, never did so!" (p. 194). The first question concerns the quality of God's mercy. If, as Dimmesdale states, Chillingworth is the blackest of sinners, and if he has been sent to insure Dimmesdale's salvation, then the unavoidable inference must be that God has purposely damned one man to rescue another. Surely this is a dismal kind of mercy. The God of Jonathan Edwards may have been arbitrary, but he was not perverse.

The second question is one of the central problems of the novel and crucial to the destiny of the main characters. Is it possible for good to issue from evil, or evil from good? The conundrum is explored in two beautifully handled scenes, one between Chillingworth and Dimmesdale, and the other between Hester and Dimmesdale.
In the first of these scenes, Chillingworth is shown at his most diabolic. He is examining flowers picked from the graveyard. He explains their ugliness to Dimmesdale, who is watching him, by saying "They grew out of . . . [a dead man's] heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess during his lifetime" (p. 130). After some discussion in which Chillingworth tries to prod Dimmesdale into confessing what is gnawing at him, both men agree that it is best to publish one's sins. Whereupon Chillingworth remarks, "Yet some men bury their secrets. . . ." (p. 131).

"True; there are such men," answered Mr. Dimmesdale. "But, not to suggest more obvious reasons, it may be that they are kept silent by the very constitution of their nature. Or,--can we not suppose it?--guilty as they may be, retaining, nevertheless, a zeal for God's glory and man's welfare, they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service. So, to their own unutterable torment, they go about among their fellow-creatures, looking pure as new-fallen snow; whilst their hearts are all speckled and spotted with iniquity of which they cannot rid themselves."

"These men deceive themselves," said Roger Chillingworth, with somewhat more emphasis than usual, and making a slight gesture with his forefinger. "They fear to take up the shame that rightfully belongs to them. Their love for man, their zeal for God's service,--these holy impulses may or may not coexist in their hearts with the evil inmates to which their guilt has unbarred the door, and which must needs propagate a hellish breed within them. But, if they seek to glorify God, let them not lift heavenward their unclean hands! If they would serve their fellow-men, let them do it by making manifest the power and reality of conscience, in constraining them to penitential self-abasement! Wouldst thou have me to believe, O wise
and pious friend, that a false show can be better—can be more for God's glory, or man's welfare—than God's own truth? Trust me, such men deceive themselves!"

"It may be so," said the young clergyman indifferently, as waiving a discussion that he considered irrelevant or unseasonable.

Ironically, all this intellectual wrangling resolves into nothing. On the basis of reason alone, it is impossible to choose between the two arguments, since each takes off from a different premise. Both men know this to be the case. Chillingworth, however, is not particularly interested in arriving at abstract truth or in establishing his sophistic superiority; he is trying to trap Dimmesdale, to find the man who has "wronged" him. The minister, on the other hand, wants to justify himself, to attenuate his own procrastination and unwillingness to confess. It is the latter who finally terminates the discussion as irrelevant. He realizes that, given a certain set of circumstances, he (like Chillingworth, who later tells Hester that all he has done has been "a dark necessity"), acts not by logic but by the "constitution of his nature."

In the second scene, the confrontation with Hester in the forest, Dimmesdale, as is to be expected, is less the logician and more the impetuous lover. He blurts out his despair, and when Hester tries to reason him out of it, he
winds up taking the same position that Chillingworth had taken earlier.

"The people reverence thee," said Hester. "And surely thou workest good among them! Dost this bring thee no comfort?"

"More misery, Hester!—only the more misery!" answered the clergyman, with a bitter smile. "As concerns the good which I may appear to do, I have no faith in it. It must needs be a delusion. What can a ruined soul, like mine, effect towards the redemption of other souls?—or a polluted soul towards their purification?"

(p. 190)

Hester is unable to move Dimmesdale from this position by rational argument, but when she suggests that he run away, he contradicts his original stand by replying: "Lost as my own soul is, I would still do what I may for other human souls! I dare not quit my post, though an unfaithful sentinel, whose sure reward is death and dishonor, when his dreary watch shall come to an end!" (p. 196).

What should be the last word on the subject occurs after Dimmesdale returns from the forest and is in his study.

Left alone, the minister summoned a servant of the house, and requested food, which being set before him, he ate with ravenous appetite. Then, flinging the already written pages of the Election Sermon into the fire, he forthwith began another, which he wrote with such an impulsive flow of thought and emotion, that he fancied himself inspired; and only wondered that Heaven should see fit to transmit the grand and solemn music of its oracles through so foul an organ-pipe as he. However, leaving that mystery to solve itself, or go unsolved for ever, he drove his task onward, with earnest haste and ecstasy.

(Pp. 223-24)
The question of how heaven can project good through evil, Dimmesdale decides, is unanswerable. But underlying this is another question which, surprisingly enough for a Puritan minister, he does not raise explicitly, though Hawthorne does, with the phrase "fancied himself inspired." That is, tainted as he is, how can he be sure that his inspiration is coming from above and not below? Perry Miller states, "The Augustinian piety lives by its moments of exaltation; it requires that they who have great moments live afterwards in the memory of them, but no man on his black days can be certain that it was the finger of God which touched him the day before yesterday--particularly, when his minister tells him that Satan can simulate an angel of light and lead men to destruction by giving them false confidence." Unanswerable, then, is not only the question of how good can come out of evil, but of how one can know whether what appears to be good is good.

When Hawthorne, in the conclusion to The Scarlet Letter, informs the reader that in the absence of any "more devil's work on earth for him [Chillingworth] to do, it only remained for the unhumanized mortal to betake himself whither his Master would find him tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly" (p. 258), he strikes a false note, especially false since the destinies of both Hester and Dimmesdale have

36 The New England Mind, pp. 53-54.
been left (as they must be) so equivocal. It is as false a note as the moral which precedes it: "Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!" Both the damnation and the moral try to resolve what in the course of the book has proved to be irresolvable: the interrelationship between good and evil, human will and sin, guilt and redemption.

It is true, perhaps, that Dimmesdale himself does not show any capacity for entertaining these questions on a high level of abstraction. That is, he does not seem at any point to concern himself with larger social and cultural issues, but to concentrate with morbid intensity on his own personal problem. But that problem is itself inseparable from larger issues. For in probing his ego, Dimmesdale gropes for the ultimate dividing line between individual responsibility to God and individual responsibility to man. The fact that he is a minister in a Puritan community complicates his situation infinitely, as he himself realizes when he tells Hester that there would be no problem if he were an atheist devoid of conscience.

The problem is crystallized at the moment of Dimmesdale's confession, an act of tantalizing ambiguity. No doubt the confession has a beneficial effect on Dimmesdale himself. It purges him of the corruption he has been carrying in his heart. On the other hand, it is very likely
that if his confession were believed by his congregation, it might, as he well realizes, shake their faith irreparably. And if the act does indeed have such an effect, might it not, in the end, be more damning in the eyes of God than keeping silence? Since he has already started on the path of concealment, what ultimate good can it do for him to confess publicly just when he knows he is about to die? Dimmesdale, as we have seen, has weighed the problem intellectually in his conversations with Chillingworth and Hester. He is fully aware that he must make a choice between duty to Man and duty to God. In the final analysis, however, Dimmesdale's act is no more rational in this instance than his previous actions have been. Like Chillingworth, he acts out of a "dark necessity." Just as in life he did not have the strength to confess, so in dying he does not have the strength to resist confessing. But this is not to impair his stature as an intellectual. Rather, it is to classify Dimmesdale with those productions of the nineteenth-century imagination who are capable of intellectual awareness and activity at the same time that they are incapable of acting rationally. Raskolnikov should have too much sense to slaughter a vicious pawnbroker who probably will not live much longer anyway, but he commits the act just the same. It is both futile and foolhardy for Julien Sorel to murder Madame de Renal; he does it nevertheless.
Charles Swann realizes that he should know better than to get involved with Odette, but still he does.

Kierkegaard, in *Fear and Trembling*, writes, "In spite of the severity with which ethics requires revelation, it cannot be denied that secrecy and silence really make a man great precisely because they are characteristics of inwardness" (p. 97). If Kierkegaard is right, then in so far as he cannot retain his inwardness, Dimmesdale falls short of greatness. He cannot achieve what Kierkegaard calls "teleological suspension of the ethical," and consequently winds up refusing to bear an intolerable burden in behalf of his flock. But though his action is intensely egocentric, it has wide social ramifications within the context of the novel.

In his essay "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," Lionel Trilling observes that "in America in the nineteenth century, Henry James was alone in knowing that to scale the moral and aesthetic heights in the novel one had to use the ladder of social observation" (p. 206). The persuasiveness of Trilling's argument, of course, lies in his use of metaphor. If one can be said to "scale moral and aesthetic heights," then it follows that he can properly do so by using "social observation" as a ladder. If, on the other hand, one wishes to say (and it seems equally justifiable to do so) that in the novel the writer probes psychological and moral conditions, the ladder of social observation becomes anomalous.
The point is, as Trilling himself remarks, that manners are infinitely varied, and social observation too can take any number of shapes, depending on the observer. For Dimmesdale, all cultural and social issues finally boil down to what Buber calls the primary word, I-Thou, which "establishes the world of relation," as opposed to the world of experience. It is this relation to a living Thou that Dimmesdale seeks, rather than mere experience of an It.

In the search for the evil in his own soul, and in his attempt to purify himself, Dimmesdale is manifesting the social consciousness of the Puritan intellectual. His relation to man is contingent on his finding his relationship to God, and this condition is reflected in his social milieu. Trilling says,

What I understand by manners . . . is a culture's hum and buzz of implication. I mean the whole evanescent context in which its explicit statements are made. It is that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning. They are the things that for good or bad draw the people of a culture together and that separate them from the people of another culture.

(p. 201)

At another point in the same essay, "Trilling concludes from this definition of manners that American writers "sought . . . a reality [that] . . . was only tangential to society" (p. 206). But in The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne recreates the
"manners" of Puritan society, the "buzz and him" of a theocratic culture in which the individual's relation to society is dependent on his relationship to God. And in Dimmesdale he recreates the intellectual trying to function in that society.

When Hawthorne told Horatio Bridge that The Scarlet Letter is positively a hell-fire[d] story . . . ,"\(^{37}\) he was much closer to the truth than he was in the concluding chapter of the book. Hawthorne discovered that once the hell-fire had been kindled it was not easily extinguished.

To James T. Fields, junior partner in the firm which published The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne wrote, "I find it impossible to relieve the shadows of the story with so much light as I would have gladly thrown in."\(^{38}\) It should be no surprise, then, to find that the book, as Hyatt Waggoner observes, shocked not only his contemporaries, but "to some degree Hawthorne himself . . . ."\(^{39}\)

The House of the Seven Gables is not as shocking, not as black, and not as great a work of art as The Scarlet Letter. It "represents the beginning of that decline in the quality of Hawthorne's writing which did not end until


\(^{38}\) Quoted from Stewart, p. 95.

\(^{39}\) Hawthorne, p. 151.
it had reached the almost complete failure of creativity of the unfinished romances."^0 Hawthorne, however, considered the later book "more characteristic of my mind, and more proper and natural for me to write."^1 He may have felt this way precisely because The Scarlet Letter is so much more relentless and terrifying in its drive to uncover the core of the human psyche and of the human condition in general. It is possibly a revulsion against the burrowing Hawthorne himself had done in the earlier book when he has Phoebe say of Clifford, "When he is cheerful,—when the sun shines into his mind,—then I venture to peep in just as far as the light reaches, but no further. It is holy ground where the shadow falls."^2 But having made his dive into the impenetrable blackness, Hawthorne was ready to come to the surface, to write a book which would accommodate the light that refused to enter The Scarlet Letter.

Consequently, from Dimmesdale, the Puritan intellectual, to Holgrave, the secular intellectual, the decline in the depth of characterization is apparent. Of Holgrave, Roy Harvey Pearce writes, "Explicitly, Hawthorne makes ... [him] out to be a young intellectual, like so many other

^0Ibid., p. 170.

^1Bridge, p. 126.

young intellectuals in nineteenth century America, at once mobile, unstable, rationalistic, disinterested, liberal, and eager for change." He is "the 'new man,'" says Fogle, "the democrat at his best, yet possessed of flaws as well as virtues. In his haste he would destroy much that is good along with the evil. . . . His well-meant universal philanthropy would eradicate all human warmth, idiosyncrasies, relationships—all that is represented by the heart, in fact."  

Holgrave is a "new man," moreover, not only in his political liberalism, but in his person and associations. He is a natural aristocrat, and whatever he has achieved he has achieved by his own effort. Of plebeian Maule stock, as opposed to the aristocratic Pyncheons, he is nonetheless recognizable, in both bearing and dress, as a gentleman. He is

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44 Fogle, p. 128.
to be—by the rather remarkable whiteness and nicety of his clean linen.

(p. 61)

The combination of dignity and simplicity in Holgrave's dress and bearing are telling, just as they were for Benjamin Franklin while he was in Paris. He is impressive, but without being a dandy.

The flaws that Fogle speaks of also fall into these two categories of personal and ideological, both intermixing to some extent. Holgrave's personal flaw, already mentioned by Fogle, is congenital in almost all of Hawthorne's intellectual characters. It is the Chillingworth, Ethan Brand, Rappaccini flaw without the obsession: the desiccation of the heart by the intellect, and the consequent alienation from the mainstream of humanity. Phoebe, in reflecting on the romantic young man, "scarcely thought him affectionate in his nature. He was too calm and cool an observer. Phoebe felt his eye often; his heart, seldom or never. He took a certain kind of interest in Hepzibah and her brother, and Phoebe herself. He studied them attentively, but never gave any reliable evidence that he loved them better in proportion as he knew them more. In his relations with them, he seemed to be in quest of mental food, not heart-sustenance. Phoebe could not conceive what interested him so much in her friends and herself, intellectually, since he cared nothing for them . . . as objects of human affection" (p. 213).
In answer to Phoebe's declaration that she would probe Clifford's mind only "as far as the light reaches," Holgrave asserts, "Had I your opportunities, no scruples would prevent me from fathoming Clifford to the full depth of my plummet line!" (p. 214).

It is Phoebe who rescues Holgrave from the fate of the "lost" intellectuals. His love for her finally shakes him out of his role of observer. "Her thought had scarcely done him justice when it pronounced him cold; or, if so, he had grown warmer now" (p. 218). When she questions his intentions toward the Pyncheon family, he replies, "I do feel an interest in this ... poverty-stricken old ... lady, and this ... shattered gentleman. ... But you have no conception what a different kind of heart mine is from your own. It is not my impulse ... either to help or hinder; but to look on, to analyze, to explain matters to myself, and to comprehend the drama. ... If permitted to witness the close, I doubt not to derive a moral satisfaction from it. ... But, though Providence sent you hither to help, and sends me only as a privileged and meet spectator, I pledge myself to lend these unfortunate beings whatever aid I can!" (p. 258).

At first, Holgrave conceives himself as merely a spectator in the human drama unfolding around him. He is an analyst, an objective, uninvolved scientist. But under Phoebe's influence, he begins to emerge from his passivity,
and assume his human responsibility. When he has Phoebe in a state of near hypnosis, he does not, as his ancestor had done to Alice Pyncheon, take advantage of her. Instead, because of his "reverence for another's individualty" (p. 253), he breaks the spell before it is indissoluble.

Ideologically, Holgrave is an Emersonian. Emerson had attacked the preoccupation with the past in the "Introduction" of *Nature*, asserting that "our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism." Holgrave asks, "Shall we never get rid of this Past?" And then, in a passage reminiscent of Emerson's *American Scholar*, he goes on to tell Phoebe that "we read in dead men's books! We laugh at dead men's jokes, and cry at dead men's pathos! We are sick of dead men's diseases, physical and moral. . . . We worship the living Deity according to dead men's forms and creeds. Whatever we seek to do, of our own free motion, a dead man's icy hand obstructs us! . . . I ought to have said, too, that we live in dead men's houses; as, for instance, in this of the Seven Gables!" (pp. 219-20). But perhaps the key to the difference between Holgrave and his master lies in the last sentence. Holgrave is not so much an idealist as a pragmatist. Before becoming a daguerreotypist, he had been a schoolmaster, salesman, political editor of a country newspaper, a peddler, a dentist, an official on a packetship, a world traveller, a Fourierist, and a lecturer on Mesmerism.
As long as the Pyncheon house does not belong to him, he is anxious to tear it down. With nothing to lose and with no stake in the society he lives in, he can well afford to be a bohemian. When he first takes lodging from Hepzibah, he had the strangest companions imaginable; men with long beards, and dressed in linen blouses, and other such new-fangled and ill-fitting garments; reformers, temperance lecturers, and all manner of cross-looking philanthropists; community-men, and comeouters, as Hepzibah believed, who acknowledged no law, and ate no solid food, but lived on the scent of other people's cookery, and turned up their noses at the fare. As for the daguerreotypist, she had read a paragraph in a penny paper, the other day, accusing him of making a speech full of wild and disorganizing matter, at a meeting of his banditti-like associates.

(p. 108)

But Holgrave's bohemianism, like his ideas, is shallow. He does not really believe in bohemianism any more than he believes in the ideas he has articulated to Phoebe. And he abandons both at the first opportunity. For Holgrave, detestation of the past and its burdens is more a matter of spring fever than of intellectual commitment. Describing Holgrave's state of mind, Hawthorne writes, "Man's own youth is the world's youth; at least, he feels as if it were, and imagines that the earth's granite substance is something not yet hardened, and which he can mould into whatever shape he likes. So it was with Holgrave. He could talk sagely about the world's old age, but never actually believed what he said. . ." (p. 215).
At the first promise of solidity and stability, Holgrave gives up "his crude, wild, and misty philosophy, ... his magnanimous zeal for man's welfare, and his recklessness of whatever the ages had established in man's behalf. . .." (p. 217). Again it is Phoebe who is the catalyst. Not only does she rescue Holgrave from his intellect, she also rescues him from his political and social radicalism. There is for both of them a moment of danger. Phoebe is frightened by Holgrave, "not by any doubt of his integrity to whatever law he acknowledged, but by a sense that his law differed from her own" (p. 213). But just as Jane Talbot takes William Colden into hand and converts him from Godwinism, so Phoebe straightens out Holgrave. A woman unleashing her feminine charm and moral force is too much for the most politically sophisticated male. In the following dialogue, Phoebe is reacting to a tentative proposal made by Holgrave: "'And then--I am afraid!' continued Phoebe, shrinking towards Holgrave, even while she told him so frankly the doubts with which he affected her. 'You will lead me out of my own quiet path. You will make me strive to follow you where it is pathless. I cannot do so. It is not my nature. I shall sink down and perish!'" (p. 362).

But Phoebe need have no fear. Through the prism of her female sensibility Holgrave has already seen the error of his ways.

"Ah, Phoebe!" exclaimed Holgrave, with almost a sigh, and a smile that was burdened with thought.
"It will be far otherwise than as you forebode. The world owes all its onward impulses to men ill at ease. The happy man inevitably confines himself within ancient limits. I have a presentiment that, hereafter, it will be my lot to set out trees, to make fences,—perhaps, even, in due time, to build a house for another generation,—in a word, to conform myself to laws, and the peaceful practice of society. Your poise will be more powerful than any oscillating tendency of mine."
(p. 363)

Holgrave's presentiment is remarkably accurate. At the death of the old Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, Clifford Pyncheon, "became rich; so did Hepzibah; so did our little village maiden, and, through her, that sworn foe of wealth and all manner of conservatism,—the wild reformer,—Holgrave!" (p. 370). And this, of course, is to say that he has now lost all justification for his former radicalism. Just before the Holgraves and remaining Pyncheons move into "the elegant country-seat of the late Judge Pyncheon, Holgrave comments, "I wonder that the late Judge—being so opulent, and with a reasonable prospect of transmitting his wealth to descendants of his own—should not have felt the propriety of embodying so excellent a piece of domestic architecture in stone, rather than in wood." In answer to Phoebe's ejaculation of surprise at the inconsistency between Holgrave's recent observation and his former principles, Holgrave says, "Ah, Phoebe, I told you how it should be! . . . You find me a conservative already! Little did I think ever to become one. It is especially unpardonable in this dwelling of so much hereditary misfortune, and under
the eye of yonder portrait of a model conservative, who, in that very character, rendered himself so long the evil destiny of his race" (p. 373).

"Holgrave," remarks Waggoner, "is an interesting creation, the product of a shrewd analysis." The estimate, is, I think, just. Hawthorne portrays in Holgrave the ubiquitous rebellious dispossessed intellectual who modifies his liberalism and recants his radicalism as soon as he assumes social ties and becomes a respected member of the establishment.

The seeds of corruption that remain dormant in Holgrave flower in Miles Coverdale, who is a Holgrave grown middle-aged without the tempering influence of a Phoebe. In Coverdale, "only a poet, and . . . no great affair at that," Holgrave's intellectual objectivity and coolness have crystallized into ice. From the point of view of structure of the novel, of course, Coverdale, as narrator (and a forerunner of the Jamesian central consciousness), must remain to some extent aloof. Nevertheless, he states quite explicitly about himself: "That cold tendency, between instinct and intellect, which made me pry with a speculative interest into people's passions and impulses, appeared to have gone far towards unhumanizing my heart" (p. 151).

45Page 171.

Coverdale, describing in Blithedale a Utopian venture in which he has been a participant, avers that he does not regret that he (like Holgrave) "once had a faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny,—yes!—and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment" (pp. 6-7). But that he no longer believes in the improvability of man's lot is also clear, for he says, "I rejoice that I could once think better of the world's improvability than it deserved" (p. 16). The unimprovability of the world is directly related to Coverdale's own basic flaw: spiritual coldness, and an inability to experience and communicate real human affection.

But the flaw is not limited to Coverdale himself, and it is its very ubiquity that makes the attempt at establishing a Utopia at Blithedale, or anywhere else, a dismal failure. The inability to communicate a sense of brotherhood becomes apparent even before the Utopian experiment is well under way. On the night before their departure for Blithedale, four charter members of the group are riding through a heavy snow storm, feeling, as Coverdale describes the scene, a rather gay spirit of anticipation and benevolence.

Sometimes, encountering a traveller, we shouted a friendly greeting; and he, unmuffling his ears to the bluster and the snow-spray, and listening eagerly, appeared to think our courtesy worth less than the trouble which it cost him. The churl! He understood the shrill whistle of the blast, but had no intelligence for our blithe
tones of brotherhood. This lack of faith in our cordial sympathy, on the traveller's part, was one among the innumerable tokens how difficult a task we had in hand, for the reformation of the world.

(p. 8)

The double irony here is not very subtly concealed. On the one hand, the traveller is incapable of accepting a proffer of love tendered by strangers, while on the other, Coverdale's hostile reference to the "churl" casts doubt on the sincerity of the greeters, and implies that the "churl's" belligerence may indeed be justified.

All reform, as a matter of fact, becomes dangerous principally because it tends to become an end in itself which eventually displaces human values. Hollingsworth, the most zealous of reformers, shows himself to be a warm, tender, solicitous human spirit when he devotedly nurses the ailing Coverdale to health. But even he has joined Blithedale "chiefly because we were estranging ourselves from the world, with which his lonely and exclusive object in life had already put him at odds" (p. 151). And it is not long before Coverdale finds that

by and by, you missed the tenderness of yesterday, and grew drearily conscious that Hollingsworth had a closer friend than ever you could be; and this friend was the cold, spectral monster which he had himself conjured up, and on which he was wasting all the warmth of his heart, and of which, at last, --as these men of a mighty purpose so invariably do,--he had grown to be the bond-slave. It was his philanthropic theory.

This was a result exceedingly sad to contemplate, considering that it had been mainly brought about by the very ardor and exuberance of his philanthropy.
Sad, indeed, but by no means unusual: he had taught his benevolence to pour its warm tide exclusively through one channel; so that there was nothing to spare for other great manifestations of love to man. . . .

(p. 51)

Hollingsworth's drive to reform mankind has stultified his natural human warmth and made him into a monster. Like the revolutionary zealot, he is convinced that he must reform the human race whether the race wishes it or not. Coverdale recognizes the disparity between the desire to reform humanity and true human love in a moment of revelation, which comes while he is watching Hollingsworth drive a yoke of oxen:

The harsh tones of his voice, shouting to the sluggish steers, made me sensible even at such a distance, that he was ill at ease, and that the balked philanthropist had the battle-spirit in his heart.

"Mankind, in Hollingsworth's opinion," thought I, "is but another yoke of oxen, as stubborn, stupid, and sluggish as our old Brown and Bright. He vituperates us aloud, and curses us in his heart, and will begin to prick us with the goad-stick, by and by."

(pp. 97-98)

One must remember that the scene is being reflected on by Coverdale's skeptical mind. But the disastrous events which follow (the collapse of Blithedale and the suicide of Zenobia) would tend to indicate that Coverdale cannot be completely wrong.

If Hollingsworth has abandoned himself too monomanically to reform, the same is not true of Coverdale. Though the latter says that he "once had faith . . . enough to form
generous hopes of the world's destiny," it is obvious that it does not take much to shake that faith. The mere presence of Silas Foster, a shrewd Yankee farmer who still carries part of his farm under his fingernails, convinces Coverdale of the impossibility of equalitarian brotherhood as an ideal. While the future Blithedale residents are sitting around the fire after dinner, "stout," "practical" Silas reminds the group that someone will have to "go to Brighton fair, and buy half a dozen pigs" (p. 16). "Pigs!" Coverdale reacts. "Good heavens! had we come out from among the swinish multitude for this?" Nor does it take a great deal of Silas's practical plain talk before Coverdale becomes "sensible that, as regarded society at large, we stood in a position of new hostility, rather than new brotherhood" (p. 16).

Coverdale's misgivings as to the efficacy and advisability of smashing the established dividing lines of society turn out to be justified. The intellectual "communitarians" are not, as is to be expected, very efficient farmers. But this is not what bothers Coverdale primarily.

The period of our new way of life was not lest we should fail in becoming practical agriculturists, but that we should probably cease to be anything else. While our enterprise lay all in theory, we had pleased ourselves with delectable visions of the spiritualization of labor. It was to be our form of prayer and ceremonial of worship. Each stroke of the hoe was to uncover some aromatic root of wisdom, heretofore hidden from the sun. Pausing in the field, to let the wind exhale the moisture from our foreheads, were to look upward,
and catch glimpses into the far-off soul of truth. In this point of view, matters did not turn out quite so well as we anticipated... The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over, were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, on the contrary, were fast becoming cloddish... Intellectual activity is incompatible with any large amount of bodily exercise. The yoeman and the scholar—the yoeman and the man of finest moral culture... are two distinct individuals, and can never be melted or welded into one substance. (p. 62)

Clearly, Coverdale is convinced that without an intellectual "class" there can be no intellectual artifacts. By the very nature of his cold personality he is separated from the rest of humanity, but he also believes in the separation theoretically. It is as ridiculous for Coverdale to belabor clods of earth as it is for Silas Foster to discuss books.

Emerson had tried to impress on the mind of the American scholar that "Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier." He had advised that "The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, Night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing—beholding and beholden. The scholar is he of all

47 Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Cambridge, 1957), p. 64.
men whom this spectacle most engages." But the grass and the wind, the sun and the stars are not avenues of truth for Coverdale. Emerson had also said, "There goes in the world a notion that the scholar should be a recluse. . . ." At least Coverdale seems to have found that notion correct. In the midst of his farm labor he cannot make poetry. The earth thickens his fist and the sun bakes his brain. Involved in the everyday labor of the communitarian enterprise, he loses his poetic inspiration.

What Coverdale finds at Blithedale is not "Man," the Emersonian ideal, but the ugliness of the multitude and the drudgery of toil. When Hollingsworth asks Coverdale to join him, therefore, it is not surprising that the latter sees "in his scheme of philanthropy nothing but what was odious. A loathesomeness that was to be forever in my daily work! A great black ugliness of sin, which he proposed to collect out of a thousand human hearts, and that we should spend our lives in an experiment of transmuting it into virtue!" (p. 131).

Coverdale is constitutionally incapable of egalitarian democracy. The masses he finds repulsive, both in actuality and in the abstract. His coldness, which colors the tone of the entire book, and his revulsion from the

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48 Ibid., p. 65.

49 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
proletariat, and in a sense of complete enervation and malaise. He confesses, "As regards human progress . . . , let them believe in it who can, and aid in it who choose. If I could earnestly do either, it might be all the better for my comfort. As Hollingsworth once told me, I lack a purpose. How strange! He was ruined, morally, by an overplus of the very same ingredient, the want of which, I occasionally suspect, has rendered my own life all an emptiness" (p. 243).

Hollingsworth is destroyed by his devotion to reform as an abstraction. Coverdale cannot devote himself to either man or abstract ideals. Even his poetry, which he eventually gives up, is not enough to fill the vacuum left by his lack of human compassion. He has rejected just about everything but his study and his comfort, and yet, from his study, the best he has been able to do is "a pretty little volume." And the enervation of his intellect is underlined by the presence of Zenobia's powerful mind and will.

Roy Male feels that "We sympathize with Coverdale partly because he resembles the modern intellectual cut off from ancient certitudes, longing to submerge himself in a group yet fearful that in doing so he will lose his individuality." Wagoner, however, writes, "Surely the chief

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difficulty in the way of a greater enjoyment of the novel is created by Coverdale. He is . . . a very Jamesian character. . . . But whereas James manages to make us feel sympathy for his characters, Hawthorne makes us feel little or none for Coverdale. Perhaps the basic reason is that Hawthorne disliked the Coverdale in himself too much, so that he was not in sympathy with his own central creation."  

I would tend to agree with Waggoner that it is difficult to sympathize with Coverdale. His morbid fear of losing his individuality, his intense egocentricity, his aesthete's aloofness and snobbishness, his inability either to project or to accept any human warmth, all make him one of the least admirable of Hawthorne's characters.  

If Coverdale has a saving grace, it is that he never quite gives in completely to his weaknesses. In spite of his natural coolness, he manages to fall in love with Priscilla, though he remains too ashamed to express his love till the very last line of the book. And much as he seems to prefer an emasculated existence, still he feels, "were there any cause, in this whole chaos of human struggle, worth a sane man's dying for, and which my death would benefit, then--provided, however, the effort did not involve an unreasonable amount of trouble--methinks I might be bold to offer up my life" (p. 243).  

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Kenyon, the sculptor in *The Marble Faun*, is a moralizing extension of Coverdale. As Male puts it, "If he is more substantial than Miles Coverdale, he is also much more stuffy. Hawthorne undoubtedly intended to portray the rigidity of the refined intellectual, but surely he did not mean Kenyon to be as insufferable as the modern reader finds him."  

Kenyon retains the cold aloofness of Coverdale, but adds to it an insufferable pomposity that is his own. He is more of an aesthete than Coverdale, but also more of a moralizer. Meditating over Trajan's Forum, he says, "Dead emperors have very little delight in their columns, I am afraid. . . . All that rich sculpture of Trajan's bloody warfare, twining from the base of the pillar to its capital, may be but an ugly spectacle for his ghostly eyes, if he considers that this huge, storied shaft must be laid before the judgment-seat, as a piece of the evidence of what he did in the flesh" (p. 180). Such self-righteous outbursts are what Kenyon is made of.

When Miriam, after Kenyon has showed some reluctance to listen to her troubles, says to him, "You are as cold and pitiless as your own marble" (p. 155), she is probably right. What she should have added, perhaps, is that he is also maddeningly complacent and smug. Dimmesdale is more than . . .

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redeemed by his agony; Holgrave is redeemed by his love of Phoebe; and Coverdale by his ability view himself ironically. Kenyon has none of these qualities. He is too pleased with himself to undergo any sort of agony comparable to Dimmesdale's. He does not so much love Hilda as worship her angelic goodness. Finally, he takes himself too seriously to recognize his own pomposity.

But it is certainly difficult for anyone else to take seriously the man who can say to the simple Hilda: "Were you my guide, my counsellor, my inmost friend, with that white wisdom which clothes you as a celestial garment, all would go well. O Hilda, guide me home!" (p. 520).

The most verbose of Hawthorne's intellectual characters, Kenyon is also the shallowest. Immediately preceding his proposal, Hilda had rebuked Kenyon for advocating the heresy of the Fortunate Fall. Be that as it may, there is nothing at all fortunate about the fall from the sublime agony of Dimmesdale to the ridiculous transport of Kenyon.
CHAPTER V

THE INTELLECTUAL AS DEMOCRAT

Hawthorne's intellectuals feel constantly threatened by the danger that the mind will dominate the heart. In the "sunny" novels (The House of the Seven Gables and The Marble Faun) heart and head combine (Holgrave and Phoebe, Kenyon and Hilda) to bring to the intellectual salvation and happiness. In the dark novels, the intellectual remains incarcerated in the dungeon of his own mind. But in all cases there is a tendency in the intellectual to retreat from the world, or to approach it coldly and distrustfully --to dread exposure, and to prefer the role of observer (Dimmesdale turns the observation inward) to that of participant.

Hawthorne's intellectuals, then, much as they may hover on the threshold of democracy, always retreat eventually. Out of a congenital dread of the masses they turn from a lukewarm, shallow liberalism to a quiet, secure, isolated, and equally shallow conservatism. Always their coldness stands between them and the turbulent flux of common humanity. Holgrave shifts from investigator in the Pyncheon household to custodian of Pyncheon aristocracy.

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Coverdale, even in the midst of an experiment in communal life, finds himself a secret tree hermitage from which he can observe the inhabitants of Blithedale without being seen. And Kenyon becomes a calm spectator of the doom of Donatello and Miriam.

This inability of Hawthorne's intellectuals to immerse themselves in the stream of humanity, and to experience the feeling of Utopian optimism, prevents them from ever sliding into a complete rejection of the past and of established societal and class structures.

A very different sort of intellectual is Ishmael, who sails before the mast of the Pequod in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. The most profound of all fictional American intellectuals, he is also the most dedicated democrat, and it is not surprising that he narrates the great democratic epic. In some ways he resembles Holgrave. Both are self-educated. Both have engaged in numerous occupations, and both have been, among other things, schoolteachers. Aside from an occasional denunciation of the past, however, Holgrave does not show any signs of deep thought, and one rather tends to agree with the narrator's estimation of him: "He considered himself a thinker, and was certainly of a thoughtful turn, but, with his own path to discover, had perhaps hardly yet reached the point where an educated man begins to think."\(^1\)

\(^1\)Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, p. 216.
In this he is not at all like Ishmael, who thinks furiously in all directions. As Alfred Kazin points out, Ishmael is . . . the single mind, from whose end­lessly turning spool of thought the whole story is unwound. It is Ishmael's contemplativeness, his dreaming, that articulates the wonder of the seas and the fabulousness of the whale and the terror of the deep. All that can be meditated and summed up and hinted at, as the reflective essence of the story itself, is given us by Ishmael. . . . It is Ishmael who tries to sum up the whole creation in a single book. . . . It is Ishmael's gift for speculation that explains the terror we come to feel. . . . It is Ishmael who . . . embodies for us man as a thinker, whose reveries transcend space and time.2

And yet, in good American fashion, Ishmael points out that "perhaps, to be true philosophers, we mortals should not be conscious of so living or so striving. So soon as I hear that such or such a man gives himself out for a philosopher, I conclude that, like the dyspeptic old woman, he must have 'broken his digester.'"3 Unlike Holgrave, Ishmael refuses the title of philosopher. He refuses it, moreover, at the very moment that he is philosophizing, and shows his disdain for the title-minded man by ending in flourishes of colloquialism. One is reminded of Emerson's distinction between the "mere thinker" and Man Thinking.


3Ibid., p. 59. Page references in my text are to this edition. Thoreau had recorded, in his Journal, "What is religion? That which is never spoken." (Entry for August 18, 1858.)
Ishmael, too, does not suffer from the congenital reserve of Holgraine, Coverdale, and Kenyon. As a result, he falls much more easily into his democratic pose, and is much less self-deprecating about it. As H. P. Vincent points out in *The Trying-out of Moby Dick*, Ishmael is a kind of Everyman. And yet, what an Everyman he is: an Everyman who is a walking encyclopedia, stuffed to overbrimming with cetological facts; an Everyman who speculates on the deepest human problems; an Everyman who can warn the unwary to avoid the honey-head of Plato, and to beware of the opposing philosophies of Kant and Locke. And withal, he is a democrat; not an apologetic democrat, either, but a democrat with swagger. He brags that he does not go to sea as a passenger, "for to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse. . ." (p. 24). "Nor," he adds, though I am something of a salt, do I ever go to sea as a Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook, I abandon the glory and distinction of such offices to those who like them. For my part, I abominate all honorable respectable toils, trials, and tribulations of every kind whatsoever. It is quite as much as I can do to take care of myself, without taking care of ships, barques, brigs, schooners, and what not. And as for going as cook—though I confess there is considerable glory in that, a cook being a sort of officer on shipboard—yet, somehow, I never fancied broiling fowls; . . .

No, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the forecastle, aloft there to the royal masthead. True, they rather order me about some, and make me jump from spar to spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow.

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4(Boston, 1949), p. 56.
And at first, this sort of thing is unpleasant enough. It touches one's sense of honor, particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes. And more than all, if just previous to putting your hand into the tar-pot, you have been lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe of you. The transition is keen one, I assure you, from a schoolmaster to a sailor, and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and the Stoics to enable you to grin and bear it. But even this wears off in time.

What of it, if some old hunks of a sea-captain orders me to get a broom and sweep down the decks? What does that indignity amount to, weighed, I mean, in the scales of the New Testament? Do you think the archangel Gabriel thinks anything the less of me, because I promptly and respectfully obey that old hunks in that particular instance? Who ain't a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way—either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content.

We hear much of the magnificence of Ahab. But who can be more magnificent than Ishmael, revelling so good-humoredly in his hard-knocks, and yet without any of the Panglossian optimism that is so irritating in the philanthropists who were such an abomination to Hawthorne? His acceptance is not grounded on a belief in the best of all possible worlds, but in the belief that from a metaphysical point of view, all men get their knocks in the end. He says, at one point, "There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the
wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is in nobody's expense but his own" (p. 186). Amazing, too, in the first quotation, is the movement of Ishmael's mind, of which I will have more to say subsequently. At this juncture, it is sufficient to point out the dexterity with which he moves from description in the first paragraph to reflection on the facts in the second, and finally, to metaphysical speculation in the last paragraph. We get the sense that Ishmael's mind is simultaneously diving into the unknown and expanding toward the infinite. No shallow democrat or reformer is this Ishmael.

And yet, he is a reformer. Charles H. Foster, in a recent reinterpretation of Moby Dick points out, perhaps a little strenuously, but convincingly nonetheless, that in addition to George Stewart's two Moby Dicks there is a third one, which is "a democratic anti-slavery fable." Foster's

5"Something in Emblems: A Reinterpretation of Moby Dick," New England Quarterly, XXXIII (March, 1961), 21. From Mardi, Foster quotes the following in support of his thesis: "But sin it is, no less;--a blot, foul as the crater-pool of conscience or no conscience--ere he die--let every master who wrenches bond-babe from mother, that the nipple tear; unwreathes the arms of sisters; or cuts the holy unity in twain; till apart fall man and wife, like one bleeding body cleft:--let that master thrice shrive his soul; take every sacrament; on his bended knees give up the ghost;--yet shall he die despairing; and live again, to die forever damned." Herman Melville, Mardi: And a Voyage Thither (New York, 1849), II, 247-48. He might also have used the following passage from Pierre: "Some unprofessional gentlemen of the aristocratic South, who happen to own slaves, give those slaves liberty to go and seek work, and every night return with their wages, which constitute those idle gentlemen's income. . . . Yet let not such an one be over-confident. Our God is a jealous God; he wills not that any
case is grounded mainly on external evidence, Melville's relationship with his father-in-law, Judge Lemuel Shaw, and with Hawthorne. "When we appraise Melville in 1850-1851," Foster writes, "we have a writer who despite his relations with the American right had also evinced the attitudes of the American left, and his interests seem a good deal less timeless, and a good deal more engaged than is implied in most accounts of the creation of Moby Dick. There begin to appear some reasons for suspecting that Melville may have been actually as independent of Hawthorne in his social views as in his artistic practice." Furthermore, Foster feels that in his much-quoted June, 1851, letter to Hawthorne, Melville "is issuing a warning that there are dangerously democratic things coming in Moby Dick. . . ."

It does not, I think, detract from the cogency of Foster's argument to say that Melville was engaged not only on the level of contemporary social issues but on the level of timelessness as well; indeed, his very ability to invest particular issues with eternal significance is part of the greatness of the book. We have already seen this tendency operating in the mind of Ishmael as he shifts from the


6 Ibid., p. 8.

7 Ibid., p. 10. One of the key citations from the letter: "When you hear of my ruthless democracy on all sides, you may possibly feel a touch of a shrink."
question of his own lowly position in society to the universal question of man's place in the Cosmos. This same process of expansiveness occurs in the abolition theme.

When Foster moves from external evidence to the novel itself, he sees the abolition theme working out principally in the relationship between Ahab and Pip. And surely some element of it is there. But once one acknowledges that the theme is in the book at all, it certainly seems most obvious in the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg. If Ishmael is an abolitionist, however, he is not the abolitionist who was roundly denounced by Emerson in "Self-Reliance":

If an angry bigot assumes this bountiful cause of Abolition, and comes to me with his last news from Barbadoes, why should I not say to him, "Go love thy infant; love they wood-chopper; be good natured and modest; have that grace; and never varnish your hard and uncharitable ambition with this incredible tenderness for black folk a thousand miles off. Thy love afar is spite at home." Rough and graceless would be such greeting, but truth is handsomer than the affection of love. Your goodness must have some edge to it,—else it is none.

Ishmael's abolitionism is firmly rooted in brotherly, if not Christian love, and as a consequence, the contemporary social issue of American slavery is merged with the timelessness of the question of universal human interdependence. And the miracle of Moby Dick is that the

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[Riverside, p. 150.]
contemporaneity and timelessness are fused into a majestic whole. Melville, to borrow a phrase from Thoreau, "legis­
lated for all time." But it is, of course, precisely
Melville's ability to saturate human relationships (in this
case that of Ishmael and Queequeg) with meaning that makes
Moby Dick such a hard book to write about. If we consider
for just a moment the barriers that are broken by those
cozy bedfellows, Ishmael and Queequeg, we have a hint of an
idea of the complexity woven into the book. The two men
(and their manhood is about the only thing they do seem to
have in common) are separated by differences in color,
nationality, culture, manners, morals, religion, and finally
class.

Nevertheless, all differences vanish when man con­
fronts man, and color, especially, is abolished, not by law
but by love. Ishmael is surprised to see some "boobies" and
"bumpkins" marvelling "that two fellow beings should be so
companionable" as he and Queequeg, "as though a white man
were anything more dignified than a white-washed negro"
(p. 65). True, the relationship between Ishmael and
Queequeg begins ominously enough. When Ishmael first sees
the tattooed skin of the man who is going to share his bed
(still unaware, however, that he is not a white man) he is
terrified. On second thought, he reflects: "What is it . . .
after all! It's only his outside; a man can be honest in
any sort of skin" (p. 37). But when he sees Queequeg's
blackness, his former terror returns. He realizes "that he must be some abominable savage or other shipped aboard of a whaleman in the South Seas, and so landed in this Christian country" (p. 33). After a little bedroom farce, which is peacefully resolved by the landlord, Queequeg and Ishmael are finally reconciled:

"You gettee in," he added, motioning to me with his tomahawk, and throwing the clothes to one side. He really did this in not only a civil but a really kind and charitable way. I stood looking at him a moment. For all his tattooings he was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal. What's all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself--the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian.

"Landlord," said I, "tell him to stash his tomahawk there, or pipe, or whatever you call it; tell him to stop smoking in short, and I will turn in with him. But I don't fancy having a man smoking in bed with me. It's dangerous. Besides, I ain't insured."

This being told to Queequeg, he at once complied, and again politely motioned me to get into bed--rolling over to one side as much as to say--I won't touch a leg of ye.

"Good night, landlord," said I, "you may go."

I turned in, and never slept better in my life. (p. 40)

There may or may not be an irony in Ishmael's saying that Queequeg has as much reason to fear him as he Queequeg. After all, it is not Queequeg's people who are enslaving Ishmael's. Then too, Ishmael recognizes the common bond of humanity that unites him and his prospective bedmate. His objection to Queequeg's smoking is a reflection of his continuing white man's fastidiousness, a touch, perhaps, of
Coverdale's coldness. But unlike Coverdale, who can warm himself only in front of an artificial fire, Ishmael discovers his own inner human warmth.

When, on the next night, Queequeg wants to smoke in bed, Ishmael does not object at all: "Be it said, that though I had felt such a strong repugnance to his smoking in the bed the night before, yet see how elastic our stiff prejudices grow when love once comes to bend them. For now I liked nothing better than to have Queequeg smoking by me, even in bed, because he seemed to be full of such serene household joy then. I no more felt unduly concerned for the landlord's policy of insurance. I was only alive to the condensed confidential comfortableness of sharing a pipe and blanket with a real friend. With our shaggy jackets drawn about our shoulders, we now passed the Tomahawk from one to the other, till slowly there grew over us a blue hanging tester of smoke, illuminated by the flame of the new-lit lamp" (p. 61).

What a change has already begun in Ishmael. The last icicle has melted from around his heart. With it goes a bit of his "civilized" white man's nicety, and also some of his preposterous property-consciousness. On the first night he is worried about social decorum and, of all things, the landlord's property, but once he can accept and return Queequeg's friendship freely, these things lose their importance for him.
Nor is it only in this matter of the smoking in bed that Ishmael has lost all his qualms. On the first morning after sleeping with Queequeg, Ishmael wakes up to find "Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife" (p. 40). His situation recalls to him a "similar circumstance" that befell him in his youth, one that he had found extremely frightening. This time, however, he does not feel fear, but "lay alive only to the comical predicament." His first impulse, a very natural one, is to free himself: "Though I tried to move his arm—unlock his bridegroom clasp—yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly, as though naught but death should part us twain. I now strove to rouse him—Queequeg!—but his only answer was a snore. . . . A pretty pickle, truly, thought I; abed here in a strange house in the broad day, with a cannibal and a tomahawk! "Queequeg!—in the name of goodness, Queequeg, wake!"

At length, by dint of much wriggling, and loud and incessant expostulations upon the unbecomingness of his hugging a fellow male in that matrimonial sort of style, I succeeded in extracting a grunt. . . ." (pp. 41-42).

But by the time the second night rolls around, all this is changed. Ishmael's frigidity has left him completely. This time, he and Queequeg "lay . . . in our hearts' honeymoon, . . .--a cosy, loving pair. We had lain thus in bed, chatting and napping at short intervals, and
Queequeg now and then affectionately throwing his brown
tattooed legs over mine, and then drawing them back; so
entirely sociable and free and easy were we. . . ." (p. 60).
And finally, before going to sleep, "Queequeg embraced me
[and] pressed his forehead against mine" (p. 63). To all
this display of affection between males, Ishmael voices no
objection.

The implications of homosexuality are fairly appar­
ent, but I think, at this point, irrelevant. Matthiessen
writes that "Melville's hopes for American democracy, his
dread of its lack of humane warmth, his apprehension of the
actual privations and defeats of the common man, and his
depth of compassion for courageous struggle unite in giving
fervor to the declaration of his purpose in writing Moby-
Dick."9 Ishmael, in his friendship with the pagan Queequeg,
rediscoverst true human warmth. What is more, he redis­
covers it within the possibilities provided by American
democratic society. Queequeg and Ishmael can recognize each
other as men because the strata of society, while they are
there, have not yet become rigidified. So, Ishmael is con­
scious of Queequeg's manners, which are certainly boorish,
even by Ishmael's standards. But the fact that he cannot
approve Queequeg's manners does not mean he cannot approve
of Queequeg. Describing Queequeg's behavior at breakfast,
Ishmael says, "I cannot say much for his breeding. His

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9Page 444.
greatest admirer could not have cordially justified his bringing his harpoon into breakfast with him, and using it there without ceremony; reaching over the table with it, to the imminent jeopardy of many heads, and grappling the beefsteaks towards him. But that was certainly very coolly done by him, and everyone knows that in most people's estimation, to do anything coolly is to do it genteelly" (p. 44).

But in spite of this, Ishmael can recognize Queequeg's truly princely qualities. "Savage though he was, and hideously marred about the face—at least to my taste—his countenance yet had something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils. . . . Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed" (p. 33). Ishmael, at this point, has become quite Rousseauistic. Queequeg, the noble savage, is set against the corruption of society. And indeed, Ishmael has found society disillusioning. Democrats are not democratic, Christians are not Christian, and, in a young country, snobs who substitute civilized frigidity for intrinsic merit are already being heard in the land. In a land of promise, genteel frigidity predominates, and love itself has become the rarest of commodities.
In desperation, Ishmael decides to try a "pagan friend, . . . since Christian kindess has proved but hollow courtesy" (p. 59). Thoreau had opened his lecture, "Walking," by telling the audience, "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society." It is the same desire to experience the expansiveness of cosmic democracy that tantalizes Ishmael. But this cosmic democracy has to do with men, not with forms; with love, not with laws.

Ishmael wants to see man face to face, just as Ahab later wants to see God. But civilized men do not have faces, or at least if they do, the faces are well concealed behind the mask of social forms. Sitting with Queequeg, "solitary twain," Ishmael begins "to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits" (p. 59). And Queequeg is capable of reciprocating these feelings:

If there yet lurked any ice of indifference towards me in the Pagan's breast, this pleasant,
genial smoke we had, soon thawed it out, and left us cronies. He seemed to take to me quite as naturally and unbiddenly as I to him; and when our smoke was over, he pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that henceforth we were married; meaning, in his country's phrase, that we were bosom friends; he would gladly die for me, if need should be. In a countryman, this sudden flame of friendship would have seemed far too premature, a thing to be distrusted; but in this simple savage those old rules would not apply.

(p. 59).

It is "rules," social forms, which seem to create distrust, harden hearts, concretize greed, freeze the natural warmth of Ishmael's countrymen. Love alone can melt this ice, as Ishmael perceives when he is squeezing sperm aboard the Pequod:

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say, — Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.

(p. 323)

Acerbities are social, and it is only love that can dissolve them. But by this time, Ishmael's love has expanded. It is not only love between him and Queequeg that he feels, but love to all men. And yet, it is not the "philanthropist's"
cold, dutiful love of man in the abstract. It is a more objectified emotion Ishmael feels, one evoked by a concrete situation. But once evoked, it increases and deepens until it finally becomes so intense as to overwhelm Ishmael and make him desire to encompass all mankind with his love. His benevolence is both spontaneous and organic, rather than artificial and mechanical. Instead of retreating inward as a result of his disillusionment with democracy, as does Coverdale, Ishmael tries to move further outward.

Nor does he, like Holgrave, attempt to retreat into the past. Whatever may be wrong with the democratic present, it is still better than the aristocracies and monarchies that preceded it. For hereditary royalty, Ishmael has only the deepest contempt. About this he is clear and emphatic. "In behalf of the dignity of whaling . . .," Ishmael suggests that kings and queens may be anointed with whale oil. He then continues, "Certain I am, however, that a king's head is solemnly oiled at his coronation, even as a head of salad. Can it be, though, that they anoint it with a view of making its interior run well, as they anoint machinery? Much might be ruminated here, concerning the essential dignity of this regal process, because in common life we esteem but meanly and contemptibly a fellow who anoints his hair, and palpably smells of that anointing. In truth, a mature man who uses hair-oil, unless medicinally, that man
has probably got a quoggy spot in him somewhere. As a gen-
eral rule, he can't amount to much in his totality" (p. 103).

In discussing the law that grants the head of a captured whale to the "King, as Honorary Grand Harpooneer," and the tail to the Queen, Ishmael wonders if the sturgeon, also a royal fish, is divided in the same way, "the King receiving the highly dense and elastic head peculiar to that fish, which symbolically regarded, may possibly be humorously grounded upon some presumed congeniality" (p. 312). Furthermore, any question about the trenchancy and prevalence of these attacks should be dispelled by Robert Shulman's article, "The Serious Functions of Melville's Phallic Jokes," in which he demonstrates beyond cavil that Ishmael's phallic jokes invariably "satirize religion, property, or rank" by juxtaposing the obscene and the sacred.11

And yet, how does this rancor fit in with Ishmael's universal love? Isn't this prejudice against kings a blemish? It could be. But it must be remembered that Ishmael consorts with royalty as well as commons, for Queequeg, after all, is the son of a king. It is inherited and irrational privilege, not kingliness itself, that Ishmael detests. In his view, being a king is not in itself enough to make a man, but every true man is a king.

11American Literature, XXXIII (May, 1961), 183.
The relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg, as I have already indicated, is extremely complex, and through it Melville undermines the foundations of all of Western man's absolutes, except, perhaps the absolute of man himself and his ability to accommodate himself to the external world through human love. He accomplishes this subversion of Western man's beliefs not by putting Queequeg's values above Ishmael's, but by putting both sets of values side by side. Ishmael eats with a fork, Queequeg with a harpoon. Ishmael's God is the tetragrammaton, and Queequeg's is Yojo. Finally, Ishmael is a plebeian, while Queequeg is a prince. Yet no indication is given that one set of values is more valid than the other. Queequeg makes himself ridiculous in Sag Harbor by putting his trunk in a wheelbarrow and then strapping the wheelbarrow to his back and carrying it. But an American sea captain makes himself equally ridiculous in Rokovoko when he washes his hands in a punch bowl. Manners, color, religion, class are all external and relative, and do not define a man. What does define him is internal. Ishmael observes, when Queequeg lies dying, that "as all else in him thinned, and his cheek-bones grew sharper, his eyes, nevertheless, seemed growing fuller and fuller; they became of a strange softness of lustre; and mildly but deeply looked out at you there from his sickness, a wondrous testimony to that immortal health in him which could not die, or be weakened" (p. 365). This internal nobility which
undercuts artificial and meaningless societal barriers is the bond between Queequeg and Ishmael. And it is this internal nobility, uncontaminated by "civilization," that Ishmael discovers in Queequeg, and through Queequeg, in himself. The love inspired by Queequeg triggers a release of emotional energy that not only deepens and broadens Ishmael's sensitivity and intellect, but also revitalizes his belief in the potential of universal democracy and brotherhood.

The Ishmael who first quit the "city of old Manhatto," with a "damp drizzly November in his soul," feeling himself "growing grim about the mouth," and "involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses. . . ." may be a proletarian, but he is not the same exultant Ishmael who chants a joyous hymn to the Great God Democratic and the nobility of his human creation:

Men may seem detestable as joint stock-companies and nations; . . . but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes. That immaculate manliness we feel within our selves, so far within us that it remains intact though all the outer character seem gone; bleeds with keenest anguish at the undraped spectacle of a valor-ruined man. . . . But this august dignity I treat of, is not the dignity of kings and robes, but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture. Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!
If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades
and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high
qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic
graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the
most abased, among them all shall at times lift
himself to the exalted mounts; if I shall touch
that workman's arm with some ethereal light; if I
shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of
sun; then against all mortal critics bear me out
in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast
spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my
kind! Bear me out in it, thou great democratic
God! . . . Thou who, in all Thy mighty earthly
marchings, ever cullest Thy selectest champions
from the kingly commons; bear me out in it. O God!
(p. 105)

Matthiessen remarks about this passage that "its crescendo
completes his [Melville's] fusion of Christianity and democ-

racy."12 This may be, but it is certain that the passage
marks Ishmael's fusion of the two. And in this fusion lies
the difference between the Ishmael who sets out awhaling and
the one who chants this ecstatic hymn. True, some critics
feel that this change in tone is to be explained by
Melville's own change of heart, his decision to write as far
as possible what he was most moved to write. But this is no
objection. As he moves through his relationship with
Queequeg, and begins to feel the blossoming grandeur of the
world rising within him, he becomes both more poetic and
more profound. Perhaps this is merely to say that Melville
found the objective-correlate for his own response to his
reading in Ishmael's response to Queequeg.

12Matthiessen, p. 445.
But while Ishmael's relationship with Queequeg deepens both his understanding of and respect for the possibilities of democracy, it threatens also to strand him in a banal Transcendental optimism. The danger of an unbridled democratic idealism is that it tends to distend into infinite nothing. Ishmael himself asks, "How many, think ye, have . . . fallen into Plato's honey-head, and sweetly perished there?" (p. 271). This danger is averted through Ishmael's contact with Ahab, for in Ahab the expanding radiance of Ishmael's love runs into the constricting blackness of Ahab's hate.

"Ahab," writes Alfred Kazin, "is a hero; we cannot insist enough on that. Melville believed in the heroic and he specifically wanted to cast his hero on American lines—someone noble by nature, not by birth, . . . And because Ahab, as Melville intended him to, represents the aristocracy of intellect in our democracy, because he seeks to transcend the limitations that good conventional men like Starbuck, philistine materialists like Stubb, and unthinking fools like Flask want to impose on everybody else, Ahab speaks for the humanity that belongs to man's imaginative vision of himself."13

It may be that Ahab represents "the aristocracy of intellect," but he represents it as aristocracy run wild.

13Page x.
Alienated from mankind, Ahab bends all his great intellectual powers first to obliterating the individuality of the members of the Pequod's crew. Then, in his dealings with Fedallah, he manifests the Faustian urge to impose his intellect on the entire universe. In the magnitude of his ambition, Ahab is indeed heroic. But whether he is a hero or not is another question: the same question raised by the defiant magnificence of Milton's rebellious Satan.

The finest description of Ahab as the modern embodiment of the classical tragic hero is Newton Arvin's:

Ahab is . . . for his time and place, the noblest and most complete embodiment of the tragic hero. He is modern man, and particularly American man, in his role as "free" and "independent" Individual, as self-sustaining and self-assertive Ego, of forcible will and unbending purpose all compact, inflexible, unpitying, and fell, but enlarged by both his vices and his strength to dimensions of legendary grandeur. About Ahab's moral largeness there can be no uncertainty; the cleansing effect of Moby Dick depends vitally upon that. He is described as not only "grand" but even "godlike," and godlike—in a sense that is at once Greek and Yankee, at once classical and contemporary—every-one feels him to be. He has such Arete, says Melville in effect, as a grim and shaggy old whale-hunter from Nantucket can have, and that is much; his very appearance suggests a demigod. . . . He calls himself "proud as a Greek God," and indeed his pride is noble enough to endure the comparison. In its highest expression it is the heroic self-trust and self-regard of the modern Western man asserted in the teeth of all that would overbear and diminish him, whether natural or beyond nature.14

This view of Ahab as tragic hero makes sense when Moby Dick is discussed in terms of Greek or Shakespearean tragedy.

And that the influence of both, especially Shakespeare, is there cannot be denied; no doubt, part of Melville's genius is his ability to adapt to his needs the most widely varied materials. But the work as a whole is much more meaningful when it is viewed as an epic. Arvin himself writes that "if one must look for analogies that will do a little to express the effect Moby Dick has on us in form . . . it is not to tragedy that one should turn but to heroic poetry, to the epic. . . . The kind of life Melville was raising to the fictive level in this book . . . was a life in some of its aspects reminiscent of that led by the Achaean peoples in the days of the folk-wanderings or by the Germanic peoples in the days of theirs. . . . It genuinely helps to define the formal quality of Moby Dick if one says that what he feels in its spacious narrative movement is not unlike what he feels in the narrative movement of the Iliad, [and] of the Odyssey. . . ."15

And Richard Chase, spurring on his hobby horse for all it is worth, calls Moby Dick an "epic romance." "But," he says, "although superficially resembling the Odyssey, Moby Dick lacks, among other things, the rich observation of ethos, of ways of life, real and fabulous, which we find in Homer's poem. The Odyssey is extremely sophisticated about

15Ibid., pp. 156-57.
manners and morals and is actually more novelistic than *Moby Dick.*"\(^{16}\)

Chase has an insight here, but he is too blinded by his thesis to follow it up. He is right when he says that the resemblance between *Moby Dick* and the *Odyssey* is superficial. And yet, if this is so, how explain the fact that no serious reader or critic of the book has failed to notice the epic qualities? The answer, I think, is that *Moby Dick* is an epic, but an epic in the biblical tradition rather than in the Homeric and Classical. This is suggested by Nathalia Wright in her book, *Melville's Use of the Bible,* and is certainly indicated both by Melville's language and by the fact that the main characters, Ishmael and Ahab, have Biblical names. But though the fact seems obvious, no one has explored it fully.

And yet, once we recognize it, so much is explained. What I have in mind here, let me emphasize, is not merely the matter of characters, names and plots, but the Biblical spirit that informs the entire book. This spirit of the Biblical epic style as opposed to the Classical, is brilliantly analyzed in the first chapter of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis.* He concludes, there, that the Homeric style is characterized by "fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all

\(^{16}\)Page 101.
events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective . . .," while the Biblical, on the other hand, contains "certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, 'background' quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic." The aptness with which the latter qualities describe Moby-Dick is striking, and I have no doubt a dissertation might be devoted to the task. Let it suffice here to draw some brief parallels.

The universal-historical claims of Moby-Dick are beautifully established in the opening and closing sentences of the book: "Call me Ishmael," with its quality of timelessness, and "Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago." The profusion of critical books and exegetical articles, most of them containing some truth, certainly demonstrates the need for interpretation. Finally, Ishmael's inability to encompass the characters or himself testifies both to the multiplicity of meaning and "unexpressed 'background' quality" which pervades the

book, and its preoccupation with the "problematic." Both these characteristics are demonstrated in the following passage:

Here, then, was this grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job's whale round the world, at the head of a crew, too, chiefly made up of mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals--morally enfeebled also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or rightmindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask. Such a crew, so officered, seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help him to his monomaniac revenge. How it was that they so aboundingy responded to the old man's ire--by what evil magic their souls were possessed, that at times, his hate seemed almost theirs; the White Whale as much their insufferable foe as his; how all this came to be--what the White Whale was to them, or how to their unconscious understandings, also, in some dim, unsuspected way, he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life,--all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go.

(P. 156)

The moment we begin to view Moby-Dick in perspective of Biblical style, Ahab's heroic and tragic stature begins to diminish. It becomes apparent, for example, that it is not Ahab's death that makes the tragedy, but the wanton destruction of the entire crew. And let there be no mistake, it is for the crew we feel more than for Ahab. Had only the latter been ground in the maws of his own obsession, then there were no tragedy, or if there were, then the whale's destroying the Pequod and all aboard, becomes one of the most purposeless scenes in literature. It is the crew that we feel always surging up from below, always suppressed, yet all-important. We feel their presence in the same way that
we feel the presence of the Children of Israel pressing against the authority of Moses and God. We need not know when each member of the crew scratches his back, for we feel the full portentousness of their human existence in Starbuck, Stubb, Flask, Queequeg, Tashtego, Daggoo, the Carpenter, the Blacksmith, Pip: we feel it in the dialogue that takes place at "Midnight in the Forecastle"; we feel it when Starbuck, helplessly watching Moby Dick's menacing onslaught on the Pequod, utters one of the most pathetic lines in the book: "Is this the end of all my bursting prayers? all my life-long fidelities? Oh, Ahab, Ahab, lo, thy work." And finally, we feel it most magnificently in Ishmael himself, Ishmael the orphan, but not the alienated man; Ishmael who says, "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs" (p. 149).

This total immersion explains, too, the disappearance of Ishmael that is so puzzling. He disappears because in his character of Everyman he has melted into the crew. This submergence of self is underlined by his description of the way in which he is saved from destruction: "Three of the oarsmen--were flung out [of Ahab's boat]; but so fell, that, in an instant two of them clutched the gunwale again, and rising to its level on a combing wave, hurled themselves bodily inboard again; the third man helplessly dropping astern, but still afloat and swimming" (p. 429). The third man, of
course, is Ishmael, and the fact that he was not able to return to the boat saves him. His silent third person reference to himself as the third man seems to indicate a complete suppression of Ego. But at the same time that Ishmael's ego has been completely suppressed, Ahab is still raging: "Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee" (p. 431).

Ahab, then, is always there, always declaiming with the grandeur and unrestrained bombast of a Shakespearean hero, always maintaining his pose as a "Greek god." But the vision that comprehends him is Hebraic rather than Hellenic. Auerbach asserts that

we become conscious of the fact that in the Homeric poems life is enacted only among the ruling class—others appear only in the role of servants to that class. The ruling class is still so strongly patriarchal, and still itself so involved in the daily activities of domestic life, that one is sometimes likely to forget their rank. But they are unmistakably a sort of feudal aristocracy, whose men divide their lives between war, hunting, marketplace councils, and feasting, while the women supervise the maids in the house. As a social picture, this world is completely stable; wars take place only between different groups of the ruling class; nothing ever pushes up from below. In the early stories of the Old Testament the patriarchal condition is dominant too, but since the people involved are individual nomadic or half-nomadic tribal leaders, the social picture gives a much less stable impression; class distinctions are not felt. As soon as the people completely emerges—that is, after the exodus from Egypt—its activity is always discernible, it is often in ferment, it frequently intervenes in events not only as a whole but also in separate groups and through the medium of
separate individuals who come forward; the origins of prophecy seem to lie in the irrepressible politico-religious spontaneity of the people. We receive the impression that the movements emerging from the depths of the people of Israel-Judah must have been of a wholly different nature from those even of the later ancient democracies—of a different nature and far more elemental.\(^1\)

What we sense in *Moby Dick* is the social condition that Auerbach describes as inhering in the Old Testament. We are conscious of Ahab's kingliness and of his alienation. We are conscious of his indomitable romantic will. But we are also conscious of his relation to and interaction with the crew, which cannot be regarded as simply a chorus. Agamemnon must satisfy the gods by sacrificing Iphigenia, and he must mollify obdurate princes, but never does he have to pay any attention to the people, the chorus which deplores the act. Ahab, on the other hand, is involved in a constant struggle with his crew, as well as with the whale. He must raise the men to fever pitch, he must offer them a gold doubloon as a bonus, he must maintain the pretence of a conventional whaling voyage, and he must alternately cajole and bully them. To keep them from erupting, he must exert his fantastic will to the utmost. And in their weakness in letting themselves be bullied and bribed and mesmerized we feel the sweep of tragedy which extends infinitely beyond Ahab himself. We feel the tragedy of free men who have accepted authority too indiscriminately, who have subordinated

\(^1\)Page 18.
their individuality to the will of one man, and who have therefore surrendered their manhood. When Samuel prays to the Lord, telling him that the people of Israel have asked him to appoint a king, God answers, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me." (I Samuel, 8:7).

Similarly, to follow Ahab, the men of the Pequod have ceased to follow "The Great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy!" And when Ahab tells the "half mutinous" (p. 385) crew, "All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound" (p. 385), they are just finding out what Samuel had told the Israelites: "This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards and olive yards, And he will take your menservants and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. And ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you: and the Lord will not hear you in that day" (I Samuel 9:11-18). And so Starbuck cries out in vain. Once he has submitted his soul to another man's will, to a king,
as it were, there is no one to hear his bursting prayers or reward his life-long fidelities.

Hearing from Peleg that "Ahab of old . . . was a crowned king!" Ishmael can only observe that he was "a very vile one" (p. 80). But Ishmael finds all kings vile, for a king, by his very nature, stands between man and his God, or perhaps, in the romantic's view, between man and his own Ego.

Hugh Henry Brackenridge, it will be recalled, had trouble in reconciling his democratic equalitarian beliefs with the mimetic devices he had inherited from his classical background. He could not portray the common man without treating him rather lightly and comically. In the Bible, however, Melville rediscovers the vision and style that enable him to write about the lower classes seriously.

Matthiessen observes that "without deliberately intending it, but by virtue of his intense concern with the precariously maintained values of democratic Christianity, which he saw everywhere being threatened or broken down, Melville created in Ahab's tragedy a fearful symbol of the self-enclosed individualism that, carried to its furthest extreme, brings disaster both upon itself and upon the group of which it is part" (p. 459).

I would agree with Matthiessen that Ahab's tragedy is the result of an unbridled individualism which leads him to conceive himself as "lord and dictator." But the disaster which befalls the crew is not, I think, a mere byproduct of
Ahab's tragedy, it is an integral part of the tragic tone of the book. If Ahab's destruction results from his uncurbed individualism, then the destruction of the crewmembers results from their permitting him to ride roughshod over them.

Not only Ahab, however, was created out of Melville's concern for "the precariously maintained values of democratic Christianity," but Ishmael as well. For if Ahab represents the negative view, the destructive individualist and alienated intellectual aristocrat, Ishmael represents the liberal democratic intellectual who is not alienated from mankind, and who remains, in spite of his liberalism, capable of both deep love and deep thought.

We have seen Ishmael's capacity to love in his relationship with Queequeg. I would like, now, to turn to Ishmael as thinker. I must state at once that I do not pretend to encompass all of Ishmael's philosophizing. Since, as Kazin points out, his is "the single mind from whose endlessly turning spool of thought the whole story is unwound," to try to embrace his thought on all subjects would require a close textual analysis of almost the entire book. Hence, I must say with Ishmael himself, "I promise nothing complete; because any human being supposed to be complete, must for that very reason infallibly be faulty" (p. 117).
Instead, I would like to focus on an important undercurrent of thought which has not been widely noticed. This is Ishmael's intellectual response to another danger which menaces "the values of democratic Christianity": a shallow, mechanistic liberalism threatening to degenerate into a completely selfish materialism.

Ishmael's criticism of Transcendentalism and of the "young Platonists" who lose their identity in the mist of a vague idealism is rather appealing to the twentieth-century reader,19 and has consequently received a great deal of attention. But if Ishmael cannot accept the extreme idealist who does not ground his thought in concrete facts, neither can he accept the shallow empiricist who posits a mechanistic universe in which all knowledge is obtained through the senses, and in which democracy is merely a civil order. What Ishmael wants to do is to deepen and broaden eighteenth-century liberalism. He does not want to conceive of man as merely a political or economic phenomenon but he wants to retain the ideals of Natural Rights and political freedom for the individual. In order to effect this, Ishmael returns to the chief source of both American liberalism and conservatism, John Locke, questioning his philosophy at two points: political theory and epistemology.

What Ishmael questions, primarily, in Locke's political theory is his glorification of property. "Political

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19See Chap. XXXV, "The Mast-Head."
Power," Locke had written in his Second Treatise of Government, "I take to be a Right of making Laws with Penalties of Death, and consequently all less Penalties, for the Regulating and Preserving of Property, and of employing the force of the Community, in the Execution of such Laws."20

For Ishmael, who, despite his rejection of extreme idealism, clings to an idealistic concept of democracy, a government that wields this kind of political power for such purposes becomes merely a device for perpetuating injustice. This, Ishmael makes quite clear in the chapter called "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish," a chapter interesting not only for its slaughter of the Anglo-Saxon sacred cows of law and property, but also for its insight into the workings of Ishmael's mind.

Ishmael starts, as he often does, with a seemingly simple fact, the classification of wounded or hunted whales as property. What constitutes possession of a whale, he claims, is defined by two brief, but nonetheless comprehensive laws:

I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it.
II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it.

(p. 303)

Having praised the clarity and succinctness of this code, Ishmael promptly proceeds to undermine it by introducing, in a tone of good-humored banter, some doubts as to its ultimate

20 John Locke, Two Treatises on Government, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1960), Bk. II, Chap. 1, Par. 3 (p. 286).
effectiveness. "But what plays the mischief with this masterly code," he slyly adds, "is the admirable brevity of it, which necessitates a vast volume of commentaries to expound it." It is ever thus with Ishmael's mind. What starts out self-evident soon becomes hopelessly ambiguous. But, always mindful of the reader, Ishmael goes on to "clarify" the code by citing some of the "commentaries."

First: What is a Fast-Fish? Alive or dead a fish is technically fast, when it is connected with an occupied ship or boat, by any medium at all controllable by the occupant or occupants,—a mast, an oar, a nine-inch cable, a telegraph wire, or a strand of cobweb, it is all the same. Likewise, a fish is technically fast when it bears a waif, or any other recognised symbol of possession; so long as the party waifing it plainly evince their ability at any time to take it alongside, as well as their intention so to do.

Ishmael's rambunctious good humor is engaging, and most of the ironies are almost too obvious to mention, but the questions they raise are not. For example, it is obvious that in common-sense terms, a strand of cobweb is not the same as a mast. In what way, then, are they the same? I would suggest that their sameness consists in the fact that the connection between possessor and possessed, metaphysically, if not legally, is always a tenuous one. There is the implication, also, that the concept of ownership of property is a human delusion. For how else is one to take the ludicrous suggestion that touching a whale with a strand of cobweb makes it the property of the person holding
the other end of the strand. The tenuous nature of the relationship between mortal man and "his" property is further indicated by the fact that the possessor, in this "commentary," does not have to be able to control the fish to make it a Fast-Fish. All he must be able to do is to control the object which connects the fish to the ship or boat. Moreover, after all their involved explanation of the physical connection that must exist between owner and owned, the "commentators" then tell us that it is not necessary that there be any physical connection at all. Merely to say, "This is mine" coupled with the ability to make the saying good, is sufficient. Clearly, in all cases, the law recognizes that the right to own something depends on the power of the owner to keep it.

And this, indeed, is how the matter works out in practice. "These are scientific commentaries," says Ishmael, not without irony. "But the commentaries of the whalingmen themselves sometimes consist in hard words and harder knocks--the Coke-upon-Littleton of the fist."

Ishmael now launches one of his seemingly irrelevant phallic jokes by describing "a curious case of whale-trover litigated in England." The defense lawyer compares the case to a recent one of adultery, in which a husband who abandoned his wife because "of the great stress of her plunging viciousness," tried to recover her, only to find that she had become the property of a "subsequent gentleman" who had
"reharpooned her." The Judge finds the parallel sufficiently convincing to grant the defense lawyer what he wants. The effect of the phallic joking is, as Robert Shulman points out, "to make the Judge's decision immoral and corrupt in terms of the very standards of respectability which a Lord Ellenborough (the Judge) piously upholds."21

So though Ishmael seems to be digressing out of a sheer overflow of high spirits, he is actually subverting the foundations of Anglo-Saxon law. He concludes his description of the case by saying, "These two laws touching Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish, I say, will on reflection, be found the fundamentals of all human jurisprudence; for notwithstanding its complicated tracery of sculpture, the Temple of the Law, like the Temple of the Philistines, has but two props to stand on."

Ishmael's association of the Temple of Law with the Temple of the Philistines is, no doubt, intended to be sacrilegious. At any rate, since Ishmael has begun his Samson's work, the temple of law is already a little shaky. But Ishmael, unlike the strong man, does not buckle the pillars with brute strength. Instead he ridicules them out of existence. For if we consider the two props of law in the light of the "commentaries," it becomes clear that the two props are in actuality one, and that the one is raw

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21Page 181.
power. A Fast-Fish belongs to anyone who can keep it. But the same thing is also true of a Loose-Fish. That is, it also is the property of anyone who can hold onto it. Having thus reduced Anglo-American law to a vicious concentration of amoral power intended to preserve vested interests, Ishmael now proceeds to bring the entire temple down on the head of all the ruling Philistines:

Is it not a saying in every one's mouth, possession is half of the law: that is, regardless of how the thing came into possession? But often possession is the whole of the law. What are the sinews and soul of Russian serfs and Republican slaves but Fast-Fish, whereof possession is the whole of the law? What to the rapacious landlord is the widow's last mite but a Fast-Fish? What is yonder undetected villain's marble with a door-plate for a waif; what is that but a Fast-Fish? What is the ruinous discount which Mordecai, the broker, gets from poor Woebegone, the bankrupt, on a loan to keep Woebegone's family from starvation; what is that ruinous discount but a Fast-Fish? What is the Archbishop of Savesoul's income of £100,000 seized from the scant bread and cheese of hundreds of thousands of broken-backed laborers (all sure of heaven without any of Savesoul's help) what is that globular £100,000 but a Fast-Fish? What are the Duke of Dunder's hereditary towns and hamlets but Fast-Fish? What to that redoubted harpooneer, John Bull, is poor Ireland, but a Fast-Fish? What to that apostolic lancer, Brother Jonathan, is Texas but a Fast-Fish? And concerning all these, is not Possession the whole of the law?

But if the doctrine of Fast-Fish be pretty generally applicable, the kindred doctrine of Loose-Fish is still more widely so. That is internationally and universally applicable.

What was America in 1492 but a Loose-Fish, in which Columbus struck the Spanish standard by way of waifing it for his royal master and mistress? What was Poland to the Czar? What Greece to the Turk? What India to England? What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-Fish. (pp. 309-10)
At this point we might expect that Ishmael is through. But, no. Once in flight, he does not rest until he achieves orbit. Having reached the utmost limits of social criticism, he recklessly plunges beyond phenomena into the infinite:

What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? What all men's minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? What is the principle of religious belief in them but a Loose-Fish? What to the ostentatious smuggling verbalists are the thoughts of thinkers but Loose-Fish? What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?

(p. 310)

Ishmael's mind! It functions like a nuclear chain reaction. One explosion leads to a bigger explosion ad infinitum. Starting with the banal question of how to determine whom a captured whale belongs to, he expands into the larger question of property rights in general. This raises the question of property rights and political freedom, and as though this in itself were not perplexing enough, he cannot rest until he has set the question of political freedom in the larger perspective of the metaphysical problem of freedom of the human will. He cannot stop the flow of his symphonic prose until he has entangled the reader's soul in his verbal net, secured it, and made it a Fast-Fish, too.

Locke wrote that "The great and chief end . . . of Men's uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property."22

22Second Treatise, II; 9, 124 (pp. 368-69).
That Ishmael could never have accepted such doctrine is patent. The bond that Ishmael recognizes between men is not preservation of property, but their common humanity and interdependence, the responsibility of every man for his brother. Hence, at one point, Queequeg is on a dead whale's back, cutting in, while Ishmael is connected to him by a "monkey rope" which is supposed to keep Queequeg above water. If Queequeg should sink, then Ishmael is honor-bound to sink with him. As Ishmael sees it, "So then, an elongated Siamese ligature united us. Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother; nor could I any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond entailed" (p. 253). It is this unbounded democracy of human brotherhood and love that Ishmael strives toward, not merely a democracy of the right to own property.

Much as he hates the property-worship in Locke's political theory, however, Ishmael detests the sterility he finds implicit in Locke's epistemology even more. This should not come as a surprise, since Melville himself could scarcely abide the light. What he was attracted to in both Shakespeare and Hawthorne was their ability to utter dark truths. Ishmael, too, loves blackness. He runs from both the pyrotechnic radiance of Emerson's idealism and the bright sunshine of Locke's empiricism. "When on one side," he remarks, "you hoist in Locke's head, you go over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant's and you come
back again; but in very poor plight. Thus, some minds forever keep trimming boat. Oh, ye foolish! throw all these thunderheads overboard, and then you will float light and right" (p. 259).

But Ishmael, in spite of his splendid advice, was himself unable to throw either of the thunder-heads overboard. In him are joined the two currents of the American consciousness—the rational liberalism of the enlightenment so nobly embodied in Jefferson and Franklin, and the irrational foreboding darkness of Puritanism observable in the Mathers and Edwardses. Thus he is forever trimming boat between a Calvinist point of view which is essentially ontological, metaphysical and mysterious and the empiricist point of view which is essentially epistemological, experiential and lucid. Living in a society in which the world-view of the enlightenment had triumphed, Ishmael is indeed a part of that world to the extent that he accepts enlightenment egalitarian principles and denies the validity of established class structure and hereditary privilege. But, accepting these enlightenment principles, Ishmael is unable to reject the residue of portentous irrationality inherent in his Biblical heritage. And it is this inability, no doubt, that explains the Biblical rather than classical orientation of Moby-Dick, and which also explains Melville's dissatisfaction with both
Emersonian idealism and Lockean empiricism. Nathalia Wright asserts that

. . . in his belief in the existence of this world beyond the world of sense Melville has often been called Platonic. Like the Platonists, he did believe truth resided in the unseen world of ideas and conceptions rather than in the world of material manifestations. But in his essentially romantic conception of this invisible sphere he was closer to the Hebrews than to the Greeks. Order, rhetoric, and logic did not represent the primal truth to him as did elemental and undisciplined energy.

For the Greeks there was clarity not only in this world but also in the world of gods and ghosts. The gods had a fixed abode, disembodied spirits followed a well-marked course, and converse with both was held naturally and reasonable. In all their mythology there is no touch of fearful novelty. But to the Hebrews this world was vague. . . . And because it was vague it could be very dreadful to them. Whereas the Greeks could watch supernatural beings move among them, influencing their affairs, to the Hebrews such interference was utterly mysterious. It was a blow out of the dark, sudden and unexplained.23

Ishmael's sense of the world, like Melville's, is closer to that of the Hebrews than to that of the Greeks. Order, rhetoric, and logic do not represent primal truth to him, as he makes clear time and again in his humorously "learned" expository comments on whaling lore. An example of Ishmael's logic: after citing the evidence for classifying whales as mammals, he concludes, "Be it known that, waiving all argument, I take the good old fashioned ground that the whale is a fish, and call upon holy Jonah to back

me" (p. 118). Of his lack of system, he boasts, "Finally: it was stated at the outset, that this system would not be here, and at once, perfected. You cannot but plainly see that I have kept my word" (p. 125). When he sets out, in "The Affidavit," to establish the "verity" of his narrative, he confesses, "I care not to perform this part of my task methodically" (p. 168). Before he describes "The Honor and Glory of Whaling," he avers that "there are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method" (p. 283).

Moreover, the world for Ishmael remains dreadful and mysterious, dark and unexplained. Yet, he does not live in Biblical times. He lives, rather, in a world which has felt the impact of Locke's thought, as well as that of Kant's and Emerson's, and he himself is a part of that world, a world highly amenable to daylight. The enlightenment universe is an orderly one which reveals itself to our senses. In it we can be certain that we know what we know. Man can approach the objects of experience with confidence, and what he cannot experience he need not worry about. But it is precisely this view of the universe that Ishmael cannot wholly accept. He sees in the world around him an element that is not orderly. The universe is surrounded, as a matter of fact, with the irrational and unknowable. And it is the dimension of the unknowable that he tries to graft onto Locke's experiential world. In order to do this he must first break through the wall of Locke's sensational epistemology.
And this is what he accomplishes in his attempts to describe whales in general and Moby Dick in particular.

The trouble with whales, the reader soon discovers, is that though they are objects of experience, and consequently a proper subject for scientific inquiry and classification, they are not knowable in their entirety. Discussing pictures of whales, Ishmael reveals that he has never found one that is perfectly accurate. Consequently, he avers, "Any way you may look at it, you must needs conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last. True, one portrait may hit the mark nearer than another, but none can hit it with any very considerable degree of exactness. So there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale looks like" (p. 215).

And yet, while the whale in its wholeness is unfathomable, one portrait, as Ishmael says, "may hit the mark nearer than another." Ironically, however, it is not those who have had the most experience with whales who paint them best. Ishmael claims that "with not one tenth of England's experience in the fishery, and not one thousandth part of that of the Americans, . . . [French painters] have nevertheless furnished both nations with the only finished sketches at all capable of conveying the real spirit of the whale hunt. For the most part, the English and American whale draughtsmen
seem entirely content with presenting the mechanical outline of things, such as the vacant profile of the whale. . ."
(p. 217). The implication is that the empirical method does not necessarily lead to a knowledge of truth. The empirical mind, which is a sort of file catalogue of sense perceptions can reproduce only surfaces, and the spirit of a "thing" ("the-thing-in-itself") is not to be found in its surface. Knowledge of truth, then, seems to require a leap beyond experience.

This becomes more and more evident as Ishmael continues to pile up information about the whale, for no matter how much information he gathers, he still despairs of encompassing leviathan. Worse still, as the factual evidence accumulates, the whale becomes more mysterious rather than more familiar. Describing the whale's head, Ishmael becomes concerned with the "problem" of how one can tell where it ends, since there is no neck to separate head and trunk. Speaking of the skin of the whale, he raises the problem of whether the skin is a thin outer coating or the full coat of blubber. Ishmael's perception of the problematic nature of even the seemingly simplest portions of the whale's anatomy could be documented almost endlessly. Let two more crucial examples suffice: the whale's fountain and Moby Dick's whiteness.

Ishmael begins the chapter on "The Fountain," as is his wont, by converting an apparently simple phenomenon into
a mystery and a metaphysical problem: "That for six
thousand years--and no one knows how many millions of ages
before--the great whales should have been spouting all over
the sea, and sprinkling and mistifying the gardens of the
depth, . . . and yet, that down to this blessed minute . . .,
it should still remain a problem, whether these spoutings
are, after all, really water, or nothing but vapor--this is
surely a noteworthy thing" (pp. 283-89).

Ishmael then launches a lengthy discussion on human
and cetological respiration, and the relationship between
the latter and the whale's breathing and its spout. From
it all, he finally concludes, "But why pester one with all
this reasoning on the subject? Speak out! You have seen
him spout; then declare what the spout is; can you not tell
water from air? My dear sir, in this world it is not so
easy to settle these plain things. I have ever found your
plain things the knottiest of all. And as for this whale
spout, you might almost stand in it, and yet be undecided as
to what it is precisely" (p. 291). So after all his in-
volved and painstaking reasoning, he decides that reason, in
this case, cannot decide anything. Nor does experience fare
any better. For it is possible to experience the spout
directly, to stand right in the middle of it, and still not
know what it is. He concludes, finally, "The wisest thing
the investigator can do then, it seems to me, is to let
this deadly spout alone."
There is, then, no way of knowing the whale. If each of his parts is impossible to describe clearly, and if the whale himself is more than the sum of his parts, then how unfathomable must he be in his entirety? And yet, as mysterious as is the ordinary whale, Moby Dick is infinitely more inscrutable and terrifying, and this largely because of his whiteness.

"It was the whiteness of the whale," says Ishmael, "that appalled me." He has no hope of explaining himself, but he will try. As is his custom, he starts rather calmly by enumerating, in a long, periodic sentence, the ways in which "whiteness refiningly enhances beauty," resolving the sentence in a paradox: "yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood" (p. 153).

Whiteness, a simple concept: and yet, by the time Ishmael has finished piling up what seems to be almost an infinitude of concessive clauses, the reader begins to feel the terror that Ishmael finds in it. But whiteness, and color in general, it should be added, gave Locke trouble, too. He could not quite convince himself of its objective existence, and therefore categorized it as a secondary quality, as opposed to such primary qualities as "extension,
figure, number, and motion of bodies." These secondary qualities "are in truth nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us. . . ." Moreover, the "ideas produced in us by these secondary qualities have no resemblance of them at all. There is nothing like our ideas existing in the bodies themselves. They are, in the bodies we denominate from them, only a power to produce those sensations in us; and what is sweet, blue, or warm in idea, is but the certain bulk, figure, and motion of the insensible parts in the bodies themselves, which we call so."

For Locke, then, it is impossible to conceive of color without first conceiving of a substance in which it inheres. In itself it has no reality, no existence. But the very thing that so terrifies Ishmael is that he can conceive of the existence of color, specifically of whiteness, without substance. And this is precisely what he does. It becomes the whiteness that invests substance with reality rather than the other way round, as Locke would have it. The "elusive something" that terrifies is in the whiteness itself. And "this elusive quality it is, which causes the

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25 II: 8, 14.

26 II: 8, 14.
thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds. Witness the white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the tropics; what but their smooth, flaky whiteness makes then the transcendent horrors they are?" (p. 153). What, indeed? And again, Ishmael proceeds to pile up instance after instance, this time heaping horror on horror: the "albatross," the White Steed of the Prairies," the "Albino," the "White Squall," and so on. He climaxes this series with a terrifying reference to what seems to be Jung's racial unconscious: "Nor, in some things, does the common hereditary experience of all mankind fail to bear witness to the supernaturalism of this hue. It cannot well be doubted, that the one visible quality in the aspect of the dead which most appals the gazer, is the marble pallor lingering there; as if indeed that pallor were as much like the badge of consternation in the other world, as of mortal trepidation here." And he concludes this section by affirming, "Therefore, in his other moods, symbolize whatever grand or gracious thing he will by whiteness, no man can deny that in its profoundest idealized significance it calls up a peculiar apparition to the soul" (p. 160).

In the next section, Ishmael takes another approach. He tries to account for the terrifying quality of whiteness by considering instances in which whiteness, though divorced
from any directly terrifying associations, is terrifying still, adding that "without imagination no man can follow another into these halls." Again the evidence is poured on: "Whitsuntide," "a White Friar or a White Nun," "the White Tower of London," "the White Mountains of New Hampshire," "the White Sea," "the tall, pale man of Hartz forests"--all these, according to Ishmael, terrify by their very whiteness rather than by any "primary quality." But at this point he is drawn up short by a question. Is he merely suffering from an unfounded hypochondria? He answers with another question. What terrifies a young colt in Vermont when he hears the rustle of a buffalo robe behind him? It is not, says Ishmael, "anything associated with the experience of former perils." It is something more basic still, "the instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world." And the same instinct is what inspires Ishmael's terror, but in Ishmael's case, the instinct is awakened not by the shaking of a buffalo robe, but by whiteness. And yet, after all the "evidence" he has given of the terror inherent in whiteness, he is willing to concede that the terror may exist not externally, but only in Ishmael himself. "Though neither knows where lie the nameless things of which the mystic sign gives forth such hints; yet with me, as with the colt; somewhere those things must exist."

Still, Ishmael finds, the spell of whiteness with its "appeal to the soul" and its ability to symbolize both what
is spiritual and what is appalling, is unsolved. Perhaps this stems from its "indefiniteness," which "shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe." Or perhaps it is the sheer ambiguity, since white is both the absence of color and the "concrete of all colors." Or perhaps, Ishmael concludes, its power stems from the very theory of the "natural philosophers" themselves.

When we consider that . . . all other earthly hues . . . are but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel house within; and when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, forever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge--pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper. . . .

(p. 163)

Ishmael takes the definition of secondary qualities, which Locke had intended to be perfectly lucid, and in his usual fashion converts it into a source of inscrutable mystery. But he does not criticize Locke as Berkeley and Hume did, by questioning his logic in some instances, and pushing it to extremes in others. What he does, instead, is to accept Locke's fully accessible universe as given, and invest it with a horror and mystery that is implicit in it, and yet that it would have appalled Locke to imagine. For Locke, the category of secondary qualities was a source of clarification. It distinguished tangible substance from its
Intangible concomitants, such as odor, taste, color, sound. But what impresses Ishmael in contemplating this category is that it posits the paradox of non-existent existence, that which both exists and does not.

But in this inscrutable universe, the greatest of mysteries remains the White Whale. Ishmael is most appalled by his whiteness. But there are those who dread more than any other quality his seeming ubiquity, and still others who suspect and fear his immortality. And finally, there are those, like Ahab, who feel the challenge of his "unexampled, intelligent malignity" (p. 153). Combine these qualities, throw in a wrinkled forehead, "unwonted magnitude," a deformed lower jaw, and silvery "spirit-spout," all in addition to the natural inscrutability of the common whale, and the sum is Moby Dick. The terror with which he is invested finally becomes interwoven with the terror of a universe in which "all visible objects . . . are but as pasteboard masks . . ." (p. 39).

Auerbach writes that in the Old Testament stories, "The sublime influence of God . . . reaches so deeply into the everyday that the two realms of the sublime and the everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically inseparable." In Moby Dick, the White Whale supplies that sublime influence. His presence pervades the book and colors
even the most ordinary events, raising them, at times, to fever pitch. Over against all the actions of the crew, all the gams, all the dialogue, and all the cetological detail, looms the gigantic, unencompassable, irrational, foreboding presence of Moby Dick. And it is Ishmael who knows that presence. Ahab, too, knows Moby Dick. He also has recognized the inscrutability of the White Whale, and it has driven him to alienate himself from humanity. To conquer the mystery becomes his obsession, and eventually it drives him mad. But there is, as Vincent points out, another mad soul aboard the Pequod, and that is Pip. Pip jumps overboard, and, afloat on the open sea, finds "the awful lonesomeness . . . intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity . . ." (p. 321) drives him mad.

Like Ahab, then, Ishmael knows Moby Dick. He has looked into the faceless face (a head-on view of the whale, Ishmael emphasizes, reveals only a gigantic forehead) of the irrational; yet, he has maintained his human dignity in spite of it. Like Pip, too, Ishmael has been left afloat in the middle of the "heartless immensity." But the "awful lonesomeness" does not drive him mad either. Just as he does not, like Ahab, alienate himself from his fellow men, so neither does he feel, like Pip, "the intense concentration of self." In a universe of naked, hostile (or, at best indifferently destructive) force, he retains always the
positive democratic values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and these constantly humanized by the spirit of Christian love.

The reader, I think, cannot draw a great deal of consolation from the fact that Ishmael is not destroyed, for in spite of all that has been written on the subject, there is no really convincing reason why he should have been "saved" any more than anyone else on the crew. The very manner of his salvation implies chance more than design. ("It so chanced, that ... I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman ... ; the same, who, when on the last day the three men were tossed from out the rocking boat, was dropped astern.") But that, following his accidental salvation, he preserves his own intellect and reason while floating in the very center of an irrational universe, this is an unmistakable affirmation; an affirmation that man can resist, not madly and alone, as Ahab does, but in the ties of human equality and brotherhood, as is indicated by the last sentence of the "Epilogue": "It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan." It is not an orphan that the Rachel finds, but another orphan. One of many.

In his desire to establish a bond of honesty and love with all his fellow men, in his belief in equality, and in his hatred of artificial class distinctions, Ishmael is a democrat. But in some respects he seems to anticipate, also,
the modern existentialist. He recognizes the irrationality of the universe, and consciously rejects the rationalism of both idealists and empiricists. One can almost hear him saying with Camus, "If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not come up, for I should belong to this world. I should be this world to which I am now set in opposition by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason is what sets me against all creation." Furthermore, Ishmael responds to the world around him as a whole man, as is apparent in his relationship with Queequeg.

Melville, like Hawthorne, was fascinated by the apparent dichotomy between head and heart. Hawthorne, however, was primarily concerned to show what happened when head dominated heart. His canon is replete with destroyed heartless hulks: Chillingworth, Rappaccini, Ethan Brand, among others. On the other hand, those who find a balance, Holgrave and Kenyon, for example are hopelessly dull. (In Dimmesdale there seems to be neither domination nor balance, but endless conflict.)

Ishmael may have been an attempt on Melville's part to portray a character who achieves balance in the same way as

23 Le Myth de Sisyphe (Paris, 1942), p. 74. (Translation mine.)
Holgrave and Kenyon, but a balance more deeply rooted in his personality (Holgrave and Kenyon, it will be recalled, are saved by the outside agency of the good girl). The result is that in Ishmael, Melville achieves more than a balance between head and heart, he achieves an integration of the two. In him head and heart are not so much balanced as fused. And this is unquestionably part of Ishmael's magnificence and Moby Dick's greatness.

In Pierre Glendinning, the integration is blasted apart, and as a consequence he is destroyed, a casualty of heart over head. Matthiessen points out that "Pierre was fated for disaster when he threw away all pondering scruples and cried: 'The heart! the heart! 'tis God's anointed; let me pursue the heart!" Matthiessen also calls attention to the parallels between Pierre and Hamlet, stressing, however, the fact that Pierre makes a conscious decision not to be a hesitant Hamlet, a decision which merely precipitates his plunge into destruction.

These parallels between Hamlet and Pierre are interesting and may be a clue to the book's failure. No doubt there are many reasons for this failure, among them Melville's sheer creative exhaustion (where can a man go after Moby-Dick)? But the most palpable one would seem to be an error in artistic judgment. Melville was crowded for money after

29Page 468.
the publication of *Moby Dick*. It was too much what he wanted to write, and consequently would not pay. As a result he conceived the idea of turning for bread to a tried money-maker, the melodrama of seduction. Yet, altogether a potboiler he could not write. So he decided to graft Shakespearean darkness and depth onto his seduction melodrama. In this case the graft did not work.

The book is truly a botch which bears some resemblance to the worst writing of Charles Brockden Brown. Richard Chase has been quoted as saying that "A stately and elevated language . . . is . . . useful in the economy of . . . Wieland." That such language can be useful is not to be denied. But the question we must ask about *Pierre*, as we did about *Wieland*, is how effective is such language in this particular book. In *Moby Dick*, Melville used both Biblical rhetoric and Shakespearean bombast to great effect. In *Pierre* the bombast is empty at best, ridiculous at worst. Melville had stated most emphatically, in his review of Hawthorne's *Mosses*, that we were not looking for an American Shakespeare. Unfortunately, by the time of the writing of *Pierre*, he had forgotten. He has Pierre say, at one point, "Oh! if ye be now nigh us, ye things I have no name for; then by a name that should be efficacious--by Christ's holy name, I warn ye back from her and me."30 This seems to be an

echo of Cassio's speech in Othello, "Oh, thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou has no name to be known by, Let us call thee Devil." Echo or not, however, the language is not suited to the occasion. The overwriting is transparent and clumsy, and contributes to the impression that Pierre is not so much an idealistic intellectual as a raving lunatic.

Also, there is a noticeable switch in Melville's use of stylistic levels. In Moby Dick, the style is consistent, and all characters share equally a universal human dignity. Even Pip, whom Matthiessen regards as the parallel of Lear's Fool, engages our human sympathy on its highest level. We are told, for example, that "Pip loved life." And there is nothing comic or demeaning in Ishmael's description of Pip's abandonment by Stubb: "Out from the centre of the sea, poor Pip turned his crisp, curling, black head to the sun, another lonely castaway, though the loftiest and the brightest" (p. 321). Finally, the whale that Stubb captures on this occasion is referred to as "that whale of Stubb's so dearly purchased" (p. 322).

In Pierre, on the other hand, there is the conception of a definite distinction between "high" and "low" characters. For example, after he reaches the city, Pierre hires a cab to convey him to his city-dwelling cousin's house. Since Pierre is not sure of the address, the cab driver starts to get rather surly. Pierre, enraged, tells him to stop the cab. The driver answers: "I obeys orders: the
first house with a light; and 'cording to my reck'ning—
though, to be sure, I don't know nothing of the city where
I was born and bred all my life—no, I knows nothing at all
about it—'cording to my reck'ning, the first light in this
here street will be the watch-house of the ward..." (p.
324). The tone and conception seem to be Dickensian. At
any rate, there is clearly a difference between the aristo-
cratic Pierre and the plebeian cab-driver, and the differ-
ence is revealed in two levels of language. As a human
being, the cab-driver cannot be taken seriously.

There is still the problem of how Melville could have
imagined Pierre would be a potboiler. He had written to
Richard Bentley, his English publisher, that Pierre was
"very much more calculated for popularity than anything you
have yet published of mine..." Newton Arvin comments
that "if this is what he literally thought, he was getting
alarmingly out of touch with reality."^{32} But in the same
letter, Melville went on to explain. He considered that
Pierre was "a regular romance, with a mysterious plot to it,
and stirring passions at work, and withal, representing a
new and elevated aspect of American life..." And in a
way, he was not wrong. Arvin mentions the hodgepodge of
models that Melville used: "the old novel of sensibility,
the Gothic romance, the novel of romantic sophistication,
and . . . Elizabethan tragedy. The hands are Melville's hands, but the voice, too much of the time, is the voice of Mrs. Radcliffe or Susanna Rowson. . ." (p. 227). The answer to Melville's blindness is surely here. After all, such best-sellers as The Power of Sympathy and Charlotte Temple were as shocking and sensational in their content as Pierre. They, too, dealt with incest, adultery and suicide. But for once, in this case, Melville underestimated the common reader. He could not hoodwink him. Whatever powers of titillation they may have had, such books as The Power of Sympathy and Charlotte Temple were in earnest in their preaching and moralizing. The subversiveness of Pierre was obvious to everyone.

Time and again Melville's inner chaos erupts through the surface of the book. Again he was unable to take his own very sound rational advice, as presented in the pamphlet, El, by Plotinus Plinlimmon, which so impresses Pierre when he reads it.33 The theme of the pamphlet is the irreconcilability of absolute or divine truth and practical or earthly truth. "Though the earthly wisdom of man be heavenly folly to God; so, conversely, is the heavenly wisdom of God an earthly folly to man" (p. 295). Consequently, those who attempt to live by absolute truth here on earth will somehow

33See Arvin, p. 221.
become involved "in strange, unique follies and sin, unimagined before" (p. 296). The author of the pamphlet concludes from this that "A virtuous expediency . . . seems the highest desirable or attainable earthly excellence for the mass of men, and is the only earthly excellence that their Creator intended for them" (p. 299). Melville himself, Arvin avers, would have liked to be able to accept "this moderate, Montaignesque morality," which was "reasonable, tolerant, yet serious and uncynical. . ." 34 But he could not accept it at the writing of Pierre, and neither could the wild hero of his book.

But the Plinlimmon pamphlet which seems so out of place in the light of Pierre's subsequent frantic activity, might have served as a satisfactory introduction to the last work of fiction Melville wrote, Billy Budd. For by that time Melville seems to have found a measure of serenity, and seems to have reconciled himself to horological time (earthly truth) in a way that was not possible at the time of the writing of Pierre, or of Moby-Dick, either. But this is not to say that Melville's reconciliation was complete. Though Billy Budd is the product of Melville's last years, in it he is still concerned with the same problems that occupied him in his earlier works. The tone is muted, but it clearly emanates from the same instrument. It is

34Ibid.
one thing for the narrator of Billy Budd to point out the futility of the Chaplain's trying to give absolution to one as innocent as Billy. It is another when he says, "Bluntly put, a chaplain is the minister of the Prince of Peace serving in the host of the God of War--Mars... Why then is he there? Because he indirectly subserves the purpose attested by the cannon; because he too lends the sanction of the religion of the meek to that which practically is the abrogation of everything but brute force." 35 This is the old Melville anger flashing out again.

At any rate, the extreme anguish that Melville must have undergone to achieve what reconciliation he did find seems to be reflected in the person of Captain Vere. For it is Vere more than the innocent and naïve Billy who experiences the full brunt of the agony. This is made clear time and again. Billy, it is averred, "was wholly without irrational fear of [death], a fear more prevalent in highly civilized communities than those so-called barbarous ones which in all respects stand nearer to unadulterate Nature" (p. 260). Also, "That the condemned one suffered less than [Vere] who mainly had effected the condemnation was apparently indicated by the former's exclamation in the scene soon performed to be touched upon" ("'God bless Captain Vere!'").

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Even the parallel between Isaac and Abraham (pp. 251-52) indicates Vere's agony. For, as both Kierkegaard and rabinnical commentators indicate, it would surely have been easier for Abraham to sacrifice himself than the son of his old age ("thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest"), the last hope of future generations.

Critics have treated Vere rather lightly, and certainly the intensity of his suffering has been ignored in the rage to find typological interpretations of Billy. And yet, these typological interpretations do not hold very well. R. W. B. Lewis, for example, wants to see Billy as Adam re-enacting the "myth of paradise": "Accused by Claggart of mutiny thereupon striking and killing his accuser, Billy Budd falls like Adam (through Eve), by the serpent; it is observed that the lifeless sergeant-at-arms resembles 'a dead snake.'" And yet, the distance between Billy's situation and the Adamic myth is obvious. Lewis himself concedes something when he pushes Eve into the picture without any justification. But, further, the parallel breaks down completely when it is remembered that Adam did not strike the serpent dead. If he had been able to do this, presumably Man would have been free of evil.

37The American Adam, p. 150.
And even the interpretation of Billy as Christ figure presents some difficulties. Lewis writes, "Billy is the type of scapegoat hero, by whose sacrifice the sins of his world are taken away: in this case, the world of the H.M.S. 'Indomitable' and the British navy, a world threatened by a mutiny which could destroy it." But, after all, Billy, intentionally or not, has killed a man, an act inconceivable of Christ. Moreover, because of the act, Billy is paying for his own sin, and is not being sacrificed to remove the sins of the world. There is one more objection to Lewis' reading. Billy is being sacrificed to preserve civil order, to lessen the possibility of mutiny. Of the crew he demands nothing. Christ, on the other hand, demanded obedience to divine command. As Plinlimmon states in his pamphlet, "Though Christ encountered woe in both the precept and the practice of his chronometricals, yet did he remain throughout entirely without folly or sin" (p. 296). But Billy commits both folly and sin, or at least one of the two.

Assuredly, such typological readings are to some extent justified by the text, and can add a valuable dimension to our appreciation of the work, but pushed too far they tend to obscure a fact that Chase calls attention to: "Captain Vere . . . is at the moral center of the book."  

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38 Page 151.
It is his agony rather than Billy's resignation that constitutes the tragedy. In his anguish, the dilemma of the democratic intellectual is worked out.

Vere is an eighteenth-century English intellectual who has mastered Plinlimmon's doctrine of expedience. "He had a marked leaning toward everything intellectual. He loved books, never going to sea without a newly replenished library, compact but the best." However, "His bias was towards those books to which every serious mind of superior order occupying any active post of authority in the world, naturally inclines: books treating of actual men and events no matter of what era--history, biography and unconventional writers who, free from cant and convention, like Montaigne, honestly and in the spirit of common sense philosophize upon realities" (pp. 163-64).

In a sense, Vere is both a mature Ishmael and a sane Ahab. Ishmael, it will be recalled, refuses responsibility because it is all he can do, he tells the reader, to take care of himself, without worrying about ships, barques, brigs, and sc on. As a result, it is possible for the Ahab's of the world, who do accept responsibility, to go mad with their own power and impose their will on society. Vere does accept responsibility, but he does not become a dictator like Ahab. "Tho' a conscientious disciplinarian he was no lover of authority for mere authority's sake" (p. 236).
Moreover, he is a benevolent leader, "an officer mindful of
the welfare of his men, but never tolerating an infraction
of discipline. . . " (p. 160). There is perhaps an additional
irony in this contrast between Ahab and Vere since English
Men-of-War were generally less democratic than American
whalers.

Vere himself is an aristocrat. He does not, like
Ahab, vaguely go back to the Biblical kings, but he is
"allied to the higher nobility . . . " of England.

Despite this fact, however, "his advancement had not
been altogether owing to the influences connected with that
circumstance" (p. 160). Nor is he arrogant about his breed­
ing. "Any landsman observing this gentleman not conspicuous
by his stature and wearing no pronounced insignia, emerging
from his cabin to the open deck, and noting the silent
defereence of the officers retiring to leeward, might have'
taken him for the King's guest. . . " (p. 161).

It is no doubt Vere's reading that has given him his
sense of social, political, and philosophical equilibrium.
It bolsters him "against those invading waters of novel
opinion social, political and otherwise, which carried away
as in a torrent no few minds in those days, minds by nature
not inferior to his own" (p. 164). But Vere's opposition to
new theories is not based on a selfish desire to preserve
his own position in the established order. "While other
members of that aristocracy to which by birth he belonged
were incensed at the innovators mainly because their theo-
ries were inimical to the privileged classes, not alone
Captain Vere disinterestedly opposed them because they
seemed to him incapable of embodiment in lasting institu-
tions, but at war with the peace of the world and the true
welfare of mankind" (p. 164).

But if reading of the common-sense philosophers has
preserved Vere from the errors of both extreme radicalism
and selfish conservatism, it has nonetheless exposed him to
two other bookish vices. One is coldness, and isolation
from his fellow men. (Other officers found him "lacking in
the companionable quality.") The other is "a certain
dreaminess of mood" (p. 161). Neither deficiency appears,
however, in its extreme form. Vere is neither an alienated
man nor a Hamlet incapable of action. He is "in general a
man of rapid action..." (p. 235). And it is precisely his
capacity for action that is taxed to the utmost when Billy
Budd strikes Claggart dead. Although he knows immediately
what his course of action will be ("Struck dead by an angel
of God! Yet the angel must hang!" [p. 229]), yet he does
not follow that course precipitately or arbitrarily. Instead,
he summons a drum-head court. But his reason for doing this
is not to avoid responsibility, as becomes quite clear when
he persuades the soft-hearted court to sentence Billy to
death.
Vere sees quite clearly the ambiguity in the situation, that there has been an ironic turnabout, and that absolute and earthly justice must inevitably, in this case, conflict: "innocence and guilt personified in Claggart and Budd in effect changed places. In a legal view the apparent victim of the tragedy was he who had sought to victimize a man blameless; and the indisputable deed of the latter, navally regarded, constituted the most heinous of crimes" (p. 234). But the officers of the court cannot reconcile themselves to condemning a man innocent of evil intent. Consequently, Vere, recognizing them as "well-meaning men not intellectually mature. . . ." (p. 243), must convince them that Billy must be sacrificed. "Mindful of paramount obligations," he tells them, "I strive against scruples that may tend to enervate decision. Not, gentleman, that I hide from myself that the case is an exceptional one. Speculatively regarded, it well might be referred to a jury of casuists. But for us here acting not as casuists or moralists, it is a case practical, and under martial law practically to be dealt with" (p. 244).

I think, but I would not swear, that there is an irony here. Vere himself has already regarded the case speculatively. He has himself been the casuist, and in his attempt to persuade the court, continues to be one. He has weighed the relative merits of chronometrical and horological truth, and has chosen the latter. He has decided that man can do
no more than try to preserve order in this universe insofar as he is able to do so. And of this he tries to convince the court:

If, mindless of palliating circumstances, we are bound to regard the death of the Master-at-arms as the prisoner's deed, then does that deed constitute a capital crime whereof the penalty is a mortal one. But in natural justice is nothing but the prisoner's overt act to be considered? How can we adjudge to summary and shameful death a fellow creature innocent before God, and whom we feel to be so? . . . I too feel . . . the full force of that. It is Nature. But do these buttons that we wear attest that our allegiance is to Nature? no, to the King. . . . In receiving our commissions we in the most important regards ceased to be natural free agents. . . . Suppose condemnation to follow these present proceedings. Would it be so much we ourselves that would condemn as it would be martial law operating through us? For that law and the rigor of it, we are not responsible. Our vowed responsibility is in this: That however pitilessly that law may operate, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it.

(pp. 244-46)

Knowing Melville's hatred of law, one may wonder how to take this speech of Vere's. Is it an indication that he has become an Ethan Brand, a man whose heart has been dried by his intellect? Or is the calculating ferocity of Vere's reasoning proof in itself that man should leave himself a recourse to Natural Law; that he should sometimes (as Thoreau advocated in Civil Disobedience) follow his conscience rather than civil law?

The latter question Vere considers openly. "But something in your aspect seems to urge that it is not solely the heart that moves in you, but also the conscience, the
private conscience. But tell me whether or not, occupying
the position we do, private conscience should not yield to
that imperial one formulated in the code under which alone
we officially proceed?" (p. 246). The three men are not
ready with a reply. And indeed, the question is not easily
answered, if it is answerable at all. But Vere declares
that whatever extenuating circumstances there are will be
considered at the "Last Assizes." This denial of private
conscience is not arbitrary, and is perhaps better under­
stood when some of the circumstances of the Nore mutiny,
which preceded the action of Billy Budd, are considered.
At that time, when the British navy was "the right arm of a
Power then all but the sole free conservative one of the
Old World, the blue-jackets . . . ran up with huzzas the
British colors with the union and cross wiped out; by that
cancellation transmuting the flag of founded law and free­
dom defined, into the enemy's red meteor of unbridled and
unbounded revolt" (p. 151). It seems quite clear from the
language of this description that "unbridled and unbounded
revolt" must be avoided, even if the cost turns out to be
heavy.

The first possibility, that Vere has lost his human
warmth, does not seem to accord with Vere's agony, and his
last interview with Billy. He, more than the officers who
would acquit Billy, realizes the price that is being paid
for civil order. He knows, for example, that one of the
officers "might not prove altogether reliable in a moral dilemma involving aught of the tragic." But he is aware of the moral dilemma and feels the tragedy. And he accepts his own painful role in it without complaint. It is Vere who communicates the sentence to Billy, and the narrator intimates that he might have revealed to Billy his own part in bringing about the decision of the court. And finally, his dying words are "Billy Budd, Billy Budd." In a sense, Vere is an Enlightenment, secular counterpart of Ivan Karamozov's Grand Inquisitor. The latter offers "bread, miracle, and mystery," to the benighted masses. Sacrificing his own happiness and possible chance of salvation, he offers the populace earthly happiness and the promise of bliss in return for obedience. The happiness comes from the institution of order, and the order depends on submission and obedience. The price paid by the people, which is the Inquisition, is high, the price paid by the Inquisitor himself may be higher. But he feels the reward, order, is worth it.

Vere also pays a heavy price, and for a very similar commodity. He does not work through authority, as does the medieval inquisitor, but, as is more suitable to an eighteenth-century intellectual, through reason. In a sense this helps to explain that peculiar trial. Vere is the chief witness, the prosecutor, the defense attorney, and finally the judge. He has seen the crime, and he understands it in all its
ramifications. In bringing about the death penalty, he does not exercise raw authority, but he overwhelms the three-man court with reason. He does not demand the death of Billy by virtue of his power as Captain, but he exacts the death penalty by imposing the power of his mind. When he begins to speak, "something both in the substance of what he said and his manner of saying it, showed the influence of unshared studies modifying and tempering the practical training of an active career" (p. 243). And when he is through, the "loyal lieges, plain and practical, though at bottom they dissented from some points Captain Vere had put to them, . . . were without the faculty, hardly had the inclination to gainsay one whom they felt to be an earnest man, one too not less their superior in mind than in naval rank" (pp. 248-49).

And his reasons for setting up the "moot" trial and executing Billy are very close to the Inquisitor's reasons for burning Christ. The Inquisitor tells Christ, "I would not serve madness. I turned back and joined the ranks of those who have corrected Thy work. I left the proud and went back to the humble. What I say to Thee will come to pass, and our dominion will be built up. I repeat, tomorrow Thou shalt see that obedient flock who at a sign from me will hasten to heap up the hot cincers about the pile on which I shall burn Thee for coming to hinder us. For if anyone has
ever deserved fires, it is Thou." He deserves the fires because he has offered mankind the two things that it cannot tolerate, freedom and conscience.

That mankind is not ready to bear these two burdens, Vere agrees. And thus Billy must be destroyed. But the destruction must be ceremonial. Hence, both the trial and the execution become rituals for the edification of the people. When one of the officers asks if Billy cannot be found guilty, but the penalty mitigated, Vere answers, "Consider the consequences of such clemency. The people (meaning the ship's company) have native sense; most of them are familiar with our naval usage and tradition; and how would they take it? Even could you explain to them—which our official position forbids—they, long moulded by arbitrary discipline have not that kind of intelligent responsiveness that might qualify them to comprehend and discriminate. No, to the people the foretopman's deed . . . will be plain homicide committed in a flagrant act of mutiny. What penalty for that should follow, they know. But it does not follow. Why?" (pp. 247-48).

When men themselves become sufficiently rational, then perhaps they will be able to live in a structure built on reason alone. But until that is done, man must be kept in awe of what he cannot understand. Ishmael had recognized the same fact. In the chapter on the Specksynder, he writes, "Be a man's intellectual supremacy what it will, it can
never assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base" (p. 127). Vere, however, has become reconciled to the necessity of accepting even what is paltry and base, so long as it helps to preserve worldly order. It is that order that Vere accepts completely. "A true military officer, the narrator asserts, "is in one particular like a true monk. Not with more self-abnegation will the latter keep his vows of monastic obedience than the former his vows of allegiance to martial duty" (p. 236). And apparently he has convinced even Billy. For Billy's last words, "God bless Captain Vere!" seem to add a kind of divine sanction to the civil ceremony.

But though he has chosen horological truth, Vere knows what has been lost too. He is fully aware of the price that has been paid, and in this lies his tragedy.

"There are not many final works," writes Arvin "that have so much the air as Billy Budd, Foretopman has of being a Nunc Dimittis. Everyone has felt this benedictory quality in it. Everyone has felt it to be the work of a man on the last verge of mortal existence who wishes to take his departure with a word of acceptance and reconciliation on his lips." Arvin, as he usually does, has hit the mark
beautifully. But we feel Melville's acceptance as a very sad one indeed. Gone is the hope, and gone are the high spirits of Ishmael. Gone, too, is the magnificent anger. The intellectual, Vere seems to indicate, must settle for the world he has. But the settlement, in the end, is made with a touch of noble reluctance. Perhaps the best insight into the quality of half-heartedness is offered by Melville's will, written in 1838, three years before his death. "Any property I may die possessed of," he wrote, "including money in banks, and my share in the as yet undivided real estate at Gansevoort, I bequeath to my wife. I do this because I have confidence that through her our children and grandchildren will get their proportion of any benefit that may accrue." 41

Melville, too, had reached a settlement with the world. But it is obvious that his heart was only half in it. To the extent that he recognized the obligation to pass his property on to posterity, he accepted horological time. But he was not sufficiently interested in the matter to be bothered with details of distribution. Those he left in the more capable hands of Elizabeth.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Between Captain Vere and Captain Farrago there exist some surprising resemblances. Both are eighteenth-century men of reason, both are reconciled to the doctrine of expediency, and both accept civil order as an ultimate value. But there is a very important difference between them, too, for Vere recognizes, as Farrago does not, the full implications of his choice. He knows that in choosing one set of values he has had to surrender another set. He sees that the price of civil sanity is ideal truth, and that the expedient cannot be reconciled with the Absolute. And what makes his situation more difficult is that he has glimpsed the radiance of the Absolute and felt its attraction. No one feels the loss of Billy's goodness and beauty more than Vere, and his sense of what is being lost is his tragedy.

But Vere's dilemma is not his alone. It is the dilemma of the intellectual in the Western world. This intellectual emerges from the chaos and upheavals of the end of the eighteenth century. What marked that century intellectually, and what helped to create the atmosphere of
revolution in which the century ended, was the continual breakdown of old absolutes.

Under severe pressure from both Rationalism and Empiricism, God degenerated from the Absolute Law-giver to an ineffectual mechanic who no longer had the power or right to interfere in his own work. But eventually the claims of Rationalism and Empiricism were also challenged. "From the time of Kant on," writes Henry Aiken, "the assumption of a preordained correspondence between the mind and its object was regarded as dogmatic and uncritical. . . . It is the thinking subject himself who establishes the standards of objectivity. . . . Every . . . [philosophical] system, consciously or otherwise, presupposes certain ultimate commitments or 'posits.' These are made by the rational animal himself in order that he may live and do his work, and their validity has no higher court of appeal than his own determination to abide by them."¹ This breakdown gives rise to a search both for an Absolute for "reality." The search becomes especially significant in the American novel, in which the common-sense solution to the "problem of reality" is not always accepted.

In the English novel (which is not necessarily to say the English mind), society itself becomes a substitute for the Absolute. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

the English novel serves as a vehicle of heroic action which takes place in a social milieu. Consequently, the hero who performs the heroic action is a member of a gentlemanly class. What distinguishes him is both his gentlemanly bearing and speech and his capacity for external adventure. He is a hero who goes about knocking scoundrels on the pate. And there is no mistaking the scoundrels, either. It may take a long time for Squire Allworthy to see Blifil's villainy, but in the end it is unmistakably revealed, and the reader has known his duplicity all the time.

In the American novel, society has seldom been conceived as an absolute. It is there, of course, but lacking the sanction of tradition, its superficiality is generally recognized. As a consequence, good and evil become not just a matter of social hypocrisy but take on cosmic significance. One cannot eliminate evil merely by exposing a Blifil or a Uriah Heep, for it is too ineradicable and also too elusive. The gentleman-hero and hypocrite-villain have generally had no place in the American novel principally because the gentleman, \textit{qua} gentleman, has not necessarily been considered good; nor has evil, which cannot be socially comprehended or defined, been conceived of as being so easily exposed. The hero of the American novel, then, instead of performing "good" actions (in the sense of unveiling and attacking evil), tends rather to explore the nature of good
and evil, and, ultimately, to explore the nature of "reality" itself.

Especially in the American novel of the mid-nineteenth century, the relationship between good and evil is always problematic. Who can unerringly place Ahab in the party of Satan or God? Critical opinion is divided, as it must be. The same is true of Hester and Dimmesdale, and of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale, Hawthorne's conclusion notwithstanding. It is true, also, of Vere, Claggart, and Billy Budd. It is not a question of evil's concealing itself and then being revealed, but a question of its not being distinguishable from good.

The convolutions of good and evil which are apparent in Dimmesdale's confession are evident, too, in the entire situation of Billy Budd. Morally, Billy does not seem to be guilty. Vere and the rest of the crew are all convinced of his innocence. He was falsely accused, and struck his accuser as a result of an irresistible impulse, with no intent to kill. Moreover, Billy has the appearance of guiltlessness. His physical beauty is striking, as is, too, his simplicity.

Claggart, on the other hand, at first glance, seems to have the appearance of a villain. And yet, his appearance cannot be wholly villainous, since he has impressed the officers of the British navy sufficiently so that he is rapidly promoted from a common seaman to the rank of
Master-at-arms, a position which, ironically enough, is the equivalent of Chief of Police on land. Billy's appearance, then, is clearly that of innocence, while Claggart's is equivocal.

But in spite of his innocent appearance and his seeming moral purity, Billy has committed a heinous crime, as Vere observes, the most heinous conceivable for a sailor at sea. He has killed the officer whose duty is "preserving order on the populous lower gun-decks." So, in a sense, the purity of Billy's appearance is a deception. And yet, at the same time that his appearance is false, it is also true. This situation has further complications, for when the story appears in a weekly newspaper, Claggart is portrayed as a martyr and Billy as an assassin.

The impossibility of disentangling the situation is illustrated in a dramatic moment during Billy's trial. One of the officers asks Billy if he had any knowledge of an incipient mutiny. Billy is actually under the impression that he did have such knowledge, for Claggart had tried to frame him by getting another sailor to sound him out on the subject. However, Billy cannot admit this to the court. Hence,

the reply lingered. This was naturally imputed by the court to the same vocal embarrassment which had retarded or obstructed previous answers. But in main it was otherwise here; the question immediately recalling to Billy's mind the interview with the afterguardsman in the forechains. But an innate repugnance to playing a part at all
approaching that of an informer against one's own shipmates—the same erring sense of uninstructed honor which had stood in the way of his reporting the matter at the time though as a loyal man-of-war-man it was incumbent on him and failure so to do if charged against him and proven, would have subjected him to the heaviest of penalties; this, with the blind feeling now his, that nothing really was being hatched, prevailing with him. When the answer came it was a negative.

(pp. 239-40)

Here ambiguity is piled on ambiguity. The officers assume Billy's innocence, and therefore impute his hesitation to his speech defect. In this case, however, his physical flaw has nothing to do with his not speaking. His hesitation is not owing to his speech deficiency at all, but to the fact that if he answers truthfully he will be condemning himself in the eyes of the law. And yet, Billy feels that in spirit he is innocent. Consequently, he lies to the court, because in order to achieve the spirit of truth it is necessary to violate the actual truth. So truth, in this case, rests finally in a series of counterbalancing distortions.

The same problem attaches to Ahab. Kazin maintains that "he is a hero of thought who is trying, by terrible force, to reassert man's place in nature." But even if it be granted that the ultimate goal of his quest is "good," nevertheless it is painfully obvious that both the means and the actual outcome are "evil."

\(^2\)Moby Dick, ed. Alfred Kazin, p. x.
Melville, like Hawthorne, conceives evil, not as an external object that can be unmasked and then bludgeoned into submission, but as a kind of virus that infiltrates and infects the soul. When Ahab tries to meet what he thinks is evil head-on, he succeeds only in destroying himself and his fellow men. Moreover, just where the evil resides—whether in the whale or in Ahab—becomes problematic. Ahab sees Moby Dick as "unexampled, intelligent malignity," but Starbuck sees Ahab himself as a demon. The turnabout becomes complete when Moby Dick starts after the Pequod, and the hunter becomes the hunted. Striking at evil as at an external entity in the universe, Ahab is as mad as Quixote tilting at windmills. For evil is like a cancer that permeates the soul and is also a part of it. To remove it is to destroy the substance it is already consuming. Ishmael recognizes this problem most clearly. He is certain that evil exists. He sees its phenomenological manifestation in "whiteness," but he knows that he cannot be certain whether it exists only in his own mind or in the external world of objects. It is the inextricability of good and evil, too, that prevents Dimmesdale from achieving purification. Good and evil are inseparable, and just as a malignant cancer dies only with its victim, so does evil, too.

In the "commingling" of good and evil there seems to be a trace of the third-century heresy of Mani. But it does not seem that the trace is large enough to justify Chase's
contention that the American mind has "recaptured the Manichaean sensibility," whatever Chase conceives that to be. If the American imagination has been, as Chase avers, "less interested in redemption than in the melodrama of the eternal struggle of good and evil . . . ," may it not be because redemption seemed so elusive in a secular society founded on Enlightenment ideas. Hawthorne's statement about Melville, that he could neither believe nor be comfortable in his disbelief, is true not only of Melville, but of his intellectual heroes as well.

The objection to overemphasizing the Puritan-Manichaean elements in the American imagination is that it assumes a faith in the absolute nature of good and evil, and tends to overlook the equally important element in the American mind of eighteenth-century skepticism and liberalism. If Manichaean could believe in anything, it was in the absolute existence of good and evil, light and dark. The conflict conceived by the American imagination, however, is not merely one between good and evil, absolute light as opposed to absolute dark, but one between the relative "goods" of an absolutist, theocratic, Puritan tradition and those of a liberal, democratic, pluralistic tradition.

The effect on the Western mind of the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence remains even in the twentieth century. Max Beloff, in The Age of Absolutism, writes, "So
great has been the mental impact of the ideas of abstract and inalienable rights to which the American and French Revolutions gave currency that despite their modern denial in so many quarters, a mental effort is involved in trying to reconstruct the political outlook of a society in whose institutions they found no expression." Even Mr. Khruschev must speak in terms of liberation and human freedom.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, inflammatory new ideas clashed with older conservative beliefs to produce an intellectual crisis. On the one hand there was an arbitrary God who chose his elect for heavenly bliss, and on the other, a God who created all men equal and endowed them with certain inalienable rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For the sensitive intellectual aware of both currents this meant a choice between a society founded on divine authority, demanding total obedience to God's laws, and a society founded on expediency, on a contract between governing and governed.

As a result, the intellectual of the middle of the nineteenth century found himself standing in a number of diverse postures toward God, Nature, Mankind, and the State, with no one of these being any more reliable a yardstick of truth than any other. And by the end of the century, truth itself had become a human device rather than an "objective

reality." William James wrote, "Up to about 1850 almost every one believed that sciences expressed truths that were exact copies of a definite code of non-human realities. But the enormously rapid multiplication of theories in these latter days has well-nigh upset the notion of any one of them being a more relatively objective kind of thing than another. There are . . . so many classifications, each one of them good for something and yet not good for everything, that the notion that even the truest formula may be a human device and not a literal transcript has dawned on us."5

Not everyone, however, was able to accept the disappearance of all absolutes with the equanimity of William James. And the novel became an important instrument in the search for new absolutes. Charles Brockden Brown's intellectuals, with the exception of Colden, seek a substitute for the absolute in revolutionary activity, and sometimes in violence itself. Significantly, all but Colden are destroyed. Dimmesdale searches for the old Absolute, the God of his fathers, but he cannot find it. Reversed, Hawthorne's description of Melville seems to fit Dimmesdale, for he could neither disbelieve nor be comfortable in his belief. Ultimately, he cannot ascend to the mystic's goal of union with the Absolute, not because he is a Puritan, but because he is seen from the perspective of Hawthorne's skeptical

mind. Holgrave, Coverdale, and Kenyon, all of whom were conceived by Hawthorne as his contemporaries, have given up the search for any absolute. No doubt their coldness is as much owing to their impassive despair as to their intellectuality; all of them settle for material comfort as the last compensation available in an inscrutable world. Holgrave retreats to Judge Pyncheon's house, Coverdale to his own study, and Kenyon to the maternal arms of Hilda.

Ahab externalizes Dimmesdale's internal search for the Absolute. What Dimmesdale seeks in himself, Ahab seeks in Moby Dick. It is not surprising that critics cannot agree whether he is chasing God or Satan. But in a way it does not matter, for if he can find either, he has actually found both. If he can discover either absolute good or absolute evil, he will have attained a reliable, stationary set of values, and will finally have struck through the pasteboard mask. After all, it is not so much evil or good in themselves that torture him, nor even the conflict between them, but the ambiguity which prevents him from knowing one or the other definitely. In his passion to know what is beyond human ken, in his passion to promulgate the law and at the same time rise above it, Ahab resembles the revolutionary intellectual. He rebels, however, not against society but against the whole universe.

Ishmael seeks to substitute for the old authoritarian God the "great democratic God." He looks to democratic
Christianity for a new Absolute, and, to some extent, he finds it in his relationship with Queequeg, and in his mergence with the crew of the Pequod. But under Ahab's merciless pressure Democracy as an absolute breaks down, and Ishmael once more finds himself an orphan. But it is doubtful that Ishmael could have retained his solution even in the absence of Ahab. For both Ishmael's "great God absolute" and Ahab's obsession are incompatible with a pluralistic society which demands a state of equilibrium between polarities of right and left.

Henry Aiken writes, "Since the Renaissance, the primary and increasingly crucial 'existential problem' of man has been the adjustment of the new attitudes and ideas to the orthodox values and the traditional conception of human destiny that are represented in the medieval synthesis. From the middle of the eighteenth century on, however, the very possibility of such an adjustment came increasingly into question, and on more and more fundamental cultural levels. It is precisely in this problem that Ishmael is involved. He tries to reconcile the old and the new values into a new absolutism, but he cannot achieve the impossible. Absolute democracy is a contradiction in terms. Still, Ishmael cannot be classified with Dimmesdale, Ahab, and the

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6. The Age of Ideology, p. 25.
revolutionaries, for though he strives for the Absolute, he is never obsessed by it.

Only Vere and Farrago, of those intellectuals I have dealt with, wholly accept the pluralism of democratic society. Both of them recognize the need to sacrifice the ultimate to the expedient. And both are willing to give up absolute truth in order to achieve a functional worldly truth. Ideologically, the two characters are close to each other, yet the stylistic levels on which they are portrayed are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Farrago is essentially a comic character conceived in the tradition of the episodic novel of manners, and Modern Chivalry itself is a cross between the picaresque novel and the mock epic. Captain Vere, on the other hand, is conceived much more seriously. He is not exactly a tragic hero, but rather a man who must make a tragic choice. But whether Vere is tragic or not, Billy Budd is certainly conceived as a tragedy.

It is an intellectual bond, too, rather than a formal one, that unites Farrago and Vere with the other characters I have dealt with. All are concerned with the individual's relation to state and society, good and evil, and ultimately to reality itself, in the absence of any absolute authority. But by their very nature as characters who seek a reasonable equilibrium, Vere and Farrago, and to some extent Ishmael, tend to see problems more clearly than any of the others, who are blinded by their obsessions.
As interesting as this intellectual bend, however, and actually closely related to it, are the formal differences. The formal and stylistic range in the four authors I have considered is enormous: the loosely constructed picaresque-mock-epic of Brackenridge; the wild gothic novels of Brown; the carefully controlled innovations on medieval romance of Hawthorne; and finally, Shakespearean rhetoric and Biblical vision in Melville. All this in a period of less than sixty years (1792-1851). The only conclusion that seems possible is that the urge to experiment has been, from the first, an important element in the American novel. In the fiction I have studied, the search for "reality" and the search for form have gone hand in hand. The novels dealt with reflect the growing intensity of the crisis of adjusting old values to new ideas, of evaluating "reality" in a world of shifting and cracking absolutes. But it would be foolhardy to conclude that all American novels have undertaken this search for "reality," though indeed, as is amply illustrated by the novels of Hemingway, Faulkner, and Bellow, the urge to experiment is still strong.

I do not intend, however, to chase that elusive wraith, "the tradition of the American novel." The essence of the novel as a form has been, and is, freedom and variety. As Henry James puts it in "The Art of Fiction," "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. . . . There is no impression of life, no
manner of seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of
the novelist may not offer a place; you have only to remem-
ber that talents so dissimilar as those of Alexandre Dumas
and Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Gustave Flaubert have
worked in this field with equal glory." There is no reason,
then, to assume that the "novel of manners" is the novel,
nor to accept the postulate of Lionel Trilling, the most
influential and original of the "manners" critics, that the
only way to "reality" in the novel is through "manners."

One hesitates to quarrel with Mr. Trilling because
of his brilliance and charm as a writer. But he raises
certain questions that cannot be ignored. For example, he
asserts that "the great novelists knew that manners indicate
the largest intentions of men's souls as well as the small-
est and they are perpetually concerned to catch the meaning
of every dim implicit hint." It is impossible to determine
how Mr. Trilling arrives at this inference, especially since
he does not inform the reader who, in his opinion, the great
novelists are. Moreover, how does he know what these novel-
ists "knew," and what is the relation between their knowledge
and practice? Is it through their fiction that he can tell
what they knew, or is it from their writing about fiction?
Are their definitions of "manners" always the same as his?
Finally, what does he mean when he speaks of the "the

intentions of men's souls"? Does he mean to imply that the "soul" has an independent will?

This vagueness becomes crucial when Trilling asserts,

It is inescapably true that in the novel manners make men. It does not matter in what sense the word manners is taken— it is equally true of the sense which so much interested Proust or of the sense which interested Dickens or, indeed, of the sense which interested Homer. The Duchesse de Guermantes unable to delay departure for the dinner party to receive properly from her friend Swann the news that he is dying but able to delay to change the black slippers her husband objects to; Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller; Priam and Achilles— they exist by reason of their observed manners.8

To begin with, the truth that Mr. Trilling finds "inescapable" is very questionable indeed. For "manners," in the opening sentence, one can reasonably substitute such words as "language," "imagination," "action," "psychological analysis," and so on. And if it be objected that these are all subsumed under "manners," this is merely to point up the vagueness and weakness of the term itself.

Secondly, there is a confusion in Mr. Trilling's argument, which is partly owing to careless writing (the first word in the clause beginning, "It is equally," is not an expletive, as were the two "its" preceding it, nor is it a pronoun with a clearly perceivable antecedent). At any rate, Mr. Trilling seems to be saying that no matter what one takes the word "manners" to mean, it will still be true that

8Ibid., p. 10.
"in the novel manners make men." But it is soon clear that Mr. Trilling does not really mean, "it does not matter in what sense the word manners is taken," for his examples limit the "senses" in which it can be taken to three; and one suspects Mr. Trilling of feeling that ultimately, all of these three boil down to one.

There is also a kind of confusion in the way in which Mr. Trilling uses his examples. He relates rather clumsily what is presumably a specific instance of the Duchesse de Guermantes's "manners," but he never shows how her action demonstrates Proust's "sense of manners," nor does he show how a man has been made by these "manners." Then, without further ado, he throws in four names, at random, but the way in which Mr. Trilling imagines them to be analogous to the Duchesse's degenerate, brutal behavior is utterly mysterious. Somehow, Mr. Trilling tells us, they all "exist" in the same way.

Finally, it is interesting to observe Mr. Trilling's choice of examples. Proust, Dickens, and Homer have presumably been chosen for the great variety they represent. But when did The Iliad become a novel? It seems to me that this is one case in which Mr. Trilling should not be permitted to eat his cake and still have it. If manners make men in the epic as well as in the novel, then the fact that "manners make men" cannot very logically be used as the
distinguishing characteristic of the novel. And if this is so, one wonders just what Mr. Trilling's point is, after all.

I think what Mr. Trilling is getting at, in spite of his explicitly stated distaste for snobbery, and in spite of his mention of Cervantes and Dostoevsky, is that the novel properly conceived should deal, not just with "manners," but with genteel "manners," or with "manners" conceived from the vantage point of haute culture. That is, it is legitimate to portray, in the novel, a Sam Weller or Mr. Pickwick as well as a Duchesse de Guermantes, as long as the former are not taken seriously. Mr. Trilling's constant recurring to the Homeric epic as a standard of judgment is highly revealing. Auerbach, it will be recalled, points out that "in the Homeric poems life is enacted only among the ruling class--others appear only in the role of servants to that class. The ruling class is ... a sort of feudal aristocracy, whose men divide their lives between war, hunting, marketplace councils, and feasting, while the women supervise the maids in the house. As a social picture, this world is completely stable. ..." This Homeric concept of "manners," society, and "reality" dominates Mr. Trilling's thinking.

But as Auerbach has so brilliantly demonstrated, Homer's representation of reality is not the only one

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*Mimesis*, p. 18.
possible. As a matter of fact, the novelist in America, with some exceptions, has generally sought to do just the opposite of what Mr. Trilling would like him to do. He has not attempted to find a form in which he can undertake the serious portrayal of a traditional aristocracy, but one in which he can explore the ultimate problems of all men. He has tried to portray a society which does indeed have manners (every society does), but in which stability and class rigidity have never been an acceptable goal. The result has been a literature which has not relied as heavily as English literature on classical models, a literature which has often been much more intent on the exploration of "reality" than on the mere reflection of it. Mr. Trilling's refusal to accept "the problem of reality" as it manifests itself in American literature is of a piece with his inability to recognize the same problem (as I show in my first chapter) in Oedipus Rex, King Lear, Tartuffe, and Paradise Lost. It is typical of Mr. Trilling that in all these fantastically complex works, he should ultimately see the "problem of reality" as merely a question of social hypocrisy.

Mr. Trilling has said about the Duchesse de Guermantes, Sam Weller, Mr. Pickwick, Priam, and Achilles that they all "exist by reason of their observed manners." But in this sense, Captain Farrago, Dimmesdale, Ishmael, and all the other characters I have dealt with, also exist by reason of
their observed manners, that is, if one wishes to put it that way. As fictional characters, they exist in the same way as all other fictional characters. And the principal difference between a Sam Weller and an Ishmael is not that one is "mannered" and the other not, but that the first is an amusing caricature and the other a moving human being. No one in his right mind would think of taking anything Sam says seriously, because it is of the nature of "low" characters without social polish not to have anything to add to the structures of human thought. They are entertaining; that is all.

But though Ishmael is not an Achilles or a Priam, only an obtuse mind could fail to take him seriously. Though a common a sailor, he is capable of a profundity that Achilles never dreamed of, and of expressing his thoughts with a beauty and dignity that has seldom been matched by the most genteel or aristocratic of characters. Moreover, the man who has known Ishmael can never be the same again. His manners are infinitely "coarser" than those of the Duchesse de Guermantes, but it seems foolish to insist that because of this he does not "exist." Just as her "refined" manners reveal her actual grossness, so Ishmael's "gross" manners reveal his innate nobility.

Mr. Trilling seems to feel that the novel, as the chronical of manners, must accept the stability of the social order it records, and that it must content itself
with the limited truth available through empirical examination of "social facts." But the novel, in some of its greatest moments, has affirmed individual responsibility and dignity against social stability, and absolute truth against "reality in the social field." Hence, from his prow-pulpit, Father Mapple thunders, "Delight is to him--a far, far upward and inward delight--who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self. . . . Delight is to him, who gives no quarter in the truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin though he pluck it out from under the robes of Senators and Judges" (p. 57). Trilling says that the American novel has been "tangential" to society. But Father Mapple's speech is far from tangential. It is a bomb laid at the very cornerstone of society.

In explaining the custom of "Gamming," Ishmael says, all professions have their own little peculiarities of detail; so has the whale fishery. In a pirate, man-of-war, or slave-ship, when the captain is rowed anywhere in his boat, he always sits in stern sheets on a comfortable, sometimes cushioned seat there, and often steers himself with a pretty little milliner's tiller decorated with gay cords and ribbons. But the whale-boat has no seat astern, no sofa of that sort whatever, and no tiller at all. High times indeed, if whaling captains were wheeled about the water on castors like gouty old aldermen in patent chairs. And as for a tiller, the whale-boat never admits of any such effeminancy. . . .

(p. 196)
All novels, too, Ishmael might have added, have their peculiarities of detail. And those peculiarities contribute to a picture of "reality." The reality that Ishmael knows and loves is the reality of the whale-boat--stark, manly, devoid of emasculating luxury. Certainly, it is not the "reality" of the drawing room.

In its bareness and lack of ostentation, Ishmael's reality is austere. But it is a noble reality, too. For underneath it pulsate the highest aspirations of the democratic dream.
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I, David Harry Hirsch, was born in Brooklyn, New York, April 6, 1930. I received my secondary-school education at Boys High School in Brooklyn, and my undergraduate training at New York University, which granted me the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1951. In 1953, I received the Master of Arts degree from New York University. I spent the next two years in the United States Army. I returned to the academic scene in 1956, enrolling in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University. I was a teaching assistant during the academic years 1957-1958 and 1958-1959. During the two following years, I was an assistant instructor. I held this position while completing the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.