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THE GROTESQUE IN AMERICAN FICTION

DISSERTATION

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INTRODUCTION

Toward the end of Flannery O'Connor's novel, Wise Blood, a very funny incident occurs. To escape from the rain, Enoch Emery, a boy of eighteen with yellow hair and a fox-shaped face, ducks under the marquee of a movie house and finds himself in a line of children queued up to meet Gonga, the gorilla movie star. Soon Gonga arrives in the back of a sound truck, but before he will shake hands with the children, he insists on being covered with a raincoat. When the line finally begins to move forward, Enoch desperately tries to think of an obscene remark with which to insult Gonga. At last Enoch reaches the head of the line and finds his hand in the warm, soft paw of the gorilla:

For a second he only stood there, clasping it. Then he began to stammer. "My name is Enoch Emery," he mumbled. "I attended the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy. I work at the city zoo. I seen two of your pictures. I'm only eighteen years old but I already work for the city. My daddy made me com ..." and his voice cracked.

The star leaned slightly forward and a change came in his eyes: an ugly pair of human ones moved closer and squinted at Enoch from behind the celluloid pair. "You go to hell," a surly voice inside the ape-suit said, low but distinctly, and the hand was jerked away.

The scene speaks for itself. It is absurdly comic, and as such is representative of a number of similar incidents in Wise Blood.
The equally remarkable sequel to this incident is characteristic of another group of events which occur in Miss O'Connor's novel, those which combine humor with violence. That night, when the truck carrying Gonga pulls away from another movie house, Enoch slips out of the shadows and climbs aboard. He is armed with a sharp metal rod fashioned out of the mainshaft of an umbrella. As the truck speeds across the city, Enoch kills the man inside the ape-suit and strips him of his costume. Near a pine grove he slips from the truck and quickly exchanges his clothes for the gorilla suit. After beating his arms violently against his chest and growling loudly, Enoch the gorilla returns to the highway where he encounters a man and woman sitting on a rock enjoying twilight:

The young man turned his neck just in time to see the gorilla standing a few feet away, hideous and black, with its hand extended. He eased his arms from around the woman and disappeared silently into the woods. She, as soon as she turned her eyes, fled screaming down the highway. The gorilla stood as though surprised and presently its arm fell to its side. It sat down on the rock where they had been sitting and stared over the valley at the uneven skyline of the city. (p. 198)

If we are shocked by the murder which Enoch commits, we also laugh at the humorous picture of an adolescent boy finally achieving some kind of identity in the guise of a gorilla. The combination of violence and humor in the scene produces in us corresponding emotions.
Finally, there is a third class of events in *Wise Blood*, the ones which are completely violent. To illustrate, let me discuss the murder of Solace Layfield by Hazel Motes. While busy preaching in the streets of Taulkinham, Hazel finds himself receiving competition from Hoover Shoats, alias Onnie Jay Holy, and his hired prophet, Solace Layfield. The two competitors attempt to recruit members for their church, The Holy Church of Christ Without Christ. Hazel is angered by the two men whom he considers false prophets. So after the three men have ended their preaching, he follows Solace's car into the country and forces it to stop. After a brief argument in which Hazel insists that Solace take off the suit of clothes given him by Shoats, Layfield attempts to escape:

The Prophet began to run in earnest. He tore off his shirt and unbuttoned his belt and ran out of his trousers. He began grabbing for his feet as if he would take off his shoes too, but before he could get at them, the Essex knocked him flat and ran over him. Haze drove about twenty feet and stopped the car and then began to back it. He backed it over the body and then stopped and got out. The Essex stood half over the other Prophet as if it were pleased to guard what it had finally brought down. The man didn't look so much like Haze, lying on the ground on his face without his hat or suit on. A lot of blood was coming out of him and forming a puddle around his head. He was motionless all but for one finger that moved up and down in front of his face as if he were marking time with it. Haze poked his toe in his side and he wheezed for a second and then was quiet. "Two things I can't stand," Haze said, "--a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is. You shouldn't ever have tampered with me if you didn't want what you got."

(p. 204)
This is a shocking incident. We are repulsed by Haze's violence, for certainly Layfield's behavior in no way provokes such an extreme reaction. And we are amazed at Haze's justification of his act: his explanation of things he can't stand bears little logical relation to what he has just done.

The incidents in *Wise Blood*, then, fall into three groups: the absurdly comic ones, ones which combine humor and violence, and ones which are solely violent. As characteristic of the incidents, I have discussed the two encounters between Enoch Emery and Gonga the gorilla, and the murder of Solace. The most suitable word which I know for describing them is the adjective "grotesque." It is the only word that includes at once the concepts of absurd humor, gratuitous violence, and perverted logic. It is, in short, an omnibus word, useful for discussing matters which are bizarre, eccentric, perverted, fantastic, absurd, morbid, monstrous, gruesome, ugly, or illogical.

If we examine only the incidents in *Wise Blood*, we in no way realize just how grotesque the novel is. Every character in the novel further enhances the grotesqueness of the book. Take, first, their names: Hazel Motes, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, Enoch Emery, Sabbath and Asa Hawks, Hoover Shoats, Solace Layfield, and Leora Watts. None of these names is common, and everyone suggests something other than a human being. "Hazel Motes," for example
makes us think of nuts and dust, several of the names bring to mind animals, and "Leora Watts" suggests something electric. As unusual as the characters' names are their obsessions. Hazel Motes' world, for instance, revolves around his ancient rat-colored Essex and a religion which denies the existence of sin by wallowing in it. And the center of the world for Enoch Emery is a shrunken mummy, in that part of the zoo labeled MVSEM, which he finally steals as the "new Jesus" for Haze's Church Without Christ. Wise Blood, thus, deals with a group of humans who constitute a very odd fictional gallery, who are all grotesque in some way.

The grotesque in the novel goes even beyond the characters and incidents. As Lewis Lawson has recently pointed out, "If the content of Wise Blood seems bizarre and ludicrous, the rhetoric only reinforces that appearance." In the first place, comparisons are frequently incongruous: drugstore chairs are like toad stools, cows are like housewives, houses are like ugly dogs, tree trunks are like ankle socks, a woman's hair is like ham gravy or like a stack of sausages, and windshield wipers are like two idiots clapping in church. Furthermore, Miss O'Connor describes humans in non-human terms. For example, characters in Wise Blood are at various times yellow jackets, spiders, frogs, eagles, fleas, hound dogs, mandrills, foxes, bats, wasps, game-hens, parrots, and shrikes. At
other times humans are completely mechanical objects:
Sabbath's head works like a screw and her eyes look like
chips of green glass; Haze's landlady looks like an
upside-down mop with a switchbox for a head; Haze is com­
pared to a puppet with a face which looks either like a
gun or a piece of paper pasted to a window; and Mrs.
Watts' grin is like a sickle. Miss O'Connor also makes the
characters of Wise Blood non-human when she describes their
emotional states: Enoch's heart is like a motorcycle and
his breathing is like a wild bell clapper, Hazel's throat
grips him like an ape clutching the bars of a cage, and Mrs.
Flood's heart shakes like a bird cage. Finally, the con­
versations and speeches in Wise Blood enhance the grotesque
rhetoric of the novel. To illustrate their absurd nature,
I quote at length the exchange between Hazel and Mrs.
Hitchcock which takes place early in the book:

Mrs. Hitchcock said she knew a man who lived
in Chi . . .
"You might as well go one place as another," he said. "That's all I know."
Mrs. Hitchcock said well that time flies.
She said she hadn't seen her sister's children in
five years and she didn't know if she'd know them if
she saw them. There were three of them, Roy, Bubber,
and John Wesley. John Wesley was six years old and
he had written her a letter, dear Mammadoll. They
called her Mammadoll and her husband Popadoll . . .
"I reckon you think you been redeemed," he
said.
Mrs. Hitchcock snatched at her collar.
"I reckon you think you been redeemed," he
repeated.
She blushed. After a second she said yes, life
was an inspiration and then she said she was hungry
and asked him if he didn't want to go into the diner.
(p. 14)
The action, the characters, and the rhetoric of *Wise Blood*, then, all work together to make it grotesque. Yet even they do not constitute all its grotesqueness; from a structural point of view the novel is also extraordinary. Aside from the fact that time is treated conventionally in the book, we find in it none of the usual prerequisites for a novel. In the words of Lewis Lawson, "It is a prose fiction of considerable length, but beyond that requirement none of the standard elements of the novel is to be found. The development of characters, the exploration of character interaction, and the development of plot are unimportant. Such action as occurs is often without motivation, leads nowhere, and is almost always absurd." 3

Thus, *Wise Blood*, with its comic and violent incidents, its unusual characters, its unorthodox rhetoric, and its extraordinary structure, is the complete grotesque.

I have discussed the grotesque in *Wise Blood* at length for the purpose of raising some specific literary problems. First, when the grotesque looms so large in a novel, it is reasonable to expect that any satisfactory reading of the book will take account of its grotesqueness. But by such a standard there has been no satisfactory reading of *Wise Blood*. Lewis Lawson's study of the work's grotesque elements is far from being a complete reading, while the most comprehensive treatment of *Wise Blood* that
I know, by Jonathan Baumbach, pays little attention to the novel's grotesqueness. Our troubles are magnified when we realize how frequently grotesque elements in other American novels have been ignored by critics. With a few exceptions—Howard Babb's discussion of *The Great Gatsby*, Kenneth Burke's piece on Caldwell, Irving Howe's analysis of *Winesburg, Ohio*, Ihab Hassan's treatment of McCullers, and Dewayne Peterson's study of Poe—literary scholars and critics rarely go beyond noticing the grotesque in specific American novels. I think that it is clear they should. When a particular piece of fiction emphasizes the grotesque, then literary critics have a responsibility to pay attention to it. But since they have not, there is a clear need for a study which does, for a study which illuminates particular works of American fiction by taking account of their grotesque elements.

My discussion of the grotesque elements in *Wise Blood* also brings to mind the great many American novels which have centered about the grotesque in recent years. If we think only of novelists who have come to prominence since the second world war, we realize that a majority of them have dealt with the grotesque: Carson McCullers, Truman Capote, J.P. Donleavy, James Purdy, Joseph Heller, William Burroughs, Paul Bowles, John Hawkes, John Barth, Thomas Berger, Thomas Pynchon, and Eudora Welty, to name some. Although it is impractical to consider these
novelists at length here, I do want to discuss several of them briefly. In doing so I hope to indicate that recently in American fiction there has been a school of the grotesque.

In J.P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man* there is a grotesquely comic scene which rivals anything Flannery O'Connor ever created. Coming home on a streetcar in Dublin, the hero of the novel, Sebastian Dangerfield, notices that other passengers are behaving strangely to him. He becomes very uncomfortable as various things are said to him and as passengers move to get away from him. And then he finally notices that all the time his fly has been open and his penis exposed. Or if we wish to match the grotesque violence in *Wise Blood*, we need only turn to John Hawkes' *The Cannibal* in which there is a brutal murder, by Germans, of an American soldier. Taking place after the second world war, this murder is extremely surrealistic; it gives some sense of the nightmarish quality of the post-war world.

Not only can we find grotesque incidents in many American novels written since the war, but we also are confronted time and again with grotesque characters. Take, for example, Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. In this novel we have Cousin Randolph, an effete homosexual who paints Japanese fans; Edward Sansom, a mute cripple who drops red tennis balls from his bed in order to get attention; his wife, Miss Amy, a frustrated lady
torn between the impotence of her marriage and the per-
version of Cousin Randolph; Jesus Fever, an ancient Negro
over a century old, who drives a mule which falls asleep
in its traces; Miss Wisteria, a dwarf from a circus; and
Little Sunshine, a Negro hermit who lives in the woods at
a deserted resort. These constitute as grotesque a gallery
as do the people in *Wise Blood*, and are characteristic of
the figures who populate modern American fiction.

There is also in recent fiction grotesque rhetoric
to match that in *Wise Blood*. To see this we might look
quickly at Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. Full of the most
illogical uses of language, *Catch-22* is perhaps best remem-
bered for the absurd conversations which occur in it. I
quote part of one which comes from the courtmartial of
Clevenger:

"Precisely what did you mean, Cadet Clevenger, when
you said we couldn't find you guilty?"
"I didn't say you couldn't find me guilty, sir."
"When?"
"When what, sir?"
"Goddammit, are you going to start pumping
me again?"
"No, sir. I'm sorry sir."
"Then answer the question. When didn't you
say we couldn't find you guilty?"
"Late last night in the latrine, sir."
"Is that the only time you didn't say it?"
"No, sir. I always didn't say you couldn't
find me guilty, sir. What I did say to Yossarian was--"
"Nobody asked you what you did say to Yossarian.
We asked you what you didn't say to him. We're not
at all interested in what you did say to Yossarian.
Is that clear?"
"Yes, sir."
"Then we'll go on. What did you say to Yossarian?"
"I said to him, sir, that you couldn't find me
guilty..."
The lack of communication in this exchange points to a modern dilemma, while the grotesque use of language in it is representative of what happens in much modern American fiction.

Finally, there is the matter of the extraordinary structure of many contemporary novels. Although this is a subject which I take up later in this study, I want to mention at this point William Burrough's novel, Naked Lunch. Written when Burroughs was high on heroin, the novel has a nightmarish quality about it that is unparalleled in modern literature. It is such that we want to call the makeup of the novel grotesque. And our desire to do so is enhanced by the circumstances of the book's composition: pages of the manuscript were picked off the floor of Burroughs' apartment at random and sent to the printer. The result was a novel which defies all our expectations for fiction, a novel which has a truly grotesque structure.

There is, then, a school of contemporary American novelists whose work centers about the grotesque. Fortunately, this school has been studied fairly thoroughly. Louise Gossett's book, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham, North Carolina, 1965), is concerned with one aspect of the grotesque in Southern fiction. Irving Malin's New American Gothic (Carbondale, Illinois, 1962), explores the grotesque world of Truman Capote, James Purdy, Flannery O'Connor, John Hawkes, Carson McCullers, and J.D. Salinger.
And two dissertations—Lewis Lawson's "The Grotesque in Recent Southern Fiction" (Wisconsin, 1964) and Ralph Ciancio's "The Grotesque in Modern American Fiction" (Pittsburgh, 1964)—discuss the grotesque school in detailed terms. There is no need to repeat what these works have done so well.

Finally, my discussion of the grotesque elements in Wise Blood suggests the fact that there is a tradition of the grotesque in American fiction. As William Van O'Connor remarks in the opening essay of his recent book, The Grotesque: An American Genre and Other Essays, American novelists have been preoccupied "with the irrational, the unpredictable, the bizarre, with the grotesque." Although only Poe and Sherwood Anderson explicitly called their fiction grotesque, O'Connor contends—quite rightly I believe—that we can apply the same adjective to many of the works of Hawthorne, Melville, Bierce, and Saltus; of such naturalists as Crane, Norris, and London; and of a whole host of moderns including Nathanael West, Erskine Caldwell, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and most of the novelists writing today. This tradition of American fictional grotesque, beginning with Charles Brockden Brown and extending to novelists currently writing, has been ignored for the most part. Wilbur Frohock's The Novel of Violence in America (Dallas, 1957) and Leslie Fiedler's Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1960) touch
upon it, but neither of these works treats the tradition systematically. There is a need for such a treatment.

In the first place, it will make a contribution to the aesthetics of American fiction. Since the grotesque is a phenomenon central to many American novels, it stands to reason that a study of that phenomenon will better allow us to understand how the novels work in which it is found. Secondly, such a study will have importance for literary history. It will explore a trend in American literature, making clear thereby one form of continuity in American fiction. Finally, it should prove invaluable in reading contemporary fiction. T.S. Eliot has explained why: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism." 8

In the last few pages I have argued the need both for a study of the grotesque tradition in American fiction and for a re-reading of many individual works in that tradition. This is more than I can hope to accomplish in the present essay; my work here will only serve as an introduction. After examining the fathers of the grotesque tradition in American fiction, I will discuss three trends
in that tradition: the evolution of the grotesque character from the symbolic to the literal, the gradual emergence of the comic grotesque, and the movement toward grotesque structure. Along the way I expect my discussion of these trends to lead to new, possibly more coherent, readings of specific works. But I will not be able to undertake the extensive re-reading of so much American fiction which I indicated above is needed. Before we can study the tradition of American fictional grotesque, however, at least one problem needs to be solved: we must understand as clearly as possible what is meant by the word "grotesque." It is to the solution of this problem that my first chapter is devoted.
FOOTNOTES FOR THE INTRODUCTION


3 Ibid., 137.


CHAPTER I

DEFINING THE GROTESQUE

Date in the fifteenth century excavators uncovered in Italy a previously unknown kind of ornamental painting which dated back to the beginning of the Christian era. To describe this form of painting they coined the word "grottesco," meaning grottolike, from which is derived the English noun and adjective "grotesque." Not for long, however, did the word "grotesque" refer solely to a decorative style of painting. As the years passed, it was used with reference to architecture, literature, music, sculpture, and, finally, the movies. In addition, the word "grotesque" has gradually become a non-aesthetic term. Among the many things which have recently been called grotesque are the United States government, the cartoon character Major Hoople, plants stunted by atomic radiation, kangaroos, girls in leotards, morals in California, Senator McCarthy's triumph, the Soviet point of view, and the cabin of a boat. In sum, what was once a precise technical term is now applied to a great variety of aesthetic and non-aesthetic objects, occurrences, and attitudes.

To define such a term is difficult. As Lily Campbell pointed out long ago, "it is almost impossible to understand the nature of the grotesque because of the very mass of unordered details which make up our knowledge concerning it, because of the indefiniteness with which it is
generally referred to, and because of the actually varying significance attached to the term by philosophers, artists, and critics.\(^3\) There are several ways by which critics have tried to prove Miss Campbell unduly pessimistic. One, of course, has been simply to define the word "grotesque" as broadly as possible. In the words of Curt du Faur: "Das Groteske kann grobkomisch sein, ironisch, satirisich, gesprenstisch, satanisch; es reicht so weit das Menschenleben reicht, and darüber hinaus in die Hölle, nur der Himmel ist ihm verschlossen. So lassen sich schwer Grenzen ziehen."\(^4\) This approach, however, assumes that because the word "grotesque" can be applied intelligibly to a wide range of things, its meaning must be equally as broad. Such an assumption is not necessarily valid. Also, du Faur seems to make a vague word even vaguer. Thus, although his treatment of the grotesque might increase our understanding of the term, I do not believe it is the appropriate one for this study.

Students of the grotesque have also avoided Miss Campbell's roadblock by using the approach adopted by Robert C. Elliott in his recent book, *The Power of Satire*: "One word on definition. Satire is notoriously a slippery term, designating, as it does, a form of art and a spirit, a purpose and a tone—to say nothing of specific works of art whose resemblances may be highly remote. My use of satire throughout will be pragmatic rather than normative;
that is, it will comprehend responsible uses of the term as I encounter them. I shall depend upon context and qualifying terms to convey the relevant sense of satire intended at any given time. Elliott's method has some validity. Indeed, both Ihab Hassan and G. Wilson Knight have more or less used the same approach in relating the grotesque to Carson McCullers' fiction and to King Lear. Unfortunately, the term "grotesque" is different from the term "satire." The tradition of the grotesque is much more obscure and to talk of responsible uses of "grotesque" is probably to leave most students of literature in the dark. Also, "grotesque" probably does not, as Elliott says "satire" does, designate a form of art and a spirit, a purpose and a tone. "Grotesque" is certainly an aesthetic term, but it is unlike "satire." And so Elliott's approach is also unsuitable for this study. We need still another way of dealing with "grotesque."

I propose to review theoretical discussions of the word "grotesque." Because my study deals with American fiction, I will be concerned primarily with discussions of the aesthetic dimensions of the term. I will be ignoring very little in following this principle, for there are few theories which deal with the word's non-aesthetic meanings. Such a review will be valuable because it will explore the tradition of the term, because it will indicate its range of meaning, and because it will allow us to understand what
the grotesque will mean in my study of American fiction. As a means of organizing this review, I adopt Meyer Abrams' classification of critical theories, which appears in the opening chapter of his brilliant book, *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Briefly, this classification works as follows. All critical theories which attempt to be complete take account of the artistic work, the artist, the universe of which the artistic work is a copy, and the audience for the work. But even though comprehensive theories treat all four of these matters, they are inevitably preoccupied with one only. Thus, we find objective critical theories which are predominantly concerned with the artistic work as an autonomous whole, expressive theories which discuss the work of art by stressing the role of the artist in its creation, mimetic theories which focus on the universe of which the work of art is essentially an imitation, and pragmatic theories which center on the needs and reactions of the audience for the artistic work. And what Abrams found to be true in general of all critical theories, I find to be true specifically for theories of the grotesque.

Pragmatic theories of the grotesque are the easiest to handle because there are only two; of these Baudelaire's is the less complex. He thought that the grotesque is clearly related to the comic. Comic laughter, he believed, is provoked by the sight of an object which is the sign of weakness or disaster among other men. In other words,
comic "laughter comes from the idea of one's own superiority." The grotesque laughter, on the other hand, is produced by "fabulous creations, beings whose authority and raison d'être cannot be drawn from the code of common sense" (p. 144). In short, "from the artistic point of view, the comic is an imitation: the grotesque a creation" (p. 144). But matters are not so simple, Baudelaire continued. "The comic is an imitation mixed with a certain creative faculty, that is to say with an artistic ideality," while the grotesque "is a creation mixed with a certain imitative faculty—imitative, that is, of elements pre-existing in nature" (p. 144). The crucial question, then, is: how does one finally tell the grotesque from the comic? For Baudelaire the answer is quite simple: "There is but one criterion of the grotesque, and that is laughter—immediate laughter" (p. 145). To be sure, the comic also produces laughter, but this is laughter which takes a moment or two to come forth. Thus Baudelaire's theory of the grotesque, depending as it does on the audience for art, is a pragmatic one.

The other pragmatic theory of the grotesque is Lewis Lawson's: the grotesque "is an aesthetic category that is determined only in the subjective perception of the viewer, not by the construction of the art object, but by that which the art object expresses. Nothing within the art object proclaims its grotesqueness; the viewer must proclaim that
the object is grotesque. The grotesque is not objectively verifiable." So much for the importance of the audience. But how does a viewer proclaim an object to be grotesque? To answer this question we must follow Lawson's argument in more detail. Relying heavily on Arthur Koestler's *Insight and Outlook*, Lawson concludes that "if ... the comic results essentially from incongruity, that is, the clash of contradictory concepts, so too does the grotesque. Just what the two operative fields are which precipitate the grotesque is another matter" (p. 125). After suggesting as possibilities such polar categories as animal-vegetable, ludicrous-fearful, creation-imitation, tragic-comic, comic-elegaic, and acceptance-rejection of the known world, Lawson chooses the last: "I mean to say that there is present in grotesque, whatever the context of the word, a clash between accepting and rejecting the possibility of truth outside our experience ... Anything termed 'grotesque' contain[s] both extremely realistic (acceptance of reality) and at the same time unrealistic or surrealistic (rejection of reality) elements ..." (pp. 126-27). In short, the essence of the grotesque is the joining of mutually exclusive elements—the real and the unreal. But it is up to an observer to determine when an object is grotesque for him: "we sense the grotesque only when we compare the vision of the artist to what we think is the public vision" (p. 181). It is
our view of what is real and what is unreal which determines whether we proclaim an object to be grotesque.

There are more expressive theories of the grotesque than there are pragmatic ones, but we need not devote more space to them because none of them is very well developed. Essentially, the expressive theorists hold that we can identify the grotesque by discovering those cases where the artistic imagination works without reference to reality.

As representative of this position, let me summarize the views of J.A. Symmonds, J.C. Morison, Helen Gardner, and Mary Cass Canfield. For Symmonds the grotesque was closely related to the fantastic, which "in art results from an exercise of the capricious fancy, playing with things which it combines into arbitrary non-existent forms." The grotesque, then, "is a branch of the fantastic. Its specific difference lies in the fact that an element of caricature, whether deliberately intended or imparted by the craftsman's spontaneity of humor, forms an ingredient in the thing produced."10

Exactly how something which is a non-existent form can at the same time have something of caricature in it Symmonds never said.

Morison's discussion of the grotesque is very brief, but fundamentally he agreed with Symmonds. Speaking of the grotesque, he wrote: "Its proper province would seem to be the exhibition of fanciful power by the artist; not beauty or truth in the literal sense at all, but inventive
affluence of unreal yet absurdly comic forms, with just a flavour of the terrible added..."¹¹ When we come to Helen Gardner, we find the discussion of the grotesque limited to medieval art. Still, Professor Gardner connected the grotesque to the fantastic, making at the same time the interesting observation that the fantastic and the real are often alike: "The grotesques that live high up on the balustrades of the towers, peering out over the city—half man, half beast, crow, elephant, the three-headed Cerberus—were born probably of pure fancy, and show that the fantastic and chimerical forms of the world of the imagination also belonged to the mirror of nature..."¹² Finally, Mary Cass Canfield summarized the expressive theory of the grotesque in rather poetic terms: "The traditional shapes of aesthetic fancy are grotesque... The grotesque... is a denial of reality; it is a denizen of that unreal world so necessary to those whose feet are bruised by the hard road of fact... The grotesque is a twisted, fog-ridden forest in that Never-Never-Land which is the home of those who find mortal flesh a prison."¹³

Turning to the mimetic theories of the grotesque, we find that a great many of them have been proposed over the past three centuries. But they all share the same assumption, that the essence of the grotesque is something gone wrong with the real world, with nature. As Dryden
put it, "there is yet a lower sort of poetry and painting, which is out of nature; for a farce is that in poetry, which grotesque is in a picture. The persons and action of a farce are all unnatural, and the manners false, that is, inconsistent with the characters of mankind. Grotesque painting is the just resemblance of this. . . ."14

About how to characterize the deviation from nature, however, there has been little agreement.

Some mimetic theorists insist that "distortion" is the best adjective for describing the grotesque. In the words of Howard Babb, "the grotesque . . . represents a world fundamentally like ours, but in a markedly distorted manner, with the result that this world seems alien—fancifully exaggerated, yet uncannily ominous."15 Walter Bagehot would have agreed with Babb, except that he believed that the grotesque has a different function: "This art works by contrast. It enables you to see, it makes you see, the perfect type by painting the opposite deviation. It shows you what ought to be by what ought not to be, when complete it reminds you of the perfect image, by showing you the distorted and imperfect image."16 Finally, Bernard Berenson also felt that the distinguishing mark of the grotesque is distortion, and he maintained parenthetically that "the grotesque is not the incongruous."17

Such a claim, however, is incompatible with several other mimetic theories of the grotesque. Kenneth Burke,
for example, thinks that "the grotesque is the cult of incongruity." It consists, to be more specific, of "scrambling or garbling proprieties . . . of putting the wrong things together." Karl Rosenkranz characterized the grotesque as "eine Willkür, die aller Gesetze zu spotten scheint." What he had in mind was a certain kind of incongruity, the kind which Vitruvius discussed in *De architectura* while describing Roman decorations:

On the stucco are monsters rather than definite representations taken from definite things. Instead of columns there rise up stalks; instead of gables, striped panels with curled leaves and volutes. Candelabra uphold pictured shrines and above the summits of these, clusters of thin stalks rise from their roots in tendrils with little figures seated upon them at random. Again, slender stalks with heads of men and of animals attached to half the body. Such things neither are, nor can be, nor have been . . . . For how can a reed actually sustain a roof, or a candelabrum the ornaments of a gable? or a soft and slender stalk, a seated statue? or how can flowers and half-statues rise alternately from roots and stalks?

A view similar to Rosenkranz' was held by Robert Bridges, who wrote of the grotesque that "its characteristic is the fantastic and bizarre grouping of all kinds of natural and artificial objects and forms on purely decorative links, without any regard to natural propriety in their combination, animals growing apparently out of flowers, etc." Finally, several theorists have claimed that the incongruous dimension of the grotesque often grows into the absurd. As Lee
Jennings has put it, the "principle of absurdity . . . threatens to undermine the very bases of our accustomed world and even obeys a certain perverse legality all its own."²²

There remains but one mimetic theory of the grotesque to discuss, that proposed by Wolfgang Kayser in his book, The Grotesque in Art and Literature.²³ After studying thoroughly theories of the grotesque, Kayser concluded that he could not synthesize a new definition from them. Instead, he thought that a true definition could only be derived from an examination of those things called grotesque. What, in other words, do those things have in common that cause them all to be called grotesque? Kayser concluded that everything grotesque in some way involves the estranged world, that the world is estranged because it is absurd, and that the grotesque work deals with the absurd in an effort to subdue it. To be sure, he thought of his theory as an objective one and Lee Jennings has called it an expressive theory,²⁴ but I think the orientation of it is clearly mimetic. As the most comprehensive of such theories, it provides a suitable conclusion for our discussion of them.

We come, finally, to the objective theories of the grotesque, to those where "our concern [is] the qualities of the object, not the kind of hypothetical 'world' from which it issues forth."²⁵ Most commonly, objective
theorists have claimed that for an aesthetic object to be grotesque it must be both terrible and humorous at the same time. Technically, of course, there is disagreement whether such theorists are objective or pragmatic, but in this discussion I regard the terrible and the humorous as formal properties of the aesthetic work. Although Hugo, Ruskin, Campbell, and Michel have all agreed that the terrible and the ludicrous are defining properties of the grotesque, the most detailed argument for such a position is Lee Jennings'. After carefully examining both theories of the grotesque and paradigm examples of grotesqueness, Jennings concludes that "the grotesque object always displays a combination of fearsome and ludicrous qualities... Since theories of the grotesque have always fluctuated between the ideas of unearthly horror and ridiculous buffoonery or playful embellishment, it is reasonable to suppose that these seemingly contradictory tendencies are combined in the phenomenon itself and that the mechanism of their combination is the key to its understanding" (pp. 10-11). He finishes his definition by explaining why the grotesque can never be solely terrible or ludicrous: "The grotesque is an intimate combination of both features. It can never lie entirely in the realm of the terrible, for it arises only when the terrible is treated playfully and rendered ludicrous. On the other hand, it can never be completely innocuous or playful, even if a fantastic or
scurrilous form of play is meant. The grotesque presents the terrible in harmless guise; and its playfulness is constantly on the verge of collapsing and giving way to the concealed horror" (p. 16).

Jennings' conclusions about the grotesque are different from those reached by some other objective theorists. As early as 1788, for instance, Carl Flögel identified the grotesque with buffoonery in his *Geschichte des Groteskakomischen*. Similarly, Theodor Lipps felt that the grotesque is essentially a kind of comedy: "Endlich sind wir berechtigt, als grotesk diejenige komische Darstellung zu bezeichnen, für welche die Karikatur, die Überreibung, die Verzerrung, das Unglaubliche, das Ungeheuerliche, das Phantastische, das Mittel zur Erzeugung der komischen Wirkung ist." And Elli Desalm found paradox to be the defining property of the grotesque. But by far the largest group disagreeing with Jennings has been that which talks of the grotesque as itself a form.

Of the grotesque Johannes Volkelt wrote, "Ich ... nehme an, dass diese eine starke Steigerung in der Richtung des Formcharakteristischen aufweist. Wir haben also an Formen von starken Unterbrochenheit and Zerrissenheit zu denken, an Formen, die in hohen Grade zerknittert und zerzaust, aufgeworfen und wulstig, mager und spießig, verrenkt und auswuchsartig sind." Another formal definition of the grotesque is that proposed by Elisah Jordan,
who wrote, paradoxically, that "the distortion of form determines that the dominant character of the grotesque is its designlessness . . . . By the term grotesque we mean, then, to refer to those aesthetic objects that represent the widest variations from the normal categorial forms, and that are yet determined by aesthetic categories." Finally, William Van O'Connor has recently been discussing the grotesque in terms which align him with Volkelt and Jordan. Although he confines his attention to literature in particular, he implies that his remarks hold generally for aesthetic objects. In brief, O'Connor believes that the grotesque is a form where categories are continually erupting inside one another. In the fiction of Flannery O'Connor, for instance, we find orthodox Catholicism, crass commercialism, and fundamental Protestantism all breaking down and merging with each other. This, according to O'Connor, makes her fiction grotesque.

There are many discussions of the grotesque which I have not mentioned. Some of these do not define the nature of the grotesque so much as they concentrate on the uses or levels of the grotesque. Such theories I feel justified in ignoring. Others, however, do discuss the nature of the grotesque. I ignore these only because they are so like theories which I do review.

Now one fact in particular emerges from my discussion of all these theories: there is considerable disagreement
about the nature of the grotesque. We must, say the theorists, identify the grotesque in aesthetic objects by looking at the work of art itself, or at the artist's approach to that work, or at the relationship between the work and the external world, or at the audience's reaction to that work. Furthermore, even those theorists who share a critical preoccupation disagree among themselves. Mimetic theorists, for example, define the grotesque as distortion, or incongruity, or absurdity, or estrangement. In the face of such disagreement, what are we to say about the nature of the grotesque?

Perhaps we have been trying to define the grotesque in the wrong way. Instead of examining theories about the grotesque, we should study those aesthetic objects commonly regarded as paradigm examples of grotesqueness. If we can determine what these objects have in common, we will be able to define the grotesque. This approach has two major shortcomings. First of all, it has been used to obtain contradictory results. Kayser followed it when he defined the grotesque as the estranged world, while Jennings employed the same method with the result that he defined the grotesque as a combination of the fearful and the ludicrous. How are we to adjudicate between Kayser and Jennings? Also, the approach assumes that all works designated as grotesque share some property. Of this conclusion I am not so certain. If we take Aristophanes' Lysistrata, The Satyricon
of Petronius, medieval gargoyles, the paintings of Hieronymous Bosch, Don Quixote, Tristram Shandy, Alban Berg's "Wozzeck," Giacometti's sculpture, and The Trial as representative examples of the grotesque, what can we say that they have in common? Nothing, I believe. And so we are still left with the nature of the grotesque undefined.

Can we, in fact, ever define the grotesque? The fundamental disagreement about the nature of the grotesque seriously calls into question the possibility of arriving at a real (true) definition of the term. And such a doubt is reinforced when we realize how remote are the resemblances between some of the works of art which have responsibly been called grotesque. Perhaps the effort to define "grotesque" has been a misdirected one. Let me explain.

Traditionally, philosophers, and indeed literary critics, have held a theory of language which states that "there can be no intelligible, correct thought or expression of it unless we know the essence of the entity about which we are thinking, writing, or speaking, and are able to formulate that knowledge in a true, real definition of its nature."34 In particular, traditional philosophers of language would argue that the word "grotesque" has a set of necessary and sufficient properties which indicate its correct, intelligible use. "Grotesque," in other words, has meaning only because we are able to formulate a
definition of it which points to the entity designated by the term. But the later Wittgenstein and his followers have challenged the validity of such a theory. They have shown that the intelligent and correct use of a word does not necessarily depend upon a knowledge of its essence, its nature, its defining properties. Many words, in fact, designate no essence, no defining properties, no necessary and sufficient conditions indicating their correct use. They can be used intelligently and correctly, but to look for their essences is simply an exercise in futility.

This new theory of language will become clearer if we examine two passages about the word "game:"

Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games." I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic-games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games'"—but look and see whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that."

"Game," thus, is a term in our language the employment or use of which in perfectly intelligible, correct talk about games in no way entails or presupposes a set of necessary and sufficient properties that all games have in common and that gives meaning to the term. "Game" does not depend upon an essence for its use; hence, it is simply an error in the logical description of language to maintain that all terms depend for their intelligible employment upon their corresponding essences.

An examination of the word "game," in short, reveals the inadequacy of the traditional philosophy of language.
Card games have some things in common with ball games, but the two kinds of games are also unlike in many ways. If some games are amusing, still others are intellectually taxing. Some games require skill, some luck; some involve winning, some do not. In short, "what we find . . . are no necessary and sufficient properties, only 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing;' so that we can say of games that they form a family with family resemblances but no common trait."37

Clearly, the word "grotesque" is much like the word "game." Students of the grotesque have all believed that if they looked hard enough and far enough, they would be able to find the essence of grotesqueness and thus would be able to formulate a real (true) definition of the grotesque. But these students have all failed to reach their goal. The reason is clear. Accepting a philosophy of language which is invalid, they have assumed that all works to which the word "grotesque" can be applied must have something in common. This assumption is false. As I have already asked above, what do Lysistrata, The Satyricon, medieval gargoyles, Bosch's paintings, Don Quixote, Tristram Shandy, "Wozzeck," and The Trial--to mention but a few works regarded as grotesque--have in common by virtue of which they are grotesque? Some of these works are similar in certain ways, but there is no one property or set of properties which they all possess. Instead of sharing at
least one common trait, they have only family resemblances.

No matter how hard theorists look, they will be unable to formulate a real (true) definition of "grotesque." That this is so is also revealed by the behavior of the word. If we examine the theorists' use of "grotesque"—as I have done earlier in this chapter—we see that the term does not have a set of essential conditions indicating its correct use. Instead, the meaning of "grotesque" is perennially debatable. The disputes of the theorists indicate that "grotesque" is a term that has no essence. Any criterion proposed for governing the use of "grotesque" will always be subject to debate, challenge, rejection, or replacement. Hence, any definition of the grotesque which purports to be a real one must actually be stipulative or persuasive, for it constitutes a violation of the logical behavior of the word. It is obviously impossible to state the essence of a term whose very use precludes that it has such an essence.

The Wittgensteinian approach to definition does involve one problem. How shall we know when it is appropriate to use the word "grotesque"? What criteria, in other words, exist for governing the use of the word?

In the first place, we can decide whether a specific work is grotesque by seeing how similar it is to works that are commonly called grotesque. I will call this the "paradigm case rule." There is no better way to understand how
it works than to follow Morris Weitz's application of the rule to "tragedy":

The answer to What is tragedy? then, is not a statement of what all tragedies have in common, of their necessary and sufficient properties. The answer consists primarily in offering undeniable examples, paradigm cases. "Oedipus Rex and dramas like it are tragedies" is an adequate answer. Oedipus Rex--let us call it A--has certain properties: a hero, terrible suffering, reversal of fortune, reconciliation, momentous action, etc. Let us call these properties 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Now, "dramas like Oedipus Rex" refers to dramas B-N that contain properties 1-5; or properties 1-3 but not 4 and 5; or properties 2-5 plus new properties 6-8. Thus, dramas B-N, roughly the history of dramatic tragedies, are tragedies because they have properties, 1-5, 1-3, or 2-5, plus 6 and 7; and so on. They are not tragedies because they have properties, 1-5, that are necessary and sufficient ones of all tragedies. Drama N / 1 (e.g., Death of a Salesman), is a tragedy, then, not because it contains a set of essential properties, but because it is like the recognized tragedies A-N in some respects, although it differs from them in others. Knowing what tragedy is, finally, is not knowing a true theory of tragedy, but being able to cite indisputable examples and to decide on the basis of similarities and dissimilarities what else is to count as a tragedy.38

Weitz, I feel, is perfectly lucid here, but what he says does raise one question: how do paradigms get established?

Clearly critics do not choose them arbitrarily or subjectively, but work from tradition. Those entities are paradigm examples of tragedy to which the term has most commonly been applied. In a sense the critic, by using paradigm examples, substitutes historical rigor for the logical passion for definitions.
"Grotesque" is not a formal term in the way "tragedy" seems to be, but otherwise what Weitz says applies to it. We can call Faulkner's Popeye a grotesque character because of his similarity to paradigm cases—for example, some evil characters in Dickens; we can call Catch-22 a grotesque novel because of its similarity to a paradigm case—for instance, The Trial. Whether or not we call a specific work of American fiction grotesque is not a factual question but a decision question. Knowing the paradigm examples of grotesque literature—the plays of Aristophanes, The Satyricon of Petronius, Don Quixote, the works of Rabelais, Tristram Shandy, some tales by Poe, parts of Dickens' novels, some fiction by Dostoevsky, Ulysses, The Trial, to name the most obvious—we can decide whether The Sound and the Fury, for instance, is also grotesque. True, there is no guide which tells us how similar Faulkner's novel has to be to any or all paradigm cases of the grotesque. But this is a difficulty which cannot be overcome—it is a characteristic of language. As literary critics, all we can do is make our decision as carefully as possible.

We can further decide whether a specific work is grotesque by seeing how many traditional defining properties of the term it has. I will call this the "paradigm properties rule." Again, we can go to Morris Weitz to see how the rule works: "What, first, is the logic of 'X is a work of art,' when it is a descriptive utterance? What are the
conditions under which we would be making such an utterance correctly? There are no necessary and sufficient conditions but there are the strands of similarity conditions, i.e., bundles of properties, none of which need be present but most of which are, when we describe things as works of art. I shall call these the 'criteria of recognition' of works of art. All of these have served as the defining criteria of the individual traditional theories of art; so we are already familiar with them. From my review above, we are also already familiar with the defining criteria of the individual theories of the grotesque. Thus, we can decide whether The Sound and the Fury is grotesque by seeing whether it is ludicrous, or terrible, or absurd, or distorted, or pure fantasy, or any combination thereof. Once more there is no guide which tells us how many paradigm properties a work must have in order to be called grotesque. Again, it is a difficult decision which demands great care of the critic.

There is, finally, a third way for deciding whether a specific work is grotesque. At times we may want to call works grotesque which seem not to be according to the two rules I have set forth. Recognizing the open-ended nature of "grotesque," we decide to extend the term to cover a work which is neither like typical grotesque works nor has typical properties of the grotesque. This is a legitimate decision, although it requires, of course,
support and invites disagreement. There are no guidelines for judging the support to be adequate, but this is not unusual in literary study. Frequently, for example, we accept or reject a reading of a novel because that reading does or does not seem adequate. It is a matter of judgment, not of following a prescribed set of rules.

In summary, although my conclusion is that the term "grotesque" cannot be defined in the classical way, I believe I have shown that it still has meaning and can be used intelligibly and correctly. In the course of doing this, I have reviewed theories of the grotesque and mentioned some paradigm examples of grotesque art. My essay on the grotesque in American fiction which follows assumes that the reader has in mind these theories, these examples, and the conclusion about definition which I have drawn from them.


3"The Grotesque in the Poetry of Robert Browning," *Bulletin of the University of Texas*, No. 92 (April, 1907), 5.


7(New York, 1953), pp. 3-29.


10"Caricature, the Fantastic, the Grotesque," *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* (London, 1907), pp. 156-58.


13 Grotesques and Other Reflections (New York, 1927), pp. 3 and 5. Two other discussions of the grotesque, related to the expressive theories, might be consulted. Mark Spilka, Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation (Bloomington, Indiana, 1963), links the grotesque "with perspective, and more particularly with an infantile or childlike view of experience" (p. 17). And Walter Abell, The Collective Dream in Art (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), writes that "stated in psycho-historical terms, the grotesque appears to be a symbol, unconsciously created, of collective psychic states" (p. 122).


19 Aesthetik des Häßlichen (Königsberg, 1853), p. 221.


23 pp. 179-89.

25 Jennings, "The Ludicrous Demon," 7. Subsequent quotations in this paragraph from Jennings are cited in my text.

26 For a bibliography of works concerned with the problem as it applies to the comic, see Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York, 1957), pp. 445-46.


28 (Leipzig, 1788).

29 *Ästhetik* (Hamburg, 1903), I, 584.


31 *System der Ästhetik* (Munich, 1905-14), II, 412.


35Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 31e.

36Weitz, Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism, pp. 224-25.


38Ibid., pp. 309-10.


Charles Brockden Brown has been called frequently the father of American fiction, but it is a mistake to think of him as the first American novelist. Whether one regards Francis Hopkinson's *Pretty Story* (1774), Peter Makoe's *The Algerine Spy in America* (1787), or *The Power of Sympathy* (1789—usually attributed to William Hill Brown) as the first American novel, the fact is that there were at least twenty-five novels published by Americans before Brown wrote *Wieland* in 1798. Some of these, like Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*, were picaresque novels; some, like Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, were sentimental tales of domestic life; and some, like Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*, were wild adventure stories. *Wieland*, however, was like none of these. With its grotesque elements, it was rooted in the tradition of the Gothic novel as that had developed in England and Germany. If, therefore, *Wieland* was by no means the first American novel, it was still unique in American fiction. It was the first American novel to grow out of the European Gothic tradition, and, as we shall see, it began the grotesque tradition in American fiction. To be sure, there had been some Gothic short stories in American magazines before 1765, but
it is still essentially accurate, I believe, to claim that Wieland represented an important innovation in American fiction. To understand the book, as well as the grotesque movement which it fathered in American fiction, it is necessary to turn briefly to the Gothic tradition from which it grew.

Although some scholars have maintained that the Gothic novel grew out of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, it is customary in a discussion of the tradition to look first at Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764). I see no reason to break this custom. The Castle of Otranto is bad art, but historically it has been very important, for it initiated the Gothic movement in fiction which has had, and continues to have, strength in both England and America. Not so much is to be gained, however, by examining the book as by studying the Preface to the second edition. To look at the novel itself is to learn something about bad writing, but to read the Preface is to come into contact with ideas which have been crucial in the tradition of Gothic fiction.

In the Preface Walpole, throwing off the pseudonym under which he originally published the novel, attempted to explain the philosophy behind the book's composition:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination and improbability; in the latter,
nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But: if in the latter species Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. The actions, sentiments, conversations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days, were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion.

The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the moral agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak, and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions. He had allowed, that in all inspired writings, the personages under the dispensation of miracles, and witnesses to the most stupendous phenomena, never lose sight of their human character: whereas in the productions of romantic story, an improbable event never fails to be attended by an absurd dialogue. The actors seem to lose their senses, the moment the laws of Nature have lost their tone.

Whether or not Walpole's remarks describe accurately his novel is a moot point, for some of his characters' thoughts, speeches, and actions seem as unreal as any ever created by an ancient romancer. But one thing is certain: the two paragraphs quoted above anticipate the ways in which the Gothic novel developed after The Castle of Otranto. If it is true that the ancient and modern forms of Romance were united in Walpole's work, it is also true that they rarely came together afterwards. Rather, The Castle of Otranto inspired two kinds of Gothic fiction, the rational novels of Clara
Reeve and Ann Radcliffe, and the wild, more irrational novels of Lewis, Maturin, and others.

The rational school of Gothic novelists was interested in writing fiction which did not violate the bounds of probability. If fiction was to be Gothic, then these writers insisted that it be so on account of such matters as atmosphere, setting, characters, and incidents. Used properly, these could create a Gothic novel without straining credibility. Crucial for understanding the rational school of Gothic fiction is the Preface to Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777). After admitting that she was consciously modeling her novel after *The Castle of Otranto*, Miss Reeve went on to point out a shortcoming of Walpole's work:

... the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite. Had the story been kept within the utmost verge of probability, the effect had been preserved, without losing the least circumstance that excites or detains the attention.

For instance; we can conceive, and allow of, the appearance of a ghost; we can even dispense with an enchanted sword and helmet; but then they must keep within certain limits of credibility. A sword so large as to require an hundred men to lift it; a helmet that by its own weight forces a passage through a court-yard, into an arched vault, big enough for a man to go through; a picture that walks out of its frame; a skeleton's ghost in a hermit's cowl:—When your expectation is wound up to the highest pitch, these circumstances take it down with a witness, destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter.

This shortcoming she attempted to avoid in *The Old English*
Baron. Although she wanted to make the novel a "picture of Gothic times and manners," Miss Reeve did not resort to the supernatural or to other improbabilities. Using at the worst mysterious noises, she wrote a book which from a modern point of view seems not at all Gothic. She was so careful to avoid what she thought were Walpole's mistakes that she did not write a recognizably Gothic novel.

The same thing cannot be said of Miss Reeve's follower, Ann Radcliffe. In her novels—the most famous of which are The Romance of the Forest (1791), The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), and The Italian (1797)—we find secret passages, unusual music, corpses, castle dungeons, bandits, mysterious black veils, and other horrors. But none of these violate credibility. And none are exaggerated as they are in The Castle of Otranto. If each novel is full of suspense, still in the end the suspense is resolved. Committed to the principles set forth by Clara Reeve, Mrs. Radcliffe carefully explained on rational grounds all the apparent supernatural events of her novels. The natural events she was careful to keep within the bounds of probability. Take, for example, the black veil in The Mysteries of Udolpho. Although at first it is suspected that this veil covers a decaying corpse, it turns out that it is hung to conceal the waxen image of one. The image is intended to remind prospective evildoers of the fact of mortality.
What starts out, then, in the novel as mysterious and horrible ends up explained. Mrs. Radcliffe's novels are the best examples of the rational school and they remain Gothic even for the modern reader.

While Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe were practicing their art, a more irrational school of Gothic fiction also began to establish itself in England. Chief among the members of this school was Matthew Lewis, who looked mainly to Germany for guidance. Now it is true that Walpole's The Castle of Otranto is filled with incredible happenings: an enormous helmet falls from the sky, three drops of blood fall from the nose of a statue, a portrait comes to life, servants see the foot and leg of a giant, and one of the characters disappears into the sky where he is received by St. Nicholas. Lewis, however, did not model himself after Walpole. Educated in Germany, he was more at home in the literature of that country than in that of his own land. He turned to the former when he began writing.

In the words of Ernest Baker, "it was the sensational dramas, tales, and romances of Kotzebue, Tieck, Weit Weber, Musäus, Körner, Heinse, Zschokke, Spiess, and other dealers in the uncanny, the grotesque, the horrific, the maudlin sentimental, that chiefly attracted him."\(^9\) Drawing upon the works of these men, Lewis wrote in 1795 The Monk, the most sadistic, horror-filled Gothic novel of all. Although the novel chronicles two different love stories,
Lewis' main interest is in the occultism, the devil, the rape, the murders, the torture, and the ghost which he introduces into the book. For example, the novel ends when Ambrosio, the monk of the title, sells his soul to the devil in order to escape from the Inquisition. After revealing to Ambrosio that one of the women he had violated was his sister and that another was his mother, the devil picks the monk up, flies into the sky with him, and drops him to his death on the rocks below. Such things would never occur in the rational Gothic novels. Followers of Lewis included Mary Shelley and Charles Maturin, but these authors wrote after Charles Brockden Brown. To understand Wieland it is necessary only to take account of Lewis and his German ancestors.

Brown borrowed from both the rational and irrational schools of Gothic fiction, but before discussing his debt to them I want to say one more thing about the Gothic novel. Whether it was rational or irrational, the Gothic novel was filled with the grotesque. The open-ended nature of "grotesque" allows for both the probable and the improbable. The image of a decaying corpse in The Mysteries of Udolpho is just as grotesque as Ambrosio's seduction of his mother or his death at the hands of the devil in The Monk.

At the same time, everything that is Gothic is not grotesque. Those things such as creaking doors, howling winds, and castle dungeons--used to create Gothic atmosphere--
probably do not qualify as grotesque. Thus, there was in England and Germany a Gothic school of fiction which frequently dealt with the grotesque, and there began with Brown in America a tradition of fictional grotesque which owed a good deal to the Gothic school. The two traditions, however, were different. In my discussion of Brown which follows this must be kept in mind. I shall be talking of the grotesque in Brown, but I shall also be discussing how his treatment of it depended on the Gothic school.

Although Brown obviously borrowed from Gothic fiction, he was not content to ape his literary fathers; he was too good a writer for that. But if we are to understand the grotesque movement in American fiction, we must first be clear about what Brown took from Gothic novels. Knowing this, we shall be able to see how his fiction differed from them.

Whether Brown had read The Monk is still an open question. But if he had not, he was most certainly familiar with Lewis' German masters. And Brown was not averse to borrowing from these men. In Wieland, for example, we have a case of spontaneous combustion and the murder by a religious fanatic of his entire family. In Ormond, written a year later, we find an attempted midnight rape and the subsequent murder of the seducer. Finally, in Arthur Mervyn (1799-1800) are some of the most horrible descriptions of plague known to students of literature. All these
examples remind us more of the German tales of horror than they do of the rational Gothic fiction. Yet it is a mistake to conclude that Brown was more indebted to the school of Lewis and the Germans. In truth, his approach to grotesque incidents, characters, and scenes aligned him essentially with the rational school of Reeve and Radcliffe. To see how much Brown was like these two women and at the same time to gain insight into his use of the grotesque, we might look first at the Prefaces to Wieland and Ormond.

Speaking of the events in Wieland, Brown wrote:

The incidents related are extraordinary and rare. Some of them, perhaps, approach as nearly to the nature of miracles as can be done by that which is not truly miraculous. It is hoped that intelligent readers will not disapprove of the manner in which appearances are solved, but that the solution will be found to correspond with the known principles of human nature. The power which the principal person is said to possess can scarcely be denied to be real. It must be acknowledged to be extremely rare; but no fact, equally uncommon, is supported by the same strength of historical evidence.

Some readers may think the conduct of the younger Wieland impossible. In support of its possibility the writer must appeal to physicians, and to men conversant with the latent springs and occasional perversions of the human mind. It will not be objected that the instances of similar delusion are rare, because it is the business of moral painters to exhibit their subject in its most instructive and memorable forms. If history furnishes one parallel fact, it is a sufficient vindication of the writer; but most readers will probably recollect an authentic case, remarkably similar to that of Wieland.
And in the Preface to *Ormond* he offered a defense of the title character in similar terms: "Ormond will, perhaps, appear to you a contradictory or unintelligible being. I pretend not to the infallibility of inspiration. He is not a creature of fancy. It was not prudent to unfold all the means by which I gained a knowledge of his actions; but these means, though singularly fortunate and accurate, could not be unerring and complete. I have shown him to you as he appeared, on different occasions and at successive periods, to me. This is all that you will demand from a faithful biographer" (VI, 4). These quotations clearly reveal, I believe, how much Brown was committed to the Radcliffean philosophy of grounding the fictional grotesque in the real world.

But Brown went even beyond Radcliffe in his fiction. It was not enough for him to defend abstractly the grotesque in his fiction against charges of impossibility. In one novel, *Wieland*, he insisted on offering documentary proof for everything grotesque. Whereas Reeve and Radcliffe, then, might be called rationally Gothic, Brown was scientifically grotesque. A brief look at Wieland will make this point clear. We have already seen how in the Preface Brown alluded to "an authentic case, remarkably similar to that of Wieland." What he had in mind was the case of a New York farmer who, having had a vision of two angels who ordered him to destroy his idols, went berserk
and killed his horses, children, and wife. In addition, Brown provided footnotes to give credibility to the spontaneous combustion and ventriloquism in Wieland. Of the extraordinary incineration of the elder Wieland, he wrote: "A case in its symptoms exactly parallel to this is published in one of the Journals of Florence. See, likewise, similar cases reported by Messrs. Merrille and Muraire, in the 'Journal de Medicine' for February and May, 1783. The researches of Maffei and Fontana have thrown some light upon this subject" (I, 39). And he explained the major mystery of the novel, Carwin's ventriloquism, in the following lengthy footnote:

**Biloquism, or ventrilocation.** Sound is varied according to the variations of direction and distance. The art of the ventriloquist consists in modifying his voice according to all three variations, without changing his place. See the work of the Abbé de la Chappelle, in which are accurately recorded the performances of one of these artists, and some ingenious though unsatisfactory speculations are given on the means by which the effects are produced. This power is, perhaps, given by nature, but is doubtless improvable, if not acquirable, by art. It may, possibly, consist in an unusual flexibility or extension of the bottom of the tongue and the uvula. That speech is producible by these alone must be granted, since anatomists mention two instances of persons speaking without a tongue. In one case the organ was originally wanting, but its place was supplied by a small tubercle, and the uvula was perfect. In the other the tongue was destroyed by disease, but probably a small part of it remained. This power is difficult to explain, but the fact is undeniable. Experience shows that the human voice can imitate the voice of all men and of all inferior animals. The sound of musical instruments, and even noise from the contact of
inanimate substances, have been accurately imitated. The mimicry of animals is notorious; and Dr. Burney ("Musical Travels") mentions one who imitated a flute and violin, so as to deceive even his ears. (I, 217)

In such a way did Brown account for the mysterious voices and dialogues which various characters in Wieland continually hear. Brown's explanations do not, however, destroy the grotesque character of the people or actions which they cover. Instead, they fix these people or events in the real world and thus make them credible. Whereas the grotesque in The Monk seems only the creation of a rather bizarre imagination, in Wieland—and, indeed, in all of Brown's fiction, with the exception of the two domestic novels, Clara Howard and Jane Talbot—it is part of the real world. And this, I believe, was Brown's major contribution to the grotesque movement in American fiction. With very few exceptions, his followers have insisted on making the grotesque in their fiction believable. If they were mostly creators of what James, and Richard Chase after him, called romance, they have still preferred to keep certain checks on their imaginations.

In addition to scientific explanations, Brown chose two other devices for making the grotesque in his fiction credible. First of all, he gave his fiction an American setting. Unlike the works of Lewis and Radcliffe, which are set in some never-never land full of dark forests, rather indistinct castles, and mysterious monasteries,
Brown's novels take place in the America of the late 1700's: in Philadelphia, New York, and the relatively uninhabited regions slightly to the west. These settings he justified in the Preface to *Edgar Huntley*: "One merit the writer may at least claim:—that of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors. Puerile superstition and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed for this end. The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness, are far more suitable; and for a native of America to overlook these would admit of no apology. These, therefore, are in part, the ingredients of this tale, and these he has been ambitious of depicting in vivid and faithful colours" (IV, 4). Because the grotesque in Brown's fiction can always be located, it assumes an air of plausibility. With few exceptions, American novelists in the grotesque movement have followed Brown and set their fiction in an America known to their readers.

Brown also made the grotesque in his fiction believable by treating it very concretely. Take, for example, this passage dealing with Arthur Mervyn's experience in a plague hospital:

I lay upon a mattress, whose condition proved that a half-decayed corpse had recently been dragged from it. The room was large, but it was covered with beds like my own. Between each, there was
scarcely the interval of three feet. Each sustained a wretch, whose groans and distortions bespoke the desperateness of his condition.

The atmosphere was loaded by mortal stenches. A vapour, suffocating and malignant, scarcely allowed me to breathe. No suitable receptacle was provided for the evacuations produced by medicine or disease. My nearest neighbor was struggling with death, and my bed, casually extended, was moist with the detestable matter which flowed from his stomach. (II, 173)

This kind of description is missing from novels of the Gothic tradition. Whereas Walpole, for instance, merely mentions in *The Castle of Otranto* that a helmet falls from the sky and kills the prince, Brown appeals vividly and specifically to our senses when describing the plague. He causes us to believe in it and to sense how grotesque it must have been. In the words of Richard Chase—originally meant to refer to the novelist's technique—Brown "renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail."14

In the last few pages I have tried to show both what Brown borrowed from Gothic novels and what he gave to the grotesque movement in American fiction. Although his grotesque incidents and characters tend to be closely related to those from novels by Matthew Lewis and his masters, his method of treating them was that of Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe. More than anything, Brown wanted to make the grotesque in his fiction credible. To that end, he provided scientific explanations for some grotesque things, rendered others in very concrete language, and set his novels in a real place, America, familiar to his readers.
He was, in my opinion, successful in making the grotesque in his fiction plausible. Such, indeed, was his legacy to novelists who came after him. As varied as these writers have been, they have all shared with Brown the desire to keep the grotesque in the real world.

Before examining Poe's contribution to American fictional grotesque, I want to look at one more aspect of the grotesque in Brown's novels: its relation to the central concerns of his fiction. Is the grotesque an organic part of Brown's novels? In one sense, I think that it is. We have already seen how Brown favored a scientific approach to the grotesque, and critics have shown that in all his fiction Brown was eager to emphasize a rational approach to life.\(^{15}\) Thus, his handling of the grotesque implicitly develops one of the major themes of Brown's fiction. Yet for all this, we must conclude that usually the grotesque in his fiction is only artificially related to the central themes of his novels.

Alexander Cowie explained one of these themes when he pointed out that there is always implicit in Brown's fiction some philosophical or moral problem: in Wieland it is religious obsession, in Edgar Huntley criminology, in Ormond anarchism, and in Arthur Mervyn humanitarian reform.\(^{16}\) To be sure, the grotesque murders committed by the insane Theodore Wieland tie in with Brown's interest
in religious obsession in *Wieland*, but the same cannot be said of other grotesque elements in Brown's novels. What relation, for instance, have the sleepwalking scenes in *Edgar Huntley* to the theme suggested by Cowie? How are we to connect Brown's interest in humanitarian reform with the grotesque character Welbeck in *Arthur Mervyn*? We cannot. Nor can we relate the grotesque in Brown to his second major concern, the portrayal of young adults being initiated into the world. In *Wieland* Clara grows up as the result of her experiences with her seducer, a fact that she makes quite clear in the final chapter of the novel. Her maturation in no way results from the fact that Carwin makes rather bizarre use of his powers as a ventriloquist. Nor is it related to the other grotesque elements in the novel, the spontaneous combustion and Theodore's madness. Likewise, the development of the title character in *Arthur Mervyn* is not so much the result of his contact with Welbeck and the plague as it is the logical outcome of his love relationships with Eliza Hadwin and Achsa Fielding. And, finally, in *Edgar Huntley* the hero grows up as a result of learning that first suspicions are frequently wrong. The grotesque elements in the novel—the sleepwalking scenes, the mad men and women, the encounters with the Indians—are unrelated to Edgar's development.

Brown, then, successfully made the grotesque in his fiction plausible, but he failed to integrate it into his
novels, to relate it organically to his major interests in the works. When we turn to Poe, on the other hand, matters are quite reversed. He made the grotesque an integral part of many of his tales, but frequently these tales, as well as their grotesque elements, are absolutely implausible.

To be sure, there is an element of realism in Poe which at first glance makes his fiction believable. Take, for example, the opening chapter of the *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*. When Poe concentrates there on describing explicitly the geography and population of Nantucket and on recounting a typical adolescent escapade, a wild boat ride at night, the reader is made to feel that fact, not fantasy, is being related. But in the final analysis Poe's realism is trivial. For all of it which is to be found in the *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, the tale remains on the whole fantastic and unbelievable. And the same thing can be said of most of Poe's other tales. When we read them, we remain unconvinced of the validity of their grotesque elements. We are reminded more of what Walpole called the ancient romance where imagination and improbability ran rampant, than we are of Brown's fiction or of grotesque American fiction written after Poe.

What, instead, is crucial in Poe for an understanding of the tradition of American fictional grotesque is the care with which he made the grotesque an organic part of his fiction. This was his bequest to American fictional grotesque, and we must look at it. But before we can do this properly,
we must try to understand what Poe meant by the grotesque. In his Preface to Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque Poe wrote that "The epithets 'Grotesque' and 'Arabesque' will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales here published." This remark leaves us in the dark. It confuses the terms "grotesque" and "arabesque" and is the very antithesis of precision. Unfortunately, the remainder of the Preface does little to dispel the darkness. Only toward the end, after dealing mainly with the charge that his tales were too Germanic, does Poe finally make a statement which relates, however slightly, to his definition of the "grotesque." "If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis," he wrote, "I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul." By the grotesque—and perhaps by the arabesque—Poe evidently meant something having to do with psychological horror. This is not very concrete.

Only in a passage from "The Masque of the Red Death" does Poe become explicit about what constitutes the grotesque. Speaking of the masqueraders, he wrote: "Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm—much of what has been since seen in 'Hernani.' There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre,
something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams."20

Here Poe uses "grotesque" to describe a particular scene. He means by the term, in the words of Wolfgang Kayser, "the distortion of all ingredients, the fusion of different realms, the coexistence of beautiful, bizarre, ghostly, and repulsive elements, the merger of the parts into a turbulent whole, the withdrawal into a phantasmagoric and nocturnal world."21

This would seem to tell us quite explicitly what Poe meant by the grotesque, but such a conclusion should not be reached too hastily. In the first place, we must note that in "The Masque of the Red Death" Poe uses "grotesque" in a non-aesthetic, non-literary sense to describe a scene in the story. This causes a problem, for what we are especially concerned with is how he applied the term to his fiction. We must ask whether Poe's non-aesthetic definition of "grotesque" is applicable to aesthetic objects. Furthermore, this use of "grotesque" in "The Masque of the Red Death" does not correspond to Poe's use of the term in the Preface to Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque. It is not so much that the two uses are contradictory as it is simply that they are unlike. Did Poe prefer one? Did he mean for us to have one in mind when reading his tales? Only after we answer
these questions satisfactorily can we conclude that we know what Poe meant by "grotesque."

If we examine the critics' attempts to deal with Poe's concept of the grotesque, I think we must conclude that these questions probably cannot be answered well. I say this because these attempts are confused and in hopeless disagreement. Let us look at three of them.

In his critical biography of Poe, Arthur H. Quinn commented briefly on Poe's Preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*: "He eluded a definition of the terms . . . and he uses them differently at different times, but generally speaking, the Arabesques are the product of powerful imagination and the Grotesques have a burlesque or satirical quality." Although we would probably all agree with the first part of Quinn's observation, we must wonder on what grounds he was able to discriminate between the arabesque and the grotesque in Poe. In fact, Wolfgang Kayser has questioned whether such a discrimination is at all possible, for in his opinion "Poe uses grotesque and arabesque synonymously in the title of his collection." Kayser thought this because he believed that Poe had obtained his knowledge of the grotesque from an essay on the supernatural written in 1827 by Sir Walter Scott.

In that essay Scott dwelt at some length on the tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann. Among other things, he pointed out that "the grotesque in his compositions partly resembles the
the arabesque in painting, in which is introduced the most strange and complicated monsters, resembling centaurs, griffins, sphinxes, chimeras, rocs, and all other creatures of romantic imagination, dazzling the beholder as it were by the unbounded fertility of the author's imagination, and sating it by the rich contrast of all the varieties of shape and colouring, which there is in reality nothing to satisfy the understanding or inform the judgment."

Certainly Scott equated the grotesque with the arabesque, but I question Kayser's conclusion that this clears up our confusion about Poe's definition of "grotesque." If Scott gave a definition of "grotesque," he did so in terms which are mostly irrelevant to discussions of literature. When he was relevant, as in the last part of the statement quoted above, he was too general to provide a clear guide for recognizing the grotesque in literature. And, finally, Kayser offers no clear proof that Poe ever knew of Scott's discussion of the grotesque. The third attempt to make clear what Poe meant by "grotesque" is Harry Levin's. His method is etymological: "The etymology of grotesque, deriving as it does from grotto, makes it particularly appropriate for [Poe's] purposes. It means an artistic creation which is entirely imaginary, which has—in Milton's phrase—"no type in nature"." It is surprising that a scholar of Levin's learning is not more careful to avoid the genetic fallacy, especially as there...
is no evidence that Poe knew anything of the history of "grotesque."

To sum up, Poe explicitly called some of his tales grotesque, but he never did an adequate job of saying what he meant by the adjective. Only twice did he concern himself with defining it, and then he managed to raise more questions than he answered. In short, confusion surrounds Poe's use of "grotesque." This confusion extends to modern scholars who have attempted to make clear what Poe understood by the grotesque. We are left, I believe, with no alternative but to conclude that Poe himself never was sure of the meaning of "grotesque," and that we, therefore, are not likely to be any surer. If we use the word "grotesque" with reference to Poe's fiction, we must do so according to the guidelines I have set up in my first chapter.

I indicated above that Poe's contribution to American fictional grotesque was the integration of the grotesque into fiction. Before Poe the grotesque tended to be excess literary baggage, but with him it became an organic part of literature. In a sense, it became the subject of that fiction in which it appeared. But we should not be surprised at Poe's contribution to the tradition of the grotesque in American fiction.

Speaking of Paradise Lost, Poe wrote in "The Poetic Principle:" "This great work ... is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite
in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems" (Works, XIV, 267). In this brief quotation we find the central tenet of Poe's poetics, that a work of art must have above all unity. Without unity there is no art. This stress on unity is familiar, of course, to all who have read "The Philosophy of Composition," the supposed account of how Poe wrote "The Raven." But Poe's best application of the unity principle to fiction came in his famous review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales. In that review he said: "A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design" (Works, XI, 108). In short, Poe's theory of art grew out of a belief that in a work of art every element must be functional, that elements of a work of art must work together to produce a unity. His use of the grotesque in his fiction naturally reflects this theory. Feeling as he did about unity, Poe chose to employ the grotesque organically. The grotesque in his fiction always
contributes to some pre-established design, always is part of the unity of his fiction.

In Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque are twenty-five stories, many of which are of little interest here. Such early burlesque pieces as "Loss of Breath," "Lionizing," "The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall," and "How to Write a Blackwood Article" can be ignored. Other tales such as "The Conversation of Erios and Charmion" and "Shadow" seem to have nothing grotesque about them and thus also do not require our attention. But at least five stories—"Berenice," "Morella," "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "William Wilson"—are serious works of literature which are grotesque. We might examine any one of them to see how Poe integrated the grotesque into his fiction. In addition, some of Poe's stories not included in Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque are full of the grotesque. We think immediately of "Hop-Frog," "The Black Cat," "The Pit and the Pendulum," and "The Masque of the Red Death." But especially we recall, I believe, "The Cask of Amontillado," a grotesque tale which has of late been underrated. It is this story which I shall discuss here to show Poe's technique of handling the grotesque.

As in all of Poe's serious grotesque tales, it is difficult when looking at "The Cask of Amontillado" to separate out the grotesque elements. Consider, for example, the subject of the story. Essentially the tale describes
the revenge which Montresor inflicts on Fortunato for an unnamed insult by burying him alive. Such a subject, combining as it does the horrible and the perverted, is certainly grotesque. So, too, are other parts of the story—the characters, the settings, the black humor. All this is to say that the tale is an artistic whole and that the grotesque elements are inseparable parts of that whole.

Although Montresor is by far the better developed character in the story, we see enough of Fortunato to include him in the gallery of grotesques. When he first appears, he is dressed as a fool and reminds us of so many figures in grotesque painting: "The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells" (Works, VI, 168). Throughout the rest of the tale, weakened by his drunkenness and his excessive pride in his ability to judge wine, Fortunato plays the fool. He allows Montresor, as it were, to take him on a last wild goose chase, ignoring on the way all the obvious hints which Montresor drops about his intentions. When Fortunato is finally chained in his burial vault, he suddenly is no longer a fool. Instead, he becomes a madman, another familiar figure in grotesque art. At first he tries furiously to break his chains, next he screams violently—although there is no one to hear him except Montresor—then he congratulates Montresor on the fine joke, then he pleads pathetically with
with his avenger, and finally he can only shake the bells on his cap. All this we are told in the space of a page. Understandably stripped of his humanity by being brought face to face with his death, Fortunato completely loses control of himself and becomes extremely grotesque, though, to be sure, sympathetically so.

Montresor, however, is far more grotesque, and in addition he does not at any time attract our sympathies. We are repulsed by him from the very beginning when he announces his theory of revenge which requires that the avenger both proceed without risk and at the same time let his victim know what is being done to him. Without ever revealing what the thousand injuries and the insult were which he suffered at the hands of Fortunato, Montresor then puts his theory into practice in the rest of the tale. Without emotion, without passion, he fiendishly leads Fortunato to his death. Along the way to the vault Montresor proves his grotesqueness by pretending to be Fortunato's friend, by playing on Fortunato's pride in his wine connoisseurship, and by continually inquiring after his victim's health. When he finally chains Fortunato in the vault, he continues to torture him: "'Pass your hand,' I said, 'over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is very damp. Once more let me implore you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my
power" (VI, 173). Then Fortunato begins to scream, and for a moment Montresor is taken aback. So inhuman is he that his victim's most predictable reaction surprises him. But he rises to the occasion and mocks Fortunato by screaming back at him. Finally, as Montresor is about to entomb Fortunato, he suddenly tells us that his "heart grew sick" (175). Lest we conclude, however, that he is showing himself at the last moment to be human, Montresor caps his grotesqueness by saying that "it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so" (175). In the space of a few pages Poe has managed to create one of the most grotesque characters in literature.

Other grotesque elements in "The Cask of Amontillado" are the two settings and the black humor. The first part of the tale takes place "one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season" (168). As viewers of the fine film, Black Orpheus, remember, such a setting is characterized by masked figures, wild dancing, Dionysian music, and drunkenness. It is appropriate for the meeting of Montresor and Fortunato. And the second setting of the story, the underground vaults of the Montresor family, is equally appropriate for Montresor's revenge upon Fortunato. As the two men descend farther and farther into the earth—in a sense it is a descent into hell with Montresor playing Satan—the air becomes fouler, the walls more coated with nitre, the moisture more prevalent, the skeletons more
numerous. When Montresor finally chains Fortunato to the granite wall of the vault, he does so in a place under the river bed, with human remains piled high on all sides. Such a grotesque setting complements the grotesque act performed there.

The black humor in the tale is also grotesque. Throughout the story Montresor loses no opportunity to say things to Fortunato which have an innocent meaning for the victim, but a very diabolical one for Montresor and the reader. As Fortunato begins to show interest in going to inspect the Amontillado, Montresor replies: "'My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature'" (169). When they decide to go underground, Montresor remarks, "... I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo" (169). Later, upon entering the Montresor vaults, Fortunato begins to cough violently. This provokes Montresor to one of his most hypocritical outbursts: "'Come,' I said, with decision, 'we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as I once was. You are a man to be missed'" (170). In reply, Fortunato says, ironically: "'Enough ... the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough'" (170). Later Montresor drinks to Fortunato's long life, and then he reveals his family motto: *Nemo me impune lacesit* (171). Since Fortunato fails to catch any of the double meanings in what Montresor says, he soon finds himself chained in
in his tomb. The tale closes with Montresor's account of Fortunato's immurement and with one final sick joke: "I hastened to make an end of my labour. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat* (175)! All this black humor is, I believe, grotesque, and as such it works in conjunction with characters, settings, and incident to produce a grotesque tale.

The grotesque, then, is organic to "The Cask of Amontillado." It is interesting to note that there is also in the tale a very logical, rational element. When Montresor avenges himself on Fortunato, he does not do so passionately or irrationally. Instead, he achieves his revenge by following a very logical plan. He skillfully ensures that his servants will not be home. Thus, when he enters the vault with Fortunato, there are no witnesses. He coolly takes advantage of Fortunato's pride in his wine connoisseurship. He deposits ahead of time in the vault bricks and mortar for walling up Fortunato. In short, Montresor acts not like the usual insulted man bent on revenge, but like an automaton. This, I feel, is grotesque. What Montresor does is grotesque enough, but it is made even more so by the precision and logic which he exhibits in doing it. Thus, in "The Cask of Amontilladd" reason becomes
The grotesque is so central to the story that it absorbs the rational into it.

We can contrast this with what happens in another of Poe's tales, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Here the subject is the logical, rational procedure which Dupin employs to solve a murder. But the procedure yields the conclusion that the murders must have been committed by an orang-outang. Having constructed a murder case for Dupin to solve, Poe can only figure out one way for him to solve it—-to conclude that it was done by an orang-outang. Thus, what starts out as an exercise in reason rises to the realm of the grotesque. So central is the grotesque to Poe's imagination that it intrudes even into the fiction where he is interested in reason and logic. In "The Cask of Amontillado" the grotesque so pervades the story that it becomes, in a sense, the subject. But even in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," which sets out to record the very antithesis of the grotesque—-the working of a logical mind—-the grotesque is organic. It is necessary if the tale is to have an ending.

Before leaving Poe, I think we might say one more word about his conception of the grotesque. By virtue of his emphasis on organic unity the grotesque frequently becomes the subject of Poe's tales. Consequently, his theory of the grotesque is really contained in his theory of organic unity and cannot have a fully independent status.
Thus, I think we might understand some of the confusion which has surrounded Poe's use of the term "grotesque." For Poe, the term can only be understood as part of his aesthetic, not as a separate entity. Poe may not have been able to articulate this fact, but from our position it seems relatively clear.

Poe's crucial discovery was how to make of the grotesque a viable literary device. What he discovered was that it could be the subject of fiction or that it could be used organically to dramatize non-grotesque subjects such as psychic survival in "Ligeia" or "Morella," or the working of a rational mind in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." This was his legacy to the tradition of American fictional grotesque. Once Brown had naturalized the grotesque and Poe had integrated it into fiction, that tradition was free to develop along its own lines. It is with three of these lines that my next three chapters are concerned.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II

1 See Lyle H. Wright, American Fiction, 1774-1850 (San Marino, California, 1948), p. 311.


3 Sister Mary Redden describes these stories in The Gothic Fiction in the American Magazine, 1765-1800 (Washington, 1939).

4 See, for example, C.F. MacIntyre, "Were the Gothic Novels Gothic?," PMLA, XXXVI (1921), 642-67.


8 Ibid., p. iii.

9 History of the English Novel, V, 205-06.


11 This is not particularly a new point. See Birkhead, The Tale of Terror, p. 200; Oral Coad, "The Gothic Element in American Literature before 1835," JEGP, XXIV (1925), 72-93; and Redden, Gothic Fiction in American Magazines, p. 47.
Subsequent references to Brown are taken from this edition and are cited in my text.

Brown's source was undoubtedly the New York Weekly Magazine, II (July 20, 1796), 20, and II (July 27, 1796), 28. The source was first called to the attention of students of literature by Carl Van Doren, "Early American Realism," The Nation, XCIX (1914), 577-78.


(Philadelphia, 1840), I, 5.

Ibid., I, 6.

Works (New York, 1902), IV, 254. Subsequent references to Poe are from this edition and appear in my text.


The Grotesque in Art and Literature, p. 77.

"On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition" Foreign Quarterly Review, I (1827), 81-82.
25 Gustav Gruener in "E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Allan Poe," *PMLA*, XIX (1904), 13-14, examines the evidence that Poe knew Scott's articles and concludes that he feels sure that Poe did. This is not very precise proof.

CHAPTER III

THE GROTESQUE CHARACTER IN AMERICAN FICTION

We cannot help noticing how frequently grotesque characters appear in American fiction. In Brown and Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, Twain and Bierce, Crane and Norris, Anderson and West, Faulkner and our contemporaries we find again and again physical and spiritual freaks: dwarfs, petrified men, noseless humans, feeble-minded people, monomaniacs, sexual perverts, and savages.

But as striking as these characters are in themselves, the uses which novelists have made of them are still more interesting. In this chapter I want to examine what some of these uses have been. I concentrate on three in particular. In the time of Hawthorne and Melville novelists used grotesque characters in a symbolic manner to comment upon the human condition. They were not particularly interested in creating grotesques who were faithful reproductions of living humans. Rather, they wanted their grotesque characters to suggest some essential truth about the human situation. By the end of the nineteenth century things had changed. In depicting grotesques the naturalists were trying to say exactly how human beings are. True, they were interested in promoting the philosophy of determinism, but they expected their grotesque

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characters to be accepted as real human beings. For the naturalists, grotesques were simply people who deviated most from the norm, be it physically or spiritually. Finally, within the past few decades novelists have been treating grotesque characters in an entirely new way. They no longer use them symbolically and they no longer see them as human anomalies. Instead, in the eyes of contemporary novelists the grotesque character is a typical human being, is a faithful reproduction of a normal person. With these remarks in mind, let me turn to a more detailed discussion of the grotesque character in American fiction.

A. Hawthorne and Melville

Both Hawthorne and Melville tried to make their fiction credible. We all remember how Hawthorne, in the Preface to The Scarlet Letter, claims to have discovered the outline of the novel, as well as the actual scarlet letter worn by Hester, in a Salem Custom House. His aim in doing so is to persuade his readers of the factual nature of the novel. Such is also his purpose in the first paragraph of "Wakefield." In that paragraph Hawthorne tries to make plausible the very odd story which follows by maintaining that he read of it in some old magazine or newspaper. Wakefield's story is remarkable, Hawthorne agrees, but because it is based on a journalistic account, readers should accept it.
Like Hawthorne, Melville wanted his fiction to seem plausible. This is one reason why so much of what he wrote is in the first person; by adopting the autobiographical form he made his fiction seem like fact. Melville further accomplished his aim by filling his fiction with facts. (Admittedly, much of his fiction is factually based on his own life or on his reading, and the problem in it then is to fictionalize the facts sufficiently.) His early novels read at times like guides to life at sea or on some tropical island, while *Moby Dick* is, among other things, a storehouse of knowledge about the whale. By filling his novels with so many facts, Melville lent truth to his fiction.

At the same time that Hawthorne and Melville tried to root their fiction in the real world and thus to give it an air of credibility, they also created grotesque characters whom it is difficult to accept as literal copies of real people. Ministers who wear black veils over their faces, copyists who prefer not to work, captains who madly swear vengeance on dumb brutes—these characters do not have their counterparts outside the world of literature. But the two novelists knew this. In creating grotesques they were not trying to copy nature but to suggest some truth about the world. Grotesque characters, in other words, for Hawthorne and Melville are supposed to function
symbolically. We can understand this better if we look at two of their remarks about fiction.

In the second paragraph of "Wakefield" Hawthorne indicates what he thinks a reader should make of the story of the eccentric husband: "Whenever any subject so forcibly affects the mind, time is well spent in thinking of it. If the reader choose, let him do his own meditation; or if he prefer to ramble with me through the twenty years of Wakefield's vagary, I bid him welcome; trusting that there will be a pervading spirit and a moral, even should we fail to find them, done up neatly, and condensed into the final sentence. Thought has always its efficacy, and every striking incident its moral." In short, we should not be interested in whether Wakefield is a faithful copy of some person living in the real world. Despite Hawthorne's claim that "Wakefield" is based on a newspaper story, it is difficult to believe that any husband would desert his wife for twenty years in order to live but a block away from her. Rather, as readers we should be interested in what the supposed behavior of Wakefield teaches us. In his grotesqueness he can suggest to us some truth about the human situation. To repeat, "every striking incident has its moral."

Hawthorne's statement explains in part what we are to make of the implausible grotesque characters which appear in his fiction and Melville's. And Chapter XXXIII of The
Confidence Man advances the explanation still further. In that chapter Melville addresses the reader directly on the question of whether everything in a work of fiction should be faithful to real life. He concludes with the following words:

There is another class, and with this class we side, who sit down to a work of amusement tolerantly as they sit at a play, and with much the same expectations and feelings. They look that fancy shall evoke scenes different from those of the same old crowd round the custom-house counter, and the same old dishes on the boarding-house table, with characters unlike those of the same old acquaintances they meet in the same old way every day in the same old street. And as, in real life, the proprieties will not allow people to act out themselves with that unreserve permitted to the stage; so, in books of fiction, they look not only for more entertainment, but, at bottom, even for more reality, than real life itself can show. Thus, though they want novelty, they want nature, too; but nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed. In this way of thinking, the people in a fiction, like the people in a play, must dress as nobody exactly dresses, talk as nobody exactly talks, act as nobody exactly acts. It is with fiction as with religion; it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie.2

In a sense Melville aligns himself here with the transcendentalists. When he insists that fiction "should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie," he is perhaps expressing in his own words Emerson's proposition that "every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact." Grotesque characters for Melville are not exactly natural facts, though they are tied to the natural world. But they do function in such a way to allow us
access to some spiritual fact. If there is nobody in the real world exactly like grotesque characters, that fact is unimportant. What is crucial is that these characters function symbolically, suggesting to us some universal truth. In effect, they permit us to transcend reality, to see "nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed."

I think it is clear now what Hawthorne and Melville intended for their readers to make of grotesque characters in fiction. Although both men wanted their novels to be credible, they more or less ignored verisimilitude in creating their grotesques. They did not expect that these characters would in any way suggest people in the real world, but hoped instead that they would act as symbols which would allow comment upon the human condition. This point will become clearer if we look at some fiction by the two men. But first let me note that much of what I say in this chapter about particular works of American fiction is commonplace. This is unavoidable. I use commonplace readings to support what I feel is an original thesis about grotesque characters in American fiction.

In Hawthorne almost all of the grotesque characters are people who withdraw from the human community. What he does in recounting their tales is to dramatize the effects which their withdrawals can have on both the community and themselves. To see this, let us look at the following grotesques: Wakefield, the Minister in "The Minister's Black
Veil," Ethan Brand, Rappaccini, and Chillingworth. In "Wakefield" Hawthorne simply presents the problem of withdrawal. When he describes a man who deserts his wife for twenty years in order to live only a block away from her by himself, he is showing us a unique example of a human cutting himself off from the world. And lest we miss the symbolic importance of this grotesque figure, Hawthorne makes explicit the moral of the story. At the end, when Wakefield has returned home, Hawthorne comments: "He has left us much food for thought, a portion of which shall lend its wisdom to a moral, and be shaped into a figure. Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another, and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe" (Works, I, 186).

Hawthorne goes much farther in "The Minister's Black Veil" than he does in "Wakefield," for he explores in the former story the concrete effects which withdrawal can have on those around the Minister. Such an interpretation of "The Minister's Black Veil" is relatively easy to support, but because it goes contrary to most other readings of the story, I want to mention briefly some of these interpretations. One group of critics has tried to explain "The Minister's Black Veil" by concentrating on the subtitle
of the story, "A Parable." Still other critics have interpreted the story by focusing on the character of Mr. Hooper and on his possible reasons for donning the veil. Finally, some have turned to the black veil itself for the key to Hawthorne's tale. There is one way, however, in which the various readings of "The Minister's Black Veil" are similar. They all approach the tale as a kind of detective story or mystery. The task of the critic is to seek out clues to explain Mr. Hooper's behavior, the significance of the black veil, or Hawthorne's parabolic intent.

Such an approach to "The Minister's Black Veil" is a misdirected one, for the requisite clues simply are not forthcoming. If we wish to speculate about the meaning of the black veil or about the emotions and thoughts which motivate the minister to wear it, we must do so at our peril. We must, as it were, impose a priori conceptions on the story. But there is something in the story about which we need not speculate, the relation of Mr. Hooper to the community, a relation which is radically altered by the appearance of the black veil. The entire story is, in fact, an exploration of the community's reaction to the veil—at church, at the funeral and at the wedding, and during interviews with Mr. Hooper—and of the corresponding change in the minister's position within the community.

In his examination of Milford's reaction to the black veil Hawthorne takes pains to present the community on all
levels, to include a representative sampling of mankind pictured in a variety of situations. Thus, the responses of both young and old, of both sceptical and superstitious, are depicted. Hawthorne contrasts the oldest parishioner's slow and dim awareness of the change in the minister with a small boy's lively and self-frightening mimicry, the unmoved coldness of the rational physician with the supernatural imaginings of an irrational old lady. Similarly, the author dramatizes the effects of Mr. Hooper's appearance at both funeral and wedding, in both public assembly and private interview. Nor does Hawthorne explore only the reactions of the general community, for in a sense the more intimate community of the family is represented by Elizabeth, the parson's betrothed. Indeed, the minister himself shares in the community horror as he shudders at his image in a mirror. And, finally, the members of the community offer a variety of explanations for Mr. Hooper's black veil: eccentricity, mental disorder, hidden sorrow, communion with demons, and secret sin.

Hawthorne, then, carefully structures "The Minister's Black Veil" to dramatize the impact of the black veil on the community. Although the town's citizens react to the veil in a variety of ways, there is one thing common to all their responses. Each time Mr. Hooper appears wearing the veil he provokes behavior which is either unsuitable or uncharacteristic. For example, when he first shows up
at church in the veil, his parishioners react more like a
mob than like a congregation: "Few could refrain from
twisting their heads towards the door; many stood upright,
and turned directly about; while several little boys clambered
upon the seats, and came down again with a terrible
racket. There was a general bustle, a rustling of the
women's gowns and shuffling of the men's feet, greatly
at variance with that hushed repose which should attend the
entrance of the minister" (Works, I, 42-43). Likewise, the
wedding, which should be a joyful occasion, is pervaded by
gloom. And even the legislature is so influenced by the
minister's election sermon that it foregoes politics for
"legislative measures . . . characterized by all the gloom
and piety of our earliest ancestral sway" (58).

Various individuals' reactions to the veil also
deviate from the expected pattern of behavior. The sceptical
physician, normally a "sober-minded man," believes
that the veil renders the parson "ghostlike from head to
foot" (46). Similarly, the "busybodies," the self-appointed
advisors of Mr. Hooper, are unable to "make the black veil
a subject of friendly remonstrance" (50). But perhaps the
best illustration of this strange reversal of character is
seen in Elizabeth. Although she is characterized as steadfast, calm, and determined to be unappalled by the gloom of
the black veil, during her interview with Mr. Hooper she is
terrorized by the veil and departs in tears, shuddering and trembling at the sight of it.

The behavior of the Milford community, then, is abnormal on account of Mr. Hooper's withdrawal. But in a sense the community response functions in the story as a norm. Because all the Milford citizens react to Hooper in the same way, we can say that within the framework of the story their actions are normal. It is the abnormal become normal. The community response functions as a norm by which to gauge Hooper's grotesqueness. If his behavior were to elicit no unusual reactions, we might conclude that there is nothing wrong with him. But such is not the case; he is clearly grotesque.

No reader, I believe, takes seriously the claim that a minister might wear a black veil over his face for most of his adult life. Yet everyone is struck by the tale recounting such behavior. If Mr. Hooper's action has little of literal importance in it, it does have great symbolic meaning. To wear a piece of crape in front of one's face is to cut oneself off from the world and to force the world to behave strangely. The withdrawal of an individual has communal consequences.

It also has personal consequences, as we see in Hawthorne's treatment of another grotesque character, Ethan Brand. Early in his life, Brand conceives of a search for the unpardonable Sin. He quits his job, leaves the human
community behind, and travels throughout the world looking for the Sin. He grows intellectually on account of his efforts, but unfortunately discovers that the Sin is all the time within his own breast. It is "the sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims" (Works, III, 122). Aware, finally, of his sin, Brand commits suicide by jumping into a limeburner. His grotesque life and death symbolically illustrate the tragic individual consequences withdrawal may have.

If Brand's Faustian search ends up in his own destruction, that of another Hawthorne grotesque, Rappaccini, destroys those around him. The trouble with Rappaccini, as Baglioni reminds us, is "that he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment. He would sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustardseed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge" (Works, IV, 137). We all remember the consequences of Rappaccini's love for science: his daughter's lover becomes a poisonous creature and she herself dies. The grotesque scientist serves Hawthorne well, for we come away from "Rappaccini's Daughter" intensely aware of the danger in the unchecked pursuit of knowledge, of the need to pay attention to humans first and abstract ideas second.
We come now to Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*, the grotesque character in Hawthorne who functions most powerfully as a symbol. This is not so much because he is more grotesque than others, for as we shall see his sin is like that of Brand and Rappaccini, but rather because he appears in a novel where Hawthorne has the space to examine him thoroughly and to explore in depth his relations with others. Because Hawthorne treats him so fully, I shall also.

Early in *The Scarlet Letter*, before Chillingworth develops his desire to avenge himself upon Dimmesdale, Hawthorne makes clear that the physician suffers from a Faustian complex. When he first describes Chillingworth, he notes that "there was a remarkable intelligence in his features, as of a person who had so cultivated his mental part that it could not fail to mould the physical to itself . . .". A few pages later Chillingworth vows to discover Hester's lover: "But he will be known!—he will be known!—he will be known!" (63) Chillingworth is a man who lives to know. And in his interview with Hester in the jail, the old physician admits that in a sense he had driven her to sin by slighting his emotional for his intellectual life (73-74). In short, Chillingworth is characterized early in *The Scarlet Letter* as an intense seeker after knowledge.

In part the novel is a working out of the consequences of such onesidedness in a man. Taking residence with Dimmesdale, Chillingworth resolves to know the man,
even though he is as yet unaware of the minister's guilt. Although he pretends to minister to Dimmesdale, the townspeople see clearly what Chillingworth is: "... it grew to be a widely diffused opinion, that the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, like many other personages of especial sanctity, in all ages of the Christian world, was haunted either by Satan himself, or Satan's emissary, in the guise of old Roger Chillingworth. This diabolical agent had the Divine permission, for a season, to burrow into the clergyman's intimacy, and plot against his soul" (128). To pursue knowledge unnaturally is to become diabolical.

When Hawthorne describes Chillingworth's study of Dimmesdale, he makes this point still clearer: "He had begun an investigation, as he imagined, with the severe and equal integrity of a judge, desirous only of truth, even as if the question involved no more than the air-drawn lines and figures of a geometrical problem, instead of human passions, and wrongs inflicted on himself. But as he proceeded, a terrible fascination, a kind of fierce, though still calm, necessity seized the old man within its grip, and never set him free again, until he had done all its bidding" (129). The unnatural desire for forbidden knowledge eventually transforms a man. In Chillingworth's case it leads him to be inhumane, to probe the heart of Dimmesdale, and eventually to wish for a terrible revenge upon the minister.

At the beginning of The Scarlet Letter Chillingworth
is an intense seeker after knowledge. Although he is not
an attractive person, he certainly is not grotesque when the
book opens. But as it proceeds, he becomes grotesque.
His desire to know leads him to investigate Dimmesdale's
soul, and what he finds there is of great consequence.
Discovering that Dimmesdale has been Hester's lover, Chillingworth decides upon a revenge, a revenge which consumes
all his energy. As the years go by, Chillingworth torments
Dimmesdale continually, determined to avenge himself. In
his persistence he is grotesque.

Finally, however, judgment is made upon the physician.
Although Hester sinned by committing adultery and Arthur
sinned to a greater degree by concealing his role as Hester's
lover, Chillingworth is deemed to be the worst of all in
his desire for knowledge and revenge. As Dimmesdale puts
it, "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" (195).

At the end of The Scarlet Letter we see just how
grotesque Chillingworth has become. So intense has become
his pursuit of knowledge turned revenge, that he can only
exist by it. As Dimmesdale goes to the scaffold to confess,
the physician begs him not to. Dimmesdale, however, remains
steadfast, confesses, and then dies with a pure heart,
having made public his guilt. In confessing and dying he
also takes away the food for Chillingworth's soul. For "this unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systematic exercise of revenge; and when, by its completest triumph and consummation, that evil principle was left with no further material to support it, when, in short, there was no more Devil's work on earth to do, it only remained for the unhumanized mortal to betake himself whither his Master would find tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly" (260).

As the result of his unnatural search for knowledge which leads to a grotesque desire for revenge, Chillingworth manages to destroy Dimmesdale and himself. If we find the physician too diabolical, too vengeful, too inhuman to allow us to imagine his worldly existence, we still find him a powerful character who functions most effectively on a symbolic level. He stands as a warning to us of the dangers in forbidden knowledge.

Various characters in Hawthorne's fiction, then, are grotesque because they cut themselves off from the world. Wakefield deserts his wife, Mr. Hooper alienates his congregation, and Brand, Rappaccini, and Chillingworth place knowledge above mankind. None of these men is inherently grotesque, but they all become so as they alienate themselves from the human community and communal values. Hawthorne's message is clear: if one is to live as a human being, not as a grotesque creature, then he must do so in
the midst of other human beings, respecting their humanity, acting in accordance with communal values and mores.

In Melville characters become grotesque for a slightly different reason, by being absolute about something. Foremost among the absolutists is Ahab. Before we learn of Ahab's purpose on the whaling voyage, we discover that he in some way is 'sick.' As Captain Peleg tells Ishmael, "I don't know exactly what's the matter with him; but he keeps close inside the house; a sort of sick, and yet he doesn't look so. In fact, he ain't sick; but no, he isn't well either." Eventually we learn that Ahab's sickness is not of the body but of the mind. Enraged by the bodily harm done him, he vows vengeance on a dumb brute, Moby Dick, and forgets his duty as Captain to look after his crew and to fill his ship with whale oil. In dedicating his life to vengeance Ahab is much like Chillingworth.

So determined is Ahab to kill Moby Dick that he frequently appears mad. Melville, in fact, calls him a monomaniac a number of times (pp. 182, 196, 209, 235, 427, 460, 529, 541). And Ahab himself reveals his madness through word and deed. Reminded, for example, by Starbuck that it was Moby Dick who took off his leg, Ahab replies: "'Aye, aye,' he shouted with a terrific, loud, animal sob, like that of a heart-stricken moose; 'Aye, aye! it was that accursed white whale that razed me; made a poor pegging
lubber of me for ever and a day!' Then tossing both arms, with measureless imprecations he shouted out: 'Aye, aye! and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up!'" (160-61) Such outbursts point clearly to Ahab's madness.

His madness, however, is more than just a desire for revenge. In addition, Ahab the absolutist is resolved to rise above his place in the universe and thus to discover something about the noumenal world. The hunt for Moby Dick, therefore, takes on great symbolic importance. As Ahab explains to Starbuck,

"All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach the outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing in it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal; I will that hate upon him." (p. 162)

In this speech Ahab asserts his wish to be more than a man. He wants to know what man can never know, and he cannot accept his human limitations. We cannot help admiring him in his strength and determination, but his desire borders on madness. It is magnificent, but it is unnatural. To
a great extent the last three-fourths of *Moby Dick* work out the consequences of this unnatural determination.

As the voyage of the Pequod continues, Ahab more and more comes to forget the literal purpose of his revenge for the symbolic one. His life becomes more a contest with the universe than with a whale. So when lightning strikes the masts of the Pequod, Ahab addresses the fire in terms which he usually reserves for *Moby Dick*: "... I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; and e'en for hate thou canst but kill; and all are killed. No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me" (500). In Melville's words, this is "Ahab in all his fatal pride" (512). He is mad to desire revenge on an unthinking whale, but he is madder still to think that he can dispute with the forces of the universe.

The consequences of Ahab's absolutism become madness are clearly dramatized in *Moby Dick*. Captain Ahab himself suffers internally. He becomes "a creature... whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture: feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates" (p. 200). In short, the intensity of Ahab's purpose causes him to eat his heart out. The crew of the Pequod suffers also. If only Starbuck is hurt
spiritually, still the entire crew, with the exception of Ishmael, perishes on account of Ahab. They are innocent victims of a moral grotesque.

Yet none of these foreseeable consequences is of interest to Ahab, who remains determined in his purpose to the very end. As the third day of the chase after Moby Dick grows to a close, only Ahab's boat remains whole in the water. The whale surfaces and prepares to sink that boat. About to lose his life to the great whale, Ahab expresses for the last time his defiance of the whale and of the universe. Nothing can bend him.

"I turn my body from the sun. What ho, Tashtego! let me hear thy hammer. Oh! ye three unsurrendered spires of mine; thou uncracked keel; and only god-bullied hull; thou firm deck, and haughty helm, and Pole-pointed prow, — death-glorious ship! must ye then perish, and without me? Am I cut off from the last fond pride of meanest shipwrecked captains? Oh, lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief. Ho! ho! from all your furthest bounds, pour ye now in, ye bold billows of my whole foregone life, and top this one piled comber of my death! 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. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common goal; and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! Thug, I give up the spear!" (565)

Ahab is a magnificent example of man's perpetual desire to transcend himself. We, along with Melville, admire him in his strength, but we must also reject his
purpose as unnatural. It is abnormal to desire revenge upon a whale, and it is abnormal to contend with the universe as Ahab does. But what is most abnormal about Ahab is the persistence with which he acts. Ignoring the fact that what he does is called mad or unholy, ignoring the consequences for his sailors and for the Pequod's owners, Ahab continually strives on the literal level to kill Moby Dick and on the symbolic level to strike through to the noumenal world. In his actions he is mad, and in persisting in his madness Ahab is grotesque. So grotesque that we discount him on a literal level, Ahab remains the great symbol of man trying to rise above himself. Inevitably he fails, and in doing so serves as a fit warning to us to be content with our humanity. He is the great grotesque character in American fiction, making dramatic through his last voyage a great theme of human existence.

Other of Melville's characters also act so absolutely that we must also call them grotesque. One of them is Pierre. Confusing absolute good with earthly good, he so acts as to cause, ironically, misery all about him. Like Ahab, Pierre tries to transcend his humanity; he tries to achieve an absolute, ideal good when such an achievement is possible only for God. Eventually his absolutism leads to five deaths: Pierre kills his cousin, Lucy and Mrs. Glen-dinning die of grief, and Isabel and Pierre himself commit
suicide. Melville demonstrates that an absolute belief in good can lead only to evil and misery.10

Before leaving Melville, I want to discuss briefly two grotesque characters from his short stories, Merrymusk in "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!," and Bartleby. Merrymusk, it will be remembered, is the owner of a noble golden rooster which can crow magnificently. Although Merrymusk is poverty-stricken and although his wife and children are all ill, they all take comfort in the fabulous cock. Despite his family's financial needs, Merrymusk refuses to sell the rooster, even though he is offered five-hundred dollars for it. He would rather own the bird than see his family cured of poverty and disease. In the end Merrymusk, his wife, and their children all die. In describing Merrymusk's absolutism Melville invites us to question the relative value of spiritual and physical goods. Certainly his work is a living monument to the importance of the spirit, but at the same time Melville realized that the spirit cannot be nurtured if the physical isn't nourished. Merrymusk is unable to acknowledge this truth. With wife and children dying, he remains ecstatic because his rooster provides them all with spiritual sustenance. He pays for his ecstasy.

Another memorable grotesque character from Melville's fiction is Bartleby the scrivener. We can see his grotesqueness if we look briefly at those facts we know about
him. Employed by a Wall Street lawyer as a copyist, Bartleby at first carries out his duties admirably. But gradually he refuses to do more and more of the tasks expected of him, each time declining with the polite phrase, "I prefer not to." Eventually he gives up copying altogether. At the time he eats very little, seemingly only ginger-nuts and cheese, and sleeps in the lawyer's office. When Bartleby will no longer do any work, the lawyer becomes exasperated and finally changes offices to be rid of him. Bartleby continues to haunt the old office, much to the annoyance of the new tenant. After some time he is removed to jail where he gives up eating altogether and soon dies.

No person in the real world acts quite so extremely as Bartleby, but symbolically his story suggests many things. It condemns a world which isolates men (we remember the walls in the story) and makes them work at meaningless tasks, either in a Dead-Letter office or copying for a lawyer. It suggests the efficacy of passive resistance; for Bartleby, through his strange behavior, is able to disturb the narrator, to cause him to alter his pattern of living. But most of all it requires us to think about Bartleby himself. In the story he asserts his independence, rebels against the lawyer and everything for which he stands. But to what end? Bartleby's is a nihilistic rebellion, an assertion of self to no purpose. It leads to withdrawal, default upon responsibilities, and death. Bartleby's
absolutism, in short, has negative results as far as he is concerned. As Egbert Oliver has put it, "In 'Bartleby' the principle of self-reliance, the complete individualism of turning inwardly upon oneself and withdrawing from the obligations and associations of the outward world, is considered and exposed as leading only to the negation of death."

Like other grotesque characters in Melville and Hawthorne, Bartleby functions symbolically, forcing us to contemplate a fact about human existence. What Hawthorne and Melville do with their grotesque characters is use them to articulate their views about the human condition. The characters have meaning only as Hawthorne and Melville give it to them; that is, meaning is something mediated through the authors' minds. As literal beings, the grotesque characters in Hawthorne and Melville have no status at all, for their entire importance is symbolic. But when we turn to the naturalists' fiction, we find that no longer do grotesque characters work symbolically. Instead, they are literal reproductions of persons living in the world. In the naturalists' fiction meaning is not something mediated through the author's mind, but something which relies upon the principle of selectivity. Looking at the world about them, the naturalists select those people to write about who fit the thesis of determinism. These people happen to be grotesque. Their meaning grows out of
their lives; it is not imposed on their lives by an author.

B. The Naturalists

To speak of naturalism inevitably involves some reference to realism. And to discuss either movement is particularly difficult here, given my remarks about definition in Chapter I. Nevertheless, rather than go through the elaborate procedure of that chapter, I attempt here to arrive quickly at some orthodox understanding of realism and naturalism. Fortunately, there is a bit more agreement about them than there is about the nature of the grotesque.

Let us begin by looking at three representative attempts to discriminate between realism and naturalism. The first is that of Charles Walcutt (1956): "I use the term naturalism to indicate a philosophical orientation. . . realism to indicate the apparent fidelity, through style, to details of objects, manners, or speech."12 The philosophical bent of naturalism, Walcutt makes clear, is determinism.13 Next is a statement by Richard Chase (1957): "... naturalism is a special case of realism. And though it is often identified with its interest in unusually sordid reality, it actually becomes a special case of realism by adhering to a necessitarian ideology."14 Finally, there is the claim by Lars Ånebrink (1961) that "Realism is a manner and method of composition by which the author
describes normal, average life in an accurate and truthful way (exemplified in Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham*).

Naturalism, on the other hand, is a manner and method of composition by which the author portrays life as it is in accordance with the philosophic theory of determinism (exemplified in Zola's *L'assommoir*)."\(^{15}\)

It is clear that both realism and naturalism are involved in the attempt to get at the world as it is, not as it has been, could be, or should be. They differ, however, in their ideological approach to the task. The realist thinks that the artist should serve as a clear lens which stands between the world and art. As such, he in no way transforms the world, and so his art serves as a faithful copy of it.\(^ {16}\) The naturalist, on the other hand, while also photographing the world, uses a selective lens in his work. He does not exactly alter the world in the production of his art so much as he chooses to copy from it those details which support his philosophy.

Most of us, I believe, would go as far as Walcutt, Chase, and Ahnebrink do in agreeing about the nature of realism and naturalism. But we would probably want to dissent from a point made by Chase alone, that naturalism cannot be equated with an "interest in unusually sordid reality. Ahnebrink, in fact, can lead us in our dissent.
While speaking of Howells' method, he observed that

His realism was a quiet realism depicting the commonplace, clean American life as he saw and understood it, seemingly devoid of theft, murder, adultery, and the like. Moreover, his realism was selective, but selective on a sound, philosophic basis, on a definite, reasoned theory: What was most common and most usual, was most real, according to Howells. The naturalist, however, frequently dealt with the uncommon, the abnormal, selecting that because it fitted his theory of life; the realist should, ideally, have no theory. Anything that was, was real; what was most common, therefore, not the abnormal, was his material. If the sordid in a given time and place was most common, then it was real and the realist used it; if it was not most common, as it was in the world Howells wrote about, then the realist did not use it. The naturalist, however, always used it, because he had a theory according to which life was sordid and mean, conditioned by material and biological forces.17

Essentially this statement sums up another widely held belief about realism and naturalism. Realism deals with the normal, the commonplace, the expected; naturalism prefers the abnormal, the unusual, the bizarre.

Given this background, we are able to say something about the characters in naturalistic fiction. In the first place, they are supposed to be copies of people in the real world. Leaving aside the complicated aesthetic problem of how literature can reproduce the world, we can affirm that the naturalist expected his readers to recognize his characters. Secondly, characters in naturalistic fiction are frequently grotesque. Whereas the realist preferred to treat the commonplace, the naturalist favored the abnormal. "Abnormal" may not be a synonym of
"grotesque"—especially in view of Chapter I of this study—but the two terms are frequently associated. There are few grotesque characters in realistic fiction, but they abound in the naturalistic. And they are faithful reproductions of people in the world. The naturalists, to be sure, did not create grotesque characters merely to reproduce the world, for they used these characters in addition to illustrate the truth of determinism. But they did not use them as Hawthorne and Melville did. By their grotesque characters the naturalists meant to say that such people really existed.

We can better understand the use which naturalists made of grotesque characters if we look at several pieces of their fiction. In particular, I want to discuss Crane's "The Monster," London's The Sea-Wolf, Norris' Vandover and the Brute, and Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio. The grotesque characters in these works are not incredible as the grotesques in Hawthorne and Melville. But it is not their credibility that bears upon my thesis. Suffice it to say that the naturalists made their grotesque characters plausible by paying attention through style to the manners, actions, and speech habits of living people. Here I want to show how in naturalistic fiction grotesque characters are always humans who differ considerably from the norm, be it physically or spiritually. They are all plausible in their grotesqueness, but it is clear, through the
presence in the works of normative characters, that they are also abnormal.

A brief plot summary of "The Monster" will help in discussing it. Henry Johnson, a Negro servant in the home of Dr. Trescott, rescues the physician's young son from a fire. In his act of heroism, unfortunately, he has his face severely burned and his life endangered. Dr. Trescott, grateful to Johnson for saving his son's life, nurses him patiently back to health. The only trouble is that Johnson's face is so mangled that no one want to be around him. Also, the town reacts against Trescott for saving and taking care of Johnson: it discontinues going to him for medical advice. The story ends as the ladies of the town boycott Mrs. Trescott's Wednesday tea.

Crane's theme is social ostracism. To best dramatize this theme he needs someone who differs markedly from everyone else, and thus he creates the faceless Negro, Henry Johnson. It is interesting to note that before Johnson's face is burned, he is not rejected. True, he is rather a comical character and the butt of some racial remarks by men in the barber shop, but essentially he has a place in town. Yet as soon as his face is scarred in the fire, as soon as he becomes physically grotesque and different from others, he finds himself alone. Only Dr. Trescott accepts him. Johnson is called a thing and a person outside of nature.
He is shunned by professional people (the Judge), poor Negroes (Williams and his family), children (especially Sadie Winters), his girl friend and her mother, and the men at the barber shop. And because Johnson is associated with the Trescotts, the town also ostracizes them. Thus, Crane uses a physical grotesque to make his theme concrete. What is ironic, of course, is that in their inhuman treatment of Johnson and the Trescotts the town's citizens also become grotesque. They become, as it were, moral monsters.

As a grotesque character, Johnson clearly differs from the norm. This is obvious since everyone in town has a face except Johnson. But it is not so clear that as moral grotesques the citizens also deviate from the norm. The problem is one of locating the norm with reference to the treatment of Johnson. Perhaps the townspeople, in their ugly behavior, are normal. At first glance, Dr. Trescott might appear to be the moral center of the story, but basically his treatment of Johnson is motivated by gratitude instead of charity. One cannot say how he would have treated the poor Negro if it had not been his son who was rescued. There is, however, one character who takes a human view of Johnson, the woman named Martha Goodwin.

Although Martha appears only twice in the story, Crane manages to tell us a good deal about her. In Section XIX he characterizes her as a strong-minded woman
with opinions on just about everything. Especially notable is her moral sense which she lets play on "the situation in America, the condition of women in China, the flirtation between Mrs. Minster of Niagara Avenue and young Griscom, the conflict in the Bible class of the Baptist Sunday-school, the duty of the United States toward the Cuban insurgents, and many other colossal matters" (Works, III, 81). "In regard to social matters," says Crane, "she . . . was probably the most savage critic in town. This unknown woman, hidden in a kitchen as in a well, was sure to have a considerable effect of the one kind or the other in the life of the town. Every time it moved a yard, she had personally contributed an inch. She could hammer so stoutly upon the door of a proposition that it would break from its hinges and fall upon her, but at any rate it moved" (Works, III, 83).

Having established Martha Goodwin as a person with a conscience, Crane has her comment upon the problem of Henry Johnson. In Section XXII she takes on her sister Kate and their neighbor Carrie Dungen over the question of Johnson's rejection by the town. Her two adversaries believe that because the town as a whole ostracizes Johnson, they should too. They substitute social conformity for morality. But Martha ridicules the whole conception of conformity, insists that Johnson is no one to be scared of, and condemns the town for being silly in its treatment
of him. Crane leaves a good deal implicit in the scene, but the confrontation certainly establishes Martha as the moral norm of the story. In comparison with her, the town's citizens are abnormal, are moral grotesques.

"The Monster," then, can be read as social satire, but the same cannot be said of Frank Norris' Vandover and the Brute. Essentially, this novel is the portrait of a man who gives into his physical desires and becomes grotesque. Norris' purpose is to chronicle the decline of a man who is unable to keep a balance in his life between the spiritual and the physical. He refuses to judge Vandover, for his deterministic philosophy allows for a man's degeneration. But he does make clear, by showing us other characters, that Vandover as grotesque is abnormal.

Vandover's decline has three stages, each one of which takes up about one-third of the novel. During the first hundred pages or so he manages to keep his life in balance. Although his sensual side is quite well developed—he loves expensive food and drink, good cigars, loose women, and card playing—his interest in art remains high. He goes regularly to the School of Design and finishes a number of paintings, although he never finds the energy to get to his masterpiece, "The Last Enemy." In addition, he frequents the refined society of San Francisco, paying special attention to Turner Ravis, with whom he has had a Platonic relationship for some years. He remains, in short,
in control of his life. But then several things happen to him. In a moment of careless passion he gets Ida Wade pregnant. This fact, however, remains unknown to him until he reads of her suicide in the paper. Her death shocks him so that he breaks down and confesses his part in it to his father. Under the urging of the old man, he decides to reform. To recover from the shock of Ida's death, Vandover goes on a cruise, but on his return to San Francisco he finds his father dead. Vandover is suddenly alone in the world.

During the next part of the novel Vandover's decline begins. He has to give up his father's home for financial reasons and move to more impersonal quarters. He pays less and less attention to his art. And his connection with Ida Wade having been made public, he finds himself rejected by Turner Ravis and her friends. As a substitute for what he has lost, Vandover turns to dissipation:

All at once Vandover rushed into a career of dissipation, consumed with the desire of vice, the perverse, blind, and reckless desire of the male. Drunkenness, sensuality, gambling, debauchery, he knew them all. He rubbed elbows with street walkers, with bookmakers, with saloonkeepers, with the exploiters of lost women. The bartenders of the city called him by his first name, the policemen, the night detail, were familiar with his face, the drivers of the night hawks recognized his figure by the street lamps, paling in light of many an early dawn.19

But Vandover is not completely happy in his new life, for
his spiritual side asserts itself occasionally. At times he resolves to return to art and once he even attempts suicide. More and more, however, his sensual appetites demand attention. So dissipated does Vandover become finally that he turns into a brute. He actually suffers from lycanthropy, a disease which causes him to think of himself as a wolf.

In the last section of the novel Vandover's degeneration becomes complete. He manages to gamble away his inheritance and to remain almost perpetually drunk. Also, his attacks of lycanthropy increase; of these Norris says: "At certain intervals his mania came upon him, the strange hallucination of something four-footed, the persistent fancy that the brute in him had now grown so large, so insatiable, that it had taken everything, even to his very self, his own identity—that he had literally become the brute" (Works, V, 278). Reduced to the level of a brute, Vandover's existence becomes brute-like. He is conscious only of satisfying his animal needs, especially his hunger. The last scene of the novel shows this best. In it Vandover is working for his old friend Geary cleaning out cheap homes of factory workers. Although he must handle the most disgusting mixture of dirt, grease, and decayed food, Vandover remains content. As an animal he is happy to do what will earn him food.

Norris does not condemn Vandover's transformation
into a grotesque creature but attempts instead an explanation of it in terms of determinism. There is not room here to explore this explanation in depth, but two quotations from the novel will indicate the general direction it takes. Early in the book Norris remarks: "In a suitable environment Vandover might easily have become an author, actor, or musician, since it was evident that he possessed the fundamental \textit{afflatus} that underlies all branches of art. As it was, the merest chance decided his career" (\textit{Works}, \textit{V}, 9). By chance Norris means such matters as Ida's suicide, the death of Vandover's father, and Vandover's contact with certain people. All these add up to life and determine Vandover's end. Norris says it more poetically:

\begin{quote}
It was Life, the murmur of the great, mysterious force that spun the wheels of Nature and that sent it onward like some enormous engine, resistless, relentless; an engine that sped straight forward, driving before it the infinite herd of humanity, driving it on at breathless speed through all eternity, driving it no one knew whither, crushing out inexorably all those who lagged behind the herd and who fell from exhaustion, grinding them to dust beneath the myriad iron wheels, riding over them, still driving on the herd that yet remained, driving it recklessly, blindly on and on toward some far-distant goal, some vague unknown end, some mysterious, fearful bourne forever hidden in thick darkness. (\textit{Works}, \textit{V}, 202)
\end{quote}

It is on account of life that Vandover becomes grotesque.

If Norris refuses to condemn Vandover for becoming grotesque, this does not mean that he refuses to judge him.
What Norris does is to make clear that Vandover is abnormal in his grotesqueness. He sympathizes with Vandover, but he still sees him deviating from the norm. The norm in the novel consists of those characters who also have sensuous appetites, but who do not become grotesque. Most prominent among these are Geary, Haight, Ellis, and Dummy. Geary and Haight are companions of Vandover when he is relatively in control of himself. Although they both enjoy indulging themselves at the Imperial, neither Geary nor Haight ever let their animal natures take control of them. Ellis and Dummy are Vandover's friends during the section of the novel when his decline begins. They are both more hedonistic than Geary and Haight, and keep up with Vandover in his drinking and gambling. Yet they never entirely succumb to their brute instincts, never, that is, become grotesque. Neither is very refined, but each of them has control of himself. Only Vandover gives in completely to his sensual appetite. In doing so he becomes grotesque, the abnormal character in the book.

Another animal-like character is Wolf Larsen in Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*. The most impressive thing about him is his body, which the narrator, Humphrey Van Weyden, describes as follows:

- His height was probably five feet ten inches, or ten and a half; but my first impression, or feel of the man, was not of this, but of his strength. And yet, while he was of massive build, with broad
shoulders and deep chest, I could not characterize his strength as massive. It was what might be termed a sinewy, knotty strength, of the kind we ascribe to lean and wiry men, but which, in him, because of his heavy build, partook more of the enlarged gorilla order. Not that in appearance he seemed in the least gorilla-like. What I am striving to express is this strength itself, more as a thing apart from his physical semblance. It was a strength we are wont to associate with things primitive, with wild animals, and with creatures we imagine our tree-dwelling prototypes to have been—a strength savage, ferocious, alive in itself, the essence of life.20

Yet Wolf is not completely an animal, for he is also very well self-educated. Among the books in his cabin, for instance, are volumes by Shakespeare, Tennyson, De Quincey, Browning, Tyndall, Darwin, and Bullfinch. On the face of it, then, Wolf Larsen appears to be a well-rounded man.

What is grotesque about Larsen is his philosophy of life, a philosophy shaped by the works of Darwin and Nietzsche, but independent, finally, of them. "I believe that life is a mess," he says. 'It is like yeast, a ferment, a thing that moves and may move for a minute, an hour, a year, or a hundred years, but that in the end will cease to move. The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strong eat the weak that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all'" (p. 50). For Larsen, life is essentially a circle, going nowhere, concerned only with survival.

With this point of view Van Weyden cannot agree. He
argues with Larsen that Life must have some value, opposes his idealism to Larsen's materialism. But Larsen denies this (p. 69), asserting that it is the nature of life to live and to want to keep living, that is, that life has no value except in so far as it values itself (pp. 52, 73). But Van Weyden is still not satisfied because he believes in some transcendent system of ethics, some system which makes stealing, for example, wrong. Stealing, however, in Larsen's opinion, is neither right nor wrong, but a fact. "'Might is right, and that is all there is to it. Weakness is wrong. Which is a very poor way of saying that it is good for oneself to be strong, and evil for oneself to be weak—or better yet, it is pleasurable to be strong, because of the profits; painful to be weak, because of the penalties' " (p. 79).

So much for Larsen's philosophy. Even more grotesque than the philosophy is that Wolf lives it. He rules his ship brutally, concerning himself not all with the humanity of his crew. Among other things he ruthlessly allows Leach and Johnson to go to their deaths in a small boat because they have displeased him. Also, he tows his cook by a rope behind the ship and causes the poor man to lose a foot to a shark. He even treats his own brother like a thing, stealing from him part of his crew. And when the tables turn on him he remains a defiant brute. Toward the end of the novel he runs aground on an island where Van Weyden and
Maud Brewster have taken refuge. Wolf is alone on his ship because his brother has repaid him by stealing his entire crew. Stricken by some disease, Wolf goes blind and eventually becomes paralyzed. Yet he never quits fighting for his life, never gives in to Van Weyden's humanity. Whenever Van Weyden tries to repair the ship, Wolf attempts to hinder him. And when he is finally confined to a bunk, paralyzed and speechless, he manages once more to communicate his defiance to Van Weyden, even though he cannot act on it. He dies as he has lived, ruthless, egoistic, amoral, grotesque.

London makes clear through the person of Humphrey Van Weyden that London's grotesqueness is abnormal. At the beginning of the book, Van Weyden is Wolf's intellectual equal, but he is no match physically for the captain. Years of reading have left him flabby. But life aboard ship quickly makes a man of Van Weyden. Although, he never becomes strong enough to take on Wolf in a fight, he does progress to the point where he can survive physically as a sailor. In a sense he becomes Wolf's equal by the time Maud Brewster comes aboard. But when he defeats Wolf in competition for Maud's affection, escapes from the ship with her, and then conquers Wolf after the captain's ship runs aground where he and Maud are living, Van Weyden becomes Wolf's superior. The difference between them is their outlook on life. Because Humphrey is humane, he
can win Maud. And because he places a value on life, he is able to defeat Wolf. Van Weyden is the moral norm of the novel. His success and Wolf's failure reveal the inadequacy of the Captain's superman philosophy, reveal, in fact, the grotesqueness of that philosophy.

We come finally to Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. At first glance, it might seem illogical to treat this book as an example of naturalism, for Anderson's concern is not so much with faithful reproduction of surface detail as it is with psychological probing. Yet there is no reason why naturalism cannot deal with psychological grotesques. In addition, Anderson's treatment of grotesque characters aligns him, I believe, with the other naturalists I have treated in this section. Before showing this, I want to say a word about Anderson's conception of the grotesque.

This conception he explains in the first chapter of *Winesburg, Ohio*, a kind of prologue which he calls "The Book of the Grotesque." The chapter deals with an old writer who has known many people, all of whom have become grotesque. What is important is how they became grotesque: "It was the truths that made the people grotesque. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced a falsehood." 21 It is not exactly clear what
Anderson means by this. In Malcolm Cowley's opinion, we can know only by looking at the characters themselves in Winesburg, Ohio. If we do this, we find that "their lives have been distorted not, as Anderson tells us in his prologue, by their each having seized upon a single truth, but rather by their inability to express themselves. Since they cannot truly communicate with others, they have all become emotional cripples" (p. 14). I agree with Cowley that Anderson's definition of the grotesque does not cover all the grotesque characters in the novel, but I am not sure that Cowley's explanation is any more valid. Some characters do communicate with George Willard, though the communication is often non-verbal.

In opposition to Cowley, Rex Burbank believes that "the grotesques are so because for one reason or another they have (willfully or because of circumstances they cannot control) become isolated from others and thus closed off from the full range of human experience . . . they have attempted to embrace a single truth to live by (often, because their alternatives are limited, they have had to), thereby closing off other possibilities of experience and compounding their loneliness and becoming enslaved by it."22 The trouble with Burbank's explanation of grotesque is that it is too broad. Something of what he says applies to every character in Winesburg, but none of them fits his entire definition of grotesque. Both Cowley and Burbank
fail to explain adequately Anderson's conception of the grotesque. While I agree with them that his definition is not clear, I think they err in trying to show that all the grotesques in the book are alike in some way. At best, we can say that *Winesburg, Ohio* is a study in abnormal psychology, a portrait of characters who in some way or other are not whole mentally.

To illustrate this point let me discuss briefly three grotesque characters in the book. The first of these is Wing Biddlebaum, the central figure in "Hands." As a young man Wing was a teacher in a Pennsylvania high school. He was a good teacher, but one of his pupils, a half-witted one at that, became enamoured of Wing, dreamt of his teacher, and told his father of the dream as if it were homosexual fact. As a result, Wing was beaten and driven out of town. All he had done was to touch several of his pupils. Understandably, Wing was warped by his experience. When we see him, he is a silent, withdrawn man who earns his living picking berries. His strangeness results from his hands which he can never keep still, which are the physical symbol of his mental agitation and fear. Wing is not a horrible grotesque, but in his paranoia resulting from his traumatic experience as a teacher he is psychologically abnormal.

Then there is Joe Welling in "A Man of Ideas." Although Anderson never reveals the cause for Joe's
strangeness, he dramatizes very concretely his abnormality. Joe is a collector of facts, and what is more, he has an uncontrollable urge to share these facts, to tell of them with excitement to whomever is around. When the water in Wine Creek, for example, rises eleven and a half inches by Trunion bridge, Joe must burst into the drug store to announce the fact. Joe is a person who is overwhelmed by knowledge. As Anderson puts it, "Astride an idea, Joe was overmastering. His personality became gigantic. It overrode the man to whom he talked, swept him away, swept all away, all who stood within sound of his voice" (p. 104).

Finally, let me say a few words about Wash Williams in "Respectability." When Wash was young he was married to a beautiful young girl in Columbus, Ohio. Although he loved her dearly, she acted like so many people in that capital city and prostituted herself. Wash sent her home to Dayton, still in love with her. After some time her mother sent for Wash, and when he arrived, she pushed his wife naked into a room with him. Overcome with fury, Wash hit the mother with a chair and left. Several months later his wife died of a fever. At the time of the novel Wash still suffers from his marital experiences. He talks to no one except George Willard, calls all women bitches, and allows his body to be constantly soiled. He is another
citizen of Winesburg whose youthful experiences have made him grotesque.

Cowley argues that the people in Winesburg are grotesque because they cannot express themselves. Perhaps Wash Williams does keep to himself most of the time, but he shares his past with George Willard. Wing Biddlebaum also communicates with George, though, to be sure, much of what he tells him is non-verbal. His hands talk for him. And Burbank maintains that Winesburg citizens are grotesque as a result of their isolation. If Wing and Wash are essentially isolated, Joe Welling is not. He is in constant contact with others. We may find it strange that he prefers talking to them about out-of-the-way facts, but we must grant him his place in the community. Both critics, I believe, are wrong about what makes Anderson's characters grotesque. They all have psychological quirks, but further than that we cannot go in looking for some trait which they share in their grotesqueness.

The townspeople of Winesburg are grotesque. From this fact we might infer that Anderson is saying that this condition is normal. If it were not for the presence of George Willard in the book, such an inference would be valid. But Willard, the confidant of so many of the novel's grotesques, is not a grotesque. He is a whole man. It is true that he changes on account of his contact with the grotesques, but the change is not in terms of sickness and
health. Rather, George grows up. At the end of the novel he leaves Winesburg, partly in order to pursue his career as a writer, but partly also to avoid becoming grotesque. If it is normal to be grotesque in Winesburg, Anderson indicates that in the world at large such a state is abnormal.

The naturalists, then, make frequent use of grotesque characters in their fiction. Unlike Hawthorne and Melville, they do not use them symbolically, though they do use their lives as support for determinism. For the naturalists, the grotesque character is a faithful copy of some specific human being in the world. And he is a copy of a human being who deviates from the norm physically, mentally, or morally. When we turn to more modern novelists, we find that matters are once again different. For these writers, the grotesque character is the norm.

C. The Moderns

We can see the truth of this claim by looking first at Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts. The characters in this novel can be divided into three groups, the first of which is made up of those people who write in to Miss Lonelyhearts asking for advice. Signing their letters with such names as Desperate, Broken-hearted, Disillusioned-with-tubercular-husband, and Sick-of-it-all, these characters all describe themselves or those around them as grotesques. The letters tell of a girl without a nose, of a
pathetic cripple, of a woman deserted by her husband, of
a moronic girl in danger of being molested, and of a
pregnant woman suffering horribly from diseased kidneys.
To refer to his correspondents Miss Lonelyhearts uses the
word "humanity." In doing so he appears to be suggesting
that grotesqueness is the human condition. But we cannot
be sure of this until we examine the other characters in
the novel.

A second group of characters in Miss Lonelyhearts
consists of those people who surround the main character
in his daily life. Prominent among these are Shrike,
Shrike's wife, and Betty, Miss Lonelyheart's girl friend.
If none of these suffers from the physical grotesqueness
that plagues those people in the first group, the fact
remains that they are all grotesque in a mental or spiritual
way. Shrike is a hard-hearted cynic, unsympathetic to his
readers' problems, interested only in the circulation of
his newspaper. His wife Mary is a sexually selfish person
who derives her pleasure from teasing Miss Lonelyhearts.
And Betty is the perpetual virgin, overly spiritual ("Betty
the Buddha"), believing that escape is the key to happiness.
In short, all three are far from whole, are grotesque in the
way so many of Anderson's characters are.

There is, finally, Miss Lonelyhearts who forms a
group of one. He occupies a position in the novel similar
to the one occupied by George Willard in Winesburg, Ohio.
Both men are surrounded by grotesque characters. But whereas George is different from those around him and thereby stands as the norm in *Minesburg, Ohio*, Miss Lonelyhearts is much like the other characters in his novel. Consider some of the ways in which he is grotesque. While in college, Miss Lonelyhearts, along with two friends, buys a gallon of applejack, gets drunk, and kills a lamb in a wild frenzy. In addition, at the very time that he is writing his column for his pathetic readers Miss Lonelyhearts and a friend cruelly torment an old homosexual. And Miss Lonelyhearts suffers so much for his readers that he develops a Christ complex. By the end of the novel, ironically, he is as much in need of salvation as his readers. What is crucial is that Miss Lonelyhearts does not stand in the novel as a norm opposed to the deviations of other characters. He is as grotesque as they are. Since every character in *Miss Lonelyhearts* is grotesque, I believe that it is West's claim that to be human is to be grotesque. To be grotesque is to be normal. West never even suggests that he or his readers might be normal and that his characters, therefore, as grotesque are abnormal. The entire novel insists that it is normal for a human to be grotesque.

This conclusion present some problems. If, as my first chapter argues, "grotesque" is a term such that necessary and sufficient conditions cannot be given for its correct use, the fact remains that the word has always
suggested such synonyms as bizarre, strange, horrible, abnormal, and different. Never has "grotesque" been thought of as a synonym for "normal." Yet I believe that is what West thought. And as I shall show shortly, many other modern novelists have agreed with West. But if grotesqueness implies normality, how do we recognize it in modern literature? How, in short, do we discriminate between normal normality and grotesque normality? In my opinion, we call West's characters grotesque because we bring our own standards of normality to Miss Lonelyhearts. Since we still believe that grotesqueness suggests abnormality and since we still have some vague conception of how we think humans really are, we are able to call West's characters grotesque. If the time comes when our view of the world conforms with that held by modern novelists, we will agree that the grotesque is the norm. Paradoxically, once our view of reality agrees with that held by writers we probably will no longer use the term "grotesque" to characterize modern fictional characters. We use it now only because our outlook on the world is unlike the artists'. This claim about future use of "grotesque" may seem odd, but remarks of modern novelists confirm it. I will bring up several of these shortly.

Many contemporary readers would disagree with my claim about the grotesque character in modern fiction. Take Dorothy Parker, for instance. Speaking of Carson
McCullers, she says: "The writer must be aware of life around him. Carson McCullers is good, or she used to be, but now she's withdrawn from life and writes about freaks. Her characters are grotesques." In Miss Parker's opinion, the grotesque is not part of life as it really is. John Aldridge agrees with Miss Parker, maintaining that a writer should use the grotesque only as a means of contrast to call attention to reality. The best expression of his point of view comes in his attack on Truman Capote's Other Voices, Other Rooms:

The real world behind the nightmare which Capote gives us has been refined almost completely out of existence. Where in successful ironic fiction—such as Kafka's—and in successful caricature—such as Abner Dean's—the real qualities of the thing commented upon are constantly heightened and enriched by the outlandish manner in which the artist presents them, in Capote the outlandish and grotesque stand alone. They do not refer back to models in the reality we know, nor does their validity depend upon an innate satiric or ironic comment. Joel, the central figure in Other Voices, Other Rooms, is neither a boy nor a caricature of a boy. He is a creation entirely of Capote's talent for the grotesque, and what he is entirely because Capote invented him in a burst of pure technique and not because Capote perceived his original in life and evolved the technique that would best express him.25

Aldridge, in other words, thinks that Capote creates pure fantasy; his grotesque characters live in a fantasy world, but they have absolutely no relation to people in the world Aldridge knows.

Parker and Aldridge are representative of a good
many critics who are unaware of what modern novelists are up to. Wearing, so to speak, nineteenth-century glasses, they are unable to see what our novelists see. They think that to be grotesque is to be abnormal or even to be out of the world. Critics like Parker and Aldridge may ultimately be right about the grotesque, but they must take off their worn spectacles if they want to be able to read modern fiction.

Although we still lack letters and other personal documents of many modern novelists, we do have enough evidence on hand to show how they conceive of grotesque characters. This evidence indicates that readers like Parker and Aldridge are behind times. In a letter to Ihab Hassan, Flannery O'Connor remarked of her own work that

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\text{Whatever Southern life may contribute to this impression of grotesquery, there is a more fundamental reason why these stories are the way they are. The reason is that the writer's vision is literal and not naturalistic. It is literal in the same sense that a child's drawing is literal. When a child draws he doesn't try to be grotesque but to set down exactly what he sees, and as his gaze is direct, he sees the lines that create motion. I am interested in the lines that create spiritual motion. It never occurred to me that my novel was grotesque until I read it in the papers.}
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This is a very revealing statement. Miss O'Connor writes of what she sees, but what she sees is called grotesque. Yet she doesn't realize it is grotesque until told by readers of her fiction. We have here the ordinary case
of the artist out-running his audience. Because Miss
O'Connor's readers still conceive of "grotesque" as refer-
ing to something abnormal and because they still have
some antiquated view of the world in which to be normal is
to be ordinary, they use the word "grotesque" to describe
her fiction. But she never thinks to use such a word. As
I remarked above, once we see reality as contemporary ar-
tists do, we will no longer use the term "grotesque" either.
Meanwhile, we must use it to stand for the norm in con-
temporary fiction.

Among other writers who have indicated that they
agree with Flannery O'Connor's point of view are Katherine
Anne Porter and Erskine Caldwell. Although Miss Porter has
created a fine piece of grotesque fiction--Noon Wine--she
has commented on the grotesque only when writing an intro-
duction to Eudora Welty's short stories. In that intro-
duction she wrote that "as painters of the grotesque make
only detailed reports of actual living types observed more
keenly than the average eye is capable of observing, so
Miss Welty's little human monsters are not really cari-
catures at all, but individuals exactly and clearly pre-
sented. . .".27 Miss Porter realizes that the modern
writer need not exaggerate in order to create grotesque
characters. Instead, he need only write of what he sees;
what he sees happens to be grotesque. As another creator
of grotesque characters--Erskine Caldwell--has put it,
"I wanted to tell the story of the people I knew in the manner in which they actually lived their lives from day to day and year to year, and to tell it without regard for fashions in writing and traditional plots." A critic like Kenneth Burke may call Caldwell's characters grotesque, but Caldwell insists that he writes of what he knows.

Contemporary novelists, then, conceive of themselves as literally rendering the world when they create characters for their fiction. Some readers, however, unable to see the world in the same way as the writers do, feel constrained to label modern fictional characters grotesque. It is all right to do this since we need some sort of critical vocabulary to talk of characters. But we must remember that modern novelists do not think of grotesque characters as abnormal. To see better how the grotesque character is the norm in contemporary fiction, let us turn to some examples of that fiction.

First, I want to discuss several authors whose books stand somewhere between naturalism and the contemporary in their treatment of grotesque characters. If we look at Caldwell's God's Little Acre and Tobacco Road, we cannot help calling his characters grotesque (I am being an old-fashioned reader here). Caldwell never presents any "normal" character in opposition to the grotesque, nor does he indicate that either he or his reader is normal when compared
to them. But his characters cover a very small range: poor tenant farmers in Georgia and North Carolina. It is normal, Caldwell's fiction insists, to be grotesque if one is a tenant farmer in those states, but we have no indication that he would want to generalize for all humanity. I suspect that Caldwell wouldn't, given his sociological bent. Like Caldwell are Nelson Algren and John Rechy. Both write of grotesque characters as if they are the norm, but both write of a very narrow range of humanity: Algren, for example, of the narcotics world in *The Man with the Golden Arm* and Rechy of the homosexual world in *City of Night*. Characters in these worlds are grotesque, but the novels do not allow us to move beyond these small worlds.

A different case is the world created by William Faulkner in his fiction. Yoknapatawpha County seems full blown, populated with a wide range of characters and existing over a long period of time. In Faulkner's world are many grotesques: we think immediately of Popeye, Sutpen, Ike Snopes, and Benjy. And if we think at length, we conclude that almost all of Faulkner's characters are grotesque. Certainly this is true of the aristocratic whites so out of date in the modern South (old man Sartoris, for example, or Quentin Compson) and of the poor whites who come to dominate the South in the twentieth century (for example, the Snopeses). It is even true of the Negroes. Alone among Faulkner's characters who are not grotesque
are people like Gavin Stevens, Horace Benbow, V.K. Ratliff, and even Dilsey. If these are intended to stand as a norm in the Faulknerian world, then I think we might align Faulkner with the naturalists in his conception of grotesque characters, for these four are not grotesque. In truth, though, I don't think Faulkner ever knew what he intended by the four. At times they appear as norms, but at other times they are merely authorial agents existing to comment upon life in Yoknapatawpha County. In a sense I think it is fair to say that Faulkner, in his handling of grotesque characters, is half naturalist and half contemporary.

Two novelists who are completely modern are Carson McCullers and Truman Capote. I would like to examine here one novel by each to see how they treat grotesque characters. McCullers' Reflections in a Golden Eye is a strange novel which takes its title from a vision described to Alison Lngdon by her Filipino houseboy, Anacleto: "A peacock of a sort of ghastly green. With one immense golden eye. And in it these reflections of something tiny and .. . grotesque." Reflected in the peacock's eye are the actions and characters of the novel; the mirror image suggests that what happens in the book is equivalent to what happens in the world.

When we look at the characters in Reflections in a Golden Eye, we see that all are grotesques. Captain Penderton is a bisexual, scholarly man who tends to become
friends with his wife's lovers. Normally a mild man, Penderton finds a kitten out in the cold one night and stuffs it through the slot of a mailbox. Penderton's wife, Leonora, is a feebleminded, hard-drinking woman whose trademark is amorality. She cheats at cards, cheats on her husband, even cheats herself, but never has the slightest idea of what she is doing. Her lover is Major Langdon, whose ambition in life is "to be a good animal and to serve his country" (p. 168). He is married to Alison, a neurotic woman of twenty-nine with all sorts of illnesses. One night, piqued at her husband, she leaves a bridge game at the Pendants, goes home, and cuts the nipples off her breasts with garden shears. Working for Mrs. Langdon is a ridiculous, homosexual Filipino named Anacleto. His absurd dress, foolish devotion to Mrs. Langdon, and silly attempts to speak French mark him as the most grotesque of all. Finally, there is Private Williams who sunbathes nude in the woods during the day and during the night sneaks into the Penderton's bedroom to watch Leonora sleeping.

Reflections in a Golden Eye records the lives of these six characters, especially as they are concerned with the need for love. At no time does the novel suggest that in their grotesqueness they are abnormal. Theirs is a small world of the grotesque. The larger world, represented by the army troops, is also grotesque: one soldier writes to Shirley Temple every night, another jumps from
a third-story window because a friend will not lend him fifty cents, and a third is so convinced that he suffers from cancer of the tongue that he practically starves to death examining the tongue in a mirror. The novel, in short, presents no alternatives to grotesqueness. For Mrs. McCullers that is the condition of life.

Another novel in which grotesqueness is the norm is Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.\(^{31}\) Essentially a book about a boy's initiation into the adult world, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, can be compared profitably with Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. In the latter novel George Willard finds out that if doesn't want to be a grotesque as a man, he has to leave the small Ohio town where he was born. If he stays, he faces the possibility of becoming like the other characters in the book. The crucial point is that there is a normal world someplace else to which George can go. Like George, Joel Knox in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is initiated into manhood as a result of his contact with grotesques. Unlike George, however, Joel discovers that the world at Scully's Landing is the real world; in the process of becoming a man, therefore, Joel himself becomes grotesque.

About the grotesqueness of all characters in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* except Joel there is no question. Cousin Randolph, Miss Amy, Edward Sansom, Idabell, Jesus and Missouri Fever, Miss Wisteria, and Little Sunshine
make up as grotesque a gallery of characters as exist in fiction. Cousin Randolph is a homosexual, hypochondriacal man who paints precious pictures and enjoys arranging feathers in patterns. Miss Amy, married to Joel's father, Edward Sansom, is a woman who sacrifices herself for Randolph. Her marriage is fairly unrewarding since Sansom is paralyzed, able only to use his hands to drop red tennis balls when he desires attention. Jesus Fever is a bald Negro about one-hundred years old, while his daughter is an odd girl whose throat was cut by her husband when she was fourteen. At the time of the novel, Missouri's ambition is to go to Washington to see the snow. Miss Wisteria is a dwarf working for a carnival which operates in the town near Scully's landing, and Little Sunshine is a hermit who lives at a deserted resort near the landing. These people comprise the world into which Joel must grow up.

Even before Joel comes to Scully's Landing, there is a hint that he is like the people he encounters there. While living with his Aunt Ellen, he hears her read Andersen's "The Snow Queen." "Listening to it, it came to Joel that he had a lot in common with Little Kay, whose outlook was twisted when a splinter from the Sprite's evil mirror infected his eye, changing his heart into a lump of bitter ice." Nevertheless, when Joel arrives at the Landing, he is essentially a child who is ignorant of the world and whose personality is undeveloped. Part One of
Other Voices, Other Rooms introduces him to the world: Randolph's homosexuality, Jesus Fever's religious service, Miss Amy's neuroticism. All these people confuse Joel, but he is especially confused because he doesn't know where his father is. All his questions about the missing man are skillfully ignored. As a child, Joel senses the grotesqueness of life at Scully's Landing, but he is unable to make sense out of it or to come to any conclusion about it. Because it is the adult world, it remains strange to him. At the end of Part One, however, he finally becomes aware of something. Desiring to leave the Landing, he writes to Aunt Ellen for help. When he puts his letter in the mailbox, he attaches to it postage money in lieu of stamps. But Cousin Randolph removes the letter, spilling the money on the ground. Seeing the money lying there, Joel realizes that the adult world is evil.

Part Two of Other Voices, Other Rooms deals with Joel's efforts to come to terms with Scully's Landing. Having accepted the nature of the place, he proceeds to have a number of adventures, mostly with Idabel as his companion. They swim naked together, confront danger in the shape of a cottonmouth snake, and see a Negro couple making love. All these experiences are initiatory. Eventually Joel and Idabel decide to escape from the Landing. One night they leave and stop in Noon City at the carnival. There, the grotesque combination of rockets, lights, and freaks
which make up the carnival proves to Joel that he cannot escape the world of Scully's Landing. Wherever he goes, he will encounter the same grotesqueness. He becomes separated from Idabel, has a strange love experience with Miss Wisteria, and returns to the Landing physically sick.

When he recovers in Part Three, he discovers that Missouri Fever has also returned to the Landing. Having been brutally raped by several men while on the way to Washington, Missouri also realizes that the rest of the world is like Scully's Landing. Central to the novel's last section is the trip which Joel and Cousin Randolph take to visit Little Sunshine. During the trip Joel comes to accept himself both as an adult and as a grotesque. He understands the truth about Randolph, his father, and Miss Wisteria. But he no longer desires to escape. When Randolph, dressed as a woman, beckons to him from a window at Scully's Landing, "he knew he must go: unafraid, not hesitating, he paused only at the garden's edge where, as though he'd forgotten something, he stopped and looked back at the bloomless, descending blue, at the boy he had left behind" (p. 231). Unlike George Willard, Joel has had to learn that the grotesque world is all there is.

Many other modern novelists are like McCullers and Capote in their handling of grotesque characters. Those who see the grotesque as norm include Flannery O'Connor, Joseph Heller, William Burroughs, John Barth, Eudora Welty,
and James Purdy. When we read their fiction, we learn that the world is grotesque and that it is normal to be grotesque. Such a fact has a number of consequences for modern fiction, one of which I explore in my next chapter: the increased use of grotesque humor.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III

1Works (Boston, 1900), I, 173. Subsequent references to Hawthorne's tales are to this edition and appear in my text.


3Essentially what I am doing here is using "symbol" in a common-sense manner. When I speak of a grotesque character as a symbol, I mean that an author does not so much expect us to accept him as a copy of a living humna. Rather, the character stands for some general class of persons or suggests some universal truth. But I also intend to suggest the technical meaning of "symbol." That is to say, the corporeal grotesque character serves as a means of bridging the gap to the spiritual world. In short, the grotesque character allows us to transcend reality. I sligt the whole problem of symbolism in my text, but crucial to an understanding of it are F.O. Matthiessen's American Renaissance (New York, 1941), pp. 242-315, and Charles Feidelson's Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953).

4See, for example, Leon Howard, "Hawthorne's Fiction," NCF, VII (1955), 239; and William B. Stein, "The Parable of the Antichrist in 'The Minister's Black Veil'," AL, XXVII (1956), 386-92.

5See, for example, Thomas Walsh, "Hawthorne: Mr. Hooper's 'Affable Weakness,'" MLN, LXXIV (1959), 404-06; and Marvin Fischer, "Pattern of Conservatism in Rasselas and Hawthorne's Tales," JHI, XIX (1958), 191.


7William B. Stein discusses this idea in fuller, though somewhat different, terms in Hawthorne's Faust (Gainesville, 1953).

8Works (Columbus, Ohio, 1962-), I, 60. Subsequent references to The Scarlet Letter are to this edition and are cited in my text.


27 Eudora Welty, Curtain of Green (Garden City, New York, 1941), p. xvii.


31 I draw heavily in my discussion of Capote on Aldridge, After the Lost Generation, pp. 202-18. Although Aldridge confuses Capote's private life with his art, he still makes many perceptive remarks about his fiction.

32 Truman Capote, Other Voices, Other Rooms (New York, 1955), p. 11. Subsequent references to this novel appear in my text.
CHAPTER IV

THE COMIC GROTESQUE IN AMERICAN FICTION

A. The Comic Grotesque

Before I discuss the comic grotesque in American fiction, there are several other matters to get out of the way. One important thing to understand is why contemporary novelists see the grotesque character as the norm. Although this issue may seem on first glance unrelated to the comic grotesque, I think that it will shortly be clear that it is in fact quite closely related.

To see the grotesque character as norm is, I believe, to suggest something about the modern world. In the first place, as I remarked in the last chapter, it is to imply that it is human to be grotesque in our world. But this explanation does not go far enough. It is not just humans who are grotesque today but the entire world. Wherever we look—at politics, at religion, at the conduct of war, at ethical and moral standards, at the concept of human work—we find the grotesque. Faced with such a world, writers inevitably incorporate it into their art.

Let us be perfectly clear about the character of the modern world by looking at a few examples of grotesqueness in it. One, of course, is the rise of the bureaucracy, that institution which values means over ends,
function in place of form, and things over humans. The bureaucrat has taken command of man's institutions. He has come into business as the organization man, into the schools as the administrator, and into government as the civil servant; and he has rendered these institutions impersonal, inadequate to satisfy human needs, truly monstrous. We all have our favorite stories about bureaucracies, but perhaps the best pictures of them appear in two older novels, Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Kafka's *The Trial*. In *Little Dorrit* Daniel Doyce, an inventor, is stymied in his efforts to obtain a patent by the circumlocution office, a nineteenth-century bureaucracy which passes people from place to place in order to avoid getting things done. And in *The Trial* Joseph K's life becomes a bureaucratic nightmare as he vainly attempts to discover the crime with which he has been charged. Both Dickens and Kafka were far ahead of their times in realizing the dangers of bureaucracies, but both failed to halt their rise. Today our world is a bureaucracy in many ways and we are Joseph K's trapped in it.

Another fact which has contributed to the grotesqueness of the modern world has been the gradual disappearance of absolute values. All values are seemingly relative today and we are thus confronted with having to live without reliable guides. Several events have contributed to the destruction of absolute values. There were,
first of all, the Darwinian and Freudian revolutions. Although Darwin's discoveries affirmed the uniqueness of man, they also revealed the evolutionary basis of the universe, thereby calling into question any claims that the universe is structured about absolute values. Freud revealed that man's behavior is more dependent on the irrational than on reason. Accepting the truth of this, it is rather difficult to justify on rational grounds particular values in place of other ones. Then, too, developments in philosophy during the past century have helped to make values relative. The scholarly examination of religious texts, the transversion of values proposed by Nietzsche, and the-death-of-God movement are just three parts of this development which called absolute values into question. And, thirdly, anthropological research of this century had revealed that what is taboo for one set of people is generally sacred for some other set. Since there is no longer any higher authority to adjudicate between the value systems of different sets of people, we are left with a world in which everything is relative. For the existentialist this is not such a hopeless condition. To acknowledge it is the first step in attaining meaning in life. The existentialists, however, seem to be modern Tertullians who find glory in absurdity. For most of us the collapse of values makes our world grotesque.

Finally, events of the past twenty-five years have
continually reminded us that our world is grotesque. We still recall vividly the last war which saw the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis and the development and use of atomic weapons by Americans. A war which began with the good separated from the bad ended with the blood of inhumanity dripping from every hand. Such a state is truly grotesque. And today we find ourselves involved in another war which must appear absurd to all who examine it closely. Possessed of the power to win it at a stroke, we refrain by necessity from using that power, knowing that to win the war by such means would end ultimately in defeat for mankind. Meanwhile, we bomb the country we are defending, commit those war crimes we accuse our enemies of perpetrating, and wonder all along what we are doing in the war. At home matters are equally grotesque: public rhetoric makes truth out of falsehood, advertising creates planned obsolescence and conspicuous consumption, and poverty and segregation remain as hardy as ever. Faced daily with the grotesque in our lives, we remember the death of President Kennedy. His gratuitous murder is the perfect symbol for an age of grotesqueness.

It is, then, the grotesque nature of the modern world which causes our novelists to see the grotesque character as norm. Since Charles Brockden Brown novelists have been using grotesque characters in their works, but only recently have American novelists lived in a world which appears
essentially grotesque. Having become the standard in the world, the grotesque has become the norm in fiction.

The fact that our world is grotesque has had another important effect on recent fiction. As I believe I have already demonstrated, American novelists have always written about the grotesque, but in the past twenty years they have increasingly used humor to deal with it. Think, for example, of the following: John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*; Thomas Berger's *Crazy in Berlin, Reinhart in Love, and Little Big Man*; Bert Blechman's *How Much* and *The War of Camp Omango*; J.P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*; Bruce Jay Friedman's *Stern and A Mother's Kisses*; Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*; Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*; James Purdy's *Malcolm* and Cabot Wright *Begins*; Thomas Pynchon's *V*; and Terry Southern's *Flash and Filigree, The Magic Christian,* and *Candy.* In all these the comic grotesque is dominant, and I believe the authors have used humor mainly because they find the world around them grotesque. American novels of the nineteenth century frequently dealt with the grotesque, yet they rarely did so comically. That is because the world still made sense then. Today, given the absurdity, the grotesqueness of our world, novelists can only laugh. But all this is to get involved in the history of comic grotesque in American fiction, which I postpone until the second section of this chapter.

It is necessary, first, to take up some of the other
matters I hinted at in the beginning of this section. One of these is the claim made by some scholars that humor and the grotesque are mutually exclusive categories. In his book, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Wolfgang Kayser twice attempts to separate the humorous from the grotesque. In the first instance, he writes: "The comic innocuously annihilates greatness and dignity, especially if they are wrongly assumed. It effects the annihilation by placing us on the secure level of reality. The grotesque totally destroys the order and deprives us of our foothold."

Further on he maintains that "in the genuine grotesque the spectator becomes directly involved at some point where a specific meaning is attached to events. In the humorous context, on the other hand, a certain distance is maintained throughout and, with it, a feeling of security and indifference." Kayser's claims, I believe, are invalid for two reasons. He ignores, first of all, the fact that there are certain works of literature which have traditionally been thought of as examples of the comic grotesque. Among these are Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the works of Rabelais, *Don Quixote*, *Tristram Shandy*, and some novels by Dickens. In addition, Kayser works on the assumption that his definition of the grotesque is the valid one, an assumption which I have shown to be false in my first chapter. I think there can be no doubt that there can be such a thing as the comic grotesque. The problem is to understand what we mean by it.
We can do this best by looking at the various kinds of grotesque humor which appear in fiction. I think of six kinds, but intend my list to more suggestive than definitive. There is, first of all, the comic treatment of what is commonly held to be serious, horrible, or calamitous. As I Lay Dying by Faulkner fits here. Although Faulkner depicts the Bundrens performing an ancient sacred rite—the interment of the dead in the proper burial ground—he does so in a very unorthodox way. He treats the rite very humorously. The decaying corpse, the treatment of Cash's broken leg, Vardaman's contention that his mother was a fish, Dewey Dell's attempts to get an abortion, Anse's concern for his teeth—all these and more are funny in the novel. The net result of the humor is that the burial journey becomes grotesque.

Another form of grotesque humor is the intermingling of comic scenes with serious scenes. In Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood, for instance, we find in one chapter an eighteen-year-old boy in line at a matinee to shake hands with a gorilla movie star, while in the next chapter the main character, Hazel Motes, runs down and kills with a car a man who he claims is a false prophet. The farcical is juxtaposed with gratuitous violence, creating thereby the grotesque.

In addition, novelists often create the comic grotesque through an exaggerated treatment of the commonplace
or through a matter-of-fact treatment of the exaggerated. The former, which is essentially the means for creating a mock epic, can be seen working in *Tristram Shandy* where Sterne takes the mundane subject of a man's hobby and exaggerates it beyond belief. When Uncle Toby's interest in military history goes so far that he builds on a bowling green a replica of the battlefield at Namur, then we have the comic grotesque operating. It also operates in a contemporary novel like *Cabot Wright Begins* by James Purdy. In this book, however, we have a very extreme subject—a man who rapes over three hundred women—dealt with in a very matter-of-fact manner. The result is that what is on the surface horribly grotesque appears to be quite funny.

The comic grotesque further takes the form of parody or burlesque. A novel such as *Candy*, for example, is at once an exposure of pornographic literature with literary pretensions and an attack on American attitudes toward sex. In its ludicrous treatment of both subject and form it provokes laughter, and in its grotesqueness it exposes the shortcomings of what it attacks. Finally, a good deal of modern grotesque humor involves the "dirty" joke or obscene happening. Self-conscious about the flesh and about bodily processes, we still maintain a great amount of interest in them. The "dirty" joke or obscene event provides, in a sense, for the release of forbidden impulses, the satisfaction of tabooed interests. We laugh partly out of
embarrassment at the flesh, partly as a sign of release. But society mostly stifles our interest in the flesh, and so we turn to literature for vicarious experiences. One such experience is in The Ginger Man by J.P. Donleavy.

One morning the hero of the novel, Sebastian Dangerfield, is sitting on the toilet when the pipes and ceiling break, dumping excrement on his wife below in the kitchen. The entire scene is grotesque, but humorously so, and satisfies thoroughly the desire all of us have at times to defecate on those we love. Obscenity, then, is frequently a form of grotesque humor in modern fiction. As such, its value is therapeutic.

By now it should be clear what grotesque humor is. But it is not enough to examine various forms it can take. If we look at the various uses of the comic grotesque, if we explore the many effects achieved by grotesque humor, we can understand it even better. Grotesque humor, first of all, is often used for the relief of tension or anxiety. One of the problems in West's Miss Lonelyhearts, for instance, is that the hero's unsuccessful search for a means to save humanity quickly becomes overwhelming for the reader. The novel is so intense that we cannot bear it. West solves this problem by introducing occasionally characters or incidents which are comically grotesque. One case which particularly comes to mind is the medal which Mary Shrike wears about her neck. Frequently Miss
Lonelyhearts has wondered about it, but when he finally gets close enough to read the inscription on the medal, he learns that it was awarded by the Boston Latin School for first place in the one-hundred yard dash. This, I believe, is an example of grotesque humor which dissipates the tensions of readers. When we read of Mrs. Shrike's medal, we can more easily bear the agony of Miss Lonelyhearts.

Authors also employ grotesque humor as a means of attacking authority. Although modern novelists often use it in this way, an ancient drama, Aristophanes' Lysistrata, is the classical example here. In the play Aristophanes attempts to undermine the Athenian politicians' belief in war by introducing the very funny device of a sex strike. As we all know, rational arguments against war are meaningless to warlords, but the ludicrous suggestion that women will not sleep with their husbands until war is abolished is just the kind of irrational argument which is effective. In Lysistrata grotesque humor is intended to effect the audience. Rather than relieve it, however, of particular emotions, it is supposed to stir the audience to action—to the abolition of war.

The comic grotesque is, thirdly, an effective device for unmasking illusions, exposing lies, attacking evil. Recall, for example, Dickens' Nicholas Nickleby, which contains a brilliant exposure of conditions in English education. One is not so impressed with the analytical nature
of the exposure as with the grotesque humor inherent in it. Dotheboys Hall, as described by Dickens, is both ludicrous and shocking. We come away from the novel aware of conditions in Victorian schools, and contemporary audiences must have been inspired to do something about those schools. Similarly inspiring in our time is Joseph Heller's Catch-22, which attacks such matters as war, capitalism, bureaucracies, and other examples of inhumane behavior. When Heller treats all these from a comic point of view, we are shocked through laughter into realizing some sad truths about our world.

In a sense, all grotesque humor is an author's means of defending himself, and by extension humanity, against those facts, forces, or people who will not respond to sober argument. But some writers use such humor solely for this purpose, usually to deal with the facts of existence over which man has no control. I think this is what Faulkner does in As I Lay Dying. What is most characteristic of all of us as humans, our awareness that we are mortal, becomes bearable if treated humorously. The same effect is achieved by Melville in "Bartleby" where such comic characters as Turkey and Nippers allow us, and Melville, to endure more easily the isolation of Bartleby, which is, of course, representative of the isolation suffered by all of us.

The comic grotesque is also a tool of the idealist, though, to be sure, when he uses it, he is usually a
frustrated idealist. Such a writer is able to master his disillusions, to control his disappointment through the use of grotesque humor. Take, for instance, Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. Certainly Swift had idealistic desires for mankind, but the experience of living convinced him that to expect to realize his aspirations for man was absurd. Remaining idealistic, Swift dealt with his disillusions in *Gulliver's Travels* by using the comic grotesque. He was able to expose both the shortcomings of England in the eighteenth century and the universal failings of mankind by employing the grotesque. And he was able to swallow his disappointment by treating his grotesque material humorously. Twain did the same thing in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. In that neglected novel he managed to attack the evils of slavery and accept the reality of those evils by the device of the comic grotesque. Unfortunately, as Twain grew older, he could no longer master his disillusions. Thus, in his last work the grotesque stands without humor, shocking and horrible.

I have explained above that grotesque humor takes the form of the "dirty" joke or obscene event. As such, its effect is therapeutic, allowing us to experience vicariously outlawed pleasures or to release forbidden desires. Let me expand upon this use of grotesque humor here. Freud and other students of psychology have made us aware of the dark side of man, his interest in flesh, his
excremental inclinations, his sadistic or masochistic impulses. But they have also taught us that for social reasons man cannot give free expression to these desires. Grotesque humor in fiction allows most of us to satisfy these desires while retaining our social respectability. In "Good Country People," for example, Flannery O'Connor relates a gruesome tale in a rather humorous fashion. Joy Freeman, a girl with a wooden leg and a Ph.D. in philosophy, becomes enamored of a crude but worldly Bible salesman. He persuades her to accompany him to the Freeman barn where he proceeds to make love to her and then to steal her unbuckled prosthesis. The theme of the story is the worldly education of a Ph.D., but for the reader there is more than the theme. All of us at times take pleasure in other people's misery, but we feel guilty for doing so. Reading about such misery, however, produces little guilt, especially if the misery is handled comically. Thus, the comic grotesque, as I have already suggested, aligns the novelist with the psychiatrist, for it allows him to give expression to those human desires of which society disapproves and to thus effect a certain kind of catharsis in his audience.

When we laugh at the pain of others, there is a sense in which we are being hostile to them. But there is a kind of laughter which is completely malicious, the laughter inspired by hatred of the alien. Traditionally in literature we find the alien at whom such laughter is
directed. He may be simply a cripple, he may be a fool, or he may be one different in religion or nationality from the surrounding community. Whatever his difference, he represents a threat. Since he cannot be eliminated, he cannot be dealt with soberly, whether in the world or through literature. But since he won't go away, he cannot be ignored. Consequently, the writer has frequently attacked the alien through grotesque humor. This has enabled him to expose the alien, to accept him at the same time, and, most important, to shore up the walls of the community.

A modern novel where the comic grotesque is used to attack the alien is The Hamlet by William Faulkner. Here Faulkner attacks the Snopeses, who are taking over the South. No more evil than the old Southern white, represented by Will Varner, the Snopeses are hated because they are outsiders. Faulkner defends his society against them by turning on them with grotesque humor. This humor doesn't destroy the outsiders, but helps those like Faulkner to endure them.

Finally, grotesque humor often revolves about the comic hero. If we recall some of the comic heroes of literature—Falstaff, Tom Jones, Don Quixote, Huck Finn, Augie March, Felix Krull, Sebastian Dangerfield—we will realize that in each figure there is something of the grotesque. To be sure, the grotesque is more prevalent in characters like Falstaff or Dangerfield, but it is an element of almost all comic heroes. To what purpose? The
comic hero as grotesque serves, I believe, as a challenge to readers, that is, to society. In his approach to honor, Falstaff effectively attacks the prevailing connection of martial valor to honor. Tom Jones undercuts the eighteenth-century belief that men of innate goodness do not express themselves sexually. And in The Ginger Man J.P. Donleavy, through his hero, Sebastian Dangerfield, subverts some contemporary notions about the respectable life. It is probably true that comic heroes always challenge in some way the mores of society, but the ones who are grotesque do it more effectively.

B. The Comic Grotesque in American Fiction

Much of the grotesque American fiction of the last century was sober or horrible; humor had little place in it. And this is quite understandable when we take into account the world view of our nineteenth-century ancestors. If it is true that most of the old truths were breaking down during the last century, it is also true that the world made sense then. Consequently, writers had little need for dealing with it humorously. They might employ the grotesque in their fiction, but it was for sober purposes, for correction or for suggesting the truth about man. Because the world made sense in the nineteenth century, tragedy, not humor, was appropriate for dealing with it. Thus, we find such writers as Brown, with his cold rationalism, and
Hawthorne, with his dark Puritanism, setting the tone for novelists who used the grotesque in America during the last century.

And yet there were signs, both among major writers and among minor ones, that humor could not be excluded from grotesque fiction. Poe, for example, used it frequently. In a tale such as "Loss of Breath" he employed the comic grotesque to satirize the school of grotesque fiction of which his "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" were examples. In "King Pest" he burlesqued Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* by effective handling of grotesque humor. And in numerous tales, among them "The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall," the comic grotesque serves Poe in his attack on science. Melville, too, was a comic writer, as Edward Rosenberry has convincingly shown.

I have already pointed out how the grotesque and the comic come together in "Bartleby," but the same is true of other stories such as "I and My Chimney" and "Cock-a-Doodle-Doo!" Even in *Moby Dick* comic scenes—for example, those between Ishmael and Queequeg—are balanced against the grotesqueness of Ahab, thereby making the intensity of his monomania more bearable.

Some of the regional humorists in the nineteenth century also employed grotesque humor in their fiction. The comic stories about Mike Fink made use of the grotesque conditions of frontier life, George W. Harris'
Sut Lovingood's Yarns and A.B. Longstreet's Georgia Scenes combined southern folk humor with the grotesque, and southwestern humorists effectively employed exaggeration, incongruity, and the grotesque. For these regional humorists, however, as well as for Poe and Melville, the world mostly made sense. When at times it did not, they resorted to grotesque humor, but essentially all of them were closer to Brown and Hawthorne than they were to novelists of our day. But Mark Twain was not.

In Twain we find a writer who had one foot in the coherent world of the nineteenth century and one in the absurd world of the present century. Twain was, first of all, an idealist, and as such he thought of the world as writers did earlier in the century. When he expressed hopes for man's perfection, advocated living by reason, and continually saw things in terms of history, Twain was thinking as a man for whom everything made sense. But Twain was also a realist. He knew that the irrational often dominates the rational, that man is essentially evil by any traditional standard, and that history is often bunk. Such knowledge led him to see the world as without ultimate meaning. It also led him to use the comic grotesque. To master the disillusionment of his idealism he turned to comedy; and to express his pessimistic view of the world he used the grotesque. We can see all this best if we examine Pudd'nhead Wilson.
We can begin our discussion of this novel by looking at Dawson's Landing, the town in which the book is set. At the beginning of the novel, Twain describes the town in the following terms:

In 1830 it was a snug little collection of modest one and two-story frame dwellings whose white-washed exteriors were almost concealed from sight by climbing tangles of rose vines, honeysuckles, and morning-glories. Each of these pretty homes had a garden in front fenced with white palings and opulently stocked with hollyhocks, marigolds, touch-me-nots, prince's feathers, and other old-fashioned flowers; while on the window-sills of the houses stood wooden boxes containing moss-rose plants and terra-cotta pots in which grew a breed of geranium whose spread of intensely red blossoms accented the prevailing pink tint of the rose-clad house-front like an explosion of flame. When there was room on the ledge outside of the pots and boxes for a cat, the cat was there—in sunny weather—stretched at full length, asleep and blissful, with her furry belly to the sun and a paw curved over her nose. Then that house was complete, and its contentment and peace was made manifest to the world by this symbol, whose testimony is infallible. A home without a cat—and a well-fed, well-potted and properly revered cat—may be a perfect home, perhaps, but how can it prove title?

At first glance this description seems of little significance, but if we put it in the context of the entire novel, we realize that it has great thematic importance. As F.R. Leavis has pointed out, "the comfort, well-being, and amenity evoked here have more than a material significance; they are the outward signs of an inward grace. Provincial as Dawson's Landing may be, it represents a society that has
kept its full heritage of civilization."\(^8\) We shall see shortly that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is primarily concerned with civilization and its failures.

The attempts of Dawson's Landing to be civilized take many forms. Two in particular are the code followed by Judge and Percy Driscoll and Pembroke Howard, and the reaction of the town to the Italian twins. Twain explains the code, somewhat ironically, when introducing Howard:

"He was a fine, brave, magnetic creature, a gentleman according to the nicest requirement of the Virginia rule, a devoted Presbyterian, an authority on the 'code,' and a man always courteously ready to stand up before you in the field if any act or word of his had seemed doubtful or suspicious to you, and explain it with any weapon you might prefer from brad-awls to artillery" (p. 4). Howard, in short, is the perfect civilized man in the eyes of Dawson's Landing. Later in the novel Tom Driscoll's failure to act by the code marks him as uncivilized. When he is attacked by one of the Italian twins, Tom ignores the code and prosecutes him in court. The Judge is greatly ashamed—eventually he has a duel with the twin in order to save the family name—and Wilson, Twain's spokesman, reproves Tom for his conduct. Clearly, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* the code is synonymous with civilization.

That the citizens of Dawson's Landing are civilized is also revealed when the Italian twins come to town.
Provincial as the citizens are, they are aware of culture and the outside world. Thus they welcome the twins, well-traveled and accomplished men, with open arms, regarding their visit as a boon to the town. To be sure, some of the citizens behave rather absurdly with the twins—recall the conversation at the reception for the visitors or the reaction to the piano playing. The crucial point, though, is that the town is civilized; as such it recognizes the twins as worldly people and is eager to profit culturally by them.

Civilization, then, is the setting for *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Against the aspirations of the town to culture and right conduct, Twain sets the story of Tom Driscoll, Roxy, and Valet de Chambre. In essence, it is the story of slavery and what that institution does to humans, Negro and white. As Henry Nash Smith has so well put it,

When Mark Twain has conceived of Tom Driscoll he is launched upon a fable involving the tragic theme of slavery, with all it implies of hereditary but constantly renewed guilt and of perverted social conventions distorting human fact. For what but a morass of arbitrary assumptions makes Tom originally "black" and enslaved, later "white" and free, then converts him back into a Negro and a slave when the "truth" is revealed? The society of Dawson's Landing imposes upon slaves and masters alike the fictions which sustain the institution of slavery. The training corrupts both: the slave by destroying his human dignity, by educating him to consider himself inferior, by building up in him a ferocious hatred of himself as well as of his ruler; the master by encouraging cruelty toward the human beings he is taught to regard as animals, and thus by blunting his sensibilities and fostering an unwarranted pride of place.
What we have in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* is, therefore, a town being, or pretending to be, civilized on the one hand, while on the other it unconsciously accepts and perpetuates the most uncivilized of all human institutions, slavery. The discrepancy between pretensions and behavior mirrors the split Twain felt in his own life. On the one hand, Twain took the world as meaningful and therefore believed in the possibilities for civilization; on the other, he realized that absurdity stares us in the face and therefore that things like slavery will exist. *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, then, is in one sense a pivotal novel in the history of American fiction, for in its world outlook it reflects a shift which that history underwent between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

It must have been a bitter pill for an idealist like Twain to swallow—the realization that civilization is only a veneer covering the bestial and evil nature of mankind. He swallowed it, however, and helped his readers to, also, by including in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* a good deal of grotesque humor. This humor allowed Twain to mask his disillusionment with civilization and it enables us to read the novel with less depression than we otherwise might. Much of the grotesque humor is embodied in "Pudd'nhead Wilson’s Calendar," sayings from which preface each chapter of the novel. These sayings are always funny, but in a very bitter way, for they usually reveal some dark truth
about man or express some misanthropic point of view. Three
of them will serve for illustration:

Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life
is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to
Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He
brought death into the world. (p. 18)

When I reflect upon the number of disagreeable
people who I know have gone to a better world, I
am moved to lead a different life. (p. 108)

July 4. Statistics show that we lose more fools on
this day than in all the other days of the year
put together. This proves, by the number left in
stock, that one Fourth of July per year is now in-
adequate, the country has grown so. (p. 142)

There is humor here, but it is so monstrous that I choose
to label it grotesque. The content of the sayings, in a
way, parallels the theme of the novel: man is far from
perfect in his behavior despite what he might pretend to
be. But the tone of the sayings shows us how to deal with
the novel's theme, through bitter laughter.

There is grotesque humor also in the story of the
Italian twins, mainly because in relating it Twain was not
able to cut out all the traces of the original story about
them, "Those Extraordinary Twins." In that story he told
of Siamese twins who came to Dawson's Landing. Eventually,
one of them committed a murder and was tried, but because
the jury could not hang just one Siamese twin, it acquitted
the pair. In Pudd'nhead Wilson there are traces of this
story. For example, early in the novel Wilson remarks that
he wished he owned one half of a barking dog in order that
he might kill his half. Such an absurd remark earned Wilson his nickname, but more importantly we can see that it is related to the original story of the Siamese twins. Twain probably did not consciously leave details from "Those Extraordinary Twins" in Pudd'nhead Wilson, but they are there nevertheless. They constitute part of the novel's grotesque humor.

Finally, there is humor in the story of Roxy, Tom, and Valet. Although the story as a whole is tragic, representing as it does the actions of humans living under and with slavery, and although parts of it disgust us—for example, Tom's selling his mother down the river—there is a lot that is funny in it. When Roxy switches the babies in the cradles, we are reminded of a farcical practical joke or the old literary convention of mistaken identity. Or when Roxy gains command over Tom by threatening to reveal his racial identity, we are moved to laughter. Thus, Twain in many places treats a tragic story with humor. This is one form of grotesque comedy, and in the case of Pudd'nhead Wildon it was Twain's way of accepting his disappointment in civilization.

Twain wrote Pudd'nhead Wilson in 1894 at a time when most people thought that the world made sense. With his vision Twain was able to pierce beneath the surface of life to absurdity and illogic. By the time that Nathanael West wrote his first novel, The Dream Life of Balso Snell, in 1931,
it was no longer necessary to go beneath the surface to get at the grotesque. It was everywhere then, a fact which the novel's structure mirrors. Essentially, the novel records the dream memories of Balso Snell as he travels up the anus of the Trojan Horse. As absurd as the location of the novel is, the people Balso meets on his trip are even more so. He meets, among others, Maloney the Areopagite who is writing a biography of Saint Puce, a flea who lived in Christ's armpit; John Gilson, an adolescent Raskolnikov, who kills a dishwasher; Miss McGeeney, who is writing a biography of Samuel Perkins, the biographer of E.F. Fitzgerald, the biographer of D.B. Hobson, the biographer of Boswell, the biographer of Johnson; and Janey Davenport, a hunchback who carries in her hump the child of Beagle Darwin.

The setting and characters of Balso Snell are grotesque, but so are the adventures which Snell has or which he reads about in the many pamphlets which he finds scattered in his path. Snell himself is shown by a tour guide "a beautiful Doric prostate gland swollen with gladness and an over-bundance of good cheer." He then argues with the guide about art and the nature of reality, the whole exchange making very little sense. Next Snell reads of the adventures of Gilson with his mistress Saniette. Gilson is mad and has "acquired the habit of extravagant thought" (p. 27). Consequently, he continually performs a grotesque drama before Saniette, doing such things as mutilating a
sty on his eye and describing women being trod on by men with soiled feet. Again, all the adventures which Gilson has are absurd. After reading about Gilson, Snell meets Miss McGeeney, who tells him of Samuel Perkins' discovery that "in the odors of a woman's body are never-ending, ever-fresh variation and change—a world of dreams, seas, roads, forests, textures, colors, flavors, forms" (p. 36). She also describes how Perkins "built from the odors of his wife's body an architecture and an aesthetic, a music and a mathematic. Counterpoint, multiplication, the square of a sensation, the cube root of an experience—all were there" (p. 36). When Snell has had enough of Miss McGeeney, he hits her a mighty blow and throws her into a fountain.

Next Balso Snell meets Janey Davenport, who gives him the letters of Beagle Darwin to read. The letters create a fantasy in which Beagle, by pretending not to care that he has made Janey pregnant, causes her to commit suicide. The death is a joke to Beagle, who goes out drinking when he hears of it. After Balso has read the letters, Janey tells him that she has made them up, that they are part of a novel she is writing in imitation of Richardson. He then awakes, realizing that he has dreamt everything about Janey, and finds Miss McGeeney, who turns out to be his old sweetheart, sitting by him. They argue about chastity. Snell opposes it on philosophical, aesthetic, and temporal grounds and eventually persuades Miss McGeeney to lose hers.
The absurd novel ends suddenly with Balso masturbating his way out of a sleep.

The *Dream Life of Balso Snell* goes a long way beyond *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* In Twain's novel there is a conflict between the forces of meaning and the forces of absurdity, but West's book opts completely for absurdity. All is grotesque, as I think the previous three paragraphs have clearly shown. And all is comic: the people are bizarre, but their very nature compels us to laugh at them; the adventures are often shocking, yet we find them funny. Faced with a fictional world which is completely grotesque, we can only laugh.

Two passages from the novel about laughter bear examination. The first occurs in the pamphlet, written by John Gilson, which Balso finds:

> An intelligent man finds it easy to laugh at himself, but his laughter is not sincere if it is thorough. If I could be Hamlet, or even a clown with a breaking heart 'neath his jester's motley, the role would be tolerable. But I always find it necessary to burlesque the mystery of feeling at its source; I must laugh at the laugh. The ritual of feeling demands burlesque and, whether the burlesque is successful or not, a laugh. . . .

(p. 27)

And the second comes from one of the letters of Beagle Darwin which Janey Davenport shows to Snell:

> The ridiculous, the ridiculous, all day long he talks of nothing else but how ridiculous this, that, or the other thing is. And he means me... I am absurd. He is never satisfied with calling
other people ridiculous, with him everything is ridiculous—himself, me. Of course I can laugh at mother with him, or at the Hearth; but why must my own mother and home be ridiculous? I can laugh at Hobey, Joan, but I don't want to laugh at myself. I'm tired of laugh, laugh, laugh. I want to retain some portion of myself unlaughed at. There is something in me that I won't laugh at... I won't. I'll laugh at the outside world all he wants me to, but I won't, I don't want to laugh at my inner world. (p. 41)

Although these passages are perhaps as oblique as the rest of the novel, they do yield meaning. I read them as follows. There are two objects of laughter, ourselves and everything outside ourselves. Everything outside of ourselves is absurd (grotesque)—so the form and content of the novel argues—and we thus need laughter to cope with it. Laughter allows us to accept the grotesque world, but it also serves to protect us from this world. And in a sense it differentiates us from that world, for we cannot laugh completely at ourselves. Complete laughter at ourselves, as West puts it, cannot be sincere. There is some portion of ourselves which resists laughter, which still makes sense, which is not grotesque. To be sure, we must laugh at feeling since feeling is much like the outside world—irrational. But there is a core of humanity in ourselves which is not grotesque and which we hold up against the grotesqueness of everything else by refusing to laugh at it.

West, then, goes beyond Twain both in his concept
of the world and in his use of humor to deal with it. In West's eyes the world is completely grotesque; only some part of each person remains meaningful. To deal with this grotesqueness, West needs continual laughter. Even in Miss Lonelyhearts or The Day of the Locust this is true. In these novels there are settings which are realistic instead of fantastic. But the people and incidents in them are just as grotesque as those in The Dream Life of Balso Snell. And in each of these two realistic novels West needs humor to cope with the grotesque. West is not like Twain, trying to accept the fact that the world is not as he would want it. West is simply trying to accept the world in its essential grotesqueness. Thus, because his world view is different from Twain's, his use of laughter is too.

Similar to West in many ways is William Faulkner. But the fact is that Faulkner does not fit my thesis about the evolution of the comic grotesque in American fiction. Although his use of the comic grotesque in such novels as As I Lay Dying and The Hamlet is memorable, Faulkner is neither like Twain nor West in his use of it. I want to come back to him in my conclusion, where I speculate about the possibility of getting beyond a vision of the whole world as incurably grotesque. Meanwhile, I return to the central concern of this chapter.

The Hamlet was published in 1940, on the eve of the last world war. Coming when it did, the novel represents
in a sense the end of a tradition in American fiction. Prior to Twain, American novelists found meaning in the universe and thus infrequently employed grotesque humor in their works. Twain, as I have already argued, was a pivotal figure, for he realized a number of times the essential grotesqueness of the world and resorted to the comic grotesque to deal with it. Following Twain, novelists such as West and Faulkner, plus others I have not discussed—Fitzgerald, for instance, in The Great Gatsby—frequently turned to the comic grotesque as a method of portraying the world. These writers constituted a tradition. But since the war there has been a school of novelists whose mode has been the comic grotesque. Many of these I listed earlier in this chapter. There is in their fiction no longer an individual vision about our condition in the world. Rather, there is a collective vision. What was once an iconoclastic position, that the world is grotesque, has become since the war, and probably because of it, an assumption accepted unconsciously by contemporary novelists. Given such an assumption, humor has inevitably appeared in their fiction. It is the logical mode for writing about the grotesque.

Obviously I cannot discuss here all the contemporary novels which contain grotesque humor. Therefore, I make only a few remarks about two of them, J.P. Donleavy's The Ginger Man and James Purdy's Cabot Wright
The crucial point about *The Ginger Man*, I believe, is that it tells how to survive in a world where values have collapsed, religion is dead, love is numbed, where, in short, all is grotesque. Sebastian Dangerfield, the hero of the novel, shows us how to live in such a world. One takes life as it comes, even though everything in it is gratuitous, pure chance. One may be a liar, a scoundrel, an immoral bastard in order to live in it. One may resort to shocking brutality, disgusting obscenity, or even joyous laughter in order to live in it. A grotesque world, in other words, requires only the response of an animal striving to exist.

Now Sebastian's method of surviving in the grotesque world is successful for him, but we can doubt whether it would work for all of us at the same time. If all of us were to follow Sebastian's model for living, there is little chance that any people or the world would survive for long. In a sense, all we can do is rebel against the world's grotesqueness vicariously, by reading about Sebastian. Donleavy, however, provides us with a tool for dealing with the world directly, laughter. Sebastian laughs at his predicament, and so too does Donleavy. And by frequent use of the comic grotesque Donleavy causes us to laugh also. Sebastian's world is grotesque; his method for coping with it is anarchistic. We need to live in his world, but we cannot all copy his means of doing so. Our means for
living, Donleavy shows us, must be laughter. With it we can survive in a grotesque world and say with Donleavy:

God's mercy
On the wild
Ginger Man. 12

Cabot Wright Begins is, as I earlier indicated, about a man who rapes over three hundred women. Built about an absolutely grotesque situation, the novel is humorous for several reasons. One is the way in which Cabot Wright goes about raping his victims. Instead of brutally assaulting them, he manages to seduce them with such phrases as "Get Deadly!" or "About ready for your roll in the hay?" 13 In addition, the novel is spiced with humorous attacks on such institutions as the publishing world, Wall Street, and psychoanalysis. Finally, Purdy contributes to the humor of the novel by describing a most grotesque situation in a very matter-of-fact tone. Readers, then, of Cabot Wright Begins laugh. So do the characters, except for Cabot Wright, who can only giggle throughout the novel. Toward the end he is finally cured—he manages to laugh, and Purdy remarks about him in terms which deserve to be quoted:

Lying down on his side, Cabot relieved himself in laughter. His laughter was like a paroxysm, neither willing nor unwilling. His regions from the breast-bone down shook in helpless hopeless waves of self-relief, which happily for him was one prolonged orgasm. After all, laughter is the greatest boon
Nature has bestowed on miserable unjoyous man. The release, the only relief from the pain of being human, mortal, ugly, limited, in agony, watching Death cornhole you beginning with the first emergence from the winking slit above the mother's fundament, pulled into existence from between piss and shit, sorrow and meaninglessness, drudgery and illusion, passion, pain, early loss of youth and vigor, of all that had made it worth while, with the eternity of the tomb, the final word over the hunger for God, the repletion of earth and slime, the shout of the ocean in the ears of death. Meaning is there is no meaning but laughter of the moment made it almost worth while. That's all it's about. We was here, finally laughed.

This passage, I believe, stands as a fitting comment on—indeed, explanation of—so much recent American fiction.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

1 Trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, Indiana, 1963), pp. 59, 118.

2 Throughout my discussion of the uses and effects of grotesque humor I depend heavily on Wylie Sypher's Appendix to Comedy (New York, 1956), pp. 193-255.


5 The classic studies here are Walter Blair's Native American Humor, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, 1960), and Constance Rourke's American Humor (New York, 1931).


7 Works (New York, 1929), XVI, 1-2. Subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from this edition and are cited in my text.

8 Introduction to Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 17.

9 Mark Twain, p. 174.

10 Works (New York, 1960), p. 6. Subsequent references to this novel are cited in my text.


14 Ibid., p. 213.
Students of the grotesque have disagreed about whether there can be such a thing as a grotesque structure in a novel. Some have argued that characters or incidents within a novel can be grotesque, but they insist that if a work is to be called a novel, then its framework cannot be called grotesque. Others, however, are not so rigid in defining a novel and grant the possibility of grotesque structure in fiction. I have not made up my own mind about the question of grotesque structure, for I feel there are good theoretical reasons both for and against the existence of grotesque structures in novels. I cannot here resolve the issue, but I would like to look at it more closely before turning specifically to the structure of some American novels.

We can see the disagreement about grotesque structure manifesting itself in Wolfgang Kayser's The Grotesque in Art and Literature. Although Kayser is the most thorough student of the grotesque, he is unable to make up his mind about this problem. In one place he suggests that the grotesque cannot provide the structural material for an entire novel; rather, he maintains that it can only furnish the framework for a short piece of fiction: "With regard to the structural problems encountered in grotesque
literature, Jean Paul's Komet confirms our hypothesis that in the novel the grotesque appears preferably in the form of episodes and individual scenes, while being unable to furnish the structural basis for an entire work. Bonaventura's Nachtwachen, which breaks up into a number of individual Night pieces, led to the same conclusion. The matter is quite different, however, in the shorter form, the novella. Here Kayser seems to straddle the fence. It is hard to see why the grotesque cannot provide a structure for a novel if it can provide one for a novella. Kayser never explains, and we are left up in the air over the question of grotesque structure in fiction.

Some pages later Kayser takes a different stand on the question. He writes: "The question as to whether the grotesque itself can furnish the structural basis for a more extended work of literature, or, to put it more cautiously, whether it can appear within a larger context having a greater affinity to it than the didactic story or even satire, has been answered by certain works written prior to the twentieth century, by the plays of Schnitzler, Pirandello, Beckett and others, as well as by Kafka's stories." This statement is somewhat oblique, and it is one which Kayser does not clarify for us in his text. But I take it to mean that the grotesque can provide the structural basis for an extended work of literature. Kayser, thus, changes his mind in the space of a few pages. That he does so,
I believe, indicates not that he is a sloppy thinker, but instead the difficulty of deciding the question.

We can perhaps see the question of grotesque structure more clearly if we examine briefly the positions of two men who take opposite sides on it. Lee Jennings is a student of the grotesque who thinks that only characters or incidents within a novel can be called grotesque. When it comes to calling literary method grotesque, he has the following to say: "A picture of a monstrous creature is something quite different from a verbal monstrosity, and it cannot be denied that the term 'grotesque' has more meaning when applied to the former." Jennings thinks that literary technique, whether it be diction, syntax, or overall structure, is something to which the term "grotesque" does not refer. A work of literature can be about grotesque things, but as a verbal structure it cannot itself be labeled grotesque.

The opposite point of view is taken by Elisah Jordan in his book, The Aesthetic Object. Jordan writes in one place that "by the term grotesque we mean . . . to refer to those aesthetic objects that represent the widest variations from the normal categorial forms, and that are yet determined by aesthetic categories." And later he repeats himself in slightly different terms: "The grotesque is a genuine aesthetic type. Its essence lies in the attempt at the objectification of the efforts of life when art
struggles to push the aesthetic categories to the last extremity of their flexibility in the hope of overcoming the incorrigible passivity of the primordial feeling."

If some of what Jordan says here is perhaps meaningless, still it is clear that he sees the grotesque as a formal category. In his terms it makes sense to speak of a novel having a grotesque structure. According to Jordan, it would have such a structure if in it the usual formal requirements for a novel were pushed to their extremes.

Students of the grotesque disagree, then, about the possibility of grotesque structure in fiction. As I have already indicated, I cannot resolve the disagreement, but I want to present here one argument of my own for each side in order that we might see the issue as fully as possible.

It seems to me that from what we know about the relation of a world view to the structure of art, we would conclude that grotesque structure in fiction at this time is possible. Let me explain. During the nineteenth century conventional opinion held that cause and effect operated in the world and that the world ran according to clock time. To be sure, some thinkers had already discarded these assumptions in the eighteenth century, but still during the nineteenth century most people accepted them. And these assumptions are reflected in the structure of almost all nineteenth-century novels. In them we find plots which unfold chronologically and in which events are related in
a cause-and-effect sequence. There was, in short, an intimate relation last century between the structure of fiction and conventional assumptions about the structure of the universe.

The same relation holds true in this century. Discoveries in microphysics suggest that in the realm of sub-atomic particles cause-and-effect may not operate. As authors have learned of this discovery—usually through some interpreter who has generalized from the micro- to the macro-world—plots in fiction have either become arbitrarily connected series of events or have disappeared completely. And as authors have felt the impact of relativity physics in some way or another, the handling of time in fiction has had less and less relation to clock time.

I think that "grotesque" is a category similar to "cause-and-effect" and "clock time." Both have to do with the nature of things. The only difference is that "cause-and-effect" and "clock time" imply that the nature of things is uniform and orderly, while "grotesque" suggests the opposite. Now in my last chapter I argued that the contemporary world is grotesque. If this is true, we would expect that the structure of at least some contemporary novels would be grotesque. Before testing this claim, however, by looking specifically at some novels, I want to look at another theoretical argument, one which weighs against the possibility of grotesque structure.
This argument involves the concept of structure itself. Excluding the possibility that monkeys or computers might conceivably create art, I think that we can all agree that behind every artistic structure there is a human being...This fact raises serious questions about whether there can be a grotesque structure in fiction.

To write a novel a human presumably must give structure to the raw material of his experience, be it personal or vicarious. In other words, a novelist makes order out of chaos. True, he may choose to create chaos in fiction, but if he does so, he is still ordering his material for the sake of chaos. The crucial question is whether the concept of order rules out the concept of the grotesque. Certainly a novelist can order events or characters in a novel in order to make them grotesque. But can he order the order of his fiction to make it grotesque? I question whether he can, for even if we cannot define "grotesque," I still think that everyone will agree that the word does not suggest order. If anything, it implies disorder and chaos. Thus, a novelist may destroy plot in fiction, he may play with time in the most unusual fashion, he may distort characters, he may use language to block communication—he may, in short, do all sorts of grotesque things—without creating a grotesque structure for a novel. Only if he were to give up his ordering role—as I shall
show, William Burroughs does this to an extent in *Naked Lunch*—could his fiction have a grotesque structure.

I am aware that the above argument may appear extreme. But it is one which can be defended. All the elements which go into creating the structure of a novel may be grotesque without that structure also becoming grotesque. Structure implies order which is not compatible with grotesqueness. At the same time, however, my previous argument concerning the relation of structure in art to the structure of the universe is also an attractive one, defensible for most art ever created. The question becomes whether it is valid for art within a grotesque world. I cannot give an answer to the question here; hopefully my statement of the problem will allow someone else to give one. Meanwhile, I want to turn to three American novels—Melville's *The Confidence Man*, Heller's *Catch-22*, and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*—to see practically the problem of grotesque structure in fiction.

Anyone who reads Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* will certainly conclude that in several ways the novel is grotesque. Here, I want to discuss the grotesque characters, who have nothing to do with the novel's structure but who contribute to our impression of it, and the grotesque story, which is related to structure. Then, I want to go on to show how for the most part the book's structure is quite ungrotesque.
The characters in the novel, passengers aboard the Fidèle, are described as follows:

As among Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, or those oriental ones crossing the Red Sea towards Mecca in the festival months, there was no lack of variety. Natives of all sorts, and foreigners; men of business and men of pleasure; parlor men and backwoods men; farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heiress-hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo-hunters, bee-hunters, happiness-hunters, truth-hunters, and still keener hunters after these hunters. Fine ladies in slippers, and mocasined squaws; Northern speculators and Eastern philosophers; English, Irish, Germans, Scotch, Danes; Santa Fe traders in striped blankets, and Broadway bucks in cravats of cloth of gold; fine-looking Kentucky boatmen, and Japanese-looking Mississippi cotton-planters; Quakers in full drab, and United States soldiers in full regimentals; slaves, black, mulatto, quadroon; modish young Spanish Creoles, and old-fashioned French Jews; Mormons and Papists; Dives and Lazarus; jesters and mourners, teetotalers and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs; hard-shell Baptists and clay-eaters; grinning negroes, and Sioux chiefs solemn as high-priests. In short, a piebald parliament, an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man. (p. 8)

This passage makes it clear that Melville intended the Fidèle to be a microcosm and the passengers aboard to represent a cross section of the world's population. But it certainly is not the variety of characters in The Confidence Man which makes them grotesque. Rather they become grotesque as they assume the guise of the Confidence Man or as they become his victims. It is grotesque that everyone in the world is either dupe or imposter.

The Confidence Man appears in the novel in eight
different masquerades. He is, first, a stranger who is equated with Manco Capac, the Inca sun god. Holding aloft a slate on which he writes words about charity, he wanders around the ship, being ignored for the most part by the other passengers. They notice him only when he falls asleep on deck. Next the Confidence Man becomes the grotesquely crippled Negro beggar, Black Guinea, who goes about like a circus performer catching coins in his mouth. The Confidence Man appears in his third guise as John Ringer, a man in mourning, who tells a sad story to Henry Roberts in an effort to borrow money from him. Following this the Confidence Man turns up as an agent for the Widow and Orphan Asylum which was recently set up for the Seminole Indians. He solicits contributions for his charity from a number of passengers, all the time telling them of his plans for a World Charity. Then the Confidence Man turns into John Truman, president and transfer agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company. In this guise he sells stock, presumably worthless, to several passengers. The sixth masquerade which the Confidence Man assumes is that of a quack—herb doctor and bonesetter—who peddles aboard the Fidèle "the Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator" and "the Samaritan Pain Dissuader." He manages to sell his worthless products to incurably sick and crippled passengers. Soon the Confidence Man changes into a representative of the Philosophical Intelligence Office who ironically goes about
advancing scientific arguments for trusting human nature. Finally, the Confidence Man appears as the Cosmopolitan who turns out to be a misanthropist posing as a philanthropist.

In each case I think it can be said that the Confidence Man is grotesque. Sometimes physically so, sometimes because of what he is selling, but always he is grotesque because of his view of human nature. Approaching every passenger as a gull, he treats them as things, not as humans. This in itself is grotesque, but the Confidence Man uses others so blantly that this quality is intensified. As grotesque as he is, however, he cannot overshadow his victims, who are also.

Some of the Confidence Man's victims are grotesque because of their extreme innocence. Unworldly to the point of incredibility, the Episcopal clergyman, the charitable lady, and the old man are taken in by the Confidence Man: they fail to see what is so obvious to the reader, that he is an imposter. Others are grotesque because of the intensity of their self-interest. The college student and the sick man fit here, but the best example of this category of gulls is the old miser who buys his medicine from the Confidence Man with coins from which he has filed some silver. Still other passengers are grotesque because they recognize the Confidence Man for what he is, yet still continue to deal with him. The man with the gold sleeve-buttons listens to the imposter, believing nothing, but
finally gives him several bills in order to be rid of him. He simply wants to be free from involvement. So, too, does Mark Winsome, who sees the Confidence Man for what he is. Winsome gets around the problem of involvement by passing the Confidence Man on to his disciple, Egbert. He is unconcerned with the possibility that Egbert might be duped. There are other grotesque passengers, but I believe that the ones I have mentioned indicate their range.

The grotesque characters in *The Confidence Man* contribute to our impression of the novel as a very odd one. But they do not, in their grotesqueness, have anything to do with the novel's structure. I have dwelt on them at length because of one fact: as readers, we have a tendency to argue from the overwhelming grotesqueness of the characters to the conclusion that the novel's structure is grotesque. Such an argument in the case of *The Confidence Man* is invalid. When we come to look at the story in the novel, however, we are dealing with an integral part of its structure. And if we look at the story closely, we find that it is grotesque.

The novel takes place on April Fool's day aboard the riverboat Fidèle traveling down the Mississippi River from St. Louis to New Orleans. Essentially episodic in nature, the story consists of a number of encounters between the Confidence Man and other passengers on board the ship. But there is no particular direction to these encounters, no
plot evolving out of them, no movement, no suspense, no climax. Nor do the encounters in any way change those people involved in them. In short, what could be called the story line of *The Confidence Man* is basically static. It is simply the same encounter repeated a number of times. But this is not what we expect in a novel—though, to be sure, there are affinities here to picaresque fiction. Thus, I think that we are justified in calling this aspect of Melville's book grotesque. Our decision to do so is strengthened by the ending of the novel. Although there is no particular direction to the book's events, we still expect that somehow something will be resolved by the end. Instead, Melville, in the midst of describing an encounter between an old man and the Confidence Man, ends things in this way: "The next moment, the waning light expired, and with it the waning flames of the horned altar, and the waning halo round the robed man's brow; while in the darkness which ensued, the cosmopolitan kindly led the old man away. Something may follow of this masquerade" (p. 286). The novel just breaks off and the reader is left up in the air. A very grotesque story has come to a grotesque ending.

In one way, then, the structure of *The Confidence Man* seems grotesque, for the narrative in the book is extremely bizarre. But one structural element does not make an entire structure. If we look at other structural
elements in the novel, I think we must conclude that the book is rather conventionally put together.

The major pattern of The Confidence Man grows out of the confrontations which the major character, in his eight guises, has with the passengers of the Fidèle. The first seven of these occupy half of the novel and take place during the day, while the eighth encounter takes up the other half of the book and occurs at night. There are other ways in which the meeting between the Confidence Man and his foils are connected. Three times the encounters are interrupted by Melville, who steps forward to speak theoretically about the art of fiction. Three times tales are told during the encounters: the stories of Colonel John Moredock, the Indian hater, Charlemont, the French merchant of St. Louis, and China Aster, the candle maker from Marietta, Ohio. And three times the Confidence Man sits down with a companion over a bottle of wine. The tales, the digressions, and the meetings over wine serve to bind together an otherwise loose collection of episodes.

There are still other ways in which The Confidence Man is structured rather conventionally. For example, passengers are repeatedly characterized in terms of animals: the deaf mute is like a lamb, Black Guinea and the Philosophical Intelligence Officer are dogs, Pitch is a bear, and the Confidence Man is a monkey or a snake. Other characters are foxes, porcupines, wolves, ferrets, penguins,
buzzards, toads, hyenas, seals, and oppossums. Thus, through the language he uses to describe his characters, Melville manages to make them into inhabitants of a human zoo. In doing so he unifies The Confidence Man in still another way.

There are two final devices which enrich the structure of the novel. Several times the Confidence Man in one masquerade refers to himself in another: Black Guinea goes to look for the man in mourning, the agent for the Seminole Indians supposedly helps the same man ashore, and the quack claims to have treated him. Also, there are frequent references to Shakespeare. These, says Hennig Cohen, "are drawn mainly from the darker plays like Timon of Athens and Hamlet, or those like The Tempest, A Midsummer-Night's Dream, and As You Like It, which are much concerned with transformation and disguises, and stress rogues like Malvolio." The Shakespearian allusions, in short, are organic to the novel.

There are many ways in which The Confidence Man is structured, and most of these are conventional. In using literary allusions, animal imagery, and parallel scenes to hold his novel together, Melville certainly did nothing grotesque. Yet certainly Melville was ahead of his time in what he did with plot in The Confidence Man, for he foreshadowed what was to happen to plot in much twentieth-century fiction. And in making one structural element in
in the novel grotesque, Melville looked forward to a trend which has recently been growing in strength. We can see this in part if we turn to Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*.

No one would dispute that *Catch-22* is an absurd, chaotic book, one for which the term "grotesque" is perfectly appropriate. Supposedly, the first draft of the novel was so grotesque as to be almost incomprehensible. As Frederick Karl tells us,

An early version of *Catch-22* was itself much more nightmarish in its development than the published book. Evidently strongly influenced by *Ulysses*, Heller had originally tried to make the narrative typically Joycean: that is, full of intermittent streams of consciousness and involutions of time. Further, he suggested the narrative through recurring symbols of devastation and doom, eliminating in several places orthodox plot structure. As a consequence, the reader who missed the significance of the symbols—and they were by no means clear, even peripherally—was lost in a surrealistic forest of words from which there was no escape. Added to the stream, the symbols, and the involutions of time was an impressionistic treatment of characters and events, a half-toned, half-tinted development that seemed neither to go forward nor to remain still.

And so, Karl goes on, Heller straightened things out, paying particular attention to narrative line and character development. This may be, but the fact remains that the published version of *Catch-22* is still very grotesque. And certainly some of its structural elements are grotesque.

Take, for example, the story line. Just as in *The
Confidence Man, there is no story in Catch-22. But at least in Melville's book the events take place one after another, even if they are related only tenuously. In Catch-22 not only are such things as movement, suspense, and climax absent from the novel, but so too is time. Although one can work out a sketchy chronology for some of the events in the novel, this chronology is unimportant: it does nothing to create a story. The novel consists of five routines, each repeated a number of times in the book—though, I must caution, there is no pattern or purpose to the number or arrangement of the repetitions. The routines are as follows: "I, Hospital routine, with malingering soldiers and incompetent staff; II, Combat routine, with everything snafu, yet missions accomplished with negligent gallantry; III, Funny fraud routine, involving army supplies and G.I. tycoon; IV, Red tape routine, at training center and headquarters; V, Leave in Rome routine, with orgies." Each routine involves the absurdity and stupidity of war, and by extension of Western civilization, but none is part of some narrative which unfolds, however slowly, in the novel. And so I think we are justified in calling the story line of Catch-22 grotesque.

If Heller distorts the story of his novel enough to make us call it grotesque, then he does the same thing to language in the book. Now it is true that language is not as conventional a structuring device in fiction as
story is, but in Catch-22 it becomes such a device. The reasons for this are several. In the first place, most of the routines, unrelated as they are to a narrative, center about dialogue. And, also, because the novel, in part, is about the possibility of communication between humans, language becomes of paramount importance in it. So much so, in fact, that in the form of absurd dialogues, jokes, paradoxes, clichés, and verbal nonsense, language helps structure Catch-22.

To see how language in Heller's novel is grotesque, we might start by examining the book's title:

There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy, and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to.13

This explanation is absurd, senseless, grotesque. It involves language—supposedly the medium for logical discourse—in the height of illogic. Catch-22 is symbolic of the mad world in which the novel is set, and its grotesqueness pervades the rest of the book's language.

There are, first of all, innumerable exchanges between characters which make absolutely no sense at all. Perhaps the best one occurs when Clevenger appears before
the Action Board on a court martial charge. I quote only part of it:

"In sixty days you'll be fighting Billy Petrolle," the colonel with the big fat mustache roared. "And you think it's a big fat joke."

"I don't think it's a joke, sir," Clevenger replied.

"Don't interrupt."

"Yes, sir."

"And say 'sir' when you do," ordered Major Metcalf.

"Yes, sir."

"Weren't you just ordered not to interrupt?"

Major Metcalf inquired coldly.

"But I didn't interrupt, sir," Clevenger protested.

"No. And you didn't say 'sir' either."

Add that to the charges against him," Major Metcalf directed the corporal who could take shorthand. "Failure to say 'sir' to superior officers when not interrupting them." (p. 74)

This dialogue is representative of many which take place in Catch-22. Although those participating in it are quite serious, it leads nowhere and involves them in nonsense and double talk. It is grotesque conversation.

Heller makes language grotesque by repeatedly using paradox and by senselessly repeating words. Among the paradoxical statements we find the following: "Yossarian had stopped playing chess with him because the games were so interesting they were foolish" (p. 9); "Nately had a bad start. He came from a good family" (p. 12); "And if that wasn't funny, there were lots of things that weren't even funnier" (p. 17); "He had decided to live forever or die in the attempt" (p. 29); "Major Major never sees anyone
in his office while he's in his office" (p. 105); "This sordid, vulturous, diabolical old man reminded Nately of his father because the two were nothing alike" (p. 239). Unlike conventional literary paradoxes, these cannot be resolved. They represent the use of language for the purpose of saying nothing, and as such are grotesque.

Language is used the same way when Heller resorts to the meaningless repetition of words. Although there are some very funny examples of this, I have room for only two here. Early in the novel, Yossarian is talking to an officer in the hospital when he realizes that the man is the chaplain:

"You're a chaplain," he exclaimed ecstatically. "I didn't know you were a chaplain."
"Why, yes," the chaplain answered. "Didn't you know I was a chaplain?"
"Why, no. I didn't know you were a chaplain." (p. 13)

And later, on leave in Rome, Yossarian tries to pick up Luciana, a voluptuous prostitute:

"All right, I'll dance with you," she said, before Yossarian could even speak. "But I won't let you sleep with me."
"Who asked you?" Yossarian asked her.
"You don't want to sleep with me?" she exclaimed with surprise.
"I don't want to dance with you." (p. 152)

As I have already noted, the language in Catch-22 is a structural device. And because it is so often grotesque, it makes the structure in part grotesque also. But there
are, at the same time, structural devices which in no way are grotesque. Let me discuss two of them.

One of these is Heller's use of leit-motifs. There are a great many of these in Catch-22, including the chaplain's concern with déjà vu, the dead man in Yossarian's tent, the soldier in white, Lieutenant Scheisskopf's interest in parades, and the mystery of what happened to Snowden. Repeated references to these matters help tie the novel together. To see this fact better, I want to trace the Snowden mystery from beginning to end.

The many references to Snowden dying in the back of Yossarian's plane give some unity to Catch-22, but the fact that these references take us from mystery to enlightenment enhances the unity. Although we learn early in the book that "Snowden had been killed over Avignon when Dobbs went crazy in mid air and seized the controls away from Huple" (p. 35), Heller gives us no more information at the time about the death. To be sure, several pages later there is another mention of Snowden's death, but essentially the incident drops out of the novel for about two hundred pages. Then we learn that on the mission when Snowden was killed, Yossarian lost his nerve. We also learn that Huple, the pilot of the plane, was only fifteen and that Dobbs, his co-pilot, was crazy and wanted to murder Colonel Cathcart. The inference is that Snowden died because incompetent men were flying the plane. Finally, we learn that
Snowden was wounded and freezing in the rear of the plane where Yossarian went to help him (pp. 221-22).

For the rest of the book references to Snowden become more frequent. Heller tells us that Yossarian turned up nude at Snowden's funeral (pp. 255, 257) and that when Yossarian first went back in the plane to help Snowden, he found a "yawning, raw, melon-shaped hole as big as a football in the outside of the thigh, the unsevered, blood-soaked muscle fibers inside pulsating weirdly like blind things with lives of their own, the oval, naked wound that was almost a foot long and made Yossarian moan in shock and sympathy the instant he spied it and nearly made him vomit" (pp. 325-26). Finally, Heller tells us the whole story of Snowden's death. After over four hundred pages of incomplete details about it, he spells everything out vividly (pp. 425-30). When Yossarian went to treat the wound in Snowden's thigh, he found that the morphine had been removed from the first-aid kit by Milo Minderbinder, who had left behind his usual note: "What's good for M & M Enterprises is good for the country" (p. 426). After bandaging Snowden's thigh, Yossarian discovered a wound in the man's abdomen. Cutting into Snowden's flak suit, Yossarian heard himself scream wildly as Snowden's insides slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept dripping out. A chunk of flak more than three inches big had shot into his other side just underneath the arm and blasted all the way through, drawing whole mottled quarts of Snowden along with
it through the gigantic hole in his ribs it made as it blasted out. Yossarian screamed a second time and squeezed both hands over his eyes. His teeth were chattering in horror. He forced himself to look again. Here was God's plenty, all right, he thought bitterly as he stared—liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach and bits of the stewed tomatoes Snowden had eaten that day for lunch. (p. 429)

Looking at the horrible sight, Yossarian thought that "it was easy to read the message in his entrails. Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret. Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret" (pp. 429-30).

Snowden's story unifies Catch-22 in a number of ways. First, there are references to it throughout the novel. Then, too, these references form, more or less, a progression; the more of them there are, the more we know about Snowden. By the end of the novel his whole secret is revealed. Thus, although there is no narrative at the center of Catch-22, the story of Snowden serves as a kind of sub-narrative to give structure to the book. Last, tied up to the references to Snowden are many of the novel's themes: the stupidity of army life, Milo's capitalistic greed, Yossarian's humanity, and man's materialistic base. Snowden's story, in short, is a leit-motif which structures Catch-22 in a conventional way.

One other way in which Heller structures the novel
conventionally is to provide a central character, Yossarian, for whom most of the book's events have significance and who undergoes some change from beginning to end. For Yossarian, the war is not a great patriotic venture but a threat to his existence. He values his own survival above all else, but at the beginning of the novel is not clear how to insure it. Although he tries such tricks as malingering in the hospital or moving the bomb lines on the military maps in order to avoid fighting, he realizes that these are temporary solutions to the problem of staying alive. By the end of the novel, however, he has found his way. Disgusted by such matters as Milo's greed and Aarfy's conduct in Rome, spurred on by the model of Orr who deserts successfully to Sweden, and frustrated by his attempts to act while a soldier in a human manner to other men, Yossarian finally refuses to fly more missions. At first, he concocts a deal with the generals in order to get back to America, but he cannot follow through with it because of his conscience. In the end, he takes off for Sweden where he hopes that he will be able to survive and to live a satisfying human life.

Yossarian is not the central character in any kind of orderly narrative, but he is the character about whom Catch-22 is built. As such he is a non-grotesque structuring device. And so we find that the novel is structured about half grotesquely and about half not. Some structural
devices are grotesque for the purpose of saying something about the absurd, chaotic conditions of the modern world. On the other hand, some are conventional for the purpose of making the novel comprehensible. In the end it is a subjective decision whether we call the structure of Catch-22 grotesque; I happen to feel that it is not in the final analysis. But when we come to William Burroughs' Naked Lunch, I would maintain that there are strong objective reasons for calling the book's structure grotesque.

Take, first, the conditions under which the novel was put together. Although we must be cautious about committing the genetic fallacy, I feel that the method of composition is important in discussing the structure of Naked Lunch. Burroughs tells us in his Introduction to the novel that he was addicted to heroin and that he "apparently took detailed notes on sickness and delirium." However, he had "no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title Naked Lunch." In other words, Burroughs was not conscious, as we ordinarily use the term, of writing the novel. Furthermore, he apparently was not responsible for putting the detailed notes together. Alfred Chester tells us that "according to literary legend, Allen Ginsberg, while visiting Burroughs in his Paris apartment sometime during the 1950's, found the floors littered with hundreds of sheets of paper that Burroughs had scrawled on while high on heroin. Ginsberg,
it is said, gathered the papers together, read them with reverence, and put them into the form, or rather the sequence, they now have.\footnote{15} Ginsberg, however, was not the co-author of \textit{Naked Lunch}, for he did not arrange the papers into any particular order. Rather, he picked them off Burroughs' floor, read them, and sent them to the printer. He put them into the sequence they have in the novel, but he didn't consciously order them into that sequence according to some principle. So, not only was Burroughs not conscious of writing the notes which became \textit{Naked Lunch}, but he was also not responsible for arranging those notes in their present form. The final arrangement was purely arbitrary. In short, Burroughs gave up his ordering role in putting the novel together.

I have already suggested that if we are to have a grotesque structure in fiction, it must perhaps be in a novel in which the author has not done the final ordering of his material, but rather in which the order was arbitrarily determined. Such is the case in \textit{Naked Lunch}. This, however, does not insure that the book's structure is grotesque, for arbitrary order is more a necessary than a sufficient condition for the existence of grotesque structure. But there is still more to say about the structure in \textit{Naked Lunch}.

Burroughs himself has commented on it. He wrote
once the following words about Brion Gysin's method of writing poetry:

In the summer of 1960 Brion Gysin painter and writer cut newspaper articles into sections and rearranged the sections looking away. Result was direct message from write now.

Method is simple: Take a page or more or less of your own writing or from any writer living and or dead. Any written or spoken words. Cut into sections with scissors or switch blade as preferred and rearrange the sections. Look away. Now write out result. Brion Gysin: 'The cut up method places at the disposal of writers the collage method used by painters for the past fifty years.'

The cut up method was used in Naked Lunch without the author's full awareness of the method he was using. The final form of Naked Lunch and the juxtaposition of sections was determined by the order in which the material went--at random--to the printer.

If the book was put together arbitrarily, then it follows that it can be read the same way. As Burroughs remarks in the novel, "You can cut into Naked Lunch at any intersection point . . ." (p. 224). Or, more obliquely, "the word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement" (p. 229). So the structure of Naked Lunch resulted from the grotesque compositional methods used in creating it, and it is such that it matters not in what way you read it. I find this grotesque, for it seems to push the whole concept of a book to its limits.
There is still more to say about the structure of
*Naked Lunch*. As might be expected from what we have already
seen, there is no plot or story in the novel, no development
of character. Of course, Burroughs intended—if that is a
word to be used in talking of the book—things to be this
way. In one place in *Naked Lunch* he remarks that "there
is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front
of his senses at the moment of writing. . . I am a recording
instrument . . . I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot'
'continuity' . . . Insofar as I succeed in Direct recording
of certain areas of psychic process I may have a limited
function" (p. 221). When the writer acts as a camera, then
naturally there is no plot, no characterization. What we
get in the novel is a series of recordings of what was
before Burroughs, high on heroin, at the time of writing.
Chester calls these dreams, and suggests that they "are
brief and unsustained, rarely lasting a page, often enough
lasting barely more than a sentence or two. They are
shattered, violent, haphazard, and their component images
are drawn from almost every corner of contemporary life,
almost every stretch of the human body."17 I think Chester
is accurate, and that he gives as succinctly as possible
some indication of what *Naked Lunch* is like. It is a
phantasmagoria involving, among other things, drug addiction,
sexual experiences of every sort, and satires (?) on capital
punishment, medicine, and bureaucracies. Moving in and
out are a host of dream-like characters, most of whom are indistinguishable. Those whom we remember imprint themselves on our memories not because they develop, nor even because they are sharply outlined caricatures. Rather, we remember certain characters only because their names appear quite often in the book.

The structure of *Naked Lunch*, then, is also grotesque insofar as plot and character are grotesque. Finally, let me say a few words about the language in the novel. In Burroughs' opinion, we should all be wary of language. As he said once, "What scared you all into time? Into body? Into shit? I will tell you: 'The Word.' Alien Word 'The.' 'The' Word of Alien Enemy imprisons 'Thee' in Time... In Body. In Shit. Prisoner, come out. The great skies are open. I Hassan: Sabbah Rub Out The Word Forever... I would like to sound a warning: to speak is to lie." What Burroughs says here may have some validity; a number of neo-Freudians such as Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse would agree with him. But such a philosophy does not seem very compatible with the creation of literature. The philosophy operates in *Naked Lunch* and helps make its structure grotesque. The language of the novel is uncommonly flat and automatic. This is the way it should be, for with his distrust of language Burroughs is always looking for a way to get around it. Unfortunately, this is impossible
in literature. And the attempt leads clearly to grotesqueness in Naked Lunch.

If we are to claim that there can be a grotesque structure in a novel, then it is to be found in Naked Lunch. The genesis of the book, the overall organization, the condition of such structural elements as plot, characters, and language—all these are grotesque. If there are certain matters repeated in the book—scatological scenes, for example—these are minor in the novel's total structure. My own feeling is that the book is the only novel where the structure is completely grotesque. It is an interesting "experiment," but it communicates little to me and represents, I think, a dead end in fiction.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER V


2 Ibid., p. 72.


5 Ibid., p. 275.


8 In this paragraph I draw from Cohen's Introduction to the novel, cited in the previous footnote.


11 "Joseph Heller's Catch-22," 141.

12 See Daedalus, 158.

14 (New York, 1959), p. v. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and are cited in my text.


17 "Burroughs in Wonderland," 91.


CONCLUSION

In this study I have discussed the tradition of the grotesque in American fiction. My purposes have been several. First, I have been interested in showing one way in which American novels from Wieland (1798) to Cabot Wright Begins (1965) are related. Although American writers have written novels for a variety of reasons, their fiction has more often than not been filled with grotesque elements. Secondly, I have maintained that not only is there a tradition of the grotesque in American fiction, but that this tradition has taken recognizable directions: grotesque characters have moved from symbolic figures to literal representations, grotesque humor has become increasingly prevalent, and grotesque structure has become a distinct possibility. One of my purposes, then, has been to say something about the evolution of the American novel. Furthermore, by discussing the grotesque in American fiction I have implicitly commented on the American imagination and the culture which has nurtured it. The American imagination has been and is moved by the abnormal, the bizarre, the monstrous, the horrible, and the absurd. By extension, I think we may conclude that American culture is one in which these qualities dominate. Missing from American life, for the most part, have been the harmony and order and sanity.
which the English novel reveals exist in Britain. Finally, this essay has provided a framework in which to read the many grotesque novels being written today.

There remains one point which I wish to take up: what will happen to American grotesque in the future? For the purpose of speculating about this question I turn to William Faulkner. At times the world is grotesque for Faulkner. In *As I Lay Dying*, for example, a basic fact of human existence, death, becomes a grotesque joke. Traditionally, human beings, as well as artists who have interpreted life for them, have found, or have been forced to find, meaning in such basic phenomena as birth and death. But this Faulkner cannot do. By surrounding the burial of Addie Bundren with a series of comically grotesque matters, Faulkner calls into question the meaning of death. The burial journey in its grotesqueness becomes a symbol for the grotesqueness of life.

In *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner aligns himself with West and more contemporary novelists who see the world as grotesque and can only laugh at it. But in *The Hamlet* he takes a different position. Here the subject is not the grotesqueness of existence but a phenomenon which Faulkner finds grotesque, the rise of the poor whites (the Snopeses) in the South. The trouble with the Snopes clan is not so much that they are more evil than other Southerners, but rather that they are outsiders. They are not Indians,
original inhabitants of the South; and they are not Negroes or aristocratic whites, inhabitants of the South during its glory. The Snopeses are aliens whose rise cannot be understood, but which is, nevertheless, a fact profoundly affecting the course of Southern history. Faulkner treats this rise with humor. Drawing at times on folk humor, he creates in The Hamlet such humorously grotesque tales as the stories of the goat trading, of Pat Stamper inflating a horse with a bicycle pump, of Ike Snopes making love to a cow, of Mink Snopes trying to stuff his murdered victim into a tree, of the spotted horses, and of the buried treasure. All these tales act as a buffer against the inescapable but incomprehensible rise of Flem Snopes and his relatives.

In The Hamlet Faulkner uses grotesque humor in a way which relates him to Mark Twain in Pudd'nhead Wilson. In that novel Twain used grotesque humor to mask his disillusionment with the failures of civilization. He did not think that the world was grotesque, but instead saw grotesque elements within a meaningful world. He laughed at these in order to be able to accept them. Similarly, Faulkner laughs at the Snopeses. The world is not grotesque in The Hamlet, for informing the novel is Faulkner's vision of history. But the Snopeses are grotesque and are dismissed with humor.

Finally, Faulkner sometimes uses the grotesque in his fiction without connecting it at all to humor. The
idiocy of Benjy, Quentin's suicide, Joe Christmas' murder of Joanna Burden and subsequent slaying at the hands of Percy Grimm, and the horrors connected with Colonel Sutpen's downfall—all these are tragically grotesque. As such they place Faulkner in the company of those American novelists who preferred the horrible to the comic grotesque. Faulkner, then, does not fit entirely with any group. Unlike West and Donleavy and Purdy, he does not see the world as wholly grotesque; unlike Twain, he does not use the comic grotesque simply to mask his own disillusionment; unlike Melville and Hawthorne and the naturalists, he does not use the tragic grotesque to comment upon a world which still makes sense. If we are to understand Faulkner's use of the grotesque, we must approach him in a different way.

Essentially I believe that in his fiction Faulkner is working his way to the point where the grotesque is no longer a viable category, either in art or in the world. To explain, I must digress for a moment into one area of modern thought. For some time a group of thinkers has been striving to find some unifying principle with which to explain reality. This group numbers among its ancestors such figures as Heraclitus, Vico, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Whitehead—all of whom placed emphasis on process as a category for unity. Today, the group includes such thinkers as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Norman O. Brown, L.L. Whyte, and F.S.C. Northrop. Whether or not
these contemporaries have been successful in their efforts, the fact remains that all of them have tried to overcome the polar form of thinking which has dominated Western culture for so long.

"Grotesque," I believe, is a category from polar thought which suggests such opposites as order, sanity, and normality. Even when "grotesque" becomes the norm, as it does in modern fiction, it still is a polar term. For modern novelists are not arguing that the grotesque is a category for explaining the universe in all its forms. Rather, they are claiming that it is the dominant characteristic of the modern world. The way is obviously open to compare present matters with a more normal past or with a possibly non-grotesque future.

Taken alone, Faulkner's stories often appear to be grotesque, or at least appear to be about grotesque matters. And I think that he probably would have agreed with such an observation. But if we take Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha fiction as a whole, I think that we can claim that he was trying to overcome polar thought in it, and that the term "grotesque" does not apply. In that fiction there is operating a vision of history which explains Faulkner's mythical universe in all its forms. The Yoknapatawpha world has an organic unity which makes impossible polar thought, and, therefore, the grotesque. We may validly apply "grotesque"
to parts of the world taken out of context, but taken as a whole the world transcends the grotesque. This is why we cannot align Faulkner solely with one group of American novelists who use the grotesque. Some of Faulkner's stories are like Twain's fiction in their grotesqueness; some are like West's in theirs; and some are like Hawthorne's and Melville's. But put together they are not grotesque at all. They exist in a unified world where such a polar term has no existence.

There are, I believe, three kinds of writers. First, there are those whose work reflects popular assumptions and prejudices. These include such people as Grace Metalious and Herman Wouk. Then there are writers whose work indicates the way the world is at a particular time. These are the antennae of the race, and today number those who argue for the world's grotesqueness. Finally, there are a few writers whose work has the capacity to make over the world completely. Faulkner was such a person. He worked out of a tradition of the grotesque in American fiction, but when he finished his Yoknapatawpha cycle, he had gone beyond the term "grotesque." In doing so he perhaps helped the world move past the polar blockade which has so long surrounded it. And he indicated that in the future the word "grotesque" may no longer have relevance for discussions of fiction.
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