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A STUDY OF THE BILDUNGSROMAN IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

DISSERTATION

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

By

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*****

The Ohio State University
1973

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Professor Richard D. Altick, who first suggested this project to me, and especially my adviser, Professor Julian Markels, whose encouragement and criticism over the past several years have been equally invaluable to me.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................... ii

VITA .................................................................................... iii

CHAPTER

I ........................................................................................... 1

II .......................................................................................... 53

III ........................................................................................ 119

IV ........................................................................................ 145

V .......................................................................................... 189

VI ........................................................................................ 249
CHAPTER I

I

The process by which the adult's social, mental, and spiritual life is shaped, for good or for ill, by the child's earliest contacts with his environment was a primary concern of the European Romantic movement. During the half-century which elapsed between the publication of Emile (1762) and the composition of The Prelude (1805), the child became the object of an "unprecedented literary interest" and a symbol for the Romantic assertion of Self against certain oppressive forms of social "experience."\(^1\) This preoccupation with the child we associate not only with the three literary giants of the Romantic movement, Rousseau, Goethe, and Wordsworth, but also with such figures as Pestalozzi, Fichte, Lessing, Schiller, Blake, and Coleridge. Invested by these writers with natural virtues that were threatened by the traditional methods of socialization, the child came to be viewed as a kind of "ideal man" who too often experienced growing up as a process of impoverishment, a steady reduction of productive energy, creative thought, and moral sensitivity. From this view arose the Romantic demand that education involve something other

\(^1\)Peter Coveney, Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature (London, 1957), pp. ix, xii.
than the curbing of vicious natural tendencies and the inculcation of cultural values, proprieties, and prejudices.

To understand the emergence of this "cult of childhood" toward the end of the eighteenth century, we might briefly recall Ruth Benedict's observations on adolescence in Patterns of Culture. Miss Benedict suggests that a society which emphasizes adolescence as a separate stage in the individual's life history does so because it wishes to promote certain values by labeling them "adult" and insisting that their acquisition is necessary for full membership in the community. Thus, while the institutionalization of adolescence is a widespread phenomenon and one particularly notable in the history of western civilization, it is not universal; by no biological or psychological necessity is it a critical stage in the life cycle. The truth is that such an institution is socially useful for promoting "adult" values and for discouraging patterns of behavior which it relieves to the lower status of childhood. Miss Benedict's analysis may help us to see how the cult of childhood, appearing at a critical point in the history of Western Europe, became a powerful and yet subtle instrument of social criticism. By simply reversing the traditional status of childhood and adulthood, by regarding the child, rather than adult society, as "the purest manifestation and reposi-

2 For a general discussion of this phenomenon see George Boas's The Cult of Childhood (London, 1966).

3 Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture (Boston and New York, 1934), pp. 23-30.
tory of ultimate cultural values," critics like Rousseau were able to subvert the established use of adolescence as a tool of socialization by making it instead a symbol of the last stage in which full identification with the best features of the culture could be made; adulthood came to mean the betrayal, rather than the acquisition, of fundamental human values. Of crucial importance here is the strategy by which social criticism could be conducted on behalf of a genuine commitment to civilization. Insisting that man is born good and that evil is exclusively the product of socialization, Rousseau nevertheless avoids becoming merely a primitivist. Indeed, by presenting an educational program designed to preserve the innate virtues of the child for a socially responsible adulthood, Rousseau becomes a defender of true culture and genuine personal growth. The goal of Emile's tutor is to bring him to adulthood by a process which will recapitulate, correct, and thus fulfill the original but aborted evolution of modern civilization from primitive societies.

The cult of the child, then, is really improperly named since it cannot be regarded as a nostalgic desire by socially-estranged Romantics to retreat to the irresponsibility of the savage or the child. Rather, as it developed, its essential aim of criticizing contemporary society within the wider framework of allegiance to the progress of civilization became increasingly clear. Like Rousseau, Wordsworth located the source of the adult's powers in the child; in

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the interest of their preservation, he urged that growth be allowed to proceed organically, according to the laws of the individual being and unviolated by harsh and hostile social experience. But The Prelude celebrates his education by nature, not because it occurred outside society, but because it strengthened him for "purposes essentially social." Similarly, when he turns away from society to the healing power of nature at the end of the poem, it is his belief that cultural as well as personal "revitalization" is at stake. Goethe also dramatized growth as the interplay of self and society by showing that self-knowledge can only begin when man knows himself in the world. If Werther mourns the fate of the youth who fails in his struggle with stifling social proprieties, Wilhelm Meister celebrates the hero who comes to fulfill himself only through contact with the ruling forms of culture. Refusing to make a simple equation between individual uniqueness and inborn nature, Goethe, more than any other Romantic, saw the self as coming to virtue, in the old sense of the word, vertu or power, only under the shaping force of social circumstance. Through his contact with adult society, the youth brings into existence what is essential, strong, and good, but originally hidden, in his being.

For Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Goethe, childhood was not to be regarded as an ideal state in itself. Rather, the child was a symbol of life's too often unrealized potential, of the ways in which insti-

5Coveney, pp. 34, 45.
utional society frustrated the development of this potential, and of allegiance to the ideal of a satisfying and fulfilling adulthood. This cluster of ideas came eventually to be expressed by the German term "Bildung," "organic development according to inner capacity." But the implications of Bildung were far broader than this brief definition suggests. As variously expressed in the works of the above writers, Bildung embraced a threefold program: 1) to preserve and translate the special powers of the child, his capacity for feeling, wonder, and joy, into the purposeful productivity of the adult; 2) to provide an internal culture of the individual strong enough to resist, challenge, and regenerate social institutions and traditions hostile to such a process of growth; and 3) to teach, through experience of the broadest sort, the discipline essential for the individual's acceptance of his own limitations and the requirements of social existence.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Romantic emphasis on the child and on the processes of growth had led to the development of a special mode of fiction, the Bildungsroman or apprenticeship novel. Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, published in 1795-96, marks the emergence of this genre in western European literature. While the educational ferment of the times was undoubtedly the key intellectual influence behind its appearance, the Bildungsroman was closely related to other dominant or emerging literary forms and

could hardly be called a radical departure from the mainstream of eighteenth-century fiction. As Susanne Howe noted in *Wilhelm Meister* and *His English Kinsmen*, the hero of the apprenticeship novel derives from and combines several well-established literary traditions, among them "the recalcitrant hero of the moral allegory" who must discriminate among the various faces worn by virtue and vice, the universal Renaissance hero searching for total self-fulfillment, and the " Parsifal hero" who must "suffer painfully in the world of experience" in order to reach his goal.  

The immediate ancestors of the genre were the picaresque novel and the Romantic autobiography; in fact, Northrop Frye suggests that the merging of these two forms produced such primary genres of nineteenth-century literature as the fictional autobiography, the *Künstlerroman*, and the *Bildungsroman*.  

The most obvious link between autobiography, the picaresque novel, and the *Bildungsroman* is, of course, their common interest in depicting youth's initiation into the adult world. However, the literary influences at work here were especially fruitful since both the autobiography and the picaresque, obliquely perhaps, but by their very natures, pose the question which becomes central and explicit in the *Bildungsroman*, the cost of this initiation, and its value, to both the individual undergoing it and the society conducting it. Thus, the theme inherited by the *Bildungsroman* from the Romantic cult of the

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7 Susanne Howe, *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen*, p. 5.

child, how to preserve youth from social corruption for social regeneration, was also nourished by the literary forms from which it sprung.

Undoubtedly, a major impulse behind autobiography is the writer's need to relate himself positively to the society in which he lives and to assure his audience of the significance of his contribution to the culture which they share. However, the Romantic autobiographer was equally compelled to assure himself of the inherent meaningfulness of his life and destiny, of the power of his personality over external social circumstances, of his ability to "extract nurture out of disparate incidents and ultimately bind them together in his own way, disregarding all that was unusable" and transforming even painful experiences and social failures into "the substance of his personality." He was, in short, anxious to demonstrate that no ultimate sacrifice of his unique selfhood had been made as a result of his transactions with society. Thus, both Rousseau, in The Confessions, and Wordsworth, in The Prelude, assert emphatically that a man's life cannot be judged in terms of public achievement alone but must also be measured according to its "ultimate wholeness and integrity," and consequently both give more emphasis to sins committed against the self than to the sins committed against the public order. Moreover, by offering up their lives for the inspection and judgment

\[10^9\text{Pascal, p. 52.}\]
of the public, both writers suggest that the growth of a single individual can be regarded as representative of general social and historical conditions, of the experience of his generation, and hence that neither his success nor his failure belongs to him alone. By inviting society to judge their lives, Rousseau and Wordsworth also invite it to judge itself.11 Romantic autobiography, then, bequeaths to the Bildungsroman an insistent sense that in the development of the individual, inner calling must be satisfied as well as social need. Both genres imply that the degree to which individual life is affirmed is no less important than the degree to which cultural life is affirmed. And both imply that the individual and society bear equal responsibility for making this mutual affirmation possible.

The picaresque novel and the Bildungsroman share certain obvious features and concerns: an episodic, linear structure deriving from the narration of the hero's adventures, a (usually) youthful hero who is educated to some extent through his initiation into the world of adult experience, and an interest in depicting the Weltbild in which the hero moves, the social milieu of his times. But while the picaresque novel is largely one of event, focussing past the hero onto his adventures in the external world, the Bildungsroman (also manifesting its debt to the novel of sensibility) shifts its emphasis to explore the subjective development accompanying the hero's exploits. Thus, the broad-ranging but essentially surface satire of the picar-

11 J. H. Broome, Rousseau: A Study of His Thought (New York, 1963), p. 154. Broome makes this observation about Rousseau only but it seems to apply generally to Romantic autobiography.
esque novel is deepened, in the Bildungsroman, into a more morally serious criticism of the opportunities and costs of "making it" in the adult world. The lower-class picaroon "obliquely suggested the new possibilities for social mobility," but his mobility is largely horizontal rather than vertical and is used to satirize rather than to subvert or question the official social order; in the words of Robert Alter, he is neither "arriviste" nor "reformer." But it is precisely because the typically middle-class and therefore socially-mobile Bildungsroman hero is both arriviste and reformer that his career becomes so critical; possessing the two most characteristic qualities of middle-class youth, ambition and idealism, he is forced to become a critic of his society at the very point where he is trying to enter and subdue it. His values and life-style, pitted against those of his culture, are crucially at stake in this encounter. Thus, while the picaroon is at war with society only in the sense that he must "wise up" enough to wrest a living from it, the apprentice-hero must make his way be becoming socially conscious enough to think of himself as seriously opposing or supporting various features of his society. The Bildungsroman, then, while borrowing many features from the picaresque novel, draws its chief strength from its romantic origins by granting, in its depiction of youth's initiation into the adult world, at least equal importance to the demands of self and of society. Its concern with the process of education is not only for the

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youth's successful accommodation to the prevailing social order, but also for the preservation of individual integrity and sensitivity. Its challenge is directed not only to the youth who must remake himself into an adult, but also to the adult world which must make such a transformation possible and desirable. Indeed it is one of the strengths of the Bildungsroman that by making the youth a "vehicle for social commentary," it is able to conduct the Romantic analysis of self-development without losing its concern with society or abandoning its function of providing social criticism.\(^{14}\)

As Lionel Trilling observes (in his essay on The Princess Casamassima), the Bildungsroman became the backbone of nineteenth-century English and continental fiction. In the hands of such masters as Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and Dickens, its characteristic form became the story of the young man from the provinces making his way into the larger social world where he desires to find his place. Trilling rightly points out that the word "provinces" must be interpreted broadly; it does not necessarily mean that the youthful hero derives from a certain geographical location but rather that he begins his career upon a certain ground of limitation and inexperience which it will be his task to overcome. Nevertheless, in the tradition of Rousseau, the "father" of all the young men from the provinces according to Trilling, the apprentice-hero's entry into adult life is

\(^{14}\)Coveney, pp. 53-54. Coveney remarks that the dual concern with self-analysis and social commentary is one of the strengths of the nineteenth-century novel in general, but this remark is particularly applicable to the Bildungsroman.
usually symbolized by his journey from the country to the city.\textsuperscript{15} The young man from the provinces is sensitive and hence acutely alive to the way his adventures impinge upon his internal development, but he is also curious and ambitious, "concerned to know how the political and social worlds are run and enjoyed" and willing to take "real risks, often of his life," so that he might gain "a share of power and pleasure."\textsuperscript{16} The hero's career usually follows the pattern suggested by the archetypal novel of this genre, Wilhelm Meister's \underline{Apprenticeship}; he meets with reverses, generally due to his own weaknesses of temperament, falls in with various adult guides, good and bad, from among which he must select his models, and (usually) ends by making a final adjustment "to the demands of his time and environment by finding a sphere of action in which he may work effectively."\textsuperscript{17}

As this basic plot implies, in the \underline{Bildungsroman} the youth's struggle, with and within his social environment, is doubly determined by

\textsuperscript{15} This journey may also reflect that what Bruno Bettelheim calls "the problem of generations" had by this time become acute. This problem begins historically when, because of technological advances, the young are no longer needed to support the older generation in its work or finish its uncompleted tasks; in order to avoid conflict and find a new manner of achieving self-definition, youth must remove itself from parental domination and seek its initiation into adulthood away from home - by going West or to the sea or the city. See Bruno Bettelheim's "The Problem of Generations," \underline{The Challenge of Youth}, ed. Erik H. Erikson (Garden City, New York, 1965), pp. 78-92.

\textsuperscript{16} Lionel Trilling, \underline{The Liberal Imagination} (Garden City, New York, 1953), pp. 67-69.

\textsuperscript{17} S. Howe, p. 4.
social necessity and by his own character; thus, by presenting the youth's career as a series of alternatives which open up for him and of choices which he must make among them, the novel can subtly suggest to what degree the individual and to what degree his society can be held responsible for his ultimate success or failure. However, the success of the protagonist's education is determined not so much by the attainment of desired ends as by the emergence of goals through his struggle with life. Thus, the threshold of adulthood has been crossed when adolescent vagueness and aimlessness have been transformed into a life shaped toward some definite purpose, when the youth has discovered a niche that is recognized by society and yet seems uniquely made for him. The drama of the Bildungsroman, then, centers on the tensions between the hero's acquisition of internal maturity and his need to assume the values of the external adult world; from this drama emerges its special, I might even say crucial, cultural significance as a fictional form that goes beyond specific social criticism either to broadly affirm its culture as one in which the transition from adolescence to adulthood can be made successfully or to condemn it as one in which the conflict between initiation and self-fulfillment ends in an impasse, in which growing up, despite the best efforts of the initiate, is impossible or "absurd."

As Lionel Trilling's brief description suggests, the Bildungsroman not only became the backbone of nineteenth-century fiction, but its development was inextricably bound up with the historical fact of the bourgeois revolution and with the dominant social question of the
nineteenth century, the meaning, value, and permanence of the newly-emerging bourgeois culture. Both the apprentice-hero's mobility and the adult reality he confronts in the city (literally, bourgeois culture is the culture of the cities) are expressions of middle-class ascendancy; the young man from the provinces makes forcibly in his career the middle-class demand that the natural man and his natural talents be respected and rewarded apart from considerations of class and blood. This demand may be directed toward traditional and entrenched class institutions desperately resisting bourgeois penetration or toward those segments of the new middle-class order which have betrayed revolutionary ideals by imitating the repressions and corruptions of their predecessors in order to prevent the further extension of privilege and opportunity downward through society; but, the fact that it becomes the dominant form and theme of the nineteenth-century novel presupposes the new historical conditions of mobility and reflects the new freedom for self-making available to youth in a crumbling class society.

In the next chapter I wish to examine in detail several well-known examples of the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman in order to assess what general criticisms and affirmations of European culture as an environment for growth are made in these novels; I will also suggest how the careers of such apprentice-heroes as Julien Sorel and Eugène de Rastignac, Frédéric Moreau and David Copperfield reveal both the problems and the triumphs inherent in the practical application of the bourgeois ideal of self-making. Before beginning this
examination, however, I would like to turn to three writers who, while widely separated by time and geography, present a remarkably coherent context for any discussion of the Bildungsroman because of their common and, in many respects, similar attempt to describe an ideal of successful development or Bildung applicable to the new conditions of social mobility and self-determination. Indeed, the entire preoccupation with growth expressed originally in the Romantic cult of the child and in the emergence of the Bildungsroman and continuing into our own era is essentially a response to just those historical conditions, an effort to explore the possibilities for individual and social maturity which the bourgeois revolution opened up. To be sure, Rousseau and Goethe stand at one end of this revolution and Erik Erikson at the other, but they are united by their shared vision of education as experience and discovery which, if conducted within a sufficiently diverse and flexible social framework, can lead to the ideal end of growth, the affirmation of the individual in his culture. I will show, in the remainder of this chapter, how these three writers together describe a paradigm of Bildung, a paradigm that is based upon their common assumptions about the process and aims of growth. It is my belief that these assumptions are rooted in and inseparable from the social revolution that ushered in the bourgeois era, that they are the highest expression of middle-class experience and values, and that they operate implicitly in the Bildungsromane of the nineteenth century, forming an ideal vision against which the actualities of nineteenth-century social life are being measured.
II

Rousseau probably began to think seriously about education during his brief and unsuccessful career as a tutor in the household of M. de Mably during 1740; here he learned that the exercise of a capricious authority was not calculated to make children "good and wise." However, *Emile*, the revolutionary educational treatise published in 1762, owes more to the ripening of his political philosophy during the middle decade of the eighteenth century than to his experience as a teacher. Indeed, it can be regarded as an inevitable companion volume to *The Social Contract* since the same basic assumption, that man is inherently good and becomes evil through the process of socialization, rules both works. *The Social Contract* and *Emile*, then, offer two complementary solutions to the problem of evil; the regeneration of society and the regeneration of the individual through education so that he may contribute to society's reform. Rousseau's assumptions about the source of good and evil dictate the educational program of *Emile*, which calls for the removal of the child from pernicious social influences - Rousseau's famous "negative education" - and the careful nurture of his goodness until it flowers into virtuous manhood. *Emile*’s education is to proceed heuristically, according to the risks of experience and their natural consequences, rather than authoritatively, according to the precepts, punishments, and prohibitions of a corrupt social order. However, although *Emile* is brought

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up outside of society, he is educated ultimately for social life. Hence, the central doctrine of Emile is that ontogeny recapitulates philogeny; just as historical evolution has, by "natural law," forced men to combine into societies, so will Emile, by the natural law of his development, retrace the journey of the species from a state of nature to a state of civilization. Yet, Emile's heuristic education will have taught him his dependence on social relations without having driven him into servitude to particular men and institutions. Thus, in manhood he will enjoy a degree of civilization superior to that possessed by his contemporaries. Having learned to distinguish between natural needs, both physical and social, and the artificial desires bred only by particular societies at particular points in their histories, he will be both a natural and social man at once, one who "inherits all the culture of the past that is accordant with his primal principle and escapes all that is at variance with it."19

Emile is divided into five books encompassing the Age of Instinct (1-3), the Age of Sensation (4-12), the Age of Ideas (12-puberty), the Age of Sentiment (puberty-manhood), and the Age of Morality (marriage and parenthood).20 The crucial task during infancy, according to


20 Broome, pp. 80-81.
Emile, is to train the child to discriminate between self-interest and selfish-interest; this is effected by allowing him to use whatever powers he has for self-gratification and by ministering to essential needs which are beyond his power to satisfy. However, all demands which are nonessential should be regarded as illegitimate and ignored lest the infant acquire too great a sense of dependency upon and mastery over his preceptors. During boyhood, Emile's sense experience should be enriched as fully as possible through free exploration of his environment. As a natural consequence of his pursuit of sensation, pleasure and pain, Emile will acquire a sense of his powers and his limitations, and thus he will learn the principle most essential for his future happiness, to adjust his desires to his own capacity for fulfilling them. For, Rousseau argues, the chief cause of human misery is an imbalance between ambition and inherent capability which leads either to a life of constant frustration and dependence or to a life of waste and unfulfillment.

During the pre-adolescent period, Emile cultivates a manual skill and learns a trade. This activity, while developing his physical dexterity, also gives Emile his first distinct idea of the connection between the individual and society; he learns that he must earn his place in society through his mastery of a useful skill. Moreover, through this practical apprenticeship, Emile equips himself to fill a place in any society and so prepares himself to weather social change and the vicissitudes of fortune. Adolescence is the next and most crucial phase of Emile's growth, for the
emergence of the sexual instinct unleashes a danger which threatens all that has been gained so far. The danger is that passion will seek gratification at the expense of others in an exclusive and dependent attachment, that selfish-interest will overshadow, and perhaps destroy, self-interest. The tutor can, however, capitalize on the emotional fullness of adolescence by turning passion into sentiment and a love which seeks only its own fulfillment into a love for humanity at large. This is to be accomplished by acquainting Emile with human suffering and thus awakening pity and fellow-feeling. By introducing him to religion and the study of history, the tutor will ensure that Emile's passion is softened and spiritualized and that his sentiments are enlisted in the project of relieving the age-old injustice and misery of mankind.

In the final stage of his education, Emile will travel, for he is to be free to choose the society in which he wishes to live, the one which best fits his nature as it has developed through education. However, his journeys, by demonstrating to him that no just state exists, will ultimately lead him back to his native country, for he will conceive it as his social duty to "contract" into the imperfect society of his birth and work for its amelioration. Emile's final choice is, nevertheless, a compromise. He fulfills the social contract only by honoring the private "social" virtues of marriage and parenthood, by assuming responsibility for the education of the next, and hopefully better, generation, one able to move the state still closer to an ideal of perfection. At the same time, by choosing a
life of rural retirement, Emile rejects such public virtues as "honor" and "courage" judging that society is too corrupt to gain his full political allegiance.21

Successful growth, as depicted in Emile, depends first upon the tutor's correct understanding of the process of development. Influenced by Buffon's Natural History, Rousseau perceived that nature is properly viewed as a process rather than as a fixed and static entity. Thus, Emile's education demonstrates that what is "natural" is not just what is original in the child's nature but rather a "determinate and persisting character of a being which shows not only in its origin but also in its 'natural history'."22 In fact, Emile really has no "nature" to begin with, only dispositions and tendencies which are gradually shaped into a nature by his encounter with his environment. Thus, Emile becomes a "natural" man because he is allowed to discover his own nature rather than having some ill-fitting social guise forced upon him. His education is successful because it encourages him to explore as fully as possible the environment which will draw his nature out and because it then adapts itself freely to the needs and opportunities of each stage in the development of this nature, respecting the continuing and irreversible unfolding of his "natural history." If Rousseau has been called the father of modern education on the strength of this work, it is because he was one of the first to recognize that richness of opportunity and freedom of choice neces-

21Masters, p. 103.

sarily precede, because only they can produce, the formation of character.

Secondly, successful growth, as it is presented in *Emile*, depends upon the willingness of both society and the individual to fulfill their obligations to each other. It assumes that there is no fundamental conflict between the two, that if the youth is allowed the freedom to develop naturally, he will eventually choose, without coercion, to commit himself to the preservation and improvement of the social order. The proper role of society in influencing the progress of human growth is embodied, in *Emile*, by the tutor. He stands as the representative of an ideal culture, the utopian state of *The Social Contract*; he is the "enlightened lawgiver" who commands the willing obedience of Emile. His double function is to enrich the natural process of Emile's growth so that the pupil's unique talents will be fully realized and simultaneously to ensure that these powers will be given both form and scope by being directed into the service of society. Thus, the tutor shows Emile that his store of essentially formless energy can only find satisfying expression through such social institutions as marriage, religion, and the education of the young, and, in this way, he performs the primary task of society which is "to win from nature social man to carry on her affairs."23 In return for his obedience, the tutor grants Emile the freedom to discover what social opportunities are available and to choose according to the requirements of his nature, that is, to choose his own time and

23 Boyd, p. 208.
manner of joining society; for the tutor recognizes that only the man who has realized his uniqueness as an individual can become a genuine and loyal citizen. In short, the tutor guarantees that Emile shall not be brought into society at the expense of his basic nature, that he shall select his own mode of belonging and shall authentically possess the social values which he chooses to honor.

In Rousseau's version of an ideal education lies, of course, an implicit criticism of traditional pedagogical systems and, more important, of the society which had created and continued to rely upon them. These systems are criticized for their suppression of nature, the human nature of the individual; moreover, they merely reflect the evils of a larger social system which, by its enslavement to artificial social distinctions created and perpetuated on its own corrupt authority, had repressed the "natural" evolution of human civilization. By the evidence of the ideal presented in Emile, Rousseau felt that the society in which he lived had failed to enlist his allegiance as a citizen or to respect his uniqueness as a man. By its insistence that nature and society are not inevitably antagonistic, Emile suggests that Rousseau felt the chief evil of his time to be the deep "divorce between individual and institutional life," the curse of a class society whose institutions recognize only the artificial and not the natural distinctions between men. Similarly, by suggesting, through the character of the tutor, that flexibility and responsiveness are qualities of a genuinely constituted social order, Rousseau implies that the actual opposition of the individual and institutions
in contemporary society was caused by social rigidity and intractability. In short, Emile implicitly criticizes Rousseau's own culture for being too firmly entrenched, too tenaciously attached to its own permanence, and thus no longer capable of nourishing a personal growth that can obey only one law, the law of change. For a more explicit criticism of his society's hostility to growth, we would have to look at The Confessions, Rousseau's record of his own development, for it is there that he speaks about the actual experience of his generation and class and about the ways in which the "weight of tradition and precedent" can crush each generation's attempt to achieve a unique place in the history of its civilization. Nevertheless, Emile, by presenting an ideal of successful growth, provides a standard by which Rousseau meant us to judge more wisely the realities and failures, individual and social, of his own career. Nor should we forget that this career was a bourgeois one; while Emile ostensibly prescribes an educational program for a young nobleman, its ideals are derived from Rousseau's own middle-class background and experience. The process of self-making described in this treatise is in reality a revolutionary demand for a society more responsive to the natural merits of the individual and more determined to enrich itself by enlisting the talents of all of its citizens.

Rousseau's perception that the child grows into his nature by an irreversible process of development nourished by the interplay of in-
nate tendencies and environmental experience has become a fundamental principle of modern psychologies of human growth. What unites such a modern commentator as Erik H. Erikson with Rousseau is not only a shared assumption about how this process works, but also a common belief that acculturation, essential to both the formation of the individual personality and to the carrying forward of all human culture, requires above all richness of opportunity and freedom of choice.

Standing at the opposite end of the bourgeois revolution from Rousseau and thus with the advantages conferred by two centuries of "modern" experience, Erikson is able to describe in a fullness of detail which Emile lacks both the process of growth and the social climate most hospitable to its operation. Many of Rousseau's intuitive guesses about psycho-biological development have for Erikson the authority and specificity of clinically-validated facts; similarly, while the social conditions symbolized in the formal and artificial environment provided for Emile represent for Rousseau a revolutionary ideal, Erikson is primarily describing actual features of modern societies which in his view need to be strengthened and thus should enlist our support and care. The process of growth described by Erikson in a number of works is no less an ideal than that presented in Emile, but because of the intervening social revolution, we have more nearly approached its fulfillment; thus, it has acquired a sharpness of emphasis and refinement of detail missing in the earlier work.

Like Rousseau, Erikson has attempted to schematize what he calls the "irreversible schedule of human virtues" (or strengths) whose
orderly development is so crucial to the health of the growing personality. According to Erikson, this schedule of strengths emerges through a series of crises extending from infancy to adulthood, each of which must be successfully negotiated before the next phase of development can be fully experienced and resolved. The series of crises and the schedule of virtues it produces include: in infancy, 1) the crisis of trust versus mistrust leading to the virtue of hope or the "capacity for renunciation" and the ability to transform "disappointed hopes" into "better prospects" which promise to be fulfilled, and 2) the crisis of autonomy versus shame which produces the strength of will or the "determination to exercise free choice as well as self-restraint;" in childhood, 3) the crisis of initiative versus guilt which resolves itself into the strength of purpose or "the courage to envisage and pursue valued goals uninhibited by . . . defeat," and 4) the conflict between industry and inferiority which precipitates competence or the "exercise of dexterity and intelligence in the completion of tasks;" in adolescence, 5) the crisis of identity versus role-confusion and 6) the crisis of intimacy versus isolation which together produce the special virtues of adolescence, fidelity and love; in adulthood, the conflicts between 7) generativity and stagnation

and 8) ego integrity and despair which issue in the strength of care, an adult "concern for what has been generated by love," whether children, works, or ideas, and the ability to make some commitment to their nurture and preservation. Thus, an adult personality which has successfully manipulated the crises of growth is known by its possession of the full schedule of virtues: hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and committedness.26

Erikson also identifies adolescence as the most critical phase of the individual's development since it not only generates its own conflicts but repeats the crises of infancy and childhood as well. Adolescence marks the individual's first full encounter with the broad social world in which he must ultimately define himself and his area of commitment; it is the period, in Erikson's words, when "life history intersects with history" and youth discovers "the essence of the era they are to join."27 Thus, the virtues of hope, will, imagination, and workmanship, tentatively won in the limited arenas of home and school, in adolescence must undergo a new and more serious test of their strength. The youth must satisfy his need to have faith in some central feature of his society and yet avoid the danger of cynicism resulting from a faith foolishly given. He must fulfill his desire to willingly complete the tasks society sets him and yet avoid being forced into activities at odds with his own code of morality and hence shameful in his eyes. He must find opportunities within

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27 Erikson, Youth: Fidelity and Diversity, p. 23.
the social order for bringing to life the visions that he has imagined while resisting attempts to restrict too narrowly the scope of his aspirations. And finally, he must discover himself through a socially-valued occupation without consenting to a career that promises only empty success unaccompanied by personal excellence. At the same time, the adolescent must bring fidelity to his choosing, a determination to transform temporary relativism into a permanent commitment to the objects of his choice.

Because of the heavy burdens of adolescence, the youth, above all, requires what Erikson calls a period of moratorium during which he can test his occupational identity and his ideological affiliations by experimenting and role-playing; through the moratorium the individual is enabled both to differentiate himself from his culture and to choose his manner of rejoining it. The adolescent moratorium is, then, a kind of "cultural institution" or "socially-organized apprenticeship" which provides society's guarantee that the "needs, energies, and faculties" of youth, no matter how unique, can be fruitfully placed "at the disposal of his society's values." It is essentially this moratorium which the tutor, with his system of negative education, grants to Emile. The special task of society during the moratorium is to match youth's fidelity with cultural diversity; the adolescent must encounter a broad variety of opportunities and sanctions if he is to feel that his choices are truly spontaneous.

29Erikson, *Late Adolescence*, pp. 74-75.
that he has had a real hand in shaping his identity and his destiny by the selections he has made. In short, society must be prepared to meet the adolescent's full range of potentialities with an equally rich diversity of social alternatives if it wishes in the end to gain from him mature commitments. Moreover, such cultural diversity not only guarantees the youth's power over his own life history but also his share in directing the destiny of his culture as well. For, whatever his final choices, they will bring to life discarded or latent cultural values which will, to some extent, determine the direction of future social growth. In this respect, Erikson validates Rousseau's perception that "personal growth" can never be separated from "communal change" nor individual crises from contemporary historical developments.\(^{30}\) Thus, during the moratorium, the adolescent's career unfolds as "a series of ever-narrowing selections of personal, occupational, sexual, and ideological commitments" by which he is enabled to enter history. If both diversity and fidelity are properly operative in this process, then for both the culture and its initiate, past, present, and future are all affirmed; the adolescent will be reborn as an adult but for a new social reality which he has helped to create "with and by those whom he chooses as his new ancestors and his genuine contemporaries."\(^{31}\)

Cultural diversity is manifested during the moratorium largely through the range of significant occupations, authentic life-styles,

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\(^{30}\)Erikson, Identity Youth and Crisis, p. 23.

\(^{31}\)Erikson, Youth: Fidelity and Diversity, pp. 13-14.
and competing ideologies offered to youth. The availability of useful and unquestionably productive work is of first importance; youth must be shown tasks that only it, the generation of the future, can accomplish. Paul Goodman, as well as Erikson, emphasizes the need for occupational diversity; in Goodman's words, growth depends upon the individual's knowledge that there are necessary tasks for him to do, tasks, indeed, that he cannot afford to "leave off doing." If such is the case, then one's existence will be justified by "naming the enterprise that one is engaged in, and by the fact that it is going on." Moreover, to some extent, work must be open to a competition of talents and not be assigned exclusively on the basis of rank, status, or other artificial modes of certification. That is, a culture must offer its young a diversity of "vocations," occupations that answer to the inner callings of individuals as well as to the general needs and traditions of society. In a culture marked by diversity, Erikson argues, finding one's vocation will mean finding out about one's possibilities and imposing them upon the community through the exercise of a dominant faculty in work. Secondly, youth requires adult models who exemplify many ways in which to be authentic; these models may include "advocates and practitioners of technical accuracy, of a method of scientific inquiry, of a convincing rendition of truth, of a code of fairness, of a standard of art-


stic veracity, or a way of personal genuineness;" what they must share is a willingness to face reality without having recourse to self-deception. That youth needs such an older generation against which to test itself and its power is a belief Bruno Bettelheim shares with Erikson; for, as Bettelheim observes, if adult society is itself a "vacuum," "if existing manhood is viewed as empty, static, obsolescent . . . then becoming a man is death, and manhood marks the death of adolescence, not its fulfillment." Under such conditions, it will seem better "not to give up the promise of youth with its uncertainty, its lack of definite commitment . . . better to be committed to such uncommittedness than to commit oneself to spending the rest of one's life as a hollow man." Finally, in Erikson's view, youth needs ideology; it needs to feel moved by the movements of its day if it is to become a "vital regenerator" of society by enlisting its loyalties in the "conservation of that which continues to feel true" and in the "revolutionary correction of that which has lost its regenerative significance." From the diverse sets of ideals emerging from the historical evolution of society, youth can choose which ideologies it wishes to bring to completion and which ones it wishes to rebel against in the interest of counter values. It is only by acquiring ideology that youth can come into the strength of patriotism, satisfy its need to identify with what it considers to be the

34 Erikson, Youth: Fidelity and Diversity, pp. 15-16.
35 Bettelheim, pp. 92-94.
36 Erikson, Identity Youth and Crisis, p. 134.
best features of its culture, and wean itself from the limited environments of family and school through commitment to some larger and self-selected human environment. The moratorium, then, by introducing the adolescent to "significant persons," meaningful tasks, and genuine "ideological forces" representative of the diverse life of his culture, enables him to relate his life to the "ongoing" history of his society and to commit himself to some version of "communal solidarity."  

Where society fails to provide its young with a culturally diverse moratorium, the natural fidelity of youth becomes cynical resignation. Failure results in identity diffusion rather than self-definition, a condition characterized by unnatural apathy or unnatural urgency, overidentification with rigid roles, a "paralysis of workmanship," the search for a "negative identity" with "improbable persons" who represent that which the youth is "least supposed to be," and a drift toward either overly formal relationships or isolation. Failure is also signalled by the widespread boredom of youth, an emotion defined by Goodman as "the pain a person feels when he is doing nothing or something irrelevant, instead of doing something that he wants to do but won't, can't, or doesn't dare." The problem is acute when the fact of boredom has become repressed and chronic, when the youth is no longer aware of it himself. Failure occurs when the

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37 Erikson, Youth; Fidelity and Diversity, p. 23.
38 Erikson, Late Adolescence, pp. 79-82; Identity Youth and Crisis, pp. 167-76.
moratorium becomes an end in itself or when it leads the youth into social captivity, an adjustment to the social order made on its terms rather than on his own. However, where cultural diversity prevails, the adolescent terminates the moratorium himself by choosing his manner of joining the community - whether as "the beneficiary of its traditions, as the practioner and innovator of its technology, as renewer of its ethical strength, as rebel bent on the destruction of the outlived, or as deviant with deviant commitments." Whatever way of social adjustment he selects, it is a "conscious compromise made for his own purposes" and one that "confirms" the individual in his mature identity even as it "regenerates" the culture.

I suggested earlier that in Emile Rousseau created an idealized version of his autobiography; he imagined the career he would like to have followed instead of the one actually recorded in The Confessions. The ideal presented in the earlier work, then, is strongly operative when he comes to make final judgments about his life in the later one, for the two are vitally connected on the grounds of Rousseau's middle-class experience. The Confessions indicts a society inhospitable to the ambitions, talents, and ideals of the natural -that is, bourgeois- man; this indictment arises from Rousseau's vision in Emile of a social order which would encourage the natural (bourgeois) man to fulfill himself and his social role simultaneously. It is my belief that Rousseau and Erikson can also be related on the grounds of middle-class experience, that a valid way of viewing Erikson's work histor-

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40 Erikson, Youth, Fidelity and Diversity, p. 23.
ically is to see it as a completion or filling in of the necessarily abstract, because revolutionary, ideal of Rousseau. Thus, the paradigm of Bildung established by the two authors is one which, with shifts in emphasis, perhaps, but not in essence, has informed Western culture since the end of the eighteenth century and the rise to dominance of the bourgeoisie. Because this paradigm is expressive above all of the demands, values, and self-trust of the middle class, it seems to me to be a crucial aid to our understanding of the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman. Nor, I would argue, is it a violation of chronology to read The Red and the Black or Lost Illusions in the light of Erikson’s analysis of growth since Erikson’s work, no less than Rousseau’s, is descriptive of a cultural ideal that is inescapably behind the careers of Julien Sorel and David Séchard, just as Émile is inescapably behind the judgments made in The Confessions. As a final step in establishing this paradigm, I should like to turn to Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship. As my analysis will show, Goethe’s novel more properly belongs with the work of Rousseau and Erikson than with the Bildungsromane of Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and Dickens, for Goethe chooses to ignore the possibilities for realistic social commentary in the interest of presenting, again, an ideal of Bildung. At the same time, since the ideal presented in Wilhelm Meister is vitally dependent upon the increased freedom and opportunity granted to youth in a largely democratic and middle-class culture, Goethe’s novel provides an excellent introduction to the more realistic and socially-critical Bildungsromane which were to dominate European fiction in the century to come.
Although Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1795-96) has been called the archetypal Bildungsroman, in many ways it is the least typical of the novels to be considered in this study. Betraying an eighteenth-century fondness for abstraction, didacticism, and digression, Goethe lacks the nineteenth-century novelist's concern for rendering social detail closely and for dramatizing in his pages contemporary political and social issues. Wilhelm's apprenticeship to life does not involve the usual journey from country to city; while he gains his education through contact with institutional society, this is represented symbolically rather than realistically and concretely depicted. Thus, whatever comments Goethe intends to make about German culture at the turn of the century are embodied in the structural patterns and symbolic constructs of the novel.

One of Goethe's chief purposes in Wilhelm Meister was to counteract the excesses of the Sturm-und-Drang school of literature and of his own romantic Werther with a more conservative ideal of individual fulfillment. This at least partially explains the formalism, controlled complexity, and rather lifeless air of the novel; for Wilhelm's career is meant to illustrate Goethe's theory of Bildung rather than the naturalistic flow of life which issues from the impact of a specific social environment upon a particular personality. Like Rousseau, Goethe had studied natural history and had observed organic growth as the process by which the inherent urge directing the organism's development is modified by forces of environment. Upon this observation,
he founded his program of Bildung, the release of inner potentialities through contact with and adjustment to external reality. In Wilhelm Meister, then, romantic individualism is opposed by a mature concept of personality, self-realization through self-limitation and social cooperation. Wilhelm’s Bildung means the transformation of the vague and idealistic strivings of romantic youth into the adult’s more limited commitments to specific and realizable goals. Wilhelm achieves self-realization, not through egoistically insisting upon his individual uniqueness, but by coming to understand himself as a representative human being and by willing himself to share the common fate of humanity, the "limited condition" for which "man is intended."

At the same time, Wilhelm Meister remains a Romantic document insofar as it insists that such limitations must be self-determined in accordance with innate capacities and cannot be imposed upon the individual from without. The abbe, who speaks for the ideals of the utopian Tower Society, voices this theme at the end of the novel: "There is no vague, general capability in men," yet "I auger better of a child, a youth, who is wandering astray on a path of his own, than of many who are walking aright on paths which are not theirs" (II, 286).

Thus, the ideal of Bildung which Wilhelm’s career illustrates is essentially that of Rousseau and Erikson. The adult world must grant youth the freedom and opportunity to discover his own way of compromise with necessary social limitations; it must guarantee that this

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41 J. W. Goethe, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, trans. Thomas Carlyle, II, 2 vols. (Boston, 1901), 150. Subsequent references to this work cited in text.
compromise will not be made at the expense of his inner life and will not vitiate his strength to resist society where he must in the interests of the culture's need for the regenerative powers of youth. Only with this guarantee can youth creatively accept the "limited condition" of mankind or, in Erikson's terms, bring his schedule of virtues to completion with adult committedness and care.

In tracing Wilhelm's Bildung, Goethe intended to develop a universal ideal of organic growth applicable to any individual in any society. The novel, however, does not ignore the particular issues of Goethe's society and time. Central to Wilhelm Meister is the question which was haunting Germany and all of Europe at the turn of the century; what impact, for good and for evil, would the rapidly-increasing dominance of the middle-classes have on traditional institutions and values? Thus, while Wilhelm begins his apprenticeship upon the Romantic error of seeing Self and World as implacably opposed, he also represents the dilemma of a middle-class youth who earnestly wishes for a more aristocratic self-culture than can be found in the world of bourgeois values embodied by his father and his friend, Werner.

Wilhelm's resistance to a commercial career in his father's trading house, a concern financed by the sale of a precious and painstakingly-gathered family art collection, is a revolt against middle-class hostility to beauty, art, and spiritual cultivation and also against middle-class devotion to hard work, economic gain, and practical business enterprise. In fact, in the original version of the novel, Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission, the hero's rebellion against
bourgeois society was the central theme of the book; Wilhelm was "right" in his desire to pursue a theatrical career, and the issue of the novel was not his education but the education of middle-class Germany through the founding of a German National Theater to serve as an instrument of its moral and spiritual edification.42

In the final version of Wilhelm Meister, Goethe treats the opposition of bourgeois and aristocratic values with greater complexity and depth. Although Wilhelm's revolt against narrow burgher values is still "right," by the end of the novel he has come back to them by way of the theater and the Tower Society; at least, he has come to embrace the ideals of usefulness, practical worldly service, and the cultivation of a single gift for social purposes. But through the trials and errors of experience, he has made these values his own and, in so doing, has transformed them into something nobler and less self-seeking than the goals pursued by his father and Werner. For, having accepted the rise of the middle classes as an accomplished fact, Goethe wished to imagine, through the career of Wilhelm, how this historical development might be made to contribute to the general progress of human culture. Acknowledging this meaning of the novel, Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked that Wilhelm's apprenticeship illustrates "the passage of a democrat to the aristocracy, using both words in their best senses,"43 and Thomas Mann praised Goethe as a "representative of the

43Ralph Waldo Emerson, Representative Men (Boston, 1850), p. 5.
middle class with its inherent capacity to outgrow itself . . . to ennoble and transcend itself."^44

Wilhelm Meister is a young man destined by his family for commercial life but with strong artistic ambitions and, in particular, a desire to cultivate himself morally, intellectually, and spiritually through association with the theater. Travelling on business for his father's firm, Wilhelm falls in by chance with a group of unemployed actors whom he agrees to finance as a working theatrical company. When the troupe is invited to play before the Prince, Wilhelm accompanies them, expecting to find among the aristocracy the atmosphere of cultivation, taste, and refinement which he has long been seeking. However, disillusioned with the cold welcome and frivolous behavior of the nobles and irritated by the vulgarity, immorality, and incessant quarreling of his companions, Wilhelm departs from the castle and leads his company to Serlo, a distinguished actor and theater manager.

In Serlo's company, Wilhelm finds a version of the theater far superior to that offered him by his own companions; the players are not of equal ability but have learned to maintain a spirit of cooperation, to strive for excellence by supporting each other's weaknesses, in striking contrast to Wilhelm's former friends with their jealousies and vanities. In Serlo, Wilhelm finds a companion receptive to his theories on Shakespeare and on dramatic art in general, and together

^44 As quoted in Mary Gies Hatch, "The Development of Goethe's Concept of the Calling in Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre and the Wanderjahre," The German Quarterly, XXXII (May, 1959), 217.
they plan a production of *Hamlet* in which Wilhelm is to act the leading part. Before committing himself to an apprenticeship in Serlo's theater, however, Wilhelm attempts to evaluate his experiences and to make a decision about his future on rational grounds rather than on emotion and inclination, the basis of his earlier choices. He admits to himself that commerce is not so mean a life nor the theater so ennobling as he had previously imagined. Nevertheless, his desire for personal cultivation remains unsatisfied; as he writes to Werner:

"What would it stand me to put properties of land in order, while I am at variance with myself?" "The cultivation of my individual self, here as I am" remains Wilhelm's goal, and it is a goal, he argues, that cannot be pursued by a burgher who "must cultivate some single gifts in order to be useful" and who "since he is bound to make himself of use in one department . . . so has to relinquish all the others" (II, 12-14).

Although the production of *Hamlet* is a success, Wilhelm is dismayed to find the audience ignorant of the finer merits of the production and Serlo more interested in making the theater a profitable venture than an instrument of national cultivation. Eventually, Wilhelm departs and is subsequently initiated into the secrets of the Tower Society, a utopian community dedicated to the ideals of heuristic education and the development of specific inner capacities which can be exercised through useful activity in the world. It is the philosophy of the Tower Society that since "all men . . . make up mankind, all powers taken together . . . make up the world . . . every
gift is valuable, and ought to be unfolded;" for only through the encouragement of each and every individual skill can society as a whole prosper (II, 322-23). As various mysterious figures he has encountered on his travels reappear, Wilhelm learns that his education has been guided by the society from the beginning, and he is awarded his indentures as a sign that his apprenticeship is at last completed. He is told that he has striven erroneously to release his capacities in the theater for there he "sought for cultivation where it was not to be found" and supposed that he could "form a talent . . . while without the smallest gift for it" (II, 254). However, his errors have been profitable since they resulted from his noble desire to clearly recognize the purpose for which he was born; "in each endowment, and not elsewhere," a member of the society tells him, "lies the force which must complete it" (II, 323). Wilhelm is now urged to transform vague striving into purposeful activity directed toward concrete goals, to find a specific vocation in which alone he can find self-realization. As a final sign that his apprenticeship has ended, Wilhelm learns that he has fathered a son and that henceforth he must dedicate himself to the education of the next generation; "with the feeling of a father, he had acquired all the virtues of a citizen" (II, 265). And by planning a marriage with Natalia, a member of the Tower Community, Wilhelm commits himself to its ideal of self-culture through specialized activity.

While Wilhelm Keister is hardly a realistic portrayal of youth's initiation into adult society, it is possible, I believe, to read the
novel according to the terms established earlier in this chapter, that is, as an affirmation of German society in Goethe's time and, more particularly, of the middle-class culture that was coming to dominate that society. Since the novel does not present Wilhelm's career as a series of choices leading to self-defining commitments within a concretely-described social landscape whose richness of possibilities we can assess, it cannot be said to offer a realistic depiction of Erikson's adolescent moratorium. What the apprenticeship of Wilhelm does stand for is the ideals of the moratorium: cultural diversity which will accommodate the diverse talents of a society's youth, individual freedom to discover these talents through trial and error experimentation, and the inevitable product of these conditions of diversity and free choice, genuine commitment. And by making his hero a representative middle-class youth, Goethe deliberately means to associate these ideals with bourgeois democratic society.

In 1819, Goethe described the theme of Wilhelm Meister as follows: it "arose from an obscure surmise of the great truth that man would often attempt something for which nature had denied him the capacity . . . yet it is possible that all his false steps lead him to something inestimably good."45 This theme is repeated twice in the novel, first during Wilhelm's initiation into the Tower Society when he is Told that "to guard from error is not the instructor's duty," but rather to let the pupil "quaff his error in deep, satiating draughts" (II, 254) and again at the end of the book when one of the characters

45As quoted by Pascal, The German Novel, p. 7.
remarks, "I cannot but laugh to look at thee; to my mind, thou resem-
blest Saul the son of Kish, who went out to seek his father's asses,
and found a kingdom" (II, 389). Wilhelm's apprenticeship, then, is
a series of educative mistakes which lead him at last, by apparently
accidental means, to the truth about himself and the world he lives
in. Wilhelm's first and most persistent error is to confuse inclina-
tion with capacity and the accidental circumstances of life with an
ordering Fate or Destiny. This confusion produces his first false
step, his decision to escape the limitations of middle-class life
through a career in the theater. Vaguely longing for a life-style
based on total self-cultivation, Wilhelm rejects his father's attempts
to impose a narrower destiny upon him in the form of a bourgeois ca-
reer; to justify this rejection, he argues that self-cultivation is a
proper end in itself, one which must be pursued exclusively and which
is therefore incompatible with an enterprise calling for the develop-
ment of specific skills and the execution of limited tasks. This noble
goal, he imagines, can only be realized by one free to devote himself
utterly to it, a nobleman or an artist, but not a burgher. Since the
aristocracy is closed to him by birth, Wilhelm turns to the theater,
and in this turning, he supposes that Fate has destined him for an
artistic career. Actually, as his early history reveals, only by
chance did Wilhelm come to associate the theater with his vague de-
sire for self-realization; the gift of a childhood toy, a set of pup-
pets, and his youthful infatuation for an actress were casual events
which inclined him toward the theater although he insists upon taking
these events as proof of an innate talent.

Wilhelm's adventures during the middle section of the novel represent the second stage of his education by error. The theater is a fitting symbol of Wilhelm's delusions about himself not only because it is an arena of fantasy and illusion, but also because it creates upon the stage a false sense of order which rests in actuality upon the confusion, waste, and disharmony prevailing behind the scenes. Wilhelm's belief in the ennobling power of the theater is belied by the majority of his companions who lack dedication, talent, and taste and are motivated chiefly by vanity, greed, and pleasure-seeking. Similarly, despite Wilhelm's belief in his own talent, he can perform only one role, that of Hamlet, and this merely because of their similarity as youths who have undertaken actions beyond their capacity and who therefore are plunged into a state of confusion, hesitation, and paralysis. Although Wilhelm is gradually brought to re-evaluate the theater as a means of acquiring self-culture, he still clings to the illusion that his life is ordered by some external power which has directed him into this vocation. As long as he persists in this delusion, he disclaims responsibility for his own choices and thus fails to achieve self-realization which can only come through deliberate commitments. Thus, Wilhelm no more fulfills the law of his inner being when he follows destiny into the theater than if he had taken up the career ordained for him by his father; he has only substituted one form of rigid determinism for another. As a result, during his career in the theater, Wilhelm exhibits the symptoms
of identity diffusion; unnatural urgency and an overidentification with rigid roles. It is a capricious, fitful, and hesitant enterprise; it is a drift rather than a deliberately chosen vocation, a drift explained and justified by the hero with his concept of Destiny.

Eventually, Wilhelm must reject this vocation as he did the one offered him by his father and for the same reason; neither can satisfy his need to join society on his own terms. Yet, as Goethe's description of the theme of Wilhelm Meister indicates, the theater is an educative false step, an instructive error. The theater, with its diversity of roles, offers Wilhelm the necessary moratorium, and his devotion to it goes to the heart of his essential educability, what one member of the Tower Society calls his "wondrous, generous seeking" without which we can never "ourselves produce the good which we suppose to find" (II, 299-300). If the theater is not a proper end for Wilhelm, it is a means to that end since it stands for his resistance to having a destiny and an identity imposed upon him from without, his desire, however stumblingly, to discover the world and his place in it for himself. What he comes to understand about the world through his career in the theater is that it is a world of accident, not one ordered by an inexorable destiny; this is an understanding which must precede responsible choosing and hence genuine commitment.

These discoveries are symbolized in the final section of the novel by Wilhelm's initiation into the Tower Society. Here he understands the meaning of what has seemed to him a painful and inconclusive apprenticeship to life. Only by opening himself to the accidents
of experience and to the errors of perception that necessarily accompany them can one arrive at the truth and find in himself the power to create order where there is none. The Tower Society's ideal of education by accident and error represents the only procedure by which a youth can become cultured in the sense of making the most cherished values of his culture truly his own, and, in the process, translating them into higher versions of themselves. Thus, in the Tower Society Wilhelm embraces the life-style he began by rejecting, the bourgeois ideal of useful activity in the world, but because he has rediscovered it by himself, motivated always by his power of idealization, he finds it ennobled and productive of the very qualities of inner harmony and self-culture which he found lacking in his father and Werner.

Only two vocational possibilities exist for Wilhelm in the novel, the commercial and the theatrical careers, and in the end, Wilhelm rejects them both as unsuited to his inner needs and skills. But clearly these are not meant to stand for the actual range of vocations open to him (as are Julien Sorel's choices of the army and the church) but for competing concepts of vocation. The commercial career represented by Werner stands for a conception of work associated by Goethe with both the best and worst features of middle-class culture. On the one hand, it involves the cultivation of specific gifts and their exercise in the practical world for the benefit of society as a whole; on the other hand, it is but a means to "getting and spending," a "ritualistic procedure for establishing the individual as a respect-
ed member of bourgeois society," an instrument for acquiring a low order of external culture measured by solid and negotiable possessions. Wilhelm rejects this concept of vocation partly because he can see only the meaner side of it and partly because he seeks in work an instrument for acquiring an internal culture measured by the harmonious possession of taste, learning, and sensibility. However, not only do his experiences with the nobility and the Serlo theater reveal that such an internal culture does not automatically reside with the aristocrat or the artist, he eventually comes to realize that the pursuit of such a goal is not properly a vocation at all. In fact, the exclusive search for inner harmony leads only to inactivity, an essentially selfish inwardness, and wasteful isolation from the world which needs the skills and energies of each of its inhabitants. The digressive narrative which occupies Book VI of Wilhelm Meister, "The Confessions of a Fair Saint," illustrates the futility of pursuing such an ideal literally.

In the Tower Society, Wilhelm encounters the synthesis of these two vocational concepts, for the members of this community are engaged in practical and limited activities which contribute to the greater social good, and yet each has acquired the internal culture and harmony of soul which Wilhelm has been seeking. Lothario is engaged in the very task which Werner had urged upon Wilhelm, the improvement of estates purchased jointly with Werner's firm. And Natalia, who

46 Hatch, p. 222.
describes her gift as the ability to discern the needs of others and supply them, is in essence describing the vocation of trade praised by Werner at the beginning of the novel: "to calculate . . . what is most required, and yet is wanting, or hard to find; to procure for each easily and soon what he demands" (I, 43). In committing himself to the Tower Society, then, Wilhelm commits himself to an enriched but essentially middle-class conception of work, that each man should be free to discover and then held responsible for exercising his innate talents in useful secular service. And, by his insistence that a vocation should be selected for its intrinsic, not its extrinsic, rewards, Wilhelm ensures that this concept of vocation shall not deteriorate into the narrower ideal of a Werner; thus he demonstrates that self-ennobling tendency of the middle class which Mann spoke of. Instead of becoming an alien artist in a hostile bourgeois society, Wilhelm becomes a purposeful yet representative middle-class youth who has used his "power of idealisation" to create a concept of vocation promising self-culture and social contribution at once. 47

Cultural diversity is symbolized in the novel not only by this broad concept of vocation but also by each of the microcosmic societies Wilhelm enters: the commercial world, the world of the theater, and the Tower Society. Indeed, what these communities share is the principle of diversity; each encourages, because the existence of each depends upon, a multiplicity of mutually supporting personalities, talents, and activities. Nevertheless, as Wilhelm moves from

the bourgeois world of Werner through the theater into the Tower Society, he encounters a succession of ever-higher forms of community life, a succession which stands again for the transforming and regenerative power of his youthful idealism. This movement gradually takes him from a society based on the competition of talents to one which encourages harmonious multiplicity. The first theatrical company Wilhelm is associated with, like the commercial life he left, fosters a competitive individualism; each of the actors feels that his own capacities can be displayed only if the talents of the others are sufficiently hidden, and consequently the prosperity of one member of the group is won always at the expense of another's. The troupe, torn by suspicions and jealousies of one another, is constantly on the point of disintegration. In Serlo's company, however, a greater spirit of cooperation prevails because the actors understand that the harmony of the total production depends upon the interdependence and mutual reinforcement of each other's unique talents and upon the continual restraint of individual egoism. Finally, in the Tower Society, Wilhelm discovers a self-sufficient and cooperative community in which every particular talent is complemented and completed by the gifts of the others. Here Wilhelm is able at last to commit himself to specialized activity because it no longer threatens him with excessive limitation or narrowness; indeed, he comes to understand that only such a community, thriving on the multiple and complementary abilities of its members, can properly achieve the wholeness and many-sidedness which he had generously but mistakenly sought exclusively.
In Wilhelm Keister's Apprenticeship, Goethe meant to affirm the "essence" of his era as the gradual transformation of a rigid class society into a more national and democratic middle-class culture. Wilhelm's initial fear that a bourgeois career would involve the sacrifice of his inner life indicates that Goethe was not unaware of the dangers accompanying this transformation, the meanness and narrowness which might characterize a society too devoted to commercial activity and to acquiring external emblems of success. And Wilhelm's idealistic commitment to the goal of self-cultivation suggests the need to preserve genuine aristocratic values derived from the culture's past. But the novel states clearly enough that self-culture is a good which cannot be associated with any one class or profession. It is only achieved through disciplined activity arising from the inner needs and capacities of the individual; as such, it is not only compatible with middle-class life but is, indeed, more likely to be realized by the middle class with its devotion to work and its democratic distribution of occupations according to merit rather than artificial qualifications. Thus, the entire progress of Wilhelm's career depends upon his middle-class mobility, his freedom to mingle with all classes and to experiment with various occupations and roles. And Wilhelm's admission to the Tower Society symbolizes what the rise of the middle classes promised at best to become: the emergence of a "new" aristocratic culture based not on rank or wealth (hence, the

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mixing of classes through marriage within the Tower Society), but on individual achievements made within the context of a cooperative and communitarian society. The Tower Community represents the utopian fulfillment of the chief social movement of Goethe's time, the establishment of a culture which conserves the best of the old values even while making them more widely available.
IV

The ideal of Bildung described in this chapter has characterized Western civilization since the end of the eighteenth century. This ideal is not only middle-class and democratic in origin but is possibly the highest expression of bourgeois, equalitarian values. It is also, at base, a revolutionary ideal since it assumes that the process and end of growth transcends mere socialization to the prevailing standards of a particular historical period, that only a continually changing community can remain humanly responsive to individual differences and to the diverse needs of successive generations of youth. Indeed, even as middle-class society became increasingly organized and hence repressive, this ideal of growth continued (and continues) to affirm the richness, variety, and productivity of human nature and a diverse, socially-mobile, and egalitarian community life. Of course, Goethe's utopian version of a bourgeois democracy has not yet been realized; as Paul Goodman contends in Growing Up Absurd, the romantic revolution which first invoked the concept of human nature to prove the necessity of fundamental social change has still not been completed: "it is the missed revolutions of modern times - the fallings-short and the compromises - that add up to the conditions that make it hard for the young to grow up ...". Nevertheless, that the ideal has not been discarded and still nourishes our vision of a truly mature culture is witnessed by the work of such contem-

49 Goodman, p. 231.
porary writers as Erikson, Goodman, and Bettelheim, writers who continue to urge us toward the kinds of social models advocated by Rousseau and Goethe two centuries ago.

In the nineteenth century, the question raised by Rousseau and Goethe about the meaning and value of the newly-emerging bourgeois culture preoccupied the major European novelists and found particularly cogent expression in the Bildungsroman where both the hero's mobility and the adult reality he confronts signify middle-class ascendency. However, because the novelists who follow Goethe portray both bourgeois culture and the bourgeois hero in more realistic terms, they can answer this question neither so easily nor so affirmatively as he did. Keenly aware, in a century marked by a rapid succession of political upheavals, of the "missed" and "compromised" revolution of 1789, the French writers particularly were ambivalent about a middle-class culture which seemed to them "suspect, corrupt, and inferior," continuously on the point of betraying its own best tendencies and values. Balzac, we should remember, denounced the century of bourgeois triumph for its uniform "worship of the golden calf," and Stendhal characterized it as "boring" and "hypocritical." At the same time, Balzac, Stendhal, and Flaubert remained committed to certain middle-class ideals, especially those derived from Rousseau. It was, after all, a bourgeois demand that the "natural man" and his "natural" talents be respected apart from considerations of class and

blood; it is this demand that is so forcibly made in the career of a Julian Sorel.

Thus, with its realistic portrayal of nineteenth-century life, when individual mobility was complicated by the chaotic motion of society itself, the Bildungsroman comes into its own as an instrument of social criticism, an instrument derived from and primarily aimed at the increasing power and primacy of middle-class culture. In the novels of Balzac, Stendhal, and Flaubert, the tension between the apprentice-hero’s arrivisme, his need to penetrate adult society and achieve recognition in his time, and his idealism, his historical consciousness that social models of the recent past are often more compatible with his inner needs than the values of his own age, becomes acute. While sharing the ideal of Bildung described in this chapter, these writers do not picture the process of growth as taking place within the ideal social conditions represented by Emile’s negative education, Erikson’s moratorium, or Wilhelm’s Tower Society. Rather, the heroes of these novels begin their education where Emile and Wilhelm leave off, under severe pressure to contract with the harsh actualities of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, with the men and institutions of their era. Like Goodman’s youth, they discover the difficulties of growing up under the conditions created by the uncompleted revolutions of modern times.
CHAPTER II

Balzac's initiates encounter an adult world of stupefying contrasts, contradictions, and confusions; it is the Paris of the ancien régime and of the Revolution, a grotesquely incoherent civilization, at once squalid and splendid, corrupt and heroic, savage and materialistic, privileged and democratic. "The world," the Duchess de Langeais tells Eugène de Rastignac, the youthful hero of Père Goriot (1834), "is a quagmire; let us try to keep on the heights."¹ This statement identifies both the irresistible and the dangerous attraction of Parisian society for the ambitious provincial. It is a world of fantastic heights and appalling depths, but it is also a world undergoing continuous upheaval; to keep one's footing on the heights requires the total concentration and energy of the youthful parvenu. In truth, the higher Eugène climbs into the glittering realms of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the deeper he feels himself sinking into the slime of Parisian corruption. Thus, it is a curiously democratic society, this Paris, for all of its worship of wealth and blood since it is the shared fate of Parisians of every class to sink into the

quagmire. The chaos and decay of Parisian society is evident in the constant shifting of positions, the pervasive confusion of appearance with reality. In the shabby bourgeois boardinghouse of Mme. Vaquer, four distinct levels of society mingle; the aristocratic and criminal worlds of Madame de Restaud and Vautrin, respectively, rub elbows with the financial sphere represented by the Nucingsens and the intellectual world of Latin-Quarter artists and students. Goriot, the victimized father, has himself acquired a fortune by exploiting the starving rabble of Paris during the Terror. Mme. de Restaud is seen visiting the pawnbroker the morning after her triumph at Mme. de Beauséant's ball, proving the truth of Vautrin's observation: "Today, at the top of the ladder, at the house of a duchess . . . tomorrow at the bottom, in a discount broker's office; so it goes with the ladies of Paris" (Goriot, pp. 51-52). The aristocracy lording it in the Faubourg Saint-Germain "has been merchant, usurer, pastry-cook, farmer, and shepherd," and Vautrin, the arch-villain of La Comédie humaine, ends up as a police inspector, the incarnation of law and order. In Lost Illusions (1844), Lucien's initiation into this world is marked by his visit to the Wooden Galleries, the center of fashionable literature; here, in the swarming and gaudy Palais, a precarious "plank-built republic," he discovers Paris epitomized. The Wooden Galleries make

a fantastic sight, a grotesque combination of walls of plaster patchwork which had once been white-washed, of blistered paint, heterogeneous placards, and all the most unaccountable

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2 Honoré de Balzac, Comédie Humaine, trans. Ellen Marriage, XXIV (London, 1897), 345. Subsequent references to this work cited in text.
freaks of Parisian squalor... the treacherous mud-heaps, the window-panes incrusted with deposits of dust and rain, the mean-looking hovels covered with ragged placards, the grimy unfinished walls, the general air of a compromise between a gipsy camp, the booths of a country fair, and the temporary structures which we in Paris build round about public monuments that remain unbuilt; the grotesque aspect of the mart as a whole was in keeping with the seething traffic of various kinds carried on within it; for here in the shameless, unblushing haunt, amid wild mirth and a babel of talk, an immense amount of business was transacted between the Revolution of 1789 and the Revolution of 1830... Public opinion was manufactured, and reputations made and ruined here, just as political and financial jobs were arranged... in the daytime, milliners and booksellers enjoyed a monopoly of the place; towards nightfall it was filled with women of the town. Here dwelt poetry, politics, and prose, new books and classics, the glories of ancient and modern literature side by side with political intrigue and the tricks of the bookseller's trade... the poetry of this terrible mart appeared in all of its splendour at the close of the day... thither came prostitutes from every quarter of Paris to 'do the Palais'... it was an appalling, gay scene.3

The essence of the era as Balzac recreates it is rampant materialism; money is king, and solvency and bankruptcy are the new manifestations of honor and dishonor. It is an age of inflation, a time in which "ambitions outrun abilities, debits overbalance credits, supply exceeds demand;" simultaneously, the age suffers from a deflation in the values of talent, hard work, virtue. Thus, Balzac's Bildungsromane record "the shrivelling of a generation's values from the Titanic to the Lilliputian."4 Vautrin alias Jacques Collins alias the Abbe Carlos Herrera sums up this quality of the times when he tells Lucien

3Honoré de Balzac, Comédie Humaine, trans. Ellen Marriage, XXV (London, 1897), 126-31. Subsequent references to this work cited in text.

that "success is the supreme justification of all actions whatsoever
... you of this generation in France worship the golden calf; what
else is the religion of your Charter that will not recognize a man
politically unless he owns property? What is this but the command,
'Strive to be rich?" (Comédie, XXIV, 345, 347). The most poisonous
result of the new materialism is the conversion of men and women into
economic integers to be manipulated and exploited. In Madame Vaquer's
boardinghouse, a microcosm of Parisian society at large, the inmates
view each other with indifference or mistrust and hatch plots to turn
each other to pecuniary account. Vautrin hopes to convert Eugène's
good looks and youth into a Virginia plantation manner by a "gang of
slaves;" Poiret and Mlle, Michonneau betray Vautrin to the police for
2,000 francs; Eugène is advised to "use" Delphine de Nucingen and to
water the "dry sponge" of Victorine Taillefer's heart for a share of
her inheritance. Not even the bonds of family affection can survive
the strain of commercialism. As Goriot's daughters bleed him to death,
Eugène impoverishes his family in order to support his foray into
Parisian society for wealth, position, and titles. In Lost Illusions,
Old Séchard sells his son to the Cointets; in Père Goriot, M. de
Taillefer disinherits his daughter. At the heart of Paris dwells Papa
Gobseck, the usurer, who profits from the ambitions, passions, and
misfortunes of Parisians of every class and who comes between father
and daughter, husband and wife, mistress and lover to symbolize the
precedence of money in human intercourse. Even the sacred mystery of
death is tainted by the gross materialism of the age; Lucien buries
his mistress Coralie with the money received for composing vulgar drinking songs, and it is to Gobseck that Eugène must apply for the price of Goriot's burial.

As a consequence of the commercialization of society, the crisis of vocation is acute for a young man who wishes to fulfill his possibilities through productive work in the community. The bourgeois ideal of a competition of talents has degenerated into the actuality of an economic jungle where only the most unscrupulous can survive, where dedication to a profession leads the youth, not into the harmony of Goethe's Tower Society, but into deadly enmity with his colleagues. Vautrin, advising Eugène not to pursue a career in the law, describes the urban jungle to his protégé, "Work? Work, in your sense of the word, might bring an old fellow of Poirot's stamp enough to live on at Madame Vaquer's in his old age. A quick means of making a fortune is the problem which fifty thousand young men in your position are trying to solve today . . . so judge of the efforts you will have to make, and the ferocity of the struggle. You must all kill one another like so many spiders in a pot" (Goriot, pp. 123-24). And in Lost Illusions, which surveys the "transformation of literature (and with it of every ideology) into a commodity and thus the complete 'capitalization' of every sphere of intellectual, literary, and artistic activity," Etienne Louiseau describes the same jungle to Lucien when he pictures the world of journalism. "It is a terrible battle; book

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against book, man against man, party against party; make war you must, and that systematically, or you will be abandoned by your own party. And they are mean contests; struggles which leave you disenchanted, and wearied, and depraved, and all in pure waste ... (Comédie, XXV, 107-08). In fact, the entire process of producing and disseminating literature, from the provincial printing establishments of the Cointets and the Séchards to the booksellers, publishers and journalists of Paris, from the manufacture of paper to the writing of poetry, has been reduced to the savage competition for profits. In Paris, Lucien learns that "literature is prostitution," that in "literature you will not make money by hard work, that is not the secret of success; the point is to exploit the work of somebody else" (Comédie, XXV, 113). In the provinces, the bourgeois business class, represented by the shrewd, tenacious, and unscrupulous Cointet brothers, preys upon David's talent and reaps the fruit of his invention. Thus, both Lucien and David, hoping to rise through the exercise of their literary and scientific competencies in the profession of literature, bitterly discover the uselessness of mere talent when unaccompanied by the "dogged greed of which your successful man of business is made" (Comédie, XXIV, 19).

The irony implied by the struggles of Eugène, David, and Lucien is the inevitable decay of the ideals of bourgeois society under the pressure of its triumph in the nineteenth century. While the energies and capabilities of the individual had for a time found an outlet in the commercial culture created by the middle class, a new form
of economic slavery arose to replace the repressions of the old feudal hierarchy. Wealth had created a new privileged class determined to appropriate power and to "undemocratize" society by exploiting rather than rewarding the talents of youth. Thus, the illusions lost in these novels are not only those of their heroes, but the illusions of bourgeois society as a whole; the great ideals of the Revolution and of the Napoleonic era have been shrivelled by the gross materialism of the succeeding era, its subjection to the golden calf, the almighty sou.  

Despite Balzac's savage portrait of Parisian life and his specific indictment of its failure to honor the bourgeois ideal of self-realization through productive work and professional competency, the world he depicts is not without its challenge to the brilliant and ambitious youth. This challenge is articulated by d'Arthez and Vautrin, two of Balzac's most authoritative, if dissimilar, spokesmen, two men who agree, for opposing reasons, that the social jungle provides an exhilarating trial of the individual's strength, will, and purpose. As d'Arthez, the spirit of obedience to private honor, tells Lucien, society should be "stern beyond measure to strong and complete natures" while indulgent to weak ones whose superficial gifts it temporarily appropriates. "Perhaps in this apparently flagrant injustice society acts sublimely, taking a harlequin at his just worth, asking nothing

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of him but amusement, promptly forgetting him; and asking divine
great deeds of those before whom she bends the knee. Everything is
judged by the laws of its being; the diamond must be flawless; the
ephemeral creation of fashion may be flimsy, bizarre, inconsequent"
(Comédie, XXIV, 190-91). Thus, d'Arthoz, Bianchon, and other members
of the cenacle, by foregoing competition for the world's goods, by ac­
cepting the price of poverty and obscurity, demonstrate that the cor­
rup tions of a money-mad society can be avoided through devotion to a
profession. If they must renounce public recognition and reward for
their contributions to the common good, they do exhibit the strengths
of a mature personality as described by Erikson: "the capacity for
renunciation," "the courage to envisage and pursue valued goals unin­
hibited by . . . defeat," "the exercise of dexterity and intelligence
in the completion of tasks," and "concern" for the works and ideas
which have been "generated by love." Equally important, they serve
society by their determination to uphold and preserve, through this
time of crisis, the bourgeois values of modesty, perseverance, thrift,
competence, and professional ethics:

The alternative to such a career of withdrawal and self-sacrific­
ing professional devotion is to be an initiate without a vocation,
driven only by a vague but unquenchable thirst for the power and
pleasures offered by contemporary society, to be "one of those young
men inured to work by poverty, who, in early youth, understood the
hopes centered in them by their parents, and create a distinguished
career for themselves by calculating the aim of their studies and
adapting them beforehand to the future developments of society, from which they mean to be first in exacting tribute" (Goriot, p. 10). The single-minded pursuit of the immediate and tangible rewards of the culture makes demands upon the strength, intelligence, and energy of youth also, demands which are in every way as challenging as the life of obscure and dedicated toil preferred by the members of the cénacle. For Vautrin, the spirit of revolt and the chief advocate for arrivisme as a vocation, such a struggle liberates the individual from outworn codes of morality and ultimately from God, freeing him to test his power of dominance over the circumstances that surround him and to truly create his own destiny. As he tells Eugène, "there is no such thing as principle; emergency is everything; there are no laws, but only circumstances. A clever man unites himself to circumstances . . . in order to direct them . . . I take upon myself to play the part of Providence and I will direct the will of God" (Goriot, pp. 129-30). In assessing Eugène's career, Balzac confirms this view: "In default of a pure and sacred love that fills a man's life, this thirst for power may become a fine thing, if all personal interest be laid aside, and the greatness of a country be proposed as an aim" (Goriot, pp. 255-56). As this Napoleonic allusion suggests, the audacious and self-trusting spirit of the bourgeois emperor, if not the more solid virtues of the bourgeois, is kept alive through the career of arrivisme.

Renunciation and revolt, then, are two "solutions" Balzac offers to the corruptions of a materialistic age; they are also the only two
alternatives open to the apprentice-heroes of his Bildungsräume. While each alternative provides the youth who chooses it with some beneficial opportunities for self-discovery and self-assertion and while each affirms at least some feature of the bourgeois ideal, it is also clear that each course involves tremendous waste and loss. In Lost Illusions, David Séchard is the initiate who chooses the tradition of the cenacle. He makes a positive contribution to the technology of his culture and at the same time realizes the strengths of adulthood through his sublime struggle with the scientific problem he undertakes, the manufacture of a cheap, vegetable paper. Nevertheless, the end of his professional devotion is his tragic isolation from the world of his time; broken by his failure to realize either fame or fortune with his invention, David retires to a "life of leisure" in the country where he takes his place "in the class of dreamers and collectors" and "dabblers in entomology" (Comédie, XXIV, 384-85). In this conclusion, only the waste of David's energies and abilities and the loss to society of his productive talents are emphasized. Along with d'Arthez and Bianchon, Séchard becomes a latter-day Emile, a victim of the failed Revolution. Because of the continuing perversions of society, they must refuse the social contract and renounce public influence and identity in order to preserve their private virtue.

Although Balzac clearly respects those who, like Séchard, Bianchon, and d'Arthez, follow the path of renunciation, for him the real drama of growth is centered in the intersection of life history
with history; it is youths like Eugène de Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré, intent on immersing and discovering themselves within the lifeflow of their times, who primarily command his attention. The vocation of arrivisme, of course, also involves waste, loss, expense of spirit; the initiate soon discovers that for society his value lies, not in the exercise of professional skills, but in his "power of shrewdness and the adroitness with which he made his entrance into the salons of Paris" (Goriot, p. 10). Moreover, it is his capacity for evil rather than for good that is most likely to be liberated by his struggles in the social jungle. Nevertheless, Balzac obviously admires the arriviste's enterprising penetration of the centers of social power and pleasure; the hero's desire to seize whatever historical opportunities for success are available, his determination, not merely to accumulate goods, but to conquer the complex social labyrinth, lead to a valuable test of his character and will. Thus, the arriviste's progress toward adulthood is measured, not by his renunciation of the world to preserve an ideal of self, but rather by his readiness to accept the inevitably compromised self that emerges from contact with the world of actuality, his "willingness," in Erikson's terms, "to face reality without having recourse to self-deception." And failure is marked by blindness, the need to cling to youthful illusions about the world and to a youthful version of oneself, "wasted" waste which results neither in self-knowledge nor in a clear-sighted view of the world's demands.

Toward the end of Père Goriot, Eugène, on the heights of Père-
Lachaise, drops into the grave of Goriot the "last tear of his youth" and turns his gaze upon Paris "lying tortuously along both banks of the Seine where the lights were beginning to twinkle. His eyes fixed themselves almost eagerly upon the space between the Place Vendôme and the Dôme des Invalides, upon the center of the great world he had longed to penetrate. The glance he darted upon this buzzing hive seemed in advance to drink its honey, while he said proudly: 'Now there is war between us.' Then, as a first challenge offered to Society, Rastignac went to dine with Madame de Nucingen" (Goriot, p. 328). Eugène is able to make this challenge because of the knowledge he has gained upon the "battlefields of Parisian civilization," knowledge which has given him the strength to kill his mandarin and cross the Parisian Rubicon, leaving the corpse of his youth on the other side. He has observed obedience in its most degraded and in its noblest forms; he has witnessed the treachery of Poirot, one of the "drudges in our great social mill... a pivot on which public mischance or impurity had turned" (Goriot, p. 13), and he has heard Bianchon conclude "in favor of the Chinaman's life" and declare himself content "with the little round of existence I shall create for myself in the country, where I expect to succeed my father in the dullest way imaginable" (Goriot, p. 158). Eugène has rejected this alternative, for his entrance into the salons of the Faubourg Saint-Germain has acquainted him with the extent of his ambition; no scruples can allay his thirst for wealth and distinction. Observing the fates of Goriot and Mme. de Beauséant, Eugène substitutes war for
love and determines to exploit the emotions of others rather than to leave himself vulnerable to such exploitation. He meets the demands of a materialistic culture by developing self-control and the power of cold calculation, at the same time recognizing that "to turn his love into a money-making machine, a man must have sunk deep in shame, and be willing to renounce the noble ideals that alone absolve the faults of youth ... He had made his bed in the slime of the ditch though ... he had as yet contaminated but his outermost garment" (Goriot, p. 179).

Midway through Fère Goriot, Vautrin tells Eugène: "I have shown you the crossroads of life, young man, you must make your choice. But you have already chosen ..." (Goriot, p. 123). In this last remark lies the meaning of Eugène's initiation, the most profound truth of the novel. Eugène had committed himself to the course of revolt when he first entered Paris and felt the contrast between its dazzling luxury and the "grinding poverty" of his home, a contrast which had "increased tenfold his longing for success" (Goriot, p. 35). Indeed, even before this, in the dreams of his country youth which originally drove him to Paris, he had made his choice. Paris does not corrupt Eugène; it merely draws out the potentiality for evil which exists in any youth of his stirring imagination and immense desire. And thus, the novel records, not the gradual destruction of youthful innocence and virtue, but rather Eugène's dawning realization of what an ambition such as his is capable of, his gradual acquaintance with the dark perfidies of his own soul. He learns, under the temptations of
Parisian life, not only what kind of person he must become to satisfy his ambitions, but what kind of person he is to cling to them so tenaciously. It is the greatness of Paris that it yields this self-knowledge, and by its very distance from the ideal presented in Wilhelm Meister, because of its tolerance for that which is corrupt and sordid, rebellious and deviant, it ensures the Eugènes of the world a way of satisfying their ambitions, of achieving at least a temporary place in the sun. It is the triumph of Paris that Eugène is brought to maturity when he can finally recognize and accept the tarnished image of himself reflected in the mirror of the city and commit himself wholeheartedly to the sacrifice of virtue for the power and pleasure of his times.

Like Rastignac, Lucien de Rubempré is a provincial drawn to Paris by his ambition and by his misplaced confidence in the market value of intelligence, youth, good looks, and a small talent. His initiation, too, is a process of disenchantment, demoralization, illusions perdues, a process which begins with his arrival in Paris and consequent fall into "something like annihilation . . . the sudden and total extinction of his consequence" (Comédie, XXV, 11-12). Like Eugène, Lucien is brought to a crossroads through his acquaintance with the dedicated artist, d'Arthez, and the embittered journalist, Louiseau. These two mentors stand for two distinct paths to fulfillment; the way of d'Arthez is "long, honourable, and sure" while that of Louiseau is "beset with hidden dangers, a perilous path, among muddy channels where conscience is inevitably bespattered" (Comédie,
Nevertheless, "the bent of Lucien's character determined for the shorter way... and to snatch at the quickest and promptest means;" "standing on the brink of the precipice," Lucien "had seen things as they are. He beheld the very heart's core of corruption... and so far from shuddering at the sight, he was intoxicated..." (Comédie, XXV, 190-91). Thus, Lucien also chooses the jungle despite his glimpse of the savage world of journalism, and he too had made this choice long before, back in Angoulême; in the drawing room of Mme. de Bargéton, he had felt "the fury of repulsed ambition," and "like all those whose instincts bring them to a higher social sphere," he had "vowed to make any sacrifice to the end that he might remain on that higher social level" (Comédie, XXIV, 111-12).

In contrast to Basteignac, however, the one and essential sacrifice that Lucien is unable to make is the surrender of his youthful ideal of himself. He can neither renounce amoral ambition and withdraw from the world like his friend Séchard nor, like Eugène, cast off all pretensions to virtue and dedicate himself to the main chance. He wavers between sin and repentance, crime and remorse; he is forever doing evil and forever weeping over his deeds. As d'Arthez protests when Lucien begs forgiveness for attacking his book: "I look upon a periodical repentance as great hypocrisy... a man who repents twice is a horrible sycophant" (Comédie, XXV, 342). In the mirror that Paris holds before him, Lucien refuses to recognize himself and thus remains "a child sacrificing everything to the pursuit of pleasure and the gratification of vanity... a plaything in the
hands of envy, treachery, and greed... the slave of circumstance - meaning well, doing ill" (Comédie, XXV, 352-53). His eyes are opened to the terrible realities of the world during his initiation, but he resists self-knowledge, refusing to recognize the unpleasant realities of his own being. The futility of his bitter apprenticeship is manifested in its circularity, for as Lost Illusions ends, he is again on the road to Paris to make a new, but no more promising, beginning. The lesson of Paris has taught him nothing.

Through the careers of Eugène, Lucien, and David, Balzac indicts a society so corrupt as to make success and virtue incompatible; these youths quickly discover the impossibility of satisfying both the idealistic and ambitious sides of their natures at once. Séchard in Lost Illusions and Eugène in Père Goriot are able to fulfill the dreams of their youth but only at a terrible cost to each; David must renounce the world in the interests of his fundamentally moral nature while Eugène surrenders his virtue to satisfy the law of his ambition, his need to impose himself upon his own time. And Lucien illustrates the total failure of compromise; unable to sacrifice either the world or himself, he wins neither private honor nor public recognition. At the same time, because the culture is tolerant enough to embrace both extremes, to accommodate at once a d'Arthez and a Vautrin and their respective protégés, it manages to keep alive, even as it degrades, the bourgeois ideal of Wilhelm Meister; this ideal is affirmed both in the cénacle's commitment to the solid bourgeois values of professional competence and self-respecting labor and in
the arriviste's spirit of bourgeois audacity and revolt. Moreover, since Ségard, before his retirement from the world, does succeed in permanently imposing his nature upon it through his invention and since Rastignac devises a way of continuing Vautrin's warfare with society while avoiding his extreme of criminality, these youths suggest the possibility for closing the gulf and joining these extremes in the future. In order to see whether this promise is fulfilled, whether the corrupt society which Balzac exposes can transform itself into a culture capable of satisfying both youthful idealism and ambition, we shall have to turn to the Bildungsromane of Stendhal and Flaubert.
At the end of The Red and the Black (1830), Julien Sorel, awaiting execution in the prison of Besançon, assesses his life and the ambition that has ruled it: "I have been ambitious, I am not going to blame myself for that," Julien reasons, for "I acted then in accordance with the demands of the time." With this profoundly ironical remark, Stendhal at once sums up the meaning of Julien's life and death, exonerates his hero, and delivers a crushing indictment of his society. For Julien's triumph has been to refuse to honor the "demands of the time" even while displaying his acute understanding of those demands and the ease with which he could satisfy them. By choosing execution over a bishopric at 3,000 francs a year, Julien manifests not only his contempt for the values of his era but also the truth that he is more genuinely contemporary than the society he rejects. Following a career which, in its every turning, insists upon his "natural" superiority to those who are placed above him by artificial and obsolete conventions, Julien proves himself to be the authentic heir of Rousseau, Voltaire, Danton, and Napoleon, a product of the immediate past. His society, in contrast, is in retreat from time, from the sweep of history; its execution of Julien is but another of its futile attempts to dam up the rush of the future. In consequence, its victory over Julien is Pyrrhic, an ambiguous triumph at

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best, one which merely prolongs a war already lost.

Clearly, Julien makes another in the Party of Revolt; like Vautrin and Rastignac, he adopts the vocation of arrivisme and wages war upon Society, hoping to win its privileges without relinquishing his contempt for it. In tracing his hero's career, Stendhal pursues the question raised at the end of *Père Goriot* but left unanswered; might one successfully enact the double role of arriviste and subversive? However, as the arc of his career demonstrates, Julien faces obstacles unknown to Balzac's apprentice-heroes for the society in which Julien is condemned to live (and die) is far more intransigent than Balzac's Paris. Julien is not offered even the social alternatives which Vautrin and d'Arthez represent; in the historically anachronistic period of the Restoration, the limited options that made Eugene's growth difficult have narrowed into the extreme choices of life and death. To "grow up" means to earn the death penalty, for, as Julien learns, one can transcend imprisoning social identities only by being violently displaced from society itself. In *The Red and the Black*, then, we have apparently moved beyond even Balzac's skepticism to the polar opposite of Goethe's middle-class utopia, to *Bildung in extremis*.

Nevertheless, Stendhal's novel is not without affirmation for Julien does discover in himself a power of resistance that is astonishing considering the pressures for conformity that weigh upon him. To use Erikson's terms, he joins society as a "rebel bent on the destruction of the outlived" and as one determined to bring the "missed"
revolution of 1789 to completion. He exhibits a political consciousness lacking in Eugène and other of Balzac’s parvenus and a strength of patriotism which ensures that his energies will be employed in the "conservation of that which continues to feel true" and in the "revolutionary correction of that which has lost its regenerative significance." Thus, unlike the typical arriviste of Balzac’s Paris, Julien is not motivated by a desire for the more tangible rewards of success, nor does he merely want to advance into a higher and more secure level of society. He scorns the money-grubbing of his father and regards with contempt the peasants in the Besançon monastery who hope, through a career in the church, to make it into the middle class. He turns down Elisa’s proposal of marriage which would make him a prosperous farmer and he rejects Fouque’s offer of a partnership in his lucrative timber business, for Julien is unwilling to sacrifice his exalted conception of himself to "the settled mediocrity of a secure and comfortable existence" (Red and Black, p. 92). Moreover, Julien has no wish to win recognition on a false basis; he sneers at the ignorant bourgeoisie who are impressed with his superficial learning, his ability to recite the New Testament in Latin. He wants only to raise himself on his genuine merits which he believes to be great; he is moved by an insistent sense of duty to himself, a need to win recognition of his "natural" superiority. Born into a subordinate class, Julien feels qualified to play a dominant role; thus, his arrivisme is an attempt to obtain the position for which he feels destined by natural right. It is Julien’s great and formless ambition that separates
him from a Rastignac; early in *The Red and the Black*, in a scene resembling the end of *Père Goriot*, Julien climbs a mountain near Verrières and from the summit observes a sparrow-hawk "silently tracing huge circles in its flight." Watching its "powerful, tranquil movements," Julien identifies with its "energy" and "isolation;" it is an apt symbol, he thinks, for Napoleon's destiny and for the destiny he wishes for himself (*Red and Black*, p. 81). It is in precisely this character, as a circling "bird of prey," that Julien frightens society, for his demands, unlike those of the petty bourgeoisie, unlike even those of Eugène de Rastignac, cannot be easily named; they will not be satisfied in the salons of Paris or bought off by meaningless social honors.

Thus, Julien's career is nothing less than a criticism of the shabby goals of the bourgeoisie in the post-Napoleonic era and an attempt to rescue the revolutionary ideals of Rousseau from degradation at the hands of their earliest beneficiaries. The source of his strength is the immediate past of his culture, the "missed" Revolution. For if his death is the tragic consequence of society's resistance to change, the collapse and betrayal of Revolutionary ideals in an era of reaction, it is also true that Julien's growth is made possible because the transformation of society was attempted. The memory of that attempt provides him with an alternative to a life of stifling conformity; he has the strength to resist the prevailing order because he has inherited the vision of something better. And by his resistance, Julien makes his commitment to the past and future
of his society, keeping alive and transmitting the Revolutionary ideal to future generations of youths like himself.

Julien's particular dilemma as a youth trying to penetrate society without sacrificing his integrity as a "man of spirit" is suggested by the novel's title, Rouge et Noir. These colors stand for the two careers considered by Julien, the army and the church, and for the two historical periods in which each prevailed as a means to advancement, the era of the Revolution and the Empire and the succeeding period of Reaction and Restoration. Julien is haunted by his knowledge that in an earlier age, he would have found a true vocation in the army, a "natural" career satisfying both his ambition for power and precedence and allowing him to climb on his genuine merits of courage, daring, passion, and imagination. It is Julien's misfortune, however, to be born during an era of counter-revolution; the church is not only the sole vocation available to the arriviste, but it honors the same qualities favored by society as a whole, qualities antithetical to Julien's nature and temperament. The church needs the "soul of a lackey," not a "man of spirit;" it demands adroitness of gesture and word, not of deed; it honors hypocrisy and intrigue, not passion and boldness. If Julien would have discovered a genuine career in Napoleon's army, in the church he must practice "cold careerism" and hope to rise only through the suppression of his most cherished ideals, opinions, and sentiments.

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8 Levin, p. 123.
Thus, Julien, like Balzac's initiates, is forced by the era he lives in to suffer an acute conflict between equally crucial internal needs. In order to rise, he must suppress his natural self, become a hypocrite, betray his ideals. But Julien is conscious as Eugene and Lucien are not that external recognition is sought precisely for the superior merits of the inner man; his *arrivisme* is itself idealistic, an expression of his high self-regard. When Father Chélan warns Julien that he will be a "priest without a vocation," that he will have to choose between worldly success and the salvation of his soul, he fails to understand that Julien cares nothing for his status in the next world; but Julien does care deeply that the position achieved in this world be accorded to his authentic self and not to some opportunistically-assumed mask. Just what it means to be a priest without a vocation, to achieve success as a hollow man, is pointedly illustrated by Julien's meeting with the Bishop of Agde in the ancient abbey of Bray-le-Haut. Entering a magnificent chamber, Julien observes at the far end of the great hall a young man in a purple cassock "gravely describing gestures of benediction" and practicing various expressions of severity before a "portable mahogany mirror" (*Red and Black*, p. 121). As Julien watches this ludicrous pantomime, his own reflection appears in the mirror, spurred boots showing beneath the black robes of his cassock; the desperate choice before him, a choice between authenticity and hypocritical careerism, is embodied in this image.
Out of his need to achieve incompatible goals, to arrive in an inferior society in his own superior character, Julien creates for himself a new and genuine vocation. He does this by acting out his "natural" career as a Napoleonic soldier within the framework erected by contemporary manners and conventions. Julien engages in class warfare; his entire career is one long siege upon the fortress of social exclusiveness, and each stage of his advance from the provincial society of Verrières to the Hôtel de la Mole is a carefully-planned strategic battle. Thus, Julien's seduction of Madame de Renal is neither an act of passion nor an act of calculated arrivisme; Julien really has no desire to commit the crime of which he is later accused, to gain influence in the household through the seduction of its mistress. Rather, Julien regards his action as the triumphant conquest of the class enemy, a proof of his superiority over richer and more powerful rivals. This same motive determines Julien's attack upon the chastity of Nathilde, an attack that is executed with military precision and which begins with the ringing cry, "To arms." By adopting the hypocrisy of society without surrendering his contempt for it, by waging war against his era with its own methods of ruse, strategy, calculation, and deceit, Julien discovers the only way possible of penetrating society without becoming its "flunky." For a while, at least, he manages to combine the roles of subversive and arriviste, "deceiving society to undermine it and wooing society to enjoy it," always relying on his store of "insubordinate energy" to make rebel-
lion and success possible at the same time. Eventually, however, out of his profound disgust with the enemy he so easily subdues, Julien must fling away this double role; with his shooting of Madame de Rénal, he brings his insurrection into the open and wages his ultimate campaign with weapons of his own choosing. By this act of courage and self-regard, he confirms his allegiance to the cause of Revolt and demonstrates that his conquest of society has not been made at the expense of compromised ideals.

Julien's climb in the novel takes him through three levels of contemporary society: the bourgeois world of Verrières, the world of the church in the Besançon monastery, and the aristocratic world of the Hôtel de la Mole. This progress also involves a movement from the outlying provinces through the provincial capital to the heart of civilization, Paris, which Julien characterizes to himself as the "centre of hypocrisy and intrigue." Although these worlds are superficially different, as Julien comes to know them, he realizes plus ca change; the incredible monotony and conformity of contemporary life illustrates how little of permanent value the "triumphs" of the Revolution and of Napoleon have established. In truth, the three social levels which Julien traverses can be directly opposed to the progression of societies which Wilhelm Keister encounters in Goethe's novel; this contrast explains the obstacles to Julien's growth. For each sphere is ridden with the disease of ambition; each fosters, and in an increasing degree, a deadly competition for power and position.

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conducted under a surface veneer of decorum and propriety. As a result, the inhabitants of each suffer from the same effects of thwarted growth and unfulfilled adulthood, the pain of inhibition, the stupefying boredom produced by the constant suppression of all genuine feeling, and the continual practice of duplicity, intrigue, and petty cruelty. The chief characteristic which binds these three levels of society together, blind hypocrisy, is manifested in their shared horror of Napoleon; for each has come into prominence because Bonaparte established the power of the bourgeoisie and brought into ascendancy the nobles and clerics who now rule society.

The essence of the era Julien is to join, then, is inauthenticity; adult membership in society presumes, not self-discovery, but self-suppression and self-betrayal, and growing up is not a process of becoming but an escape from the genuine requirements of one's personality. The age is inauthentic because it has failed to carry out the revolution of the previous era, to extend liberty and abolish privilege. It is a period of retrenchment and retrogression, and, as such, it is nothing for it can neither genuinely restore the glories of the past (only its surface manners and conventions) nor bring into being the triumph of the future, the completion of the revolution. Every member of this society is trying to escape the demands of the present and the future through some pallid imitation of the past. The Marquis and his fellow conspirators plot to reestablish the social forms prevailing before the death of Louis XVI; Mathilde wishes to recreate the court of Henri III; the sycophantic clergymen who
attend evenings at the Hôtel de la Mole only look solemn at the men-
tion of the Crusades. In a sense, even Julien is forced into inauth-
enticity with his attempt to reenact the career of Napoleon; for, as
one character observes, it was Julien's hero himself who first betray-
ed the revolution by producing "a new edition of all the senseless
follies of monarchy" (Red and Black, p. 246).

Yet, despite its uniform escapism, Julien discovers in his so-
ciety, or rather, beyond it, in his culture as a whole, a reservoir
of strength from which he draws the energy for his resistance to the
establishment. Although contemporary adult society is indeed a va-
cuum in its denial of history and the revolution, in Napoleon Julien
finds the power to combat this denial and to commit himself positively
to his own and his country's future. In Napoleon, he discovers an
alternative to empty compromise or capitulation, not by imitating
the dead forms, the "costumes and customs" of the Empire, but by de-
riving, from the audacious arrivisme of the bourgeois emperor, the
authority he needs for his instinctive assertion of his individual
worth. In each level of contemporary society, Julien also finds some
adult model of independence and integrity, a natural ally to whom he
can reveal his true character and from whom he receives genuine love
and validation of his superiority and his right to insist upon its
recognition. In Verrières, it is Father Chélan, deprived of his liv-
ing for refusing to play politics over the operation of the workhouse;
in Besançon, it is Father Pirard, forced to resign his rectorate be-

10Levin, p. 128.
cause of his Jansenism; in Paris, it is Count Almira, the revolutionary in exile with a death sentence over his head, the only social honor that is not for sale. With these men, Julien forms a separate and genuine adult community, one that continually asserts the power of the superior individual and the limits of social tyranny.

Depicting a society which fears such men and their "insubordinate energy" too much to allow them to survive, Stendhal makes a sweeping condemnation of post-Revolutionary France. At the same time, by portraying his hero's mature resistance to the inauthenticities of his age, Stendhal affirms both the past and the future of French culture. For, just as Julien's renitence is made possible by the recent revolutionary past, so does his successful penetration of society imply that the thrust of historical evolution cannot be for long held off. Indeed, this society, however deadened by its fear of change, still cannot help responding to the genuine Julien Sorel and rewarding him for his most mutinous qualities; despite Julien's belief that he owes his success to the expert practice of hypocrisy, the key figures in his rise upward are all drawn by the insubordinate inner man who inadvertently reveals himself on one occasion after another. Even the Marquis de la Mole, when he learns that Mathilde is carrying Julien's child, acknowledges that the customary threats and bribes will not work against Sorel, a man of the future. The Marquis sees this future as catastrophic since it spells the end of his privileged life, but he realizes also its inevitability; Julien and his son are signs of the times, an unmistakable indication that "we are marching towards
chaos" (Red and Black, p. 445). Thus, Julien's career is a guarantee of continued cultural energy and provides at least some hope that the promises of the past will eventually be fulfilled.
Frédéric Moreau, the hero of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (1869), is deliberately presented as an ironic contrast to his predecessors, Eugène de Rastignac and Julien Sorel. Like them, he is a provincial seeking his future in Paris, compelled to escape the dull confinement of the provinces and attracted by the "atmosphere of vast possibilities" that Paris offers to youth. In fact, early in the novel, his friend Deslauriers urges him to adopt Rastignac as a model and pursue fortune and power through the seduction of a wealthy Parisian woman. But Frédéric represents a new generation of bourgeois youth, a generation which lacks the ambition, the energy, and the imagination of Rastignac and Sorel. Although Frédéric is drawn by Paris's vast possibilities, although he is driven to hover vicariously near this center of life, he is too comfortable, too exhausted, too sentimental, too disgusted by reality to make a career as a parvenu. Instead, he avoids the struggles of Eugène and Julien to reconcile *arrivisme* with idealism by simply removing himself from the arena of adult experience, by choosing to observe rather than to enter the stream of Parisian life. In this way, he escapes conflict, compromise, and renunciation - and misses life, growth, and self-fulfillment. In Eriksonian terms, Frédéric is a case of arrested adolescence, betraying the symptoms of this condition: paralysis of workmanship, identity diffusion, and apathy. Desperately clinging to adolescent tentativeness beyond its period of necessity, he fails to complete the crucial stage of growth by voluntarily terminating the
moratorium; he is committed only to uncommittedness, to the world of illusion, dream, reverie, possibility, memory - in short, to perpetual adolescence. No authentic person, vocation, or ideology can enlist his fidelity; he is incapable of either joining in the revolt against his era or of identifying with society in any productive or even self-seeking manner. As a result, his apprenticeship is futile and inconclusive; at the end of the novel, a middle-aged bachelor of reduced means, he remembers as the happiest time of his life an abortive expedition to a brothel, a boyhood adventure which, like most of Frédéric's later experiences, was merely contemplated, never executed.

Thus, we see in Frédéric's career the gradual transformation of "what might be" into "what might have been."

One of the most striking features of Sentimental Education is the way in which life-history fails to intersect with history; Flaubert skillfully juxtaposes his narrative of Frédéric's personal career with his account of the tumultuous political upheavals of the 1840's to indicate Frédéric's isolation from his era, his imprisonment behind the barriers of adolescent sentimentality. Living amidst the excitement, violence, and brutality of revolutionary Paris, Frédéric's only connection with the events of his time is to passively observe them. He witnesses the outbreak of the February Revolution and the July Insurrection at the height of its fury, the murder of Dussardier and the bayoneting of the prisoners in the Tuileries, the storming of the Palais-Royal and the sack of the throne room, but always from the distance imposed upon him by his adolescent egoism, his overwhelming
preoccupation with his personal affairs and emotions. He fails to
join his comrades in the student demonstration which marks the be-
ginning of the Revolution because of his rendezvous with Madame
Arnoux. He is at Fontainebleau with Rosanette when the "toll of
drums" sounds the call to arms for the defense of Paris; Frédéric
listens with "disdainful pity, for all that excitement struck him as
trivial in comparison with their love and eternal Nature." When he
joins Arnoux for an evening of duty at a National-Guard post, he
dreams only a wild vision of personal violence, the murder of his ri-
al. On the morning after the fall of Louis-Philippe, he watches the
street fighting "fascinated and enjoying himself tremendously. The
wounded falling to the ground, and the dead lying stretched out, did
not look as if they were really wounded or dead. He felt as if he
were watching a play" (Education, p. 286). Yet, while the ferment of
the decade cannot enlist his allegiance on either side, he is willing
to risk his life fighting a ridiculous duel with M. Cisy over an in-
sult offered to Madame Arnoux.

As the above description suggests, Frédéric is less the descend-
ent of Rastignac and Sorel than of the cenacle members and Sóchari.
He is another latter-day Emile who refuses the social contract out of
disgust with the grossness of his age and who selects instead the
purer course of renunciation. But Flaubert's hero illustrates only
the sterility of idealistic withdrawal; his disgust leads him only to

(Baltimore, 1964), p. 202. Subsequent references to this work cited
in text.
apathy and paralysis, not to the cénacle's determination to preserve values under temporary social neglect. Unlike d'Arthez, Blanchon, and Séchard, Frédéric's isolation from the world in which he lives is a product of emotional self-absorption and a fastidious sensibility; it is unredeemed by their devotion to competence, honesty, and productive work. He is not morally offended by the corrupt politics of Paris but rather aesthetically revolted by the partisans on both sides. His vague sympathy with the revolutionary cause turns to nausea when he mingles with the masses on the boulevards and observes "the vulgarity of their faces, the stupidity of their talk, and the imbecile satisfaction glistening in their sweating brows." Only, "the knowledge that he was worth more than these men lessened the fatigue of looking at them" (Education, p. 75). Similarly, he dreams of making his way into "the exalted world of patrician liaisons and aristocratic intrigues," of seeking power and position within the establishment; these dreams collapse when his affair with the powerful Kme, Dambreuse results only in "the disillusionment of his senses" (Education, pp. 363, 369). Because Frédéric's sensibilities are offended by the social realities of his age, he chooses to protect and preserve his refined sentiments by withdrawing from those realities as far as possible.

Frédéric's chief difference from Séchard, d'Arthez, and Blanchon is his inability to attach himself to society through work. He dreams of various careers in the course of the novel, but these are inevitably abortive dreams bound up with his obsession for Madame Arnoux,
dreams which cannot withstand reality. Although he finds the law
dull and tedious and fails his examinations on the first trial, his
vision of Madame Arnoux witnessing his eloquence before the bar yields
him enough energy to take his degree. But when he must actually prac-
tice the law for a brief period in the provinces, he shows "neither
knowledge nor skill," feeling himself irrevocably cut off from Paris
and Madame Arnoux, he gives up even this incompetent performance to
do "absolutely nothing at all anymore" (Education, pp. 100-01). Walking
home from his first dinner at the Arnoux house, he pauses on the
Pont Neuf and feels

something inexhaustible welling up from the depths of his
being... he was seized by one of those tremors of the
soul in which one seems to be transported into a higher
world. He had been endowed with an extraordinary talent,
the object of which he did not know. He asked himself in
all seriousness whether he was to be a great painter or a
a great poet; and he decided in favour of painting, for
the demands of this profession would bring him closer to
Madame Arnoux. So he had found his vocation! The object
of his existence was now clear, and there could be no doubt
about the future (Education, pp. 60-61).

This moment of decision, however, results only in a few lessons from
Pellerin and some unfinished canvasses. Later, M. Dambreuse offers
Frédéric a position in exchange for his investment in the Dambreuse
coal business. Frédéric hesitates, then lends the money to Arnoux
instead. He entertains a dream of political power, of using his con-
nection with M. Dambreuse to become a deputy, an ambassador, perhaps
a minister of state. But his brief entry into the political world
ends when the Parisian club from which he seeks sponsorship hisses
him from the podium; "he reproached himself with his devotion to the Republic, forgetting that the accusations levelled against him were, after all, perfectly just . . . and soothed his wounded pride with the thought of their stupidity" (Education, p. 307). In the final analysis, idleness is the only condition in which Frédéric feels comfortable, for then he is free to pursue his dreams without being forced to put them to the deflating test of reality.

At the center of Frédéric's life, the ostensible cause of his paralysis, is Madame Arnoux, the deceived and neglected wife of an unsuccessful art dealer. The novel opens with Frédéric's first "vision" of her on a steamer bound for Nogent and traces his obsession, his "sentimental education," from this initial meeting in 1840 to their final encounter, some twenty-seven years later, when she visits his rooms and he rejects her tacit offer of herself. Frédéric characterizes the nature and extent of this obsession himself; assuring Madame Arnoux that he will never marry, he declares: "Do you think that when I've always longed for the ultimate in beauty, tenderness, and charm, and when I've finally found this ideal . . . What is there for me to do in this world? Others may strive after wealth, fame, power. I have no profession; you are my exclusive occupation, my entire fortune, the aim and centre of my life and thoughts" (Education, pp. 268-69). The idealism expressed in this passage is clearly not, like Séchard's, creative and productive; on the contrary, Frédéric's passion for Madame Arnoux is debilitating, narcissistic, and self-protective, designed to shelter him from the
contingencies of adult experience, from work, love, commitment. In pursuing this ideal, he seeks only to extend his youth, to substitute illusion for reality, the world of past and future, memory and dream, for the present world of time. Frédéric's "sentimental education" is, therefore, a history of pleasures untasted, of joys never possessed; the strength of his passion is inversely proportionate to his actual experience of its object. For this reason, when he is at last given the opportunity to possess Madame Arnoux, to encounter her as flesh-and-blood reality, he recoils. Her white hair, the unmistakable reminder that she is a living human being subject to the ravages of time, strikes him "like a blow full in the chest," and with "an undefinable feeling, a repugnance akin to a dread of committing incest . . . and partly out of prudence and partly to avoid degrading his ideal," he turns from her embrace (Education, pp. 414-15). Clearly, Frédéric's emotions are not the expression of a genuine and generous response to an authentic person, but rather a substitute for mature love; his sentiments are incompatible with the reality of Madame Arnoux and, like his brief enthusiasms for work and politics, will collapse under the pressure of discovery and intimate knowledge. His "sentimental education" is, in brief, a contradiction in terms.

While it is tempting to ascribe the failure of Frédéric's education to the irritating sterility of the hero himself, Flaubert did not mean to create Frédéric as a special case. The intention of the novel, in the author's own words, was to trace "the moral history,
or rather the sentimental history of the men of my generation.  

Thus, the paralysis of an entire generation and the hollowness of an "illusion-ridden" age is the central theme of the novel, and Frédéric's failure is repeated in the careers of his contemporaries. Too poor to imitate Frédéric's dreamy and unproductive leisure, Deslauriers is just as insulated from educative experience; his very poverty nourishes his romantic illusion, derived from the novels of Balzac, of rising to power through sexual domination and personal magnetism. His dreams become in reality the petty treacheries and small betrayals which lead to a shabby middle age, and, like Frédéric's, Deslauriers's youth ends in exhausted resignation, in the substitution of nostalgic memories of the past for fantasies of future success. In theory an ardent socialist determined to overthrow the corrupt regime of Louis-Philippe, Senecal becomes in practice a factory manager and policeman, a tyrant who "respected only the masses and was merciless toward individuals" (Education, p. 199).

Kussonnet escapes involvement in the world of his time with a pose of cynical indifference; he greets the revolution with the comment "heroes don't smell very nice" (Education, p. 288) and betrays his ideal of artistic freedom when he becomes the chief censor of the Parisian theaters and press.

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13Levin, p. 225.
In the last analysis, however, the failure of Frédéric's generation belongs to the preceding generation which might have provided youth with some alternative to sterile romanticism but which is equally a victim of self-delusion and moral exhaustion. The growth of Frédéric and his contemporaries is frustrated by an adult world that has lost its faith in the middle-class value of workmanship which d'Arthez and Séchard struggled to uphold in an age of cheap commercialism and in the revolutionary spirit of self-trust which first brought the middle classes to power and which sustained the arrivisme of Eugène and Julien. Vocational paralysis is Frédéric's only inheritance from his bourgeois elders since the ideal of work is first betrayed by the commercial collapse of Dambreuse, the unscrupulous career of Arnoûx, and the artistic corruption of Pellerin. The bankruptcy of Dambreuse reflects the moral bankruptcy of adult middle-class society, its enthusiasm for the "democracy" of Louis-Philippe and its refusal to recognize widespread social injustice and discontent; its members "would have sold France or the whole human race to safeguard their fortune, to spare themselves the slightest feeling of discomfort or embarrassment, or even out of mere servility and instinctive worship of strength" (Education, p. 240). Their insulation from the social realities of the era is expressed in M. Dambreuse's astonished reaction to the fall of Louis-Philippe: "the new state of affairs not only threatened his fortune but, far worse, contradicted his experience. Such a splendid system! Such a wise king! What could have happened?" (Education, p. 295). At the same time, Frédéric's ideolo-
gical apathy is the bequest of the bogus revolutionaries; hopeless romantics whose false ideal of the "sovereign people" is betrayed by the stupid and frenzied mob that smashes up the Tuileries, they are also cynical hypocrites ready to sell out the Republic for personal gain or power.

Sentimental Education, then, marks the death of Balzac's hope that the bourgeois traditions of self-fulfillment through work and self-discovery through arrivisme might somehow be reunited to produce a world in which youthful ambition and idealism could be satisfied simultaneously. In fact, the experience of Frédéric's generation suggests that these traditions no longer survive even separately; neither Frédéric with his revulsion at sordid reality nor Deslauriers with his petty ambition genuinely possess the strengths of their predecessors, Séchard and Eugène. Amid the widespread delusions that rule the times, Dussardier stands alone in the novel as the only youth who carries forward the values of the past and who is therefore genuinely educable, that is, open to experience, knowledge, discovery, willing to test his ideals by actual involvement in the life of his era. His commitment to the revolution is neither theoretical nor sentimental but rather a spontaneous and authentic response to human suffering and social injustice. The proof of his genuineness lies in his willingness to lend his support and even his life to the revolutionary cause despite the betrayals of his own party and despite his growing awareness that the goals for which he is fighting will not be completely realized in the Republic. But Dussardier represents the
doom, not the hope, of his generation; unlike the martyrdom of Julien Sorel, his death is not a gesture of triumph over an outworn society on the point of collapse. Rather, his assassination at the hands of a contemporary and former comrade in arms symbolizes the death of all genuine idealism in an age of sentiment and with it the death of those conditions necessary for genuine growth.
IV.

French civilization, as depicted in the novels of Balzac, Stendhal, and Flaubert, is sophisticated, decadent, opportunistic, dynamic, and complex; as encountered by youth, it is, above all, richly diverse and unmistakably corrupt. Its confusions and contradictions derive from the uncompleted revolution of 1789 and the unresolved conflicts that survived into the nineteenth century. These conflicts are expressed not only in the continuing struggle between entrenched class institutions and the democratic-commercial forces threatening their dissolution, but also in the tendency of the established bourgeoisie to betray its belief in rewarding natural talent and individual achievement with adult status, power, and wealth.

Indeed, the social criticisms in these novels are directed explicitly toward the new bourgeois order; its failure to achieve the utopian community envisioned by Goethe in Wilhelm Meister, its imitation of the feudal structure it replaced, its fear of individual superiority, revolutionary idealism, vocational enterprise, and the spirit of self-trust. This criticism grows increasingly trenchant as the century of bourgeois triumph wears on. For Balzac's initiates, the betrayal of bourgeois ideals means that success and virtue are divided, that youth can impose itself upon the social order only at a tremendous cost; it must either sacrifice the rewards of its time in the hope of contributing permanently to the social good or it must renounce love and idealism in its need to penetrate the strongholds of social
power. Yet Balzac can still affirm that either course, renunciation or arrivisme, is a valuable test of character leading to the self-discoveries and adult commitments that are the fruits of Wilhelm Meister's bourgeois education. The author of Sentimental Education assesses these alternative programs of Bildung with much more pessimism and despair and finds that neither leads to the strength of adulthood; Deslauriers's arrivisme and Frédéric's idealism lead only to perpetual adolescence and the death of the spirit.

At the same time, there is in these novels a current of affirmation which transcends the specific social criticisms they undertake. This affirmation rests upon that very atmosphere of contradiction and confusion which characterizes their portrait of post-Revolutionary, bourgeois France; it rests upon the diversity of competing values and goals which the nation's turbulent social history has produced. For it is this diversity which provides the terms of the hero's struggle, his belief that he should not accede to a life of conformity and that if he withholds his commitment, he will create an adult reality fully equal to his aspirations, his talents, and his energies. Even though it condemns Julien to death and Frédéric to a life of uncommittedness, this spirit of resistance is essential to growth. It guarantees that the moratorium, that crucial period of looking about and holding back, will be operative and that the hero's fate, however bitter, will be self-selected and not an unconscious surrender to prevailing social pressures. It is the gift of a culture whose revolutionary past has provided models of resistance for youth, and it is the gift of a cul-
ture which prizes its maturity, whose monuments of the past testify to its fluidity and capacity for change, to what Flaubert calls "the transience of dynasties" and "the inevitable impermanence of all things" (Education, p. 320).

To pass from the rich and bewildering civilization encountered in the pages of the French novelists to the world of Dickens's apprentice-heroes is to be struck, initially, with the severe limitations of Dickens's vision. Confining his odysseys of youth to institutional and domestic middle-class London, Dickens appears largely indifferent to the ideological, political, technological, and commercial features of his society as well as to the process of historical evolution that had produced contemporary urban England. In contrast to the French writers, he is not "philosophically" interested in society as a whole, in the interrelatedness of its institutions, in the spirit of the age. As George Orwell first noted: "In the last analysis, there is nothing he admires except common decency. Science is uninteresting and machinery is cruel and ugly . . . Business is only for ruffians like Bounderby. As for politics - leave that to the Tite Barnacles."14 Dickens's failure to conduct the kind of detached and sweeping analysis of society and politics that characterizes French novels like Lost Illusions and Sentimental Education might be partially attributed to the less violent nature of nineteenth-century England and to the more gradual establishment and more settled character of the English

bourgeoisie. But it also results from Dickens's close identification with the values of his class and time; mentally, as Orwell observed, he belonged to the "small urban bourgeoisie," and his sympathies were "bounded by Mr. Pickwick on the upper side and Mr. Barkis on the lower." His middle-class distrust of the "land-owning - military - bureaucratic class" and his "shabby genteel prejudices" against the lower orders of society prevented him from identifying with the dissatisfactions and aspirations of both upper and lower class youth; this is evident in his treatment of such figures as Steerforth and Bentley Drummle, Uriah Heep and Bradley Headstone. Moreover, Dickens had no "ideal of work," to use Orwell's phrase, except for a vague commitment to self-respecting labor and the virtues of the self-made man; and if he could not imagine the vocational crisis of a David Sechard, neither could he sympathize with the unlimited appetites of the arriviste or with the strong sense of natural superiority that motivates Eugène de Rastignac or Julien Sorel. Because of his own traumatic experiences as a youth in the blacking warehouse and what he apparently felt to be his own precarious position in the middle class, he sees youthful aspirations mainly in the negative terms of avoiding deprivation, insolvency, and the disgrace of falling out of bourgeois society. Dickens's insecurity makes it impossible for him to applaud the spirit of resistance so crucial to the careers of the French apprentice-heroes or to envision how youth might join society as rebel or innovator; the most fulfilling adulthood he can imagine for David Copperfield or for Pip is comfortable middle-class security achieved without surrend-
ering one's basic decency and common humanity.\textsuperscript{15}

The source of Dickens's limitations, however, is also the source of his strength. To be sure, the adult society which Dickens's apprentice-heroes long to enter excludes those brilliant centers of power and pleasure which attract the French arrivistes as well as the more socially deviant worlds of intellectual bohemianism and radical politics; it is almost exclusively represented by members of the settled and comfortable middle class. His limited area of concern, however, does not prevent Dickens from portraying an adult world that is as corrupt, as brutal, as hypocritical, and yet as attractive, as civilized, as diverse as the society encountered by Sorel, Rastignac, and Moreau. To Dickens, the small urban bourgeoisie forms the vital center of English life and power; it is the source of the nation's most cherished values as well as of its most vicious evils. It is the English middle class which best expresses the English code of decency, common kindness, and tolerance of individual differences, a code which, in its commitment to genuine civilization and cultural unity, was central to the progressive evolution of British society. This code is displayed, for instance, in Aunt Betsey's protection of the lunatic Mr. Dick, in Jagger's defense of the criminal population of London, and in the principles of Mr. Strong's school. In the small and modest households of the Traddleses, the Peggottys, and the Wemmicks originate those personal virtues of sobriety and workmanship, self-

\textsuperscript{15}Orwell, pp. 79-96.
respect and independence which Dickens so much admires and on which, he suggests, the general prosperity of the nation rests. In these households, the past is affirmed; the faith in individual merit and potentiality, which had led to the steady extension of freedom, equality, and opportunity downward through society, is justified. And in the atmosphere of domestic tranquility and love prevailing here, the nation's children are nurtured and its future health is assured.

Yet, it is this same middle-class world which so many of Dickens's children experience as vicious, uncomprehending, and indifferent. Parental neglect, cruelty, and repression characterize the bourgeois households of Murdstone, Dombey, Mrs. Jellyby, and Mrs. Pocket, and this personal failure is repeated on a massive scale in the inefficient and self-aggrandizing institutions managed by the middle classes. It is through these institutions, established to minister to the needs of society as a whole, that Dickens makes his most serious indictment of the self-important and indifferent bourgeoisie. Having won for itself the power of self-government, the middle class, in its public charge of institutional society, has demonstrated its incapacity to govern well; having won the freedom to pursue success on the basis of personal merit and innate talent, it has turned its back on those who still lack these rights and has refused to extend to them the social revolution begun in 1688. The virtues the middle class prides itself on, individual effort and the development of natural abilities, it refuses to recognize in the less fortunate members of society. Indeed, the institutions operated by the Creakles, the Bounderby's, and the
Bumbles are calculated to stifle or pervert those very qualities of independence, self-respect, and self-improvement which they claim to promote. "What a launch in life I think it now," remarks David Copperfield about his education in Greakle's school, "to be so mean and servile to a man of such parts and pretensions," and it is in a foundation school for boys that Uriah Heep learns "the destable cant of false humility" as well as how to successfully exploit it. Above all, it is middle-class complacency that Dickens ruthlessly exposes, the smugness of a Mr. Spenlow who excuses the corrupt Doctor's Commons on the grounds that it is "the principle of a gentleman to take things as he found them" (Copperfield, p. 480) and the blindness of the judge who lightens Compeyson's sentence because the latter possesses education, character witnesses, correct grammar, and a black suit with a white handkerchief. The chief victims of the indifference, hypocrisy, and complacency of adult society are, of course, the children who, even if they avoid becoming a Magwitch or a Heep, even if, like Pip and David, they make it into a secure and decent adulthood, seem to find adult happiness muted by a sense of irrevocable loss and incompleteness.

It is clear, then, that Dickens has this in common with his French contemporaries; both his criticisms of society as an arena of growth and his ideal of Bildung are derived from his own middle-class back-

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ground and identification with bourgeois values. He differs radically from writers like Balzac and Stendhal, however, in what he admires most in the bourgeois tradition. While the French authors celebrate the spirit of resistance associated with the heroes of the revolution and Napoleon, Dickens is committed to the safer and more solid bourgeois traits, believing that Mill's "culture of the feelings" will best be nourished in a bourgeois atmosphere of modest independence and domestic security. As has often been noted, Dickens was distrustful of wholesale institutional reform and of the gains to be won through revolution and resistance. He put his faith solely in the reform of individuals who, if they could be made into more sensitive, tolerant, and feeling human beings, would automatically reduce, if not eliminate, the brutalities of society. "In every attack Dickens makes upon society," Orwell wrote, "he is always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure." 18 This distrust explains to some degree the limitations of Dickens mentioned earlier, his inability, for instance, to imagine his youthful heroes relating to society on the basis of genuine professional dedication or ideological commitment; the primary mark of successful growth is not the hero's discovery of a vocation or his growing awareness of social evils that call for his reforming energies, but the establishment of his own modest household where love and kindness prevail and where the nurture of the next generation is undertaken in an environment free from deprivation.

18 Orwell, p. 71.
Because of his special emphasis on the "culture of the feelings" as the prime value in individuals and in society as a whole, Dickens dramatizes initiation in terms of the hero's encounter with individuals who stand for personal values and domestic life-styles which either do or do not range them on the side of feeling rather than for significant political attitudes or meaningful occupations. The hero's main task, then, is to select the adult models worthy of his allegiance and to avoid entanglements with those who would mislead him into false values and a spurious way of life. It must be admitted that the deficiencies in this portrait of Bildung sometimes counteract the author's claim for the adulthood achieved by his initiate. In a novel like David Copperfield, the vocational and ideological complacency of the hero who is untouched by his harrowing experience of the adult world seems to mirror that very indifference of Victorian society which Dickens is laboring to expose; and David's final appreciation of the relative merits of Agnes and Steerforth cannot convince us that he has escaped unconscious surrender to the worst traits of his culture. However, in the best of Dickens, in a novel like Great Expectations, the task of selecting the proper adult models is made complicated and costly enough to adequately represent the kinds of growth crises that Erikson identifies; consequently, Pip's final assessment of the adults who have most influenced his life, of Joe, Magwitch, and Miss Havisham, is a convincing indication of his painfully-reached and precarious maturity. Dickens successfully suggests the complex diversity of the adult world and the difficulty of the child's selection of
models with his use of eccentricity and grotesqueness to disguise the true nature of the adult and the degree of his commitment to the "culture of the feelings." In the case of Betsey Trotwood, Jaggers, and Wemmick, humanitarian impulses are masked by external demonstrations of gruffness or indifference; on the other hand, the humility of Heep, the generous frankness of Steerforth, and the benevolence of Mr. Spenlow hide depths of selfish egoism. The eccentricity of Dickens's adult world is, first of all, as Philip Collins suggests, a tribute to the irrationality and uniqueness of man which it is a mark of adulthood to honor. But it is also a warning to youth of the distortions of personality suffered by individuals who have made the wrong choices or had the wrong choices forced upon them in an unfeeling society. The child, who alone in Dickens's novels is free from these personal distortions, stands at the center of Dickens's fiction because he is the purest repository of spontaneity and the wisdom of the heart and in him lies the potential for a more sensitive and humanitarian civilization. Growth, then, becomes the process by which, under the guardianship of loving, if injured, adults like Betsey Trotwood and Joe Gargery, feeling is kept alive and matured into the "disciplined heart" or love free from the "alloy of self;" its failure is the counterprocess by which, under the impact of a heartless adult society, feeling dies into indifference or is hardened into the vengefulness of a Uriah Heep or an Estella. The child who becomes the victim of an unfeeling society is Dickens's most severe

19Collins, p. 200.
indictment of Victorian England, even as the child who strengthens his
innate sensitivity promises the redemption of this society by affirm-
ing that love is still alive in it.

The discipline of the heart or the transformation of the adoles-
cent's self-centered emotionalism into mature love free from all
"alloy of self" is the central moral theme of David Copperfield
(1850). This theme is most explicitly stated by Annie Strong when she
thanks her husband for saving her from "the first mistaken impulse
of an undisciplined heart," her childish affection for Jack Maldon.
"There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and
purpose," she explains; "My love was founded on a rock, and it endures"
(Copperfield, pp. 600-63). Annie's experience is generalized in the
novel by a number of characters who either suffer and cause suffering
because they give into the luxury of impulsive emotions - Emily,
Martha, Mr. Wickfield, and Betsey Trotwood - or who serve to guide and
to heal the wounds of others because of their capacity for a self-
denying love - Agnes, Traddles, the Strongs, and the Peggottys. David
errors on the side of impulsive feeling in his generous but mistaken de-
votion to Steerforth, who is unworthy of his love, and to Dora, who is
incapable of returning it in kind. Warned by Agnes of Steerforth's
real nature and by Aunt Betsey of Dora's inability to give him the
"deep, downright, faithful earnestness" he requires (Copperfield, p.
504), David comes to recognize his misguided choices only after
Steerforth has seduced Emily and only after his marriage has failed
"to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me . . ."
David's discipline of the heart comes finally when he learns to accept the consequences of his own free choice; he gives up his attempt to instill in Dora qualities which she has always lacked, and later, after Dora's death has left him free to love Agnes, he vows "to keep away from myself, with shame, the thought of turning to the dear girl in the withering of my hopes, from whom I had frivolously turned when they were bright and fresh . . ."

On the whole, David Copperfield is not really a convincing novel of growing up. Among its most serious defects is the hero's invulnerability to painful experiences, to the limitations imposed upon him by environmental circumstances, and to the weaknesses of his own character. While the other youths in the novel, Steerforth, Emily, Martha, Traddles, and Uriah Heep, are "permanently committed to their early choices or accidents" and "suffer irrevocable consequences from them,"20 David is predestined by his author for success even if his triumphs run counter to the logic of his unfolding career. It is unconvincing that David's emotionally deprived childhood and degrading service in the Murdstone and Grinby warehouse lead to no permanent distortions of his personality while Uriah Heep's grotesque humility is the direct consequence of his forced subservience in a foundation school for boys. Nor does David's snobbish attitude toward his companions in the warehouse and to the aspirations of Uriah, which are

really not so different from his own, expose him to the commission of moral evils as does Steerforth's insensitivity to the feelings of the lower classes. Similarly, the reader is asked to applaud the triumph of David's rags-to-riches career even while the emptiness of his goal is being revealed through Dickens's scathing portrait of gentility and gentlemen. It is difficult to believe in the horror of permanent companionship with Mealy Potatoes and his ilk when we observe that David's rise brings him into a class represented by the cadging Micawber, the perverse Murdstone, the sadistic Creakle, the ineffectual Wickfield, and the reactionary Spenlow. We are assured that David's triumph is due to the strength of his own character, to the "painful discipline" of his early years and to the "patient and continuous energy which . . . began to be matured within me." But how are we to understand, then, his placid acceptance of a career in Doctor's Commons when he admits that a proctor is a "functionary whose existence, in the natural course of things, would have terminated about two hundred years ago" (Copperfield, pp. 606, 343). Moreover, while David's chief flaw in the novel, his emotional immaturity, his tendency to act on the impulses of an "undisciplined heart," is allegedly overcome, his worst fault, his snobbery and class consciousness, he never faces up to and, in fact, continues to display at the very end of the novel, notoriously in his visit to Creakle's prison where Uriah Heep and Littimer are incarcerated. As one critic notes, it is difficult to believe in the emotional maturity of an adult who still retains his childish anger at not seeing the wicked persons
who mistreated him punished severely enough. Thus, although the theme of the undisciplined heart does serve to integrate the various narrative strands of the novel, David's safe invulnerability from any irrevocable loss or pain, especially considering the excessive punishment suffered by the two "fallen" women, Emily and Martha, for their impulsive behavior, subverts the novel's central meaning.

Yet, despite Dickens's unconvincing treatment of his central theme, it remains a richly suggestive one, especially in the light of his belief in the personal basis of social reform and in the development of a more sensitive and feeling society through the preservation in the adult of the child's openness, generosity, and capacity for love. David Copperfield's power lies in its evocation of an indifferent and irresponsible adult world expressed largely through the failure of parents and parental substitutes to nourish their children's emotional life; the insensitivity of society is perpetuated by such guardians of youth as Mr. Spenlow, Mrs. Steerforth, the Murdstones, Mrs. Copperfield, Mr. Wickfield, Traddles's uncle, the Reverend Horace Crowler, and various educational institutions, all of which are presented as obstacles rather than as aids to the moral development and emotional fulfillment of the children whose well-being is in their charge. Nearly all of the youths are deprived and many are permanently distorted by this abdication of responsibility by adult society. In some cases, the product of adult failure is the child's loss of

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all capacity to love; Steerforth attributes his destructive pursuit of sensation to missing "the art of binding myself" while Uriah Heep's vindictiveness is explained by the "charitable" institutions in which he spent his youth. "They taught us all a deal of umbleness - not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be humble to this person and humble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make our bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters!" (Copperfield, pp. 574-75). In David's case, however, early deprivation leads, not to the loss or hardening of feeling, but to the errors of the undisciplined heart. After suffering the injustice and neglect of the Murdstone regime, David naturally, if unwisely, responds with undemanding love to Steerforth's protection; when Steerforth protests the placard with which the adult world has labeled David's "natural depravity," David feels "bound to him ever afterwards." And Dora's resemblance to Mrs. Copperfield suggests that David seeks in marriage the mother's affection which was denied him in his childhood. Thus, while Dickens cannot bear to allow his hero, and alter-ego, to suffer permanent damage from his early wounds, his portrait of David is, nevertheless, psychologically profound. The hero's immaturity and impulsive need to make up for a persistent sense of "loss or want of something" directly results from the early withdrawal of adult guidance and love. And when Dickens rewrites the story of David Copperfield eleven years later, he commits himself to tracing fully the moral and emotional consequences of such adult neglect.
When Edgar Johnson calls Great Expectations (1861) "Dickens's penance for his subservience to false values,"²² he echoes George Bernard Shaw's observation that "the reappearance of Mr. D. in the character of a blacksmith's boy may be regarded as an apology to Mealy-Potatoes."²³ The great expectations of Pip which come at last to nothing make a powerful criticism of David Copperfield's rags-to-riches career. Great Expectations records Pip's error in supposing that happiness and security can be purchased with money and class position, but it more seriously indicts an adult society which fosters and encourages Pip's hollow dream. If Dickens was himself guilty, in the earlier Bildungsroman, of confusing adulthood with the life of a gentleman, by the time of Great Expectations he was prepared to expose "the leisure class ideal that lurks at the heart of a pecuniary society"²⁴ and the spurious equation of "gentility" with manhood. The emptiness of this ideal is demonstrated in its heartbreaking effect upon the youth who inherits it; for Pip experiences growing up as a steady loss of the civilizing virtues and personal strengths which should, according to Erikson's schedule, emerge from the crises of growth. While Pip's struggle to find a place in the adult world produces only the weaknesses of immaturity - mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, identity-confusion, and despair - it is


²⁴Johnson, II, 989-90.
Joe alone, excluded from the state of gentility by his speech, manner, and occupation and therefore indifferent to its false values and empty ideals, who represents genuine adulthood; in Erikson's terms, he possesses the strengths of hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and committedness that characterize the truly mature personality.

Like David, Pip is the victim of a deprived childhood and an unfeeling and morally confused adult society, but, unlike David, he is made to suffer the consequences of this fact. As a blacksmith's boy, Pip is regarded by the adults of his small world, Mrs. Joe, Wopsle, Pumblechook, and Hubble, as a "naturally vicious" boy whose only expectations are to "come to no good." Pip's childhood adventure with the escaped convict only confirms for him the adult world's bleak predictions for his future; describing Christmas dinner with Mrs. Joe and company, Pip observes: "Among this good company, I should have felt myself, even if I hadn't robbed the pantry, in a false position... They seemed to think the opportunity lost, if they failed to point the conversation at me, every now and then, and stick the point into me. I might have been an unfortunate little bull in a Spanish arena, I got so smartingly touched up by these moral goads."25

It is true that Joe represents a different adult attitude for Pip; he is loving and approving, accepting of his status as a child and a

blacksmith's boy, and thus potentially able to encourage in Pip self-acceptance and realistic aspirations. But because of his simple goodness in a corrupt world, Joe is regarded by adults as but "a larger species of child" himself and hence is treated with the same injustice and contempt that fall upon Pip. Thus, for Pip, he lacks the authority to counterbalance the accumulated disapproval of the others. Moreover, because Joe is the sole source of love in Pip's world, Pip is made morally timid in his relationship with Joe, afraid of disclosing any facts about himself that may lessen Joe's affection and esteem. Pip is led to his first self-betrayal and to the first stage of his estrangement from the only genuine model of manhood that exists in the novel, when he conceals from Joe the truth about the missing file out of his socially-induced fear that Joe, like all the other adults, "would think me worse than I was" (Expectations, p. 37).

It is because Pip begins his journey to adulthood in the false position of a naturally depraved child that he is so vulnerable to the dream of becoming a "gentleman;" because his original expectations, as represented to him by the adult world, are of the lowest sort, he is easily corrupted by the equally unfounded but more attractive "great" expectations that Miss Havisham offers him. Ironically, the advent of great expectations into Pip's life only further reduces his already abysmally low self-esteem and increases his desperate need to escape his original identity and destiny. After his first visit to Satis House, he leaves Miss Havisham and Estella "deeply revolving that I was a common labouring boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots
were thick; that I had fallen into the despicable habit of calling
knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered my-
self last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way"
(Expectations, p. 60). Even after his great expectations are seem-
ingly brought to an end with Miss Havisham's dismissal of his services,
Pip discovers that they have irrevocably blighted his earlier, more
modest hopes for the future.

I was truly wretched, and had a strong conviction on me that
I should never like Joe's trade. I had liked it once, but
once was not now . . . I had believed in the forge as the
glowing road to manhood and independence. Within a single
year all this was changed. Now, it was all coarse and com-
mon . . . having states and seasons when I was clear that
Biddy was immeasurably better than Estella, and that the plain
honest working life to which I was born had nothing in it to
be ashamed of, but offered me sufficient means to self- res-
pect and happiness . . . all in a moment some confusing re-
membrane of the Havisham days would fall upon me, like a
destructive missile, and scatter my wits again . . . they
would be dispersed in all directions by one stray thought,
that perhaps after all Miss Havisham was going to make my
fortune when my time was cut. (Expectations, pp. 99-100, 125).

In London, Pip's confusion increases as the realization of his
expectations draws nearer. He finds neither happiness nor self-ful-
fillment in his life as a leisure-class gentleman; indeed, the false-
ess of his new position is brought home to him by his increased feel-
ings of degradation, insecurity, and guilt. With Estella, he feels
more the coarse and common blacksmith's boy tainted by criminality
than ever; without her, he knows not what he is. "What shall I say
I am?" he asks Herbert; "I cannot tell you how dependent and uncertain
I feel, and how exposed to hundreds of chances . . . on the constancy
of one person . . . all my expectations depend" (Expectations, pp. 234-35). Pip is mature enough to recognize the hollowness of his life, but the whole weight and authority of adult society, from the servile Pumblechook to the judge who gives Compeyson a lighter sentence than Magwitch because of the former's genteel appearance and manner, conspire to subvert Pip's better instincts and to sap his will to recover himself and discover his manhood in the society of Joe. When he takes Estella to Richmond, he imagines "how happy I should be if I lived there with her," yet he knows "that I never was happy with her, but always miserable" (Expectations, p. 256). With his genteel companions, the Finches of the Grove, "there was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did" (Expectations, p. 260). A gentleman, Pip discovers through his acquaintance with Bentley Drummle, is "idle, proud, niggardly, reserved, and suspicious," a brute who "came of rich people down in Somersetshire, who had nursed this combination of qualities until they made the discovery that it was just of age and a blockhead" (Expectations, p. 192). Yet when Magwitch returns to destroy Pip's illusions about the source of his good fortune and with them his expectations as well, Pip feels as if he were receiving news of his own death. "All the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew . . . When I awoke without having parted in my sleep with the perception of my wretchedness, the clocks of the
Eastward churches were striking five, the candles were wasted out, the fire was dead, and the wind and rain intensified the thick, black darkness" (Expectations, pp. 303-308).

Pip not only survives the death of his expectations, however, but lives to recover himself, or rather to recover the opportunity, lost in his first visit to Satis House, to discover in himself the strengths of adulthood. Despite his loathing of Magwitch, despite his heart-breaking knowledge that "for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of these rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door ... I had deserted Joe" (Expectations, pp. 307-308), Pip now determinedly assumes responsibility for the convict's life which he had saved long ago as an uncomprehending child; he thus commits himself to the preservation of that which he has generated and to the consequences of his own best impulses. In this action, he unconsciously imitates Joe's continuing love for the orphan whose nurture he had undertaken despite its return in ingratitude. And in this commitment, Pip unexpectedly breaks through the moral confusions which he inherited from the adult world and which are the source of his own self-estrangement and alienation; the false distinctions between criminal and gentleman, poor and rich, child and adult, with which his society has labelled and divided mankind, disappear as Pip sees "in the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his ... a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously towards me with a great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in
him a much better man than I had been to Joe" (Expectations, p. 423).

Pip is, of course, not the only victim of great but fruitless expectations in the novel. Nearly all of adult society lives on hopes which come to nought. Miss Havisham and Magwitch, who expect love and gratitude in return for their benefactions to Estella and Pip, reap instead the indifference and loathing of their "children;" Herbert's expectations of becoming a great man of commerce are exceeded by those of his mother who was raised to marry a title and cannot accept her actual status as the wife of an impoverished tutor. Pip's entrance into Satis House, a world of blighted promise, symbolizes his initiation into a society which is self-deceived and bloated with inflated hopes. It is the sickness of this society which explains the pathology of Pip's youth; his paralysis of workmanship, his improbable identifications with the social extremes of criminality and leisure-class gentility, and his steady drift toward isolation are but individual manifestations of the general social disease. Like those around him, Pip must live (and starve) on the scant nourishment provided by his future expectations because he has denied the past and is apathetically unable to change the tortured condition of his present. Ironically, it is the outcast Magwitch who, with the death sentence hanging over him, demonstrates a healthy and mature acceptance of the unknown conditions under which the tenure of one's life is held. When Pip falsely reassures him of the success of their escape, Magwitch gently replies: "We can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours..."
than we can see to the bottom of this river what I catches hold of. Nor yet we can't no more hold their tide than I can hold this" (Expectations, p. 415).

That Magwitch turns out to be the source of Pip's expectations suggests how fundamental corruption and crime are to social wealth and thus emphasizes the main theme of the novel, complicity. The proximity of Newgate to the halls of justice, the indiscriminate mingling in "Little Britain" of those who mete out justice with those who receive it points to the universality of crime which binds society together just as Magwitch and Miss Havisham, Mrs. Joe and Mrs. Pocket, from their disparate levels of society, are bound together by their crimes against the young. The source of Jaggers's power is his knowledge of the criminal potential of every human heart, his "manner expressive of knowing something secret about every one of us that would effectively do for each individual if he chose to disclose it" (Expectations, p. 128). But the central evil of this society is not its capacity for sin which is, as Pip's ingratitude shows, the condition of every human life; its great moral wrong is its effort to escape this bondage of corruption by heaping all crimes upon a few unfortunate offenders, by isolating itself from these offenders with its prisons, its gallows, its hulks, and its halls of "justice," and then by masking its corruption with money, false gentility, and divisive social classes. This tendency is illustrated in Jaggers's habit of washing his hands with scented soap as if to wash off the dirty business he earns his solid security by; it is illustrated by Wemmick's
schizophrenic attempt to isolate the hardened lawyer's clerk from the loving son of the aged P. at Walworth. It is seen in the outrage of the respectable gentleman who objects to riding in a coach with "such villainous company" as two "poisonous and pernicious and infamous and shameful" convicts (Expected, p. 215); it is seen in the festive air that for once brightens Mrs. Joe's kitchen as the gathered company waits in "lively anticipation" for the taking of the escaped convicts. It is manifest in Pip's whole career of snobbism which is but his vain effort to escape the "taint of criminality" which has seemed to hang about him all his days. It is above all summed up in the "justice" of a society which first turns Kagwitch into a criminal with its neglect and then condemns him as "one who had almost from his infancy been an offender against the laws" (Expected, p. 433), as if were none of its responsibility. To grow up in such a society, as Pip's career demonstrates, is to become less and less committed and more and more isolated, since to deny one's connection with one's fellow man is the primary requirement for membership.

Yet, despite the conspiracy of society to deny its common bondage in crime, Pip does grow into manhood by recognizing at last his connection with the lowest member of society and therefore with the entire human community. In his awakened love for Kagwitch, he accepts that dark side of himself which his rising career has attempted to deny; he is able to join society when there is no longer any part of it or of himself he needs to divorce himself from. Above all, he acquires the adult virtue of renunciation, what Erikson calls the
ability to transform "disappointed hopes" into "better prospects"
which promise to be fulfilled. With the collapse of his great but
selfish expectations, Pip faces a future that is painfully blank,
but he faces it with a newly-acquired strength, the determination to
alleviate for others the suffering which has permanently distorted
his own life. In a very profound sense, life history intersects with
history when Pip can understand that the shape of a human life, its
disappointments and its joys, is the joint creation of the individual
who lives it and all the others who touch it, the society at large
which, imperceptibly and in a thousand ways, contributes to its
unique pattern. With such an understanding comes the wisdom of for-
giveness, the knowledge that blame can never be justly assigned and
that only when individuals accept their responsibility for their own
destinies will society as a whole recognize its contribution to hu-
man suffering and crime. When Pip forgives Miss Havisham, he does
not excuse her guilt in contributing to his pain; he only renounces
all desire to judge and punish her. His justice is the strength of
his manhood; it is the justice of Joe, who accepts Pip's ingratitude
as a consequence of what it means to love, and the justice of Magwitch,
who, on his deathbed, seemed to ponder "over the question whether he
might have been a better man under better circumstances. But he nev-
er justified himself by a hint tending that way, or tried to bend the
past out of its eternal shape" (Expectations, p. 432).

In the last analysis, the source of this justice is the culture
itself, that tradition of civilization which is fundamental to the
bourgeois code of decency, fair play, and tolerance and which lies deeper than the surface indifference, corruption, and neglect of middle-class Victorian society. The strength of this tradition is indicated by Orwell's remark that it "is believed in, even by people who violate it," and by the fact that it not only exhibits itself in Joe and Magwitch but even in those who have disguised from themselves their capacity for warmth and feeling and decency. It is seen in Miss Havisham's unexpected pity for the boy whose suffering was to satisfy her own wrongs, a reservoir of feeling which lay buried beneath the ruins of her life but did not die. It is manifested in Mrs. Joe's sudden awakening to love and in the mutual discovery of humanitarian impulses that Jaggers and Wemmick have hidden from each other and from themselves for years. It is this tradition of civilization that makes possible Pip's growth to adulthood, that is affirmed in the design of his career, the loss of expectations which he did nothing to earn and which could bring him neither happiness nor virtue and the gain, in return, of a wisdom and a compassion of far greater value.

26 Orwell, p. 110.
CHAPTER III

I

The novels surveyed in the previous chapter assess the costs and rewards of the bourgeois revolution, the dominant social phenomenon of the nineteenth century; undoubtedly, their primary impulse is to criticize the failure of this revolution to realize its own goal of individual self-fulfillment and its betrayal of older cultural values which it had promised but refused to make widely available. By portraying the youth's struggle to join and transform adult society, to win recognition from the social order without sacrificing his capacity for critical idealism, the European Bildungsroman becomes indeed a powerful vehicle for condemning all that is oppressive, regressive, and hostile to the development of the "natural man" in the official bourgeois culture. At the same time, by depicting the process of growth within a culture enriched by accumulated history, the Bildungsroman subsumes even its sharpest indictments of European society under a more general attitude of cultural approval. Reflecting a new social mobility and a new power of youthful resistance which are the very grounds of the hero's career, the European Bildungsroman affirms not only the bourgeois tradition of self-making but also the historical process by which this ideal has been culturally assimilated.
and, to a substantial degree, transformed into a reality. In the novels discussed above, the hero’s initiation is truly conceived as the intersection of personal history with social history, as a drama of self-testing and self-adjustment made possible by the culture’s rich and varied past as that past is embodied in (and repudiated by) contemporary social values, traditions, and institutions. When the initiation is successful and a hero like Pip or Wilhelm Meister is able to reach accommodation with the best features of his culture, then past, present, and future are all affirmed; to quote Erikson, the youth is reborn but for a new social reality which he helps to create "with and by those whom he chooses as his new ancestors and genuine contemporaries." But even when failure occurs, when, as in *The Red and the Black*, the rebirth of hero and society appears to be thwarted by the massive intractability of some dominant social perversion, the diversity of the culture portrayed and the intensity of the hero’s struggle affirm the existence of competing social values and hence insure the survival of some reservoir of cultural strength.

Contrasting European and American fiction of the nineteenth century, Richard Poirier points out that the strength of the European novelists is to perceive clearly the difference between "the dangers in society" and "the dangers of it;" the power to make this distinction is conferred by historical diversity and by the novelist's awareness of competing social models and the inevitability of social change. The European novelist can condemn the ways in which a rigid, entrenched, and undemocratic social order threatens the aspirations
of its youth by exerting pressure for a self-denying conformity; at the same time, he can describe a society which offers astonishing and "beneficial opportunities for self-discovery" and which provides a wide enough choice of "strictly social alternatives" to promise every youth "a chance . . . to find a place that can be called 'natural'."\(^1\)

Thus, whatever its social criticisms, the European Bildungsroman affirms a culture that offers its youth at least the possibility of becoming both a natural and social man at once, of achieving Rousseau's ideal of adulthood; to inherit "all the culture of the past that is accordant with his primal principle" and to escape "all that is at variance with it." What Susanne Howe says of the nineteenth-century English apprenticeship novel is true of the European Bildungsroman at large; while the world pictured is one in which defeat and failure threaten and the problem of individual adjustment is acute, still it is a world dynamic in its variety, change, and upheaval, in "its squalor and its heavy magnificence; its worldliness and its mysticism; its hypocrisy and its desperate heart-searchings and wrestlings with the Devil; its painful, puzzled clutching at the old truths that crumbled in its grasp, and the supreme gesture of its slow, faltering, stoical turning to front a new age."\(^2\)

While the American Bildungsroman is contemporaneous in its origins with the European apprenticeship novel, it springs from directly

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opposite impulses. During the last half of the eighteenth century, Rousseau was demonstrating in *Emile* and *The Confessions* how the drama of youth's initiation could be used for socially critical and reformist purposes; during the same period, Benjamin Franklin was composing the first American Bildungsroman, his *Autobiography* (1771-1789), in order to celebrate the New World as, in contrast to the old, the perfect environment for the development of a broadly ambitious and idealistic youth. Lacking Europe's inhibiting class system and thus the pernicious influence of a corrupt aristocracy and a degraded working class, promising a variety of opportunities for self-respecting labor and the independence that property bestows as a reward for work, America, in Franklin's view, offered its young the freedom to choose their social roles and to serve their society diversely but always by virtue of innate capacity and self-acquired skills rather than according to inherited rank and assigned status. The chief question to be asked of an American youth, Franklin writes in *Information for Those Who Would Remove to America*, is not "What is He?" but "What can he do?"; thus, the American avoids the fate of the majority of European boys who "are dragg'd up in Ignorance of every gainful Art, and oblig'd to become Soldiers, or Servants, or Thieves, for a Subsistence."³ It is an expression of Franklin's faith in America that his *Autobiography* offers so little social criticism and concentrates instead on showing youth how to make the most of its opportunities in

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the New World by the practice of self-criticism and self-improvement. Unlike the European novelists discussed earlier, Franklin does not have to struggle for his affirmations but can confidently offer his own career as a pattern for others to follow; it is not merely a personal success story but a proof of the success of the American experiment in general. His friend Benjamin Vaughan recommended the publication of the Autobiography on precisely these grounds, because it was the most "efficacious advertisement" for America that could be conceived and because illustrating in detail "the manners and situation of a rising people" would "very much tend to invite to it [America] settlers of virtuous and manly minds." Vaughan praises Franklin's memoirs especially for presenting a "noble rule and example of self-education" and for publishing to the world "your discovery that the thing is in many a man's private power" and "how little necessary all origin is to happiness, virtue, and greatness" (Autobiography, pp. 66-68). This is a discovery, the Autobiography insists, that could only be made in America.

The chief theme of Franklin's Autobiography, then, is the power of the individual personality when it is granted the opportunity to fully encounter and freely manipulate its world; the story of his growth is meant to vindicate his belief "that one man of tolerable abilities may work great changes and accomplish great affairs among mankind" (Autobiography, p. 88). Although the Autobiography is a haphazardly composed and incomplete record of Franklin's life and achievement, it is unified and coherent by virtue of its central
purpose: to show the great distances an individual can travel when left to his own devices, to emphasize the hero’s miraculous leap "from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and in which I passed my earliest years" to "a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world" (Autobiography, p. 1). This theme gives significance to the most famous episode from the Autobiography, the run-away apprentice’s entrance into Philadelphia, a scene which Franklin describes in detail so that the reader might "compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there." Arriving in Philadelphia with no resource other than his innate capacities, Franklin might be any poor young European provincial, from Rousseau to Rastignac, making his first entrance into Paris: "I knew no soul, nor where to look for lodgings. Fatigued with walking, rowing, and want of sleep, I was very hungry, and my whole stock of cash consisted of a Dutch dollar and about a shilling in copper coin, which I gave to the boatmen for my passage" (Autobiography, pp. 21-22). But the Autobiography goes on to assert that the fate awaiting this young American differs from that of his European counterpart; the difference rests on the condition of growing up in a new country which urgently needs the skills of its youth and which has not yet constructed artificial barriers to separate eager talent from the tasks that need to be done. Where the European provincial would squander his little store of money on carriages and clothes in a desperate attempt to establish his credentials with the artificial social caste that stands between him and his rightful position, Franklin, self-assured about
his future, can confidently bestow his unconsumed rolls upon a fellow passenger; as his subsequent career illustrates, this self-assurance is by no means misplaced.

Franklin's greatest affirmation of America lies in the absence of conflict between his desire for material and social prosperity and his desire to contribute to the progress of his community. Ambition and idealism, the two characteristics of youth which are so frequently at war in the apprentice-heroes of the European Bildungsroman, develop mutually and harmoniously in the unfolding of Franklin's career; he is easily able to serve himself and his fellow man simultaneously. Franklin experiences no difficulty in achieving "self-realization in public life" because of the national willingness to recognize men with "new ideas and energies and . . . the social and political skills to employ them." Thus, Franklin emphasizes the contrast between his "unlikely beginnings" and his later achievements not merely for dramatic purposes but chiefly to suggest the natural sequence of tasks to which the gradually unfolding powers of the individual will wish to devote themselves when those powers are not diverted into battle with a rigid social establishment. Like Rousseau, Franklin believes that the youth's initial ambition to achieve a favored position in the community will, under the encouragement of success in an open society, naturally broaden into an idealistic public-spiritedness. This is the meaning of Franklin's own vocational development. His early career, the resistance to apprenticeship in his father's

trade, the flight from his brother's tyrannical authority, and the
shrewdness with which he exploits the weaknesses of Keimer and
Bradford, his competitors in Philadelphia, illustrate every youth's
need to get free of the self-interested and jealous domination of the
established order, to differentiate himself from his elders by winning
for himself a distinct identity and a rival position in the community.
However, once this struggle has been successfully resolved, Franklin
is free to realize Goethe's ideal of Bildung, to transform social
rivalry into social cooperation. Placing his business in the hands of
a loyal employee, he devotes himself, in his maturity, to the disinterested pursuits of scientific investigation and social organization.
The apparent ease with which Franklin follows this natural course of
development or "grows up" in the Utopian manner of Emile and Wilhelm
Meister is a testament to the openness and flexibility of a young
society; for in contrast to European civilization, the very newness
of America, its lack of an "establishment," ensures that youth's
struggles to escape the domination of the old order will be minimal
and resolved without too much difficulty. Thus, unlike his European
counterparts, Franklin's energies are not exhausted by this struggle,
and he emerges from it with sufficient strength to nourish the works
and ideas which are the fruits of his adulthood and his bequest to
posterity.

In his enthusiasm for America, Franklin minimized his own peculiar
genius and insisted that his career was typical, within the capacity
of the average youth of "tolerable" abilities; it was Franklin's (and
later the culture's) mistake, however, to assume that his success was "typical," for it depended upon a unique historical setting and the luck of growing up in a time and place which demanded the very qualities that Franklin had to offer. It was Franklin's special opportunity to participate in what Erik Erikson calls "the historical moratorium offered by the discovery of an empty continent, for the establishment of a new 'way of life'."5 On the one hand, he was fortunate enough to grow up in an outpost of European civilization where the old order did not control all the avenues of advancement and where the energy and inventiveness of youth were genuinely in demand. Moreover, Franklin's urge to organize his community for the promotion of human happiness and comfort was given free play because it did not threaten existing social orderings, institutions, and ideologies. On the other hand, Franklin did not grow up in a cultural vacuum; the ideals which he was given such a splendid chance to realize were themselves drawn from Europe, from the cluster of ideas and attitudes subsumed under the term "Enlightenment." Thus, Franklin's program for self and community improvement was derived from the eighteenth-century values of reason, order, and scientific and technological progress, but to these he was encouraged to add those values which were purely a product of his own discovered nature and which were honored in America because they provided a needed method of implementing his ideals: pragmatism, flexibility, experimentation, persuasion. When critics speak of Franklin's

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astonishing harmony with his place and time, they are in fact referring to his fortunate position as a member of the "revolutionary elite," one of those special few who are granted a historical moratorium, and the personal freedom this brings, in which to realize historically-derived ideals. The enterprise he is engaged in, the organization of a new society, justifies his existence and fulfills his private genius; for him, to be an American is, to use Santayana's phrase, "a moral condition, an education, and a career." Nevertheless, the enterprise is made possible because an existing social model had given it form and direction; to be an American is essentially to make concrete the values, principles, and ideals which have arisen through the evolution of European civilization.

Thus, while Franklin finds the rawness of American society, its lack of a repressive establishment, one of its most congenial features, he also benefits from the traditions of an established culture more than is generally acknowledged. To a very substantial degree, his successful development depends upon his encounter with the past, upon the intersection of life history with history. This encounter is made possible not only by Franklin's visits to Europe, but also by the European presence in colonial America; for this presence makes available alternatives which teach Franklin both the values and the limitations of the American "way of life." Through his personal experience with such representatives of the old order as Governor Keith of

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Pennsylvania, General Braddock, and Lord Louden, Franklin comes to distrust the devolution of power in an aristocratic regime; he discovers that unassisted self-making is a more secure means of advancement than the patronage of hereditary leadership. Thus, one of the few false steps or "errata" recorded in the Autobiography is Franklin's reliance upon the support of Governor Keith, a support which he gains chiefly through the fortuitous "connection" provided by his brother-in-law. Later, General Braddock's and Lord Louden's incompetent conduct of the French and Indian War and their thankless return for Franklin's considerable assistance lead him to question the process by which positions of leadership are assigned in an aristocratic society and to challenge an authority which can neither provide the protection it guarantees nor reward the obedience it demands. Having won influence in the colonies on the basis of proven efficiency, Franklin might well conclude that individual success was a better qualification for the exercise of power than genealogy. By no means unaware of the advantages of colonial status and inclined by temperament to take a conciliatory attitude toward the mother country, Franklin was undoubtedly influenced by experiences such as these to cast his lot at last with the revolutionary party and to put his trust in an independent and self-directing America.

On the other hand, while Franklin turned upon the conventional wisdom of the past the critical gaze of a youth who is determined to test established truths for himself, he by no means demonstrated that immature hostility to everything old and everything European displayed
by so many American spokesmen of the generations to follow.
Franklin's respect for tradition and for the continuity between
past, present, and future which it guarantees is manifested in his
curiosity about his own ancestors, his eagerness to identify his in-
heritance from them in terms of personal values and habits of thought
and character, as well as in his writing of the Autobiography itself;
his desire to leave a record of his own character and experience for
future generations who might therefore learn and "deem fit to be imi-
tated... the means, which I employed, and which, thanks to Provi-
dence, so well succeeded with me" (Autobiography, p. 1). Moreover,
Franklin knew how to value the institutions and traditions which pre-
serve the experience of our ancestors; the chosen activity of his adult
life was to establish in America such products of European civilization
as schools, libraries, and scientific societies. In truth, Franklin
believed in taking everything from the past that could be used for the
benefit of a rational human community or that would assist the youth's
and the country's transition from immaturity to adulthood, and the his-
torical moratorium that America provided granted him the unique oppor-
tunity to discard those products of the past which were obsolete and
oppressive to individual freedom while preserving enough of its
European heritage to bypass the cultural childhood of an emerging na-
tion. He would have agreed with the observation of Henry James, Sr.,
a half a century later, that because we receive from Europe "her ripest
culture" and at the same time escape her defects, we can "declare the
childhood of the race forever fairly past, and its manhood at least
entered upon."

If it was Franklin's unique opportunity to participate in a historical moratorium, it was also his good fortune to find the enterprise of nation-building one particularly congenial to his special talents. Franklin characterizes his era as an "age of experiments" and attributes his personal success to freedom from adherence to fixed principles and traditional methodology; the Autobiography suggests that willingness to experiment ideologically and vocationally is the key to discovering one's identity just as socio-political inventiveness is the key to the new American civilization. To stake one's character or one's country on the blind faith that any truth is final is to trade "power" for "principle" in Franklin's view, a poor bargain indeed. Yet, when Franklin speaks of living in an age of experiments, he is referring, by the evidence of the Autobiography at least, less to a characteristic of his times than to a quality of his own nature which "the times" appreciate and nourish. If the raw frontier society which Franklin describes lacks the kind of oppressive establishment so frustrating to the careers of Rousseau and the heroes of the European Bildungseromane, it also lacks the richly diverse culture of Europe, the product of accumulated history. Thus, it is Franklin's personality, rather than his environment, which provides the dramatic variety of the Autobiography, and Franklin's enthusiasm for this raw environment (which others, like James, were to find so inhospitable to their natur-

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7Henry James, Sr., The Social Significance of Our Institutions (Boston, 1861), pp. 26, 28-29.
al talents), reflects his good fortune at residing in a country which prizes his versatile and expanding personality, which refrains from punishing, as a more established culture punishes in Rousseau, the "singularity" which accompanies self-experimentation. Lacking the rigid organization which represses the impulse to experiment in established cultures, the American environment encourages Franklin to take the risks of first experience for future generations of Americans, to invent the personalities, ideologies, and vocations which will "organize" and "establish" a new nation; because Franklin's genius is his versatility and his ability to give this versatility social form, he is valued for imposing his own diversity upon the community in the character of inventor, projector, legislator, diplomat, printer, and author. Thus, we can agree that America was peculiarly hospitable to Franklin's experimental nature, to the "provisional and possible" aspects of his character, and yet still recognize, as Franklin did not, that these are individual rather than universal values and that a less versatile and pragmatic temperament, a nature more devoted to fixed principles and eternal truths might not find the new world so accommodating to its development. And we must also recognize that in fulfilling his special genius for giving social form to the wisdom gained through his own first experience, Franklin was defining and thereby limiting, for future generations of American

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9 Sayre, p. 20.
youth, the possibilities awaiting them. As the American obsession with the Franklin ethic so clearly illustrates, our first citizen was erecting that very establishment whose oppression he was so happily free from but which would fall heavily on American youths of a later generation.
In speaking of the historical moratorium that the discovery of America provided, Erikson warns that those who follow the "revolutionary elite" will face a new and special problem, the difficulty of contending with a national mythology which grows out of the activities and values of the revolutionary elite but which is ill-equipped to promote the work of consolidation and correction which must follow new beginnings. Partly because of his own insistence upon his typicality and partly because of his value as an advertisement for America, Franklin was turned into a national exemplum, and his special virtues of versatility and organizing initiative, qualities peculiar to himself and appropriate to the conditions of a historical moratorium, became fixed and narrowed into an American success ethic ill-designed for different natures and other times. His respect for the past and for the wisdom of tradition was forgotten while his unqualified optimism for America was continued long after the time for serious criticism was due. Franklin's apotheosis into a national model of the self-made man issued in the oppressive cultural ideology of success which dominated the nineteenth century.

Franklin's optimism continued to be expresses throughout the nineteenth century, providing the basis for much of the popular rhetoric and fiction of this period as well as for the more significant literature of self-culture associated with the transcendentalists. However, it is crucial to note that neither the popular spokesmen for this affirmative tradition nor the transcendentalists produced serious
American Bildungsromane. This is partly because of their unwillingness to conduct self-analysis within the framework of social analysis and partly because of their dismissal of the past which, as it is manifested in the forms of society, provides the only ground on which a new generation can come to terms with the present and shape the future. Thus, as Franklin's ideal of self-making passed into the popular literature of the nineteenth century, the ideal became degraded. In the biographies of such successful political figures as Andrew Jackson and Davy Crockett, in the self-help manuals purveyed by Protestant clergymen eager to recommend the virtues of thrift and industry, and in the pre-Civil War sentimental novels, mainly fictionalized versions of these handbooks, America was celebrated as the perfect environment for the achievement of economic and social mobility; however, Franklin's emphasis on disinterested social service and a broad program of cultural, intellectual, and moral self-improvement was discarded. In fact, so unwilling was this literature to confront the dislocations caused by the urbanization and industrialization of American society, that it presented the failures of youth to realize itself in America as exclusively the consequence of personal vice. During the post-Civil War period, the transformation of Franklin's humane idealism into a narrow gospel of self-help and economic success was completed; this gospel, dispensed by such apologists for the business community as Andrew Carnegie, Orison Swett Marden, and Horatio Alger, rested on the false premises that equality of opportunity made character the only determinant of social advancement in America, that early poverty and mis-
fortune were advantages in the struggle for success, and that money was the equivalent of happiness and spiritual grace. In this popular tradition, as in those European Bildungsromane which work toward cultural affirmation, the emphasis falls heavily upon self-improvement although at a much debased level and without the counterbalancing social criticism; for while David Copperfield or Pip must learn to devalue the artificial success symbols of a grasping middle class in order to achieve individual fulfillment within their cultures, it is just such acquisitions as a new suit or correct English that mark the turn in fortune for an Alger hero.

It is true that at its best, this tradition encouraged the lower social orders to believe in their own talents by promising that they would be judged on merit rather than origin. At its worst, however, it drastically narrowed the scope of youth's aspirations, it condemned cruelly the majority who failed to reap the material rewards of American civilization, and it served as a convenient rationale for preservation of the status quo. In short, this strain of American literature proved itself incapable of making any serious cultural affirmations since it lacked the self-confidence to offer specific social censure within the larger framework of approval. It became an "instrument of social control" rather than an "instrument of social progress"; it was meant to express the best of American conditions and goals, and yet it added up to "an ideology of individual material achievement"
only. In truth, by the end of the nineteenth century, that concept of self-making which had expressed Franklin's faith in American society as an environment for growth had come to be an apology for its failure; ironically, the real heirs of Franklin a century after his death were those Americans who dared to criticize the national gospel of self-help on the very grounds that it acted to inhibit rather than to stimulate the genuine development of the nation's youth. One of the most eloquent spokesmen for this point of view was Charles Horton Cooley who, in 1899, characterized perfectly the dispiriting influence of the success ethic:

... the standard of success which our age presses most strongly upon our attention is a narrow and, in some sense, a low one. It needs to be raised and diversified. The standard of success should be the symmetrical reflection of all the needs of human nature, not the exaggerated image of a few of them. Without expecting that wealth will cease to be an object of pretty general esteem and endeavor, we may hope and strive to break down the ascendancy which it exercises over a class of persons who would serve the world better and find more happiness for themselves if they could devote their energies to the discovery of truth, the creation of beauty, or some other of the more imaginative aims. It may be asked, what is to hinder? The answer, however, is not difficult: to undertake careers of this sort in the face of the indifference to them which for the most prevails, requires a self-confidence and vigor of initiative which is rare; the special education necessary is often unattainable; the chance of making a living is not encouraging; and, most fatal of all by far, the state of public sentiment denies to the followers of art, for example, that appreciative sympathy which is essential to the unfolding of talent. The

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present age acts upon a large class of minds of the finer
order as an uncongenial climate acts upon a plant; it chills
them and stunts their growth; they feel home-sick.11

Running parallel to this popular enthusiasm for the opportunities
awaiting an American boy of grit and determination was a more serious
effort to maintain Franklin's kind of faith in the face of the dangers
and limitations of nineteenth-century American life. The writings of
Emerson, Channing, Thoreau, Whitman, and Henry James, Sr. reveal that
they recognized those aspects of American society hostile to the pro-
cess of self-realization, yet all five continued to affirm American
democracy as the form of social organization most conducive to the
goal of individual fulfillment. As defenders of the concept of the
self-made man, they wished to emphasize the inadequacy of political
and economic success as goals of self-making; convinced that social
and economic mobility were sufficiently established facts of American
life, they argued for cultural mobility, for increased opportunities
to cultivate the mind and the spirit. "Undoubtedly a man is to labor
to better his condition, but first to better himself," Channing wrote
in Self-Culture, and while Whitman affirmed the American conditions of
variety and freedom as most hospitable to the "full play of human na-
ture to expand itself in numberless and even conflicting directions,"
he also pronounced his country "a complete failure in its social as-
pects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and aesthetic
results" and argued that "a great moral and religious civilization"

11 Charles H. Cooley, "Personal Competition," Economic Studies,
IV (April 1899), 172.
was "the only justification of a great material one." Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, this group of American writers never lost their fundamental optimism, their belief that America alone could produce "the abstract manhood . . . man himself unqualified by convention, the man who - let me say it - for the first time in human history finding himself in his own right erect under God's sky, spontaneously aspires and attains to a far freer and profounder culture of his nature than has ever yet illustrated humanity." 13

At the same time, while it can be argued that Emerson's Essays, Walden, and Song of Myself compose as quasi-Bildungsromane, it is more noteworthy that the authors of these works could not make their affirmations in the form of fiction. The reason for this is, I think, obvious. None of them saw the individual's development as an irreversible historical process or as a product of social experience; instead, they emphasized the self-realization that can only occur outside of society and outside of time, the instantaneous metamorphosis which is the product of the individual's confrontation with the worlds of Nature and of Spirit. Life was hopeful just because of its presentness and freedom from the moral burdens of the past; self-culture was possible just to the degree that an individual could reject the roles which his society honored and rewarded and so defeat its conspiracy against his


13 James, p. 6.
manhood. Thus, as R. W. B. Lewis suggests in *The American Adam*, these subscribers to the "party of hope" were concerned less with how the youth comes to adult terms with his society and his era than with how the adult can make a return to the child's world of wonder and eternity. Self-adjustment is not visualized in "terms of readjustment or self-identification with any portion of the past . . . but simply in terms of the healthy cultivation of natural, unimpaired faculties."\(^{14}\)

The American romantics inherited Rousseau's concern for the preservation of the child's innate strengths, but they failed to retain his interest in the goal of freeing childhood for a mature and judicious adulthood.\(^{15}\) They embraced Goethe's emphasis on Bildung and self-culture while neglecting his warning that self-culture is not a proper end in itself but is achieved only through a community of individuals each of whom is willing to accept the limitations of his personality and to restrict his life to the employment of practical skills. What the optimism expressed in their work adds up to, then, is not an affirmation of nineteenth-century America as an environment for growth; it is an affirmation of the individual's continued ability, even after the wondrous condition of childhood is lost, to transcend the limitations of this environment and to escape the restrictions that accompany social life.


Ironically, the transcendentalists' effort to reinterpret and broaden the national ideal of self-making revealed a more serious threat to the maturity of American culture than the evil they were trying to alleviate, the denigration of Franklin's values into a vulgar success ethic. For while "the party of hope" successfully exposed the inadequacy of a merely economic definition of self-fulfillment, it perpetuated the dangerous illusion that an expansive and versatile personality is a valid substitute for genuine national diversity, for a culture's capacity to absorb the real and vital conflicts which result from its members' free pursuit of sharply limited and competing ideologies, vocations, and life-styles. The continued "newness" of America, the ever-present frontier, meant that American youths in the nineteenth century had an alternative to the work of consolidation and reform: escape to a new outpost of civilization where the enterprise of their ancestors could be reenacted, the creation of a new social environment by a versatile personality. And society itself devalued the unglamorous work of consolidation by continuing to encourage those activities appropriate only to the revolutionary elite in a period of historical moratorium. In its expansionist mood, its determination to repudiate its own connection with the past, and its shrill insistence upon its innocence and idealism, the official nineteenth-century American culture urged youth to choose withdrawal over involvement in society; its advice to young men was, after all, to "Go West." Insisting that the future is always before one, that no "irremediable errors" have been made, America encouraged
its young men to "keep their life plans and their identities tentative on the principle suggested by the early course of American history—that a man must have and must preserve and defend the freedom of the next step and the right to make a choice and grasp opportunities." Thus, by perpetuating "the fallacies of the new start and the clean slate," the national mythology failed to promote the mature transformation of unlimited aspirations into specific achievements, of disappointed hopes into realistic prospects; it failed as well to encourage adult committedness to whatever resulted from the irreversible flow of a life history, to the binding consequences of determining early choices. As a result, and despite its rhetoric to the contrary, the nation avoided the painful process of developing its own capacity for tolerance; by encouraging its youth to remain tentative, it escaped the necessity of learning to accommodate adult personalities who, by their determination to preserve the limited strengths of their maturity, are the only source of genuine cultural diversity. The consequences for America was an official culture devoid of historical dignity and value, a culture of artifice and imitation only.

The task of making a more realistic assessment of the prospect and process of "making it" in nineteenth-century America fell to the serious novelists of this period; indeed, in the view of some critics, it was their skepticism which gave impetus to the emergence of the


serious American Bildungsroman. In "Autobiography and the American Myth," William Spengemann and L. R. Lundquist argue that while Franklin's autobiographical affirmation of growing up in America is made possible by his belief that his "real life . . . corresponds significantly to the American mythic ideal [since] it has enacted the values his society holds sacred," the novel and the autobiography merge as forms only at the point where an author becomes disenchanted with traditional social roles and feels the need "to examine personal experience without having to assume some ill-fitting social guise." We tend to forget, they continue, "that nineteenth-century America produced a group of writers who experiment continually with autobiographical forms to solve their problem of spiritual alienation from a society whose myths failed to satisfy their personal demands." As this analysis suggests, the American Bildungsroman, like its European counterpart, is concerned that the individual's assumption of his adult role in the community not be made at the expense of his own identity and genuine internal fulfillment. However, while the European Bildungsroman, whatever its indictments of contemporary society, never loses its power of affirming the cultural ideal of self-fulfillment originating in the work of Rousseau and Goethe or the historical process which was gradually turning this ideal into a social reality, it is just the inadequacy of the national mythology of growth and of the cultural ideal of self-making which is the theme and source of the American

Bildungsroman. The gradual erosion of Franklin's optimism into the despair of Henry Adams reveals the growing realization in the nineteenth century that the special problem of American youth was to grow up in a country which was itself immature and which prized its immaturity. Indicting what Lewis calls American cultural "resistance . . . to the painful process of growing up" and to "cultural manhood,\(^{19}\) the American Bildungsroman asks how, and whether, youth, through its own suffering, can provide a model of adulthood by which its culture may learn to mature; it transforms the challenge of growing up in America to the challenge of the growing up of America. This challenge begins with the effort to create new and different mythologies of growth; it was the special contribution of the Romantic novelists to be discussed in the next chapter, Cooper, Melville, and James, to invent patterns of self-making which would criticize and hopefully correct the inadequacies and distortions of the cultural ideal provided by Franklin.

\(^{19}\) Lewis, p. 129.
Read according to the chronology of Natty Bumppo's life, The Leatherstocking Tales describe the development of Rousseau's "natural" man, one who, removed from the restraints of society and the artificials of formal education, is allowed to discover his specific gifts and to cultivate these gifts for ultimately social purposes. In his role as pathfinder, Natty fulfills his own nature and also defends two opposed but equally vulnerable American communities, the divided and dispossessed Delaware Indians and the threatened outposts of white civilization, from the hostilities of alien tribes and foreign nations. The names Natty earns throughout his long career describe the successful unfolding of his life-history; as successively, Deerslayer, Hawkeye, Pathfinder, Leatherstocking, and the Trapper, he makes the journey from an untested but promising youth through an illustrious manhood to the natural but still serviceable weakness of old age. These names suggest Natty's secure identity throughout his journey, for they all reflect his unerring sense of his worth, his loyalty to his gifts and to the habitat in which they flourish, and his determination to use his skills unselfishly for the protection of the two menaced societies, the dying red and the newly-established white cultures which co-exist uneasily in the American wilderness.
In *The Deerslayer* (1841), Natty appears as a young man who has grown up under the influence of three distinct educational forces. From the Moravian missionaries, Natty has learned respect for the values of a Christian white society. From the Delawares, he has acquired the skills necessary to a woodsman as well as an appreciation of Indian virtues and a tolerance based on his intuition that human nature is a unifying force which lies deeper than social or racial differences; Natty expresses this truth simply as "Different gifts, but only one natur". Finally, his contact with nature has reinforced Natty's forest wisdom, his understanding of human nature and tolerance for cultural differences, and his commitment to Christian principles; as he remarks to Judith Hutter, "My education has been altogether in the woods: the only book I read, or care about reading, is the one which God has opened afore all his creature's in the noble forests... This book I can read, and I find it full of wisdom and knowledge" (*Deerslayer*, p. 404). Natty is as yet untried and inexperienced, but he has already made the necessary transition from adolescent vagueness to adult committedness; as his Indian name, Deerslayer, implies, he has proven his wilderness skills, and he has also devoted himself to certain ideals which will continue to command his loyalty. Even in *The Deerslayer*, Natty possesses a mature self-acceptance which includes both pride in his individual worth and resignation to the restrictions which his unique gifts impose upon his life; he understands that the

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peculiar influences which have molded his life have been most beneficial to the development of his nature even though they have limited him by making him fit for a wilderness existence only. "A natur' is the creatur' itself; its wishes, wants, idees, and feelin's, as all are born in him. This natur' can never be changed in the main, though it may undergo some increase or lessening. Now gifts come of sarcumstances. Thus, if you put a man in a town, he gets town gifts; in a settlement, settlement gifts; in a forest, gifts of the woods . . . All these increase and strengthen until they get to fortify natur' . . ." (Deerslayer, p. 425).

The Deerslayer, then, is not a Bildungsroman in the sense that it dramatizes Natty's initiation into manhood, his mutual discovery of himself and his place in the world, for these are discoveries he has already made when the novel opens. The chief drama of the novel centers on the testing of these discoveries. Early in The Deerslayer, Natty and Harry March argue over the meaning of manhood; Harry measures it by one's capacity for violence while Deerslayer defines it as a complex acquisition of skill, principle, and courage, especially the courage to remain loyal to one's skills and principles. Natty's physical courage is demonstrated through the main events of the novel, his first killing, his rescue of Hist, and his fortitude under the tortures of the Mingo tribe. However, it is the test of Natty's principles that forms the moral interest of The Deerslayer, for, because of the diverse influences that have formed Natty's character, his loyalties are complex and demanding. He must balance the imperatives derived from the
three moral codes which impinge upon him, the Christian code represented by the missionaries and by Hetty Hutter, the exploitative economic code of the white frontiersmen, Harry and Tom Hutter, and the Indian code or ethic of nature. Natty manages to exhibit both the innocence of Hetty and the expediency of her father while avoiding the extremes of savagery practiced by the Indians and the whites. He upholds his Christian principles by refusing to adopt the attitude of Hutter that the Indian is an appropriate object for any treachery or cruelty; at the same time, he avoids Hetty's foolish innocence by realizing that the teachings of the missionaries, if strictly followed, "would make an uncertain life in the woods" (Deerslayer, p. 472). His appreciation of Indian wisdom is manifested through his friendship for Chingachgook and his respect for his adversary, Rivenoak, but while he understands the habits appropriate to an Indian culture, he will not adopt them as his own, or, as he puts it, "unhumanize my nature" by falling into ways that God intended for another race" (Deerslayer, p. 76). Natty despises the values of Harry March and Tom Hutter, but because they represent the advance guard of white civilization, he offers them his protection; at the same time, he refuses Judith Hutter's proposal because it would lead him into opposition with his chosen environment, the forest, and his chosen life-style as hunter and warrior. Natty's ability to maintain these complex loyalties which commit him to the values of both nature and civilization, to the preservation of what is best in both the Indian and white cultures, is the strongest affirmation of his manhood.
The rest of the novels in the *Leatherstocking* series similarly celebrate Natty's ability to honor his diverse commitments, to maintain his position as "un magnifique hermaphrodite moral, né de l'état sauvage et de la civilisation."\(^2\) In *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Natty appears in his prime at a time and in a place where his gifts are most in demand. This novel emphasizes Natty's natural leadership during the vicissitudes of war, for his abilities as a woodsman coupled with his Christian forbearance render him superior to the separate representatives of the red and white cultures. Again, Natty exercises his gifts on behalf of both the vulnerable outposts of white civilization as a British scout and the victims of white injustice, the hapless Delawares. In *The Pathfinder* (1840), Natty's nature resignation to the limitations imposed upon him by his own nature as well as by the circumstances of his birth and education is threatened when Natty is tempted by the lure of marriage and settlement life. However, when he leaves Mabel Dunham free to choose Jasper Western instead of himself, he recovers the wisdom he had temporarily lost: "What a creature is mortal man! He pines for things which are not of his gift, and treats the bounties of Providence lightly . . . never satisfied with his own gifts, but forever craving that which Providence denies . . . I have always known . . . that men have their gifts . . . but I'd forgotten that it did not belong to mine to please the young, and beauti-

ful, and l'arned."

In the final two volumes of Natty's saga, the hero's natural distrust of civilization has deepened into hostility and bitterness. The Pioneers (1823) depicts Natty's plight as an old man who has outlived the period of history hospitable to his values and his talents. Forced, by the advance of civilization which he has aided, to live in the settlements at last, Natty comes into conflict with social laws and mores and is finally driven west by his inability to reconcile his life-style with settlement ways: "Your ways isn't my ways . . . I love the woods, and ye relish the face of man; I eat when hungry and drink when a'dry, and ye keep stated hours and rules . . . the meanest of God's creatures be made for some use, and I'm formed for the wilderness." In his flight from "the sound of the ax," Natty comes at last to The Prairie (1827). However, while he speaks of the advancing settlers as an "accursed band of choppers and loggers" and labels settlement institutions, the "towns and villages, farms and highways, churches and schools" as "deviltries of man" even when he is too old to practice his forest skills, Natty still serves the cause of civilization by mediating its internal disputes and defending it from the treacheries of hostile Indians. Natty chooses to die as he has lived,

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"beyond the din of the settlements," (Prairie, p. 399), and he is buried by his adopted son, the Pawnee Hardheart. But he sends his rifle back East as a symbol of his allegiance to the new American society and his service as its pathfinder, and the young officer Middleton confirms that Natty continues to be honored by the society he served when he describes the legend of the hunter told to him as a young boy. "The man I speak of was of great simplicity of mind but of sterling worth. Unlike most of those who live a border life, he united the better, instead of the worst, qualities of the two people . . . he was a noble shoot from the stock of human nature . . ." (Prairie, pp. 119-20).

In many respects, The Leatherstocking Tales describe the same kind of ideal Bildung that is celebrated by Franklin in his Autobiography and equally affirm the new world as an environment for growth. Like Franklin, Natty is member of the revolutionary elite possessing a unique opportunity to participate in the historical moratorium that accompanies the discovery of a new country and the founding of a new nation. Because Franklin is interested in the opportunities which await an American bourgeois, or man of the cities, who wishes to impose his personality upon institutionalized society and share in the management of his nation's affairs, he particularly stresses the social advantages of growing up in a classless and as yet "unestablished" society. America means for him the chance to make something of himself while participating in the organization of a new nation. Cooper, however, emphasizes the natural advantages of the new world, the salutary
influence of the vast American continent with its natural resources and wonders and the benefits to be derived from the simple communal life that nature makes possible. To Natty, the American wilderness guarantees freedom from the imperatives of self-making and empire-building and the opportunity to cultivate virtues which flourish in nature but are inhibited by the demands of city life. Moreover, in this period of history, Natty's skills, like Franklin's, were in great demand; for, if the new society struggling to come into existence on the edge of a vast and untamed continent needed what Natty would call Franklin's "town gifts," his organizational genius, so did it need Natty's "forest gifts," the service of a man skilled in the art of wilderness survival. Thus, different as the supremely socialized Franklin and the rough, untutored Natty are, the project of establishing a new American society called upon their opposite energies, and this fact alone attests to the benefits of an emerging but still tentative nation as an environment for growth.

The value of nature in Natty's education and his opposition to settlement ways are frequently cited as evidence that Cooper was deeply hostile to social progress and attached to an immature dream of forest freedom. Thus, critics speak of his flight from reality, his estrangement "from his native roots and . . . unmistakable alienation from the American ethos," and his juvenile fantasies of escape

from such adult responsibilities as marriage, children, and work. However, The American Democrat argues persuasively for the superiority of a society ordered by institutions and laws to the "state of nature," and Natty himself frequently defends social orderings and distinctions; in fact, Cooper includes in his novels such frontiersmen as Billy Kirby, Tom Hutter, Harry March, and Ishmael Bush just to emphasize Natty's freedom from their crude egalitarianism and resistance to the restrictions imposed by civilized life. Cooper is by no means a primitivist unable to distinguish between the dangers in and the dangers of society; if he regarded the frontier as a valuable "area of possibility" and the repository of certain natural values, he never recommended it as a final stage of civilization. Most important, the values that Natty derives from nature are not anti-social; Natty's contact with the wilderness and with its original inhabitants, the Indians, strengthens his social virtues and fits him ideally to live in society. From nature, Natty gains the power to resist social coercion and to oppose false values, but he also learns self-restraint and discipline, acceptance of his limitations, and respectful tolerance for the abilities of others which can never be his own; he is eager to use his gifts, not for self-aggrandizement, but on behalf of others. In truth, Natty, as William Charvat so succinctly notes, is a man who is independent of "civilized institutions" but committed

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to "civilized thinking;" in his 1850 Preface to the Leatherstocking Tales, Cooper himself described his hero as "a character that possessed little of civilization but its highest principles . . . and all of savage life that is not incompatible with these great rules of conduct." Through his education by nature, Natty becomes a critic of both the lawless individualism that is hostile to civilization and illustrated by such frontier characters as Tom Hutter and Harry March and the subservience to civilized institutions which can rob men of their power of civilized thinking and which is manifested by Judge Temple and Richard Jones. Natty "stands for nature and civilization and their dynamic interplay which is greater than either alone;" he demonstrates Cooper's belief that nature and civilization cannot be separated, for civilization is the culture of nature, not an alternative to it.

It is true that the novels which depict the later stages of Natty's career, The Pioneers and The Prairie, focus on the pathos of a man who has outlived the times which nourished and needed him most. Nevertheless, Natty's estrangement from settlement ways is the natural consequence of his rich early experience which included contact with both natural and social values and the freedom to choose from among


them to fashion his unique life-style. If successful Bildung is to be measured by the youth's discovery of ideals worth devoting his life to, it is also marked by the adult's discovery of elements in his culture to which he is irrevocably opposed for such opposition is the inevitable result of a genuine commitment. Natty's antagonism to the ethos of social progress is based on his appreciation of the moral and practical benefits to be derived from nature and on his intuition that while these benefits are among the most valuable advantages an unsettled country has to offer its young men, they are not highly prized by those who see the establishment of a new society in a hostile wilderness as their primary task. Thus, Natty's American experience is not an argument for a return to the innocence of pre-Revolutionary America; it is an argument for the special virtues embodied in Natty's wilderness career but neglected by Franklin and his heirs because they were not compatible with the personal goal of self-making or the national imperative of manifest destiny. Judge Temple, Natty's antagonist in The Pioneers, is a man who has reenacted the career of Franklin, who speaks for the national goals that Franklin first formulated, and who possesses the authority to implement them. Like Franklin, he is a self-made man who has risen to a position of influence through a combination of enterprise, organizational genius, cultivation of advantageous social contacts, and political and economic astuteness. Like Franklin, he has served himself well but is also intent upon disinterestedly serving his community and country. Temple's vision for the future of Templeton and of America embraces an
orderly settlement of the wilderness, the cultivation of nature for social uses, the building of a society that will guarantee "affluence and comfort" to all who assist in its establishment, and the wise administration of this society by a natural aristocracy dedicated to the protection of personal and property rights as well as the public domain. Yet, while Temple undoubtedly speaks for many of Cooper's own beliefs, Natty's opposition to Temple in *The Pioneers* and Cooper's interest in exploring the basis of this opposition by following Natty's career in the subsequent *Leatherstocking* novels essentially constitute the author's plea that some alternative myth of America, some alternative ideal of personal and national growth, be allowed to survive. The chronicle of Natty's life is a challenge to the nation's exclusive pursuit of the Franklin-Temple vision of manipulating the environment for social progress and personal success, and it is a warning against the imposition of this single cultural ideal upon the nation as a whole.

On the surface, the conflict between Judge Temple and Natty centers on the best means to secure an end which both desire, the preservation of nature. Both appreciate that the resources of the great American wilderness are precious advantages of the new world and important to the success of the American social experiment, for both understand that civilization cannot survive the wanton destruction of its natural environment. Natty feels that his long experience in the wilderness, his skill as a hunter, his knowledge of wildlife, and his close acquaintance with the life-cycle of nature warrant his ability
to serve the end of conservation. The Judge seeks to serve this end by the restraints of the law; however, because the Judge lacks Natty's experience of nature, his ineptness is "apparent to the meanest intelligence." The game laws deprive Natty, a hunter of experience and skill, of exercising the calling he has perfected, but they allow Judge Temple to menace the community with his rifle, and they fail to prevent the wholesale slaughter produced by the pigeon shoot and the fishing expedition. In fact, the game laws "protect" nature from the uneducated hunters who least need the "wholesome restraints" of law because they must preserve nature as a means of support; these same laws give license to the most dangerous exploitative elements of the community, to those least sensitive to the necessity of preserving nature because they are farthest removed from dependence upon it.

At a deeper level, however, the quarrel between Natty and Judge Temple involves ends, not means. The Judge regards the life-style of the hunter as selfish, as inherently hostile to nature and to civilization; when he charges that the ethos of the hunter "is of vast disadvantage for temporal purposes, and ... totally removes one from within the influence of more sacred things" (Pioneers, p. 201), he reveals a desire to destroy a social arrangement which he deems inferior to his personal vision of utopia. In fact, Temple wishes to preserve nature primarily because he is concerned about the future prosperity of the society he is creating in Templeton, one based on the Franklinian

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12 Russell, p. 35.
ethics of thrift, acquisition, and accumulation; he is blind to the intrinsic value of nature, what Natty has felt as its moral and spiritual influence, its capacity for civilizing those who live under its dominion. The Judge is also unable to recognize the evils inherent in his ideal of social progress; his benevolent tolerance of the destruction created by his disciple, Richard Jones, reveals his indifference to the dangers of unrestrained technology, subservience to the dialectics of property, and bureaucratic ineptness. When Natty speaks out against settlement injustice, he accuses Judge Temple of threatening not only man's harmony with God's creation but man's harmony with his fellow man: "You've driven God's creators from the wilderness, where his providence had put them for his own pleasure, and you've brought in the troubles and diviltries of the law, where no man was ever known to disturb another . . . This comes of settling a country (Pioneers, pp. 367, 247). Natty defends the simple economy of the hunter on the grounds that free access to nature and satisfaction with a subsistence existence, the simple ethic of "Use, but don't waste" and "kill only such as you want" (Pioneers, p. 249), promote both the conservation of nature and the civilization of man. And Natty's imprisonment, "the wickedness of shutting up an old man that has spent his days, as one may say, where he could always look into the windows of heaven" (Pioneers, p. 382), is the clearest violation of nature and civilization in the novel.

The Leatherstocking Tales as a whole describe a career which is antithetical to the pattern recommended by Franklin as a national mo-
del. One effect of reading the novels depicting Natty's life in the order in which they were written is to understand that the integrity of such a life depends upon its constant loyalty to fixed principles and eternal truths and not upon its upward movement, its success in traversing the distance from rags to riches. Natty does not aspire to improve his position nor does he define success as the ability to accumulate property or influence; through the design of his career, Cooper reminds the followers of Franklin that social mobility is not a worthwhile end in life and that the individual should cultivate his gifts for intrinsic as well as extrinsic rewards, for the satisfaction of his nature as well as his ambition. Not only does Natty's status remain unchanged from the The Deerslayer to The Prairie, but his personality is mature and fixed from novel to novel. In truth, Natty does not "grow up" at all; even in adolescence, "his simplicity is the simplicity of age rather than youth" and "he is race-old."13 This is partly because Cooper first envisioned his hero as an old man, but primarily because Natty represents, not a person, but a myth, a "myth of culture"14 which embodies values opposed to the national ideology of self-making but which is, in Cooper's eyes, no less American. These values include respect for nature and the moral wisdom it teaches, freedom from ambition, singleminded devotion to one's gifts, and acceptance of the limitations such devotion imposes. However, if

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Natty does not change in the course of these novels, America does; indeed, Cooper's real interest is in the growth of the nation, not of his hero, and in the social changes which were unquestioningly approved by the heirs of Franklin but which Cooper invites us to view more critically by measuring them against the adult values which his hero stands for.
In The American Adam, R. W. B. Lewis describes a typical Bildungsroman of Melville's; the novel dramatizes the trials of a "young innocent, liberated from family and social history or bereft of them; advancing hopefully into a complex world he knows not of; radically affecting that world and radically affected by it; defeated, perhaps even destroyed... but leaving his mark upon the world, and a sign by which conquest may later become possible for the survivors." According to Lewis, it is the intention of this narrative to criticize the Adamic interpretation of American culture, to expose American "resistance... to the painful process of growing up," and to provide, through the suffering of the apprentice-hero, a model of adulthood by which the culture may learn to mature. There are, of course, some important similarities between Melville's myth of Bildung and the model of growth affirmed by Franklin and incorporated into our national ideology. Like Franklin, Melville celebrates the benefits conferred by democratic experience, the necessity, for successful growth, of being obliged to encounter the world on one's own, free from the advantages and liabilities of patrimony. Both Redburn and Pierre can grow up only by renouncing their aristocratic origins and rejecting the illusion that status is bestowed by an individual's heritage. More striking, however, is Melville's insistence upon the dangers of democratic experience. He emphasizes the suffering which not only

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15Lewis, pp. 128-29.
accompanies growth but is the very condition which creates moral ma-
turity; insisting that the pain inflicted on the individual by the
world may "leave such a scar that the air of Paradise might not ease
it," he criticizes Franklin's, and America's, suppression of the
truth that growing up involves a baptism of woe. "That mortal man
who hath more of joy than sorrow in him," says Ishmael in Moby-Dick,
"that mortal man cannot be true - not true, or undeveloped." This
wisdom Melville urges upon an America resistant to its "coming of
age."

Redburn (1849) is one of Melville's least symbolic novels; it is,
in fact, Dickensian in its tone and its theme, the initiation of an
innocent, friendless, and self-deceiving boy into the hard realities
of the world and his transformation into a more sceptical but more hu-
mene adult. Through the bankruptcy and death of his father, Redburn
is deprived of the wealth and position he was born to expect even
before he has enjoyed them. Forced by adversity to ship on the
Highlander as a common seaman, Redburn tries to avoid his fate by
clinging desperately to what aristocratic pretensions are left him and
by bitterly reviewing the bright prospects of his childhood: "I never
thought of working for my living and never knew that there were hard
hearts in the world . . . Then I was a schoolboy, and thought of going
to college in time; and had vague thoughts of becoming a great orator

16 Herman Melville, Redburn (Garden City, N. Y., 1957), p. 10. Subsequent references to this work cited in text.

17 Herman Melville, Moby-Dick (Indianapolis, 1964), p. 542.
like Patrick Henry... but now, I was a poor friendless boy, far away from my home and voluntarily in the way of becoming a miserable sailor for life... I felt thrust out of the world" (Redburn, pp. 34-35). The world which has evicted Redburn is, of course, a false one, the illusory world of childhood, and his misery is but the effect of being thrust into the world of adult realities. Redburn's resistance to this transition is expressed by his self-pitying cry: "May I never be a man... if to be a boy is to be such a wretch" (Redburn, p. 50).

Redburn soon discovers that his aristocratic past counts for nothing on the ship where one's place in the social hierarchy is earned by skill and knowledge alone. Gradually, through the humiliations of experience, he learns to give up his pretensions to superiority, to respect the sailor's trade for the versatility it demands, and to feel a genuine "pride and power" in his own mastery of the sailor's skills. His anger at the world's indifference to his existence is muted by his contact with the sailor Jackson who reflects back to him his own rage and hatred and thus implicitly warns him that a defiant response to the cruelties of fate is self-destructive and futile. Perceiving that Jackson's "hatred and gall against every thing and every body in the world" has produced only the intolerable delusion that "all the world was one person, and had done him some dreadful harm," Redburn determines to exorcise his own impotent bitterness "that it might not master my heart completely, and so make a fiend of me" (Redburn, pp. 59-60). At the same time, Redburn's self-pity turns to compassion when
he senses that "there seemed even more than wickedness about the man; and his wickedness seemed to spring from his woe; and for all his hideousness, there was that in his eye at times that was ineffably pitiable; and though there were moments when I almost hated this Jackson, yet I have pitied no man as I have pitied him" (Redburn, p. 100). In England, Redburn completes the transformation of a self-centered child into a sadder but wiser adult. When his father's guidebook fails to introduce him to contemporary Liverpool, he realizes that "the thing that guided the father, could not guide the son" (Redburn, p. 150) and that as long as he lingers in the past, he will fail to come to terms with the present world in which he must live. His acquaintance with Harry Bolton, whose aristocratic background, fallen expectations, and desperate self-pity mirror Redburn's own experience, teaches him that his sense of alienation springs from his own reluctance to grow up, to abandon the illusory world of his boyhood which, because it cannot be entered by others, he must inhabit in lonely isolation. For Harry's tendency to dwell in his past makes Redburn feel "ill at ease in his company; and made me hold back my whole soul from him; when, in its loneliness, it was yearning to throw itself into the unbounded bosom of some immaculate friend" (Redburn, p. 215). Finally, the conversion of self-pity into universal love is completed by Redburn's journeys through the squalid lanes and docks of Liverpool, his initiation into the woe of humanity; his own injuries are forgotten in his vision of the infinitely greater misery of mankind and in his indignation at the world's indifference to its own suffering.
To some extent, Redburn repeats the affirmations made by Franklin in his Autobiography. The adolescent hero is transformed into a self-reliant and compassionate adult by his reluctant voyage into the world, and this transformation is a vindication of the power of democratic experience, despite the humiliations it inflicts, to exorcise the weaknesses of immaturity and to nurture adult capacities. However, Melville’s novel emphasizes what is ignored in Franklin’s account of his own career, the concomitant power of this voyage of experience to mutilate and even destroy the individual who undertakes it. In Redburn, initiation involves introduction to the overwhelming horrors of life, disease, depravity, death, indifference, and the weight of suffering he encounters may well crush the unprepared youth. In one sense, Jackson and Harry Bolton represent certain obstacles to growth which Redburn is able to overcome largely because he exposes himself to the disciplines of experience and has the courage to renounce the comforting but dangerous illusions of childhood. In another sense, however, they are simply the victims of experience who cannot survive the shock of initiation into a world so brutal. Even Redburn does not emerge from his initiation unscarred; the voice of the adult who narrates this youthful adventure reveals a man who has yet to feel certitude about his place in the world and who communicates no sense of having discovered his strengths or fulfilled his potentialities. While Franklin’s career implies that the reward for subjecting oneself to the discipline of the world will be a life-history that contains its own integrity, one that is coherent and progressive toward some desired
end, Melville challenges this optimism by making his account of
Redburn's first voyage inconclusive and ambiguous. His hero's dis-
covery at the end of the journey that he has earned no wages suggests
a darker truth, that experience is incoherent and too frequently fails
to bestow the benefits expected from it; at best, Redburn's survival
is a challenge to its destructiveness.18

Some critics have approached Redburn and Pierre as novels of so-
cial criticism; it has been said that Redburn experiences the failure
of the American dream and that Pierre's attempt to practice Christian
ideals is doomed by the corrupt and hypocritical society in which he
lives.19 But in neither of these novels does Melville intend to use
the Bildungsroman for specific social indictments in the manner of the
French and English writers discussed earlier in this work. If Melville
criticizes the American dream, he does so, not because America has
failed to provide the social conditions which would make this dream
widely available, but because, given the nature of man and his universe,
the dream itself is a falsification of human experience. Melville's
quarrel is not with the facts of life in nineteenth-century America
which do not bear out the optimistic assumptions of his culture; his
quarrel is with those assumptions, with the middle-class faith that
a youth may easily fulfill his potentialities in a society free from
artificial restrictions and restraints. If the meaning of Pierre is

19 These interpretations of Redburn and Pierre are offered respect-
ively by William H. Gilman in Melville's Early Life and Redburn (New
York, 1951) and by Loren Baritz in City On a Hill (New York, 1964).
"the tragic disproportion between a man's potentialities and the possibilities at his command for realizing them," this disproportion is tragic just because it cannot be abolished by felicitous social arrangements; if fact, Pierre's real difficulties begin only when he wins the freedom to make of himself what he will, for his fulfillment is not threatened by the repressions of society but by the ambiguities of the universe and of his own soul.

Pierre (1852) has always confused readers by its odd mixture of parody, romance, melodrama, and tragedy, but in this unlikely combination of techniques, Melville discovered a strategy for directing his criticism past the facts of American life toward dangerous cultural assumptions. By making Pierre an object of both parody and tragedy, Melville identifies as the source of his hero's suffering his romantic idealism; at the same time, he sympathies with Pierre as ultimately the tragic victim, not of experience, but of a culture which so ill-prepared him for the ambiguities of life. Lewis Mumford writes penetratingly about Pierre's flaws, his adolescent horror at the world's frailty, his tendency to idealize ideals and to wish to retain them "in that adolescent state in which they are pure, remote, untouchable - forgetting that life is impossible in that sterile and clarified medium." But he is wrong to accuse Melville of sharing these attitudes, for Melville's parody of them during the first half of the novel firmly


establishes his distance from them; his sympathy is extended to Pierre only after the youth has passed through the crucible of experience and begun to question the purity of his idealism. The melodramatic excesses of the novel and the abnormal character of Pierre's experiences have also been criticized as weaknesses in Melville's execution of the book. But it is possible that Melville uses melodrama to ensure that Pierre will not be taken as realistic social criticism, that his intention to communicate a universal truth about the process of growing up rather than to describe literally the typical fate awaiting an American youth will not be misunderstood. The story of Pierre insists that the soul is born in anguish and that moral and mental growth is nourished by suffering, doubt, and despair. If this is an overly pessimistic account of the journey to adulthood, it is designed to counteract the prevailing myth that given hospitable social conditions, the individual's passage through the world of experience should be easy and relatively painless. Surely Franklin's dismissal of the cost of initiation is as false to life as the horrors that beset Pierre, and if Melville exaggerates the connection between woe and maturity, it is because his culture had for so long denied it.

The first half of Pierre centers on Pierre's discovery of evil in the idyllic world of Saddle Meadows, his "fall" from the blissful innocence of Eden into the painful world of knowledge, his passage from Adam to Christ. Pierre is introduced to the reader as Adam, a youth who lacks "that maturer and larger interior development" because he is unable to foresee "that this world hath a secret deeper than beauty,"
and life some burdens heavier than death." However, when Pierre learns that his father sired an illegitimate daughter, he is cast out of Paradise; he discovers that the world he lives in is more darkly ambiguous than he had ever dreamed. "The intensest light of reason and revelation combined, can not shed such blazonings upon the darker truth in man, as will sometime proceed from his own profoundest gloom," writes Melville, and yet the truth illuminated by Pierre's grief is that the world is steeped "in a mysteriousness wholly hopeless of solution" (Pierre, pp. 199, 156). Not only does Pierre discover the sins of a father worshipped as a saint, he also perceives for the first time that his mother's love for him is self-centered; it will wither and die if Pierre dares to act for himself and shatter the mirror which casts back to her a reflection of herself. Yet Pierre's fall is fortunate since the loss of paradise effects the birth of his soul; although "his whole previous moral being was overturned, and ... the fair structure of the world must, in some unknown way, be entirely rebuilt again," yet "he seemed to feel that in his deepest soul, lurked an indefinite but potential faith, which could rule in the interregnum of all hereditary beliefs" (Pierre, p. 113). Cut off from paternity and past, Pierre suddenly experiences the power of this "ever-present self" and the freedom "to do his own self-will" (Pierre, p. 232). What Pierre discovers in himself is the strength to create the virtue which has fled from the world with the revelation of its ambiguity; through

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22 Herman Melville, Pierre, or the Ambiguities (New York, 1949), pp. 26-27. Subsequent references to this work cited in text.
an act of self-sacrifice, he vows to follow the "unmistakeable cry of the Godhead" which commands him to "do his highest and most glorious duty" (Pierre, p. 205). And, "thus, in the Enthusiast to Duty, the heaven-begotten Christ is born" (Pierre, p. 134).

Thus, the experience of disillusionment does not temper Pierre's extravagant idealism but merely shifts its object from the world to himself. Having substituted his conscience for the ambiguous world as a repository of virtue, Pierre retains his innocent faith in the triumph of good by failing to recognize that his own self partakes of the universal ambiguities, that his own soul is as darkly anomalous as the world outside. After dedicating himself to Truth, Pierre's first action is to devise a scheme, his alleged marriage to Isabel, which will conceal the truth from his mother and from Lucy. His self-sacrifice fills him with "infinite magnanimities"; its "keen cruelty" to others is dismissed as the "unavoidable vast price of his enthusiastic virtue" (Pierre, p. 204). His embrace of Isabel, he is certain, is the command of God, but he does not ask himself if he would respond so generously to "a humped and cripples hideous girl" (Pierre, p. 135). Although the world is shrouded in inscrutable mysteries, the struggle taking place within his soul is interpreted by Pierre with unambiguous clarity. As Pierre hesitates over the letter carrying Isabel's appeal for help, he feels the conflict of two antagonist agencies within him; one of which was just struggling into his consciousness, each of which was striving for the mastery. One bade him finish the selfish destruction of the note, for in some dark way the reading of it would irrevocably entangle his fate. The other bade
him dismiss all misgivings; not because there was no possible ground for them, but because to dismiss them was the manlier part... This good angel seemed mildly to say - Read Pierre, though by reading thou may'st entangle thyself, yet may'st thou thereby disentangle others... the bad angel shrunk up into nothingness, and the good angel defined itself clearer and more clear, and came higher and more nigh to him, smiling sadly but benignantly; while forth from the infinite distances wonderful harmonies stole into his heart. (Pierre, p. 88)

Pierre's certitude in identifying both the forces battling for his soul and the victor in this struggle reveals him yet to be an infatuated idealist; although he has dedicated himself to Truth, it eludes him still.

In the second half of the novel, Pierre moves from the country to the city, from innocence to knowledge, and this move marks another apotheosis of his character, from Christ to Encelados, the offspring of the incestuous marriage of heaven and earth. He discovers at last that the dark ambiguities of the world are mirrored in his soul, that he cannot, in fact, distinguish his good angel from his bad. His "marriage" to Isabel exposes the incestuous nature of his feelings for her; his profession of authorship reveals to him the appalling secrets of his deepest self, what is "black and terrific in his soul" (Pierre, p. 343). Pierre finally emerges from the world of childhood, but he experiences adulthood as unbearable isolation, for he is doubly abandoned by God and man; "Now cruel father and mother have both let go his hand, and the little soul-toddler, how you shall hear his shriek and his wail, and often his fall" (Pierre, p. 335). This final portrait of Pierre as one who possesses the truth about himself and the
world at last denies the alleged benefits of undertaking the voyage of experience. For, instead of the pride of self-reliance, Pierre feels merely the awful isolation of the soul-toddler amid the ambiguities of life; for wisdom, the fruit of experience, he is conscious only of "the everlasting elusiveness of truth" and the "grief of Eternity."

Instead of social honor, he has reaped the opprobrium of mankind; for a coherent and progressive life-history, he can offer only the incoherence of his "untimely, timely end; - life's last chapter well stitched into the middle; nor book, nor author of the book, hath any sequel. . . . It is ambiguous still" (Pierre, p. 403).

Redburn corrects the optimism of Franklin's Autobiography by emphasizing the brutalities of the world and the suffering that must accompany youth's initiation into it. At the same time, the hero's willingness to undertake the voyage of experience is offered as a mature alternative to his culture's avoidance of painful adulthood. While Redburn journeys Eastward to face the harsh realities of the historical world, America is urging its young men to go west where the ideal conditions of the historical moratorium, conditions that Franklin found so favorable, might be retained or recreated. In Pierre, however, Melville's theme is no longer the destructive power of the world; rather, it is the destructive power of American ideology to so falsify the world as to incapacitate the youth for his encounter with its brutalities. The source of Pierre's tragedy is his nurture in the unreal environment of Paradise; Saddle Meadows is America, and because he grew up in this false Eden, Pierre was never "initiated into that darker
though truer aspect of things, which an entire residence in the city from the earliest period of life almost inevitably engraves upon the mind of any keenly observant and reflective youth. Judge, then, how all-desolating and withering the blast, that for Pierre, in one night stripped his holiest shrine of all overland bloom" (Pierre, p. 94). Thus, even when he departs from Eden and ventures into the lapsarian world, Pierre carries his cultural heritage of terrible innocence and extravagant idealism with him, and this heritage proves his undoing since its destruction involves the destruction of Pierre himself. Still, through his suffering and death, Pierre gains a spiritual maturity that invalidates the model of adulthood offered him by his culture. Pessimistic as this image of maturity is, it is affirmative in one sense; the ambiguous and incomplete wisdom which Pierre finally attains is the only wisdom worth possessing or bequeathing to another generation since it alone corresponds with the realities of life. Although this wisdom comes too late to save Pierre, through the story of his life and growth, Melville offers America a myth by which it still may learn to come of age.
The Portrait of a Lady (1881) describes the career of a proud and independent American girl who, insisting upon the freedom to make her own decisions and mold her own destiny in the best middle-class and democratic tradition, makes the worst possible choice. Despite her intelligence, her sensitivity, and her fundamental generosity of spirit, Isabel Archer ends imprisoned in marriage to a man whose conception of life is in deadly enmity with her own, a marriage she can only describe as "the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation." The novel is not, however, about choosing a marriage partner or about the consequences of a mistaken choice; rather, it is a fable of growing up, and, as such, it is a justification of the human suffering and failure that inevitably accompany this process. The novel explains why we fail to realize our dreams of success and happiness and generous achievement, why the world of our adulthood is so much darker and more limited than the world we dreamed of creating for ourselves in the promise of our youth. Isabel asks herself in Chapter 42 how she came to make such a hideous mistake, why she "had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end" which "instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity ... led rather downward and

earthward, into realms of restriction and depression where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, and where it served to deepen the feeling of failure" (Portrait, p. 349); she is asking the question which every human being who has the courage to face it is brought to at some point in his life. The answer Portrait gives us is that suffering and restriction are inescapable products of growth because in order to grow, we must choose, because our choices call forth immitigable but unforeseen consequences, because we must live with those consequences which we never willed to bring into existence. If to live is to choose, to be an individual personality is to see with an inevitably imperfect vision and so to choose, at least in part, blindly and sometimes wrongly; one cannot be an individual with a personal conception of life and possibly not suffer for it. This is the cost of growth; the compensations are self-knowledge, because the self is only defined at last by the particular conditions which its actions have evoked, and the opportunity to affirm one's personal vision of life through one's determination to live out that vision to the bitter end. These compensations Isabel realizes at the end of the novel on the train to Gardencourt: "Deep in her soul - deeper than any appetite for renunciation - was the sense that life would be her business for a long time to come. And at moments there was something inspiring, almost enlivening, in the conviction. It was proof of strength . . ." (Portrait, p. 458).

Like Melville, James emphasizes the connection between suffering and maturity and challenges the untenable optimism prevailing in
nineteenth-century America. However, James goes beyond Melville to identify more precisely the source of America's immaturity as a culture as well as its great potentiality for advancing the manhood of the human race. He does this by affirming the national ideology of self-making and self-reliance while insisting upon a more mature conception of what sacrifices these virtues entail, what renunciations they demand. To James, the trouble with America was its impatience; it was a culture looking for a "short-cut" to substitute for "round-about experience, for troublesome history, for the long, the immutable process of time." In The American Scene, his most perceptive piece of social criticism, James speaks of the "unmistakeable ... admission of unattempted, impossible maturity" which the American culture everywhere makes to him, and he more specifically connects this national immaturity with the horrible impermanence of America, its aversion to the continuity of history that is growth, its adolescent admiration of upheaval and change as ends in themselves. This air of impermanence strikes James as a "vivid lecture" on the dangers of individualism and leads him to ask why "conformity and subordination, that acceptance of control and assent to collectivism in the name of which our age has seen such dreary things done, become on a given occasion the one not vulgar way of meeting a problem" (American Scene, pp. 111, 141-42). Thus, what James is urging upon America in his story of Isabel Archer's initiation is a mature understanding of the only

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form that self-reliance and self-making can take. If he has no quarrel with the assumption, so basic to American ideology, that one can be whatever one chooses, he does insist upon the corollary truth, so neglected in this ideology of new beginnings, that one cannot, with integrity, escape the entire, collective consequences of his choice, the "whole envelope of circumstances" which is created by the actions of the self and comes to be inseparable from it. Nature individualism can only mean subordinating oneself to the totality of one's life-history, and the only freedom to which one can legitimately aspire is the freedom to accept the fate which is imposed upon one's life with every exercise of choice.

At the beginning of The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel Archer possesses both the strengths and weaknesses of an inexperienced but aspiring American youth. She is idealistic and self-confident, optimistic about the world she is about to enter and about her own capacity to master the surprises it has in store for her. Her idealism, however, makes her highly critical of herself and others; she seems unwilling to admit that compromises are demanded of the self in its adjustment to the world. Isabel also clings to her innocence and her tentativeness by seeking self-cultivation as an end in itself and exhibiting a disdain for life as it is manifested in actual conditions and vulgar circumstances. In short, "her grasp of reality . . . is unstable, and her desire for experience is ambivalent." She is "not a candidate for adoption" she tells Ralph, and her resistance to the authority

25Chase, p. 129.
of others, her desire to be solely responsible for her own life, is one of her strengths. At the same time, independence is an ambiguous virtue; as Ralph notes, it may mean many different things including, as Mrs. Touchett demonstrates, the desire to avoid entangling responsibilities and consequences and thus a certain moral deficiency. Isabel's freedom from convention, her determination to choose the things one shouldn't do as well as the things one should, charms Ralph and Lord Warburton. But the heroine seems afraid to exercise this freedom in the latter direction; she rarely takes advice or submits to conventional wisdom. Her power of imagination induces Ralph to share his inheritance with her, but since Isabel's imagination operates most freely in the absence of facts, she sometimes seems to prefer ignorance to knowledge. Thus, in the Albany house, her favorite room is the shabby office where the street door has been bolted shut and the windows papered over; in this room, Isabel "had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side - a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or terror" (Portrait, p. 33). Finally, Isabel demonstrates a youthful reluctance to commit herself; in the first section of the novel, her most characteristic acts are rejections. She avoids commitment because she desires to escape the limitations that choices will inevitably impose upon herself; when she tells Ralph that she does not "wish to touch the cup of experience" because "it's a poisoned drink!" (Portrait, p. 132), she betrays her fear of entanglements that would
inhibit her freedom and define herself too narrowly to the world. To Madame Merle, she expresses disinterest in her suitors' possessions on the grounds that such facts have nothing to do with the value of an individual or his essential self; "I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself," Isabel admits, "but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one" (Portrait, p. 173). Her disdain for Madame Merle's belief that the "cluster of appurtenances" which surround a human being must be taken into account is demonstrated in her rejection of Lord Warburton. Because he has been made by traditions and circumstances beyond his control and is inseparable from them, Isabel cannot believe in his substantiality as a self, a human soul; to her, he is not an individual at all but "a collection of attributes and powers" (Portrait, p. 94), and to marry him would be to become enslaved to a "system."

This portrait of Isabel established in the first twenty chapters of the novel is not only a portrait of youth with its particular strengths and weaknesses; it is also a portrait of America, for Isabel is typically American in the Jamesian sense of being an eminent case of a type. Isabel's determination to be self-sufficient, her high idealism, her aspirations for self-cultivation, her self-esteem which is not based on the outward and accidental circumstances of her life but on her faith in her own potentiality to be in every way equal to life, are expressive of nineteenth-century American ideology in its most spiritual, transcendental form. Thus, Isabel stands, at the
beginning of the novel, not only for the promise of youth, but also for the possibilities of America, possibilities as yet unrealized in experience. The second half of the novel records Isabel's fall from innocence into experience through her marriage to Gilbert Osmond for Osmond leads her out of Eden into the blighted world of evil, defeat, and failure. After her marriage, Isabel discovers that beneath Osmond's "culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers" (Portrait, p. 354); she describes with terror "his faculty for making everything wither that he touched, spoiling everything for her that he looked at . . . as if he had had the evil eye; as if his presence were a blight and his favour a misfortune" (Portrait, p. 349). James's language during Isabel's famous recognition scene deliberately suggests the theme of the fall; this language, along with the name Osmond, indicates that Isabel's marriage is not just a tragic accident but that it represents the blasted world of adulthood. This fall, however, is fortunate, for it leads Isabel toward a humanity she previously lacked, a capacity for compassion and love which is not compatible with innocence or with her earlier aggressive Americanness. Through the fall Isabel also realizes the vague potentialities of her youthful American character. Because her American values both produce the marriage and make it intolerable, it is only after her marriage that Isabel can genuinely possess these values; only after she has seen where they have led her, what they have cost her in suffering, can she decide whether they are worth affirming.
Although to some extent Isabel is victimized by the deceptions and manipulations of others, even after she has learned how Madame Merle and Osmond have made a "convenience" of her she recognizes that her marriage was of her own making. During her midnight vigil in Chapter 42, it crosses her mind that without Madame Merle her marriage might never have been. Nevertheless, after entertaining this reflection, "she knew an immediate horror at having made it. 'Whatever happens to me let me not be unjust,' she said; 'let me bear my burdens myself and not shift them upon others!' ... It was impossible to pretend that she had not acted with her eyes open; if ever a girl was a free agent she had been ... There had been no plot, no snare; she had looked and considered and chosen" (Portrait, pp. 233-34). What Isabel comes to understand in her courageous facing of the past is that she deceived herself and that her self-deceptions issued from her vision of life. Madame Merle frankly introduces Osmond to Isabel in his true character as a nobody; "No career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything" (Portrait, p. 169) is her first description of him. And Osmond completes his portrait during Isabel's first visit to his home by openly displaying his sense of self-importance and his contempt for a world that has failed to recognize his superiority. Describing himself to Isabel as "the most fastidious young gentleman living," he admits, "There were two or three people in the world I envied - the Emperor of Russia, for instance, and the Sultan of Turkey! There were even moments when I envied the Pope of Rome - for the consideration he enjoys. I should have been delighted
to be considered to that extent; but since that couldn't be I didn't care for anything less . . . " (Portrait, p. 223). Even Osmond's house and daughter sufficiently express his egotism; his possessions reveal that everything and every person admitted to his world are arranged and sorted to reflect and represent him. But Isabel does not take the facts of Osmond's life at face value; she interprets them according to her own theory of life. If Osmond is a nobody to the world with his lack of connections and achievements and honors, then that is just proof to Isabel that he offers himself to be loved for his divine soul alone. His reserve, his "quiet," his indifference to achievement are, to her, signs of "depth," not of emptiness: "It was not so much what he said and did, but rather what he withheld that marked him for her," and "her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting" (Portrait, pp. 220, 223). Isabel marries Osmond because he has no demonstrable value and she can thereby prove that she is not guided by the standards of the world in her evaluations; when Ralph expresses his belief that she would "marry a man of more importance," Isabel replies haughtily: "Of more importance to whom? It seems to me enough that one's husband should be of importance to one's self" (Portrait, p. 284). Ralph must then admit that he might have foreseen her marriage: "It was wonderfully characteristic of her that, having invented a fine theory about Gilbert Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverty dressed out as honors. Ralph remembered what he had said to his father about wishing to put it into her power to meet the requirements of her imagina-
tion. He had done so, and the girl had taken full advantage of the luxury" (*Portrait*, p. 288).

If Isabel's American temperament leads her into marriage with Gilbert Osmond, it also contributes to the horror of that marriage. Osmond had loved her for her generous vision of him and for her capacity to share it with the world, to gain for him the consideration he disdains to acquire for himself. "The desire to have something or other to show for his 'parts' — to show somehow or other — had been the dream of his youth; but as the years went on the conditions attached to any marked proof of rarity had affected him more and more as gross and detestable . . . His 'style' was what the girl had discovered with a little help; and now, beside herself enjoying it, she should publish it to the world without his having any of the trouble" (*Portrait*, pp. 254-55). But when Isabel discovers the "full moon," "the whole man," when she realizes that his "style" is simply "a sovereign contempt for everyone but some three or four very exalted people whom he envied, and for everything in the world but half a dozen ideas of his own" and that, moreover, "this base ignoble world . . . was after all what one was to live for . . . in order not to enlighten or convert or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority" (*Portrait*, p. 354), her "wondrous vision of him" is destroyed, and she cannot, do what she will, recover it. The imagination which once led Isabel to erect fine theories about Osmond cannot help but embrace the full horror of his egotism; the generous spirit which once moved her to honor a nobody whom the world
ignored cannot help but recoil from the meanness of Osmond's discovered nature; the independence with which she chose Osmond against the wisdom of the world cannot help but struggle against the narrow and sterile conventionality of his life. Isabel comes to despise her husband in spite of her ardent desire to love and follow and believe in him; in fact, she comes to wish for the annihilation of herself because of that self's involuntary but indestructable opposition to everything that Osmond represents. It is because Isabel continues to express herself, to have a vision of her own that her marriage fails, but only when Isabel must suffer for being herself and for continuing to honor her values in the face of Osmond's hatred of them can she discover what she is and what she cares for in the world. By preventing the loveless marriage between Pansy and Warburton, by returning to England to her dying cousin, Isabel fights for herself, "for the whole thing — her character, the way she felt, the way she judged," for her "certain way of looking at life which he [Osmond] took as a personal offence" (Portrait, p. 352). Isabel is exhausted by this struggle, reduced even to a longing for death and its peace, but she is not defeated, and proof of this is that the struggle goes on; as the Countess Gemini suggests, in Isabel, Osmond has met his match and "if Isabel should draw herself up, she would prove to be the taller spirit of the two" (Portrait, p. 369).

It is not only herself that Isabel affirms by facing the consequences that her choices have produced, it is also America, or, at least, those values of her culture which she cherishes. She accepts
responsibility for her dark fate without capitulating to it; she avoids the temptation to escape from the prison of circumstances which surrounds her, but she retains the will and the energy to transform that prison into a habitation which can accommodate her old belief in liberty and generosity. In this way, she acts out the American ideal of self-reliance in its maturest form. In the last pages of the novel, Caspar Goodwood tempts Isabel to believe that she can return to Eden, that she need not suffer the unwilled consequences of her earlier actions, that she has the right to begin anew. "Why shouldn't we be happy - when it's here before us, when it's so easy?" Caspar cries. "We can do absolutely as we please; to whom under the sun do we owe anything? . . . Were we made to rot in our misery - were we born to be afraid? . . . The world's all before us - and the world's very big" (Portrait, p. 481). Caspar here repeats the temptation of Hester Prynne to Arthur Dimmesdale; beyond that, he repeats the temptation that America makes to its children not to take seriously its own ideal of self-reliance, its false promise that if adulthood proves too painful, one can always retreat again to youth. But Isabel recognizes the hollowness of this promise of new beginnings; in Mrs. Touchett, she sees the horror of one who has avoided consequences and therefore suffering. "Her old pity for the poor woman's inexpressiveness, her want of regret, of disappointment, came back to her. Undoubtedly she would have found it a blessing today to be able to feel a defeat, a mistake, even a shame or two. She wondered if she were not even missing those enrichments of consciousness and privately trying -
reaching out for some aftertaste of life, dregs of the banquet; the testimony of pain or the cold recreation of remorse" (Portrait, p. 466). With this vision before her, Isabel rejects Caspar's temptation; by returning to Rome, she admits how the past enslaves the self, but she affirms the self that has created that past and cannot without integrity be separated from it.

Like most of James's Americans who make the pilgrimage to Europe, a world marked by the history of human pain, Isabel is, at the end of her journey, both less and more American than she was when she began. She is less American because she has discarded the childish illusions of her culture about the ease with which freedom and happiness can be captured and recaptured, because she has grown up beyond the isolating innocence of her countrymen. Although she has suffered, she feels herself for the first time connected with humanity at large; she experiences adulthood as a "sense of the continuity of the human lot" (Portrait, p. 423). She expresses this sense of continuity among the ruins of Rome and again on the train to Gardencourt: "It couldn't be she was to live only to suffer . . . To live only to suffer, only to feel the injury of life repeated and enlarged - it seemed to her she was too valuable, too capable for that. Then she wondered . . . when had it ever been a guarantee to be valuable? Wasn't all history full of the destruction of precious things?" (Portrait, p. 458). At the same time, Isabel is more American in the sense that experience has taught her what part of her American heritage is ineradicable, what contribution her culture, through the agency of herself as an individ-
ual, has to make to the wisdom of the human race. She determines to bring that contribution to fruition in the only mature way open to her, affirming her American values by living out the life they have led her to choose.

In the novels of Cooper, Melville, and James, the models of Bildung depicted bear little resemblance to the life-history recorded in Franklin's Autobiography. The careers of Natty Bumppo, Pierre, and Isabel Archer are designed to correct and criticize the inadequacies of the Franklin myth and the immaturity of a culture which has not only accepted this myth uncritically, incorporating and exaggerating its distortions in a national ideology of growth, but which urges this ideology upon American youth with oppressive single-mindedness and a rigid indifference to individual needs. The writers discussed in this chapter are "romantic" in the sense of disregarding the social facts of nineteenth-century American life in order to focus on the assumptions that dominate their culture; however, they regard with common skepticism the easy optimism of these assumptions. Each of these authors, through the suffering heroes he creates, argues that the strength of adulthood cannot be won or maintained without pain and self-sacrifice; each would substitute the tough ideal of adult committedness to the consequences of early choices for the culture's tender belief in new beginnings and eternal innocence. Living in a country which lacked a tradition of self-criticism or a diverse past by which contemporary values and assumptions might be measured, these writers themselves undertook the task of providing a standard of
criticism through their alternative versions of the drama of growth. As R. W. B. Lewis observes, it was through the urgings of these authors for a more mature America that the nation at last began to come of age. 26

26 Lewis, p. 129.
CHAPTER V

I

As novelists who represent the realistic tradition in American literature, Twain, Dreiser, and James T. Farrell examine concretely America's betrayal of the Franklin myth, the collapse of the American Dream which Franklin had celebrated. Unlike their predecessors discussed in the previous chapter, they do not emphasize the inadequacy of this myth or construct alternative myths of growing up — in and of America; rather, their criticism is directed toward those social facts of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century American life which prevented the American youth from reenacting Franklin's career, from finding a way to fulfill his own growth while contributing to the growth and progress of his country. Like the European novelists studied in Chapter Two, these authors use the Bildungsroman as an instrument of specific social indictment, and like their European counterparts, their indictments are aimed at middle-class society and middle-class ends and especially at an American social environment which prizes and encourages among its young only one standard of achievement, material success. Thus, the society pictured in the works of these authors is too empty to define sufficiently for youth goals worth pursuing; it is a culture which, for all of its proliferation of materialistic possibilities, cannot match the diverse potentialities
of youth with an equally diverse range of ideals, occupations, and
life-styles that would evoke adult commitments. The America of Twain,
Dreiser, and Farrell is stultifying in its uniformity, conformity, and
monotony; it is unable to provide those cultural alternatives that are
necessary if society is "to win from nature social man to carry on her
affairs."

The social criticism conducted by these novelists, with increasing
explicitness and bitterness as we move from Twain to Dreiser to
Farrell, has one striking feature; it is so fundamental that it is
embodied in the very form of their novels. It was suggested earlier
that the Bildungsroman depends upon a creative tension between the
youthful hero and the adult world he is determined to penetrate, be-
tween individual life history and social history as it is represented
in the institutions and arrangements of the culture, between the de-
mands of a self striving for definition and fulfillment and the de-
mand of the adult world for compromise with its values. In the
Bildungsromane of Twain, Dreiser, and Farrell, however, this tension
is destructive rather than creative; the balance between the opposing
forces of self and society is seriously disturbed. This is one of the
most valuable observations made by Richard Poirier in A World Elsewhere.
According to Poirier, the most telling feature of Twain's Huckleberry
Finn is the author's inability to properly "synchronize" the twofold
purpose of the Bildungsroman, to give equal attention both to the de-
velopment of the hero and to the social environment which forestalls
or erects obstacles to that development. Thus, Twain's interest in
the growth of Huck collapses at the point where his review of the environment begins, and the reason for this, Poirier argues, is that "Twain cannot imagine a society that offers alternatives to artificiality or that has in it, like Joyce's Dublin, evidences of an official culture that has historical dignity and value." Moreover, in sacrificing character development to "social panorama," Twain merely foreshadows the naturalistic movement in American literature and particularly the work of Dreiser. For, in Dreiser's novels, environment takes the place of character, society becomes invulnerable to the manifestations of individual personality, and the individual abandons all resistance, surrendering himself eagerly to the society which destroys him. And this, according to Poirier, is also evidence of some weakness in the author's personal vision of life, of his "choice . . . not to imagine . . . a society of alternatives."¹

The failure of Twain and Dreiser to "synchronize" the presentation of character development and social environment, their tendency to neglect character for the task of recreating specifically the social milieu which forms character, is certainly, as Poirier points out, a crucial feature of their work. Nevertheless, Poirier is wrong to ascribe this failure to the imaginative limitations of these authors. It is in the absence of social alternatives which would enable Huck Finn or Clyde Griffiths to transform adolescent potentialities into specific adult potencies that the meaning of their work resides; this

lack of alternatives is the crucial social condition being criticized by them. It is also the explicit theme of Farrell's Studs Lonigan trilogy which dramatizes the tragic waste involved in society's failure to acculturate and make definite the vague promise of youth. That Farrell identifies himself as carrying out a tradition of social criticism that began with Twain is made clear in the following passage from The League of Frightened Philistines: "Tom and Huck are symbols of the possibilities in human beings. Today they stand as a test not only of ourselves but of the whole of American society. They are, with all their charm, like two accusing figures, with their fingers pointing down the decades of American history. Their very characters seem to ask why - why has this promise not been realized? Why is it so rarely that the man becomes what the boy gave promise of becoming?"  

II

Several critics, Kenneth Lynn, Richard Poirier, and Leo Naxx among them, have viewed *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) as a fictional version of the adolescent American dream that fresh starts and new beginnings may eternally be substituted for adjustment to the consequences of failure. To these critics, Huck's continual search for a new style of life which will correct the deficiencies of the old simply perpetuates those cultural illusions which James had sought to dispel four years earlier with *The Portrait of a Lady*. Huck discards his troublesome identity at the beginning of the novel, tries on many new ones during the course of his adventures, and, at the end, finding himself once more threatened by the prospect of living in society as Huck Finn, simply repeats the action he began with and lights out for the territory. This career does not represent growing up, but the myth the American culture offered to its young in place of a model of growth, the value of preserving tentativeness by moving Westward. Thus, Huck exemplifies the danger of being American that Erikson speaks of in *Childhood and Society*, the danger that in a time calling for consolidation and reform, the youthful members of a new society will prefer to repeat the social experiment of America rather than compromise with that which is already established. Poirier makes this point brilliantly in *A World Elsewhere* when he contrasts the immaturity of Twain and other nineteenth-century American authors with the mature vision of life held by their English counterparts. In Poirier's reading of the novel, the raft represents "a retreat from history" and the shore, "an
investment in history and locale;" by committing himself to the raft, Twain perpetuates the fallacious belief that with a new continent before them, men could create an environment "congenial to the ideal self" and avoid adjustment to "historically rooted environments."

Since this ideal environment is associated with nature and "nakedness" while the existing social environment is associated with artificiality, costume, and the enslavement of the individual to dead traditions and bankrupt moralities, Twain, in Poirier's view, simply fictionalizes Emerson's dictum that society itself is a "conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members" and exhibits his culture's inability to distinguish between the dangers of and the dangers in society. In contrast, Poirier emphasizes how the nineteenth-century English novelist could "imagine society as including the threat of conformity and artificiality and as offering, nevertheless, beneficial opportunities for self-discovery" and "a place that can be called natural." Thus, the critic concludes, "naturalness and social form are fused" in English novels in a way that nineteenth-century American authors do not know how to sufficiently value.3

Poirier's discussion implies that only an immature mind dichotomizes nature and society, refusing to understand that it is natural for man to seek his fulfillment in social relations. Because Twain lacks this understanding, he cannot possibly, in Poirier's view, portray the successful growth of his hero; thus, Twain fails to synchronize the development of his hero with the review of the only environment within

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3Poirier, pp. 15-20, 30, 151-53, 163, 177.
which that development can take place because he cannot imagine the consciousness he values most as expanding "within the environment it the novel provides." In contrast, in a novel like Great Expectations, the author can demonstrate how Pip's social environment has in many ways retarded his growth and damaged him permanently without having to abandon the development of Pip's character as a fictional theme. And this is because Dickens can both mourn the irrevocable loss of human potentiality which has resulted from Pip's social experience and yet celebrate those social values which give Pip the strength to resist his own destruction by society.

Useful as Poirier's analysis is, it fails to acknowledge the crucial fact that Huckleberry Finn does not attack society per se but rather a very particular society the language and manners of which Twain takes great care to present in specific and accurate detail. Moreover, the salient feature of this particular environment is its proximity to nature; it is a frontier society and, as such, its major defect lies in not being civilized enough. Thus, one truth about the social environment portrayed in the novel is that on the surface it is a society of artificiality and costume, of dead traditions and bankrupt moralities; another truth is that beneath the surface it is barbaric and brutal. It has adopted the trappings of culture, but in fundamental matters of morality and common human decency, it has hardly risen above the law of the jungle. Its civilized amenities depend

^Poirier, p. 195.
upon the institution of slavery, and this in itself mocks the advance in civilization the American experiment was supposed to have marked. It defends itself against its own brutishness with false piety, sentimentality, and ersatz traditions borrowed from Europe; beneath its thin and imitative culture which honors the worst features of European societies, subservience to "authority" and a rigid caste system, lies a nightmare of greed and violence. The union of barbarism and artificiality that characterizes this frontier "civilization" is illustrated by the Grangerford family whose culture is entirely an affair of crockery cats, artificial fruit, and white linen suits, but who conduct themselves as savages. It is exemplified by Miss Watson, whose religious pieties fail to prevent her from selling Jim down the river for eight hundred dollars, and by Tom Sawyer, whose enslavement to the authority of books and to traditions of "regularity" legalizes his petty cruelties. And it must be pointed out that his union of barbarism and artificiality is the exact reverse of that fusion of naturalness with social form which constitutes the ideal condition under which a mature commitment to social life can be made.

Set against the deficiencies of civilization in the novel is what many critics insist upon seeing as the ideality of nature. But in Huckleberry Finn, Twain by no means presents nature either as ideal or as divorced from society. Nature is represented by Pap whom Huck describes as "naturally mean" and whose character fully articulates one possibility of freedom from the controls of civilization, the possibility that nature, left to itself, will be ignorant, brutal, and irre-
sponsible. Nature is also represented by those frontier towns which have not yet successfully undertaken their own civilization. In the one-horse Arkansas town where Huck witnesses the murder of Boggs and the lynching party, Twain emphasizes the connection between the community's proximity to nature and the brutality of its inhabitants.

On the river front some of the houses was sticking out over the bank, and they was bowed and bent, and about ready to tumble in . . . the bank was caved away under one corner of some others, and that corner was hanging over . . . Sometimes a belt of land a quarter of a mile deep will start in and cave along and cave along till it all caves into the river in one summer. Such a town as that has to be always moving back, and back, and back, because the river's always gnawing at it . . . All the streets and lanes was just mud, and they warn't nothing else but mud - mud as black as tar, and nigh about a foot deep in some places; and two or three inches deep in all the places. The hogs loafed and grunted around, everywhere. You'd see a muddy sow and a litter of pigs come lazily along the street and whollop herself right down in the way where folks had to walk around her, and she's stretch out, and shut her eyes . . . and pretty soon you'd hear a loafer sing out, "Hi! so boy! Sick him, tige!" And away the sow would go, squealing most horrible, with a dog or two swinging to each ear . . . and then you would see all the loafers get up and watch the thing out of sight, and laugh at the fun and look grateful for the noise. Then they'd settle back again till there was a dog-fight. There couldn't anything wake them up all over, and make them happy all over, like a dog-fight - unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail and see him run himself to death.  

In Chapter Sixteen, Huck leaves the raft under pressure from his "deformed" social conscience to turn Jim over to the authorities. However, when he encounters two men in a boat searching for run-away slaves, he spontaneously invents the small-pox story to protect Jim.  

After returning to the raft, Huck tries to find some ethical principle
by which to justify his conduct. Because he cannot determine what is
right and what is wrong in the affair of Jim's freedom, he decides
henceforth to rely upon his "natural" instincts and do "whichever come
handiest at the time" (Huck Finn, p. 78). Since the reader approves
of Huck's natural inclination rather than the promptings of his con-
science, this incident is supposed to illustrate Twain's commitment to
the "good heart," to the superiority of nature over society as a guide
to moral behavior. What is ignored, however, is the irony that Huck's
decision to act on natural rather than received morality is mirrored
by the men in the boat. They, too, know what they ought to do for the
small-pox victims; they, too, choose to do what is handiest when they
flee without giving aid; they, too, suffer guilt as a consequence of
disobeying conscience, and for this reason, they pass Huck money from
a distance. If this incident illustrates the corruption of society,
it emphatically does not argue for the moral purity of nature or the
"heart." A society built upon the foundation of slavery is so bank-
rupt that it has lost all power for coercing human nature to choose
against self-interest for the general social good; its members must,
as a result, fall back upon the principle of doing what comes natur-
ally. Thus, it is one criticism of society that in this instance, as
in so many others, Huck's heart can give him better guidance than his
socially-formed conscience; it is another, and more profound, criticism
of society that it forces Huck and the men in the boat to adopt a
principle of moral behavior that is, at root, barbaric and hedonistic.
Thus, while Twain's novel is constructed around the dichotomy of raft and shore, these two locales stand for nothing so simple as the conflict between nature and society, a sound heart and a deformed conscience, nor does this dichotomy signify, as Leo Marx argues, that Twain was adolescence committed to a freedom from social imperatives that was "hardly to be had in the Mississippi Valley in the 1840's, or, for that matter, in any other known human society." The shore represents, not "society," but a particular society, a society which cannot accurately be described as "an investment in history and locale" since it has repudiated its own vernacular values and America's historical significance as a democracy. Its culture, based on the undemocratic traditions of past and foreign civilizations, is inauthentic; because this culture is artificial and unnatural rather than a fusion of "naturalness and social form," it has no power to win social man from nature or to give the natural potentialities of its inhabitants social definition and purpose. Thus, Huck discovers that his initiation into this society can only be accomplished at the expense of both his natural and social impulses. That Huck is eager to find ways of compromising between his own nature and the demands of others in the interest of social harmony is illustrated again and again in the novel. It is illustrated in Huck's desire to accommodate the Duke and the King and to recognize their authority in spite of his private feeling that

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"these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down hum-bugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself; it's the best way; then you don't have no quarrels, and don't get into no trouble . . . it would have been a miserable business to have any unfriendliness on the raft; for what you want, above all, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others" (Huck Finn, p. 106). As has frequently been noted, this last sentence expresses a profound social code, but it is not one that functions on the shore.

If the shore does not represent the imperatives of social life, neither does the raft stand for freedom from society and its restraints; rather, the raft represents that ideal fusion of naturalness and social form, the vision of society as the culture of nature, that Poirier seeks in vain in Twain's work. That the raft does no symbolize escape from society for the characters aboard is made clear in Huck's lyric descriptions of life as experienced on the raft; in these passages, there is celebration of nature, certainly, but the value of community life is equally emphasized both in Huck's references to Jim, whose companionship provides the chief pleasure of life aboard the raft, and in Huck's capacity to derive comfort from the social life around him.

Sometimes we'd have that whole river to ourselves for the longest time. Yonder was the banks and the islands, across the water; and maybe a spark—which was a candle in a cabin window—and sometimes on the water you could see a spark or two—on a raft or a scow, you know; and maybe you could hear a fiddle or a song coming over from one of them crafts. It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or
only just happened - Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took too long to make so many. (Huck Finn, pp. 100-01)

In Chapter Fifteen, Huck and Jim are separated during a fog; when Huck returns to the raft, he finds Jim asleep and decides to pretend that Jim has dreamed the whole incident. Jim responds to Huck's trick with indignation: "... when I woke up en fine you back agin', all safe en sound', de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's and makes 'em ashamed" (Huck Finn, p. 73). With this speech, Jim guides Huck toward an understanding of genuine adulthood and the fusion of natural and social impulses that produces it. If to be natural means to honor one's own deepest feelings, to be social means to extend this respect toward the feelings of others; these two ideals of behavior are not in conflict; indeed, they nourish each other. Huck's behavior has violated both ideals since he has repressed his own feelings of joy at being reunited with Jim as well as displaying indifference to Jim's emotions and thus to his dignity.

Thus, the raft does offer Huck a choice of purely social alternatives; there he can grow up by discovering where self-interest and social interest coincide and how the individual may fulfill the demands of his nature through the social relationships he forms. As Lionel Trilling has remarked, the raft represents a "way of reaching what
society ideally dreams of for itself."  

just as the shore represents society's abandonment of those ideals it pretends to honor. Moreover, the social order of the raft does not rest upon a higher morality than that which society professes. As Leslie Fiedler notes, Huck is no Thoreau, and the raft is not Walden Pond; it does not represent an environment "congenial to the ideal self." Practical competency, a respect for utility, and, above all, the democratic belief that insistence upon one's own due is perfectly consistent with respect for the dignity of others, these are the values American society was established to promote; in Huckleberry Finn, they are practiced only on the raft, not on the shore. Because the raft stands only for what society should have become, however, it cannot permanently assist the development of Huck. At the end of the novel, Huck must face his real alternatives. He can choose to enter society but this means abandoning his essential nature and becoming like Tom; this alternative is dramatized by the last ten chapters of the novel during which Huck assumes Tom's identity and falls once again under his domination. Or Huck can abandon society to preserve his own identity, but this means losing forever the opportunity to satisfy his deep desire to join and serve his community; this alternative is articulated through the famous last lines of the novel: "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it.

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7 Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (Garden City, N. Y., 1953), p. 111.

I been there before" (Huck Finn, p. 245). Since these alternatives force Huck to choose between self and society, they nullify all possibility of his growth; for it is the dynamic interplay of these forces that alone produces Bildung.

The dichotomy of raft and shore which structures Huckleberry Finn does suggest the basic deficiency in American society described at the beginning of this discussion although it seems clear that Twain means to criticize this deficiency rather than to celebrate it; somehow the diversity of social alternatives which should exist within society had been translated in America into the paralyzing alternatives which face Huck at the end of the novel, either to join society entirely on its terms even if this means betraying cherished personal values or to honor those values outside of society, perhaps through the establishment of a new community in the empty continent to the west. Clearly, the source of this problem was the existence of a frontier which allowed society to resist its own growth by refusing to accommodate the diverse natures and values of its members, encouraging them instead to pursue their individual dreams outside of society. Through the frontier, society had found a way to honor its democratic belief in freedom of opportunity for the "natural" man without having to actually undergo the painful transformation which results from a free competition among diverse life-styles and ideologies. Twain's deepest criticism of the American social environment, then, is of its failure to absorb vernacular values into its own official culture, and this is why that culture remains artificial and narrow; in a sense, Huck himself acts out in the
novel the course that America must take for its own growth when he extends his area of self-interest to include Jim and finds himself unable to separate his natural consideration for his own good from his social consideration for Jim's good. And if Huck's final departure for the territory represents a false belief in the value of fresh starts and new beginnings, this belief is not opposed by society; rather, it is promoted by a social establishment which wishes to avoid accommodating diverse adult personalities and so refuses to create the genuine social alternatives which would make such accommodation possible.

It is possible to read Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) as a sequel to Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, not because it presents a solution to the problem raised by the earlier novel, but because it restates the challenge made by Huck to society in a more precise and articulate way. One major difference between the two novels is that in Pudd'nhead Wilson the town replaces the shore-raft dichotomy as the structural center of the novel. This means that the characters can no longer seek any alternative to socialization. Those whose relationship to the town is troublesome, like the rebellious Roxy or the eccentric Pudd'nhead, cannot simply refuse society's attempt to impose ill-fitting identities upon them; they must make it in Dawson's Landing (or its equivalent) or nowhere. The river is not a route of escape but merely a link to other communities and ultimately to the older and more established civilizations of the East. Another major difference is that in the later novel, the consciousness which Twain values most is represented by an adult character, David Wilson, rather than a boy. Therefore, the
growth of the hero is no longer an issue; instead, the challenge of
growing up is directed solely to the town, to America itself. The
chief question posed by the novel, then, is whether the community can
accommodate the adult diversity represented by the various individuals
forced to find a place within it and thereby itself expand, ripen, and
mature, or whether it will resist change and threats to its authority
by imprisoning its membership in rigid identities and thereby itself
remain narrow and intolerant, a society in which all men are slaves un-
der the skin.

This question is posed by the complexity of Twain's portrayal of
Dawson's Landing. In many respects, this town is no different from
the riverfront towns of Huckleberry Finn; it is provincial, artificial,
and built on the rotten foundation of slavery. The predominant feature
of the town emphasized in the novel is its power to assign its members
positions in society which are unalterable and yet totally unrelated
to their natural abilities, personal inclinations, or their worth as
human beings. The smartest man in Dawson's Landing is labeled a
pudd'nhead when he first enters the community, and it requires twenty
years and a lucky accident to erase that label. Roxy's switch of the
babies results in the imposition of an inferior social identity as
black and slave upon the real Tom Driscoll; and so much power has this
label to determine his character that even when his true identity is
discovered, the truth cannot set him free. Although the success of
Roxy's plan proves clearly enough that the social distinctions which
order Dawson's Landing are conventional only, these distinctions be-
come inexorably real, as real as if God had ordained them, when a unique human nature is twisted in order to fit the crippling mold society has decreed for it. But perhaps the most horrible crime that can be charged to Dawson's Landing is its total blindness to the way it violates democratic ideals; although the town is deceived for some twenty years as to the real identity of Tom Driscoll and Valet de Chambers, when this deception is unmasked, not one member of the community denounces the cruelty of a society that assumes an inherent inferiority among half of its population which it has demonstrably imposed upon them from without.

Yet, as F. R. Leavis has observed, Twain's attitude toward Dawson's Landing is complex. If he attacks its cruelty, its artificiality, its appalling ignorance, he also stresses its prosperity, its comfort, its civilized amenities, and, above all, its anxious desire to overcome its own provinciality and to "keep in touch with the remoter centres of its civilisation." Dawson's Landing is crude and repressive, but it is also capable of displaying "a touching positive humility, a will to pay homage to something other than provinciality and philistinism and the standards of everyday life." There is positive evidence of the community's wish to make itself more tolerant and inclusive. For example, there is the community's growing tolerance for the eccentricities of the Eastern outsider, Wilson, and the grudging respect it gradually extends to his intelligence. In its hospitality to the

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Italian twins, the town shows an eagerness to be exposed to other standards of civilization than its own. At the reception given to honor the twins, the reaction of the townspeople is appreciative and humble.

None of these visitors was at ease, but, being honest people, they didn't pretend to be. None of them had ever seen a person bearing a title of nobility before, and none had been expecting to see one now... The twins drifted about from group to group, talking easily and fluently and winning approval, compelling admiration and achieving favour from all... The young strangers were kept long at the piano. The villagers were astonished and enchanted with the magnificence of their performance, and could not bear to have them stop. All the music that they had ever heard before seemed spiritless prentice-work and barren of grace or charm when compared with these intoxicating floods of melodious sound. They realised that for once in their lives they were hearing masters.10

When the town takes in Wilson and the twins, it becomes wiser and more self-critical as a consequence; after Pudd'nhead's courtroom triumph, the townsfolk humbly examine their earlier prejudices against the outsider:

And as each of these roaring gangs of enthusiasts marched away, some remorseful member of it was quite sure to raise his voice and say:

"And this is the man the likes of us has called a pudd'nhead for more than twenty years. He has resigned from that position, friends."

"Yes, but it isn't vacant - we're elected." (Pudd'nhead, p. 213).

Perhaps the ethical complexity of Dawson's Landing is meant to suggest the alternatives open to it as a provincial but growing community. These alternatives are symbolized by the river which borders

10Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson (New York, 1955), pp. 75-77. Subsequent references to this work cited in text.
the town, for the river is a link to those communities "down the river" which practice the repressions of Dawson's Landing on a larger scale; at the same time, the river connects the town to the richer and more diverse civilizations of the east from which both Pudd'nhead and the twins derive. Thus, Dawson's Landing may expand and ripen under the influence of the latter, or it may use its rigid social system so successfully as an instrument of repression that it will crush all resistance, thereby stifling its own capacity for growth. Twain attempts to pose these alternatives through the character of Pudd'nhead who, because he enters this society as an adult and an outsider, possesses values and standards of his own which are, to some degree, in opposition to the values and standards of the town. In a sense, Pudd'nhead is Huck Finn having chosen the alternative of society; the question raised by his entrance into Dawson's Landing is to what degree he will have to compromise his individuality in order to assume a position in the community and to what degree he can resist a self-destroying conformity and successfully impose his nature upon the town.

In some respects, Pudd'nhead seems to validate the answer implied by the last ten chapters of Huckleberry Finn, that the price of joining society is the assumption of Tom Sawyer's identity. Even as an adult, Pudd'nhead has not surrendered the adolescent dream of glory. As Richard Chase observes, he is only superficially a rebel; at heart, he is not radically alienated from his community, and his strongest desire is to be "one of the boys," a goal he pursues with Tom-Sawyerish devices and by the prostitution of his intellectual capacity which he
puts only to "socially approved use." Certainl, Wilson is allied to Tom by his interest in fingerprinting, palmistry, and amateur detection, and certainly he does eventually win social respectability and "glory" by these devices. The worst charge that can be made against him is his moral blindness for although his discovery of the exchanged babies brings the absurdity of the caste system to light, Wilson cannot see or denounce the real evil that he has exposed. In a sense, then, Chase's description of Pudd'nhead as "Tom Sawyer grown up and become a conventional and respected citizen of small-town America, after enduring a period of scorn while he was regarded as the village atheist and crank" is an accurate evaluation of his character. But, in another sense, it can also be argued that Pudd'nhead represents the survival of Huck Finn despite the pressures of socialization. As Leslie Fiedler points out, if Wilson wishes to succeed, he still demands success on his own terms; indeed, he has retained values and loyalties of his own which he does not intend to violate and which he cannot be coerced into abandoning even by the town's ostracism. When Leavis calls Wilson the "poised and preeminently moral centre of the drama," he is referring to the Wilson who values the civilized

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12 Chase, pp. 150-51.
14 Leavis, p. 22.
superiority of the twins and who remains loyal to them even after they fall into undeserved disgrace, to the Wilson who records in his
Calendar trenchant criticisms of society, to the Wilson who, through his hobbies, is responsive to new ideas and tenacious in the face of social ridicule. Above all, he is referring to the Wilson who, like Huck, can extend his sympathy to the untouchables of his society, the black slaves. During the course of the novel, the outcast and eccentric does succeed in gaining social approval and acceptance. However, the inconsistencies of Wilson's character leave the meaning of this movement in doubt; whether it signals the enlightenment and enlargement of society or the destruction of every quality that makes the hero valuable and unique is a question that is left unresolved.
III

Dreiser, more than any other American novelist, articulates how the Franklin-Alger myth dominates our culture and poisons the lives of American youth. Dreiser's youthful heroes believe in this myth and they eagerly pursue its realization in their own lives; their actual careers, however, demonstrate how it fails both as a description and as a model of growing up. As Spiller observes, in the age of monopolies and increased separation of the classes, the dream of rising to a position of influence and affluence was simply no longer credible. Perhaps in an early work like *Sister Carrie* (1900), Dreiser could render the American urban environment as sufficiently plastic to allow for the possibility of combining success with self-development; although Carrie must rise through a series of empty liaisons, at least she does discover a career which promises her success without violating her inner nature, indeed while assisting her discovery of innate talents. But by the time of *An American Tragedy* (1925), "the path of opportunity is no longer open, there have been alterations in the American Dream."15 Thus, the America that produces Clyde Griffith's tragedy is unalterably divided by the power of money, and Clyde is destroyed by his attempt to bridge the gulf between the Lycurgus Griffiths and their Kansas City relatives, between the haves and the have-nots. The most significant point of Dreiser's social criticism, however, is not

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that the American Dream is no longer democratically available, but that it is a dream unworthy of pursuit and yet the only one the culture offers. Not only is the ideal of material success dangled before Clyde and then withdrawn; it is a sordid and shabby ideal which brings no self-fulfillment even when it is realized. This, according to Irving Howe, is the real meaning of Dreiser's *Bildungsroman*; his youths "writhe and suffer to win a foothold in the slippery social world ... They exhaust themselves to gain success, they destroy themselves in acts of impulsive deviancy" only to discover that "money, worldly success, sensual gratification ... the only ends they know or can name" are powerless to "slake their restlessness. They grapple desperately for money, they lacerate themselves climbing to success, yet they remain sullen and bewildered, always hopeful for some unexpected sign by which to release their bitter craving for a state of grace, or, at least, illumination."16 Thus, the bitter irony of *An American Tragedy* is that Clyde should destroy himself and Roberta for such a vision of the "good life" as the Lycurgus Griffiths provide just as Carrie's tragedy is to discover in success only bewildered emptiness. These narratives reveal "how shallow are the standards by which the characters live," how lacking in "some principle of value by which to overcome the meanness, the littleness of their lives. To know, however, that the goals to which one has pledged one's years are trivial, yet not to know in what their triviality consists - this is a form of

suffering which overcomes Dreiser's characters again and again."  

Dreiser saw himself as an American Balzac, the chronicler of American urban life. His youthful heroes, like those of Balzac, are provincials eager to learn the ways of the walled city and to win for themselves the prizes it has to offer. They too enter the city "full of the illusions of ignorance and youth," wondering how admission to the centers of power and pleasure may be accomplished, unaware of the "real and savage struggle for place, money, and social prestige" that lies ahead of them. Carrie Meeber is one of these youths, an American Rastignac, "a fair example of the middle American class . . . quick to understand the keener pleasures of life, ambitious to gain in material things. A half-equipped little knight she was, venturing to reconnoitre the mysterious city and dreaming wild dreams of some vague, far-off supremacy, which should make it prey and subject" (Sister Carrie, p. 6). Another such is Clyde Griffiths, his imagination fired by the material displays of the city, "the fine clothes, the handsome homes, the watches, rings, pins that some boys sported;" yet he is bewildered about the means by which these treasures might be acquired:

" . . . he had nothing, and he never had had. And yet the world was so full of so many things . . . so many people were so happy and so successful. What was he to do? Which way to turn? What one thing

\[17\] Howe, p. 819.


\[19\] Spiller, p. 1199.
to take up and master—something that would get him somewhere?"  

Carrie and Clyde, like Balzac's youths, experience the city as a magnet, an environment of things which first attracts the eager youth to the city and then directs his life-choices with its powerful contrasts of splendor and squalor. The city, presented in all of its dense materiality in the pages of Dreiser's novels, offers a pervasive and articulate dialectic to the youth. By its extremes of poverty and wealth, it presses on him from beneath, urging escape from what is drab and sordid, and lures him upward toward what is luxurious and resplendent. Dreiser's youths are quick to perceive these contrasts and to fasten their attention on those things which the urban culture defines as valuable: jewelry, fine clothes, elegant restaurants, and palatial homes. Carrie, arriving in Chicago, notices immediately the gulf which separates the favored from the unfortunate; she is repelled by the Hanson flat which, with its "discordantly papered rooms," conveys "the drag of a lean and narrow life" and "a settled opposition to anything save a conservative round of toil" (Sister Carrie, pp. 14-15). At the same time she is irresistibly drawn to the center of Chicago with its vague but insistent promise of happiness: "The great streets were wall-lined mysteries to her; the vast offices, strange mazes which concerned far-off individuals of importance. She could only think of people connected with them as counting money, dressed magnificently, and riding in carriages. What they dealt in, how they laboured, to what end it

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all came, she had only the vaguest conception. It was all wonderful, all vast, all far-removed" (Sister Carrie, p. 18). Similarly, as Clyde Griffiths walks the streets of Lycurgus, he unconsciously traces the path of his own life, a path directed by the force of the contrasts he observes. In the working-class section of town, he feels "depressed by the poverty and social angularity and crudeness of it - all spelling one thing, social misery, to him," and he escapes across the river into the elegant neighborhood where his uncle resides. "The beauty! The ease! What member of his immediate family had ever even dreamed that his uncle lived thus! The grandeur!" (Tragedy, pp. 187-88).

Through the operation of this dialectic and its power to shape the lives of his characters, Dreiser makes his sharpest criticism of the pernicious materialism of American life. In The Color of A Great City, he sums up the knowledge that dictates his novelistic method: Americans, particularly those who have known a youth of poverty, restriction, and deprivation, become "warped, oppressive, greedy, and distorted in every worthy mental sense by the great fight they have made to get their money. Nearly the only ideal that is set before these strugglers . . . is the one of getting money. A hundred thousand children . . . are inoculated in infancy with the doctrine that wealth is all - the shabbiest and most degrading doctrine that can be impressed upon anyone."21 By making materialism the focus of his criticism, Dreiser also follows his master, Balzac, and indeed, many de-

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scripions of Dreiser's novels might equally apply to Père Goriot or Lost Illusions as the following quotation from Thomas K. Whipple, one of Dreiser's contemporaries, illustrates. "American life as he renders it has two outstanding features: chaos and tragedy. It is a free-for-all of personal aggrandizement, a wild struggle to get what each can out of the general grab-bag... The strongest, ablest, and most unscrupulous win the prizes...".22

The similarities between Balzac and Dreiser, however, lead to the discovery of a more significant difference; in Balzac's novels materialism plays an affirmative role that is simply lacking in Dreiser's portrayal of American society. Certainly Balzac criticizes the way materialism corrupts vocational impulses by forcing young men to choose between fulfilling their productive natures or satisfying their ambition for power and social recognition. At the same time, however, he is aware that commercialism was a positive democratizing force since historically it led to the breakdown of class barriers and to the proliferation of opportunities for young men of merit and shrewdness however lowly their origins. Moreover, in Balzac's novels, the vocation of arrivisme is a genuinely demanding one, involving self-discovery and self-definition and a positive exercise of one's energies and intelligence. This is because arrivisme involves more than satisfying one's material appetites. The youth may measure his progress by his acquisition of things which confer social status, but his goal is not merely

the accumulation of goods; it is the conquest of a complex social world through self-mastery and the mastery of others. A youth like Eugène is aware of cultural precedents for his "vocation;" in his penetration of society, he has the sense of being involved in a struggle with historical dignity and value, the middle-class struggle to win recognition for natural merit. Thus, Balzac communicates the worthwhileness of individual life, even when it is played out in an arena of sordid materialism; individual worth may be expressed in the force of a character determined to immerse himself in the materialistic jungle and reap its rewards or in the force of a character who can assess the triviality of these rewards and reject them because his culture has provided him with other standards of value. And the underlying source of this affirmation is a culture diverse enough to encourage different responses to the material values temporarily in ascendance, a society of alternatives.

In contrast, materialism has no such positive function in Dreiser's novels. In America, money does not democratize but separates and divides, creating classes and class barriers where there were none; the society which worships success is a society without alternatives, one which reduces the possibilities of life to two choices only, having money or lacking it. Because Dreiser's youths are exposed to no other standard of value than a purely material one, their lives are shaped solely by the powerful dialectic of wealth and poverty that the city provides. They seem "anxious to surrender themselves to the powers that destroy them," especially "the power and wealth of the
City;" consequently, the city itself becomes the dominant character in the novels, a character far more articulate than any of its human inhabitants. In Dreiser's America, the vocational impulses of youth are stifled by the social environment, for the ideal of vocation has been replaced by the ideal of consumerism; a youth seeks to prove his worth, not by what he can do, but by what he can buy. In consequence, the struggle for success, whether it ends in triumph or failure, is vitiating and dehumanizing; by pursuing consumerism, the characters cease to feel themselves as persons; defining themselves instead in terms of the things they have gained or lost. Drouet without his flashy clothes is nothing; Hurstwood is annihilated by the loss of his saloon. In neither case does the man derive strength from his work, for this is insubstantial and bestows no sense of inner mastery; for each, self-esteem depends upon an accustomed environment such as the elegant furnishings of Fitzgerald and Hoy's provide. Even Carrie finds no real vocation in the theater; its appeal lies in the money she earns by it and in the illusory world of comfort and splendor that she finds upon the stage. Because the characters achieve definition only through the things that surround them, they become inaccessible to each other as persons; for both Drouet and Hurstwood, Carrie is only another acquisition, an addition to the environment which they inhabit and by which they determine their worth, just as Clyde falls in love, not with the person Sondra Finchley, but with the world of riches and

23Poirier, p. 213.
ease which she personifies. Thus, while Balzac's characters may use one another under the pressure of materialistic desires, passion is also available to them, and the choice of whether to love or to use remains a distinct alternative. In Dreiser's world, however, the characters are denied this choice as they are denied vocational alternatives; what is infinitely worse, they are not even aware of having been deprived of the power of choice and, with it, the opportunity to grow.

Sister Carrie is divided into four sections, each one structured by the environmental dialectic of have and have not; this dialectic articulates for Carrie the range of possibilities open to her and propels her steady drift away from poverty and deprivation toward the realm of wealth and possession. Thus, the design of the novel resembles a ladder; each division dramatizes one step in the heroine's climb toward success. This design communicates both Carrie's fulfillment of the American Dream and her inability to find self-fulfillment. The urgent longings which direct her progress upward remain unsatisfied even when she has reached the top; rocking before the window in her Waldorf suite, she still feels separated from a life that eludes her. Thus, Carrie begins and ends the book with the same vague but insistent desire for self-enlargement because the urban environment in which she seeks her fulfillment can give her formless aspirations only a material content.

In the first eight chapters of Sister Carrie, the barren Hanson flat and the grim factory in which Carrie labors long and hard articu-
late one possibility for Carrie, a state of material, emotional, and spiritual deprivation from which she desperately and understandably seeks escape. Drouet, the prosperous traveling salesman, provides her with a means of escape; with his linen cuffs, his gold plate buttons, his rings and polished shoes, his association with the world of theaters and fine restaurants, he becomes the instrument through which the city speaks to Carrie of the promise of life, a concrete and material entity to which she can attach her vague and inexpressible longing for self-betterment. However, since Drouet offers only a material improvement in Carrie's condition, her satisfaction with him can be temporary only; in the second section of the novel, Hurstwood displaces Drouet as the symbol of that something better for which Carrie longs.

In Hurstwood, the city provides Carrie with a new articulation of her belief that there exists a world of richer and greater possibilities than that which she has known; simultaneously, Drouet comes to represent for her the drag of a mean and narrow life in which her capacity for experience will remain untested. Driving along the North Shore where Hurstwood resides, Carrie, feeling the pressure of environmental contrasts, identifies her aspirations for growth with the attainment of a materially superior mode of life.

Across the broad lawns, now first freshening into green, she saw lamps faintly glowing upon rich interiors... She imagined that across those richly carved entrance ways, where the globed and crystallled lamps shone upon panelled doors set with stained and designed panes of glass, was neither care nor unsatisfied desire. She was perfectly certain that here was happiness... When she came to her own rooms, Carrie saw their comparative insignificance... She was not contrasting it now with what she had had, but with what
she had so recently seen. The glow of palatial doors was still in her eye, the roll of cushioned carriages in her ears. What, after all, was Drouet? What was she? At her window, she thought it out, rocking to and fro, and gazing out across the lamplit park... she longed and longed and longed. (Sister Carrie, pp. 101-02)

In New York, the environmental dialectic of have and have not again operates to intensify Carrie's longing and to equate her discontent with material deprivation. The streets, the crowds, the theaters, the shops, the restaurants of the city all whisper to Carrie that her fulfillment will be found in this realm of material splendor: "Florist shops, furriers, haberdashers, confectioners all followed in rapid succession. The street was full of carriages. Pompous doormen in immense coats, shiny brass belts and buttons waited in front of expensive salesrooms. Coachmen in tan boots, white tights, and blue jackets waited obsequiously for the mistresses of carriages who were shopping inside. The whole street bore the flavour of riches and show, and Carrie felt that she was not of it... she longed to feel the delight of parading here as an equal. Ah, then she would be happy!" (Sister Carrie, p. 260). At the same time, Carrie remembers what alternative awaits her in the city if she does not succeed in realizing her dream; dining in Sherry's amid the elegance of gilt chandeliers, polished mirrors, red-shaded candelabra, Tiffany silver, and Haviland china, Carrie is haunted by a vision of "the other Carrie - poor, hungry, drifting at her wit's end, and all of Chicago a cold and closed world..." (Sister Carrie, p. 268). Under the pressure of this contrast, Carrie is compelled once again to seek happiness through a mat-
ertrial alteration of her circumstances; as her life with Hurstwood comes more and more to resemble the penurious existence she had endured during her first weeks in Chicago, she deserts him for a career upon the stage. But although she finally reaches the world of fame and luxury, her hunger for something more, her unshakable feeling that she has been denied something of great value, remains unappeased.

The juxtaposition of scenes which concludes the novel, Carrie in her Waldorf suite and Hurstwood in his Bowery flophouse, emphasizes both the distance Carrie has traveled and the powerful urban contrasts that have motivated that journey; but this juxtaposition also symbolizes the meaninglessness of Carrie's rise since she remains as isolated from life, as uncomprehending of the means to her happiness, as undeveloped and as lacking in personal sources of strength as is her former lover.

In his article "Dreiser and the Plotting of Inarticulate Experience," Julian Markels demonstrates how the construction of Sister Carrie "implies the possibility of human purpose and dignity arising out of a necessary immersion in" the process of amoral experience. He shows how Carrie's submission to the flux of urban experience does lead to an enlargement not only of her "worldly status" but also of her "human identity." However, while describing Carrie's developing capacity for judging others and for assessing her own worth and potentialities, Markels admits that her development never proceeds to the level of articulateness. For to be articulate, he argues, an individual must recognize his desires, pursue them actively, judge them, recognize
the consequences of following them, and become responsible for those consequences, in short, enter "a moral world of experience;" these activities define a level of maturity which Carrie quite obviously never reaches. Although Dreiser implies through the character of Ames that this is the logical next step in her development, he "balks at portraying the life of consciousness and responsibility which arises logically out of his own conception of the inarticulate drift of experience." Markel's analysis suggests that Dreiser does mean to stress his heroine's innate capacity for growth in the novel; through the ways in which Carrie matures as a result of her contact with the city, Dreiser emphasizes her readiness to be led into the "moral world of experience" which is adulthood. She cannot cross this threshold, however, without some crucial assistance from her social environment; since she is inarticulate herself, her culture must articulate for her goals that are not purely material, terms other than monetary ones upon which life can be successfully negotiated. It is true that Ames provides this articulation for Carrie; in the New York restaurant, he comments critically on the waste engendered by a consumer approach to life, and he speaks of the theater, not as a means of self-aggrandizement, but as a noble profession bestowing on those who undertake it the power to educate and uplift. And Carrie responds to Ames positively; "There was something in him, or the world he moved in, which appealed to her... He had taken away some of the bitterness.

24 Julian Markel, "Dreiser and the Plotting of Inarticulate Experience," The Massachusetts Review, II (Spring 1961), 433-34, 443, 446.
ness of the contrast between this life and her life" (Sister Carrie, p. 272). However, since Ames is the only spokesman for nonmaterial values that Carrie encounters, and since his contact with her life is tangential and brief, his influence can hardly counteract the powerful argument the urban culture makes on behalf of materialism. In truth, Ames's vision of life is not supported by any other feature of the success-oriented culture but is undermined by the totality of Carrie's urban experience, and for this reason Carrie's development cannot proceed to the level of articulateness nor can she become the adult it lies within her potential to become.

In the writing of An American Tragedy, Dreiser repeats the structural method of his earlier novel. Like Carrie, Clyde begins the novel with inarticulate but powerful longings for self-realization, with a positive desire to make something of himself and to fulfill his potentiality for self-consequence. Again, the environmental dialectic of have and have not focusses this vague desire for self-betterment on the concrete pursuit of material rather than spiritual or human good. In the first book of the novel, the dialectic is established by the two poles of the Green-Davidson Hotel, where Clyde works as a bell-hop, and the impoverished life of his parents' mission. The latter, an abode of "down and out labourers, loafers, drunkards, wastrels, the botched and the helpless who seemed to drift in because they had no other place to go" (Tragedy, p. 17), speaks to Clyde of the anonymous misery to be endured without money just as the Green-Davidson Hotel teaches him "what it meant to be rich, to be a person of consequence in the
world — to have money . . . of all the influences which might have come to Clyde at this time, either as an aid or injury to his development, perhaps the most dangerous for him . . . was this same Green-Davidson, than which no materially affected or gaudy a realm could have been found . . . " (Tragedy, p. 47). In Lycurgus, these same reductive social alternatives are presented to Clyde in the form of the two women, Sondra Finchley and Roberta Alden. Sondra, "a goddess in her shrine of gilt and tinsel" (Tragedy, p. 314), validates Clyde’s belief that personal worth can be affirmed only by money, and she becomes for Clyde the means by which he may enter the world of wealth and thereby achieve consequence as a person. Roberta, on the other hand, symbolizes for Clyde the nothingness that a life of poverty and deprivation decrees for the self; in Roberta, Clyde sees his own worthlessness reflected back to him. Driving to Arrow Lake for a weekend with Sondra and her friends, Clyde passes the Alden farm: "The poverty! The reduced grimness of it all. How far he had travelled away from just such a beginning as this!" And now it threatened "to extend its gloomy, poverty-stricken arms to him and envelop him once more, just as the poverty of his family had enveloped and almost strangling him from the first" (Tragedy, pp. 427-28).

Thus, Clyde plans the murder of Roberta Alden as an act of self-preservation, and the full force of Dreiser’s social criticism comes in the final third of the novel when the society which has motivated Clyde’s crime by its reduction of life to the alternatives of self-annihilating poverty or self-affirming wealth now holds him solely re-
sponsible for the death of Roberta. The man who prosecutes him is a potential Clyde himself, a man "romantic and emotional" whose "boyhood had been one of poverty and neglect" (Tragedy, p. 504) and who uses Clyde's case to propel himself into political office. Clyde's defense lawyer, Belknap, is, like Clyde, guilty of the crime of seduction, but his wealth and connections have enabled him to escape the consequences of his act. Although Clyde is condemned by the newspapers before his case is even brought to trial, it is from the newspapers that Clyde has derived both his goals and his means of implementing them; not only has Clyde obtained his scheme for Roberta's murder from a newspaper story, but in the society-page accounts of the activities of his rich cousins and Sondra, Clyde discovers the life-style his culture honors. Yet, despite this overwhelming evidence of society's complicity in Clyde's crime, a truly American tragedy, this defense of Clyde's conduct is never made. Although the social insignificance of his parents first led Clyde to spurn their spiritual devotion in favor of the material achievement valued by his culture, the prosecution argues that Clyde should be judged the more harshly because of the moral guidance he received in his youth. "Is he the son of wastrel parents - a product of the slums - one who had been denied every opportunity for a proper or honorable conception of the values and duties of decent and respectable life?" (Tragedy, p. 641). The answer to this question, of course, is yes; a true child of his culture, Clyde stands condemned for this crime above all - that he has pursued the American dream and has failed to grasp it.
In Clyde's story, as in Carrie's, appears Dreiser's understanding that even in a crippled psyche there remains, eager and available, the capacities we associate with a life of awareness. False values stunt and deform these capacities, but in some pitiful way also express and release them. At each point in the boy's development, there occurs a meeting between his ill-formed self and the surrounding society. The impoverishment of his family life and the instinctual deprivation of his youth leave him a prey to the values of the streets and hotels; yet it is a fine stroke on Dreiser's part that only through these tawdry values does Clyde nevertheless become aware of his impoverishment and deprivation. Yearning gives way to cheap desire and false gratification, and these in turn create new and still more incoherent yearnings. It is a vicious circle and the result is not in any precise sense a self at all, but rather the beginnings of that poisonous fabrication which in America we call a "personality." Clyde embodies the nothingness at the heart of our scheme of things, the nothingness of our social aspirations. [He is] a characteristic instance of the futility of misplaced desire in a society that offers little ennobling sense of human potentiality. For in this youth there is concentrated the tragedy of human waste: energies, talents, affections all unused. Clyde is the very image and prisoner of our culture, hungering with its hungers, empty with its emptiness.25

In the above passage, Irving Howe unearths the crucial meaning of Dreiser's Bildungsromane, that American society somehow conspires to prevent the growth of the individual to the place where his choices are articulate, responsible, self-defining, in a word, adult. It is their lack of articulateness that differentiates Carrie and Clyde from Eugene de Rastignac, and it this difference that renders Dreiser's social judgments so much more severe than those of Balzac. Dreiser's youthful heroes are eager to accomplish the intersection of

life-history with history; they come to the city because it is the center of civilization, the place in which vague aspirations for self-betterment should be given a specific form. For this, after all, is the function of culture, to win man from nature by setting before him concrete and diverse goals which will enable him to define himself through the process of choosing. In Dreiser's novels, however, the city cannot and does not perform its historic function of acculturation, not because it makes the realization of goals unnecessarily difficult, the major complaint made by Balzac and other European novelists, but because it does not offer any genuine alternatives; in Dreiser's city, the getting of things may or may not be difficult, but it is the sole principle of life, a principle which does not further the growth of those who live by it but rather leaves them inarticulate and undefined, longing still for something which they cannot name but which they know they cannot do without. And thus Dreiser pleads with his readers to withhold moral condemnation of his wayward youths, for he understands that their aspirations, however ill-defined, are at root aspirations for good. It is "not evil, but longing for that which is better" (Sister Carrie, p. 417) which has directed the steps of Carrie. And Clyde, even on the eve of his execution, cannot fully accept his guilt or deny the passionate desire for a better life that has motivated his actions: "... he had a feeling in his heart that he was not as guilty as they all seemed to think ... Even in the face of all the facts and as much as everyone felt him to be guilty, there was something so deep within him that seemed to cry out against it that, even
now, at times, it startled him" (Tragedy, p. 798). Clyde's instinctual cry of protest is the expression of the deepest truth, that he is himself the most tragic victim and, as fully as Roberta, has been cheated of his life.
The *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1932-34-35) brings to a close the American literary tradition of using the Bildungsroman to conduct specific social criticism. In many respects, James T. Farrell unites the work of Twain and Dreiser, establishing the common ground between them, like Dreiser, Farrell is predominantly a novelist of American city life; *Studs Lonigan* records the impoverishment of the American urban environment and demonstrates, through the character of Studs, the failure of the American city to fulfill its historic role as an instrument of acculturation. Farrell's criticism, however, runs deeper than Dreiser's since Dreiser at least envisions the city as a source of inspiration, capable of stimulating youth's instinctive desire to grow even if it cannot transform his vague longings into specific adult commitments. In Farrell's novel, the city can no longer perform even this function; it stultifies, bores, and inhibits, offering Studs no release from the painful confinement of adolescent egotism. To be sure, Farrell concentrates on a single cultural unit within the city, the Irish-Catholic South Side of Chicago, and this might explain why he finds the city even less nourishing as a culture than does his predecessor. The truth is, however, that Farrell's method goes to the very heart of his criticism of urban life; in his view, the city is not a single cultural entity but rather a collection of isolated and imprisoning neighborhoods, each one of which opposes the ideal ethos of city life since it promotes, rather than destroys, provincialism. Thus, it is the central meaning of *Studs Lonigan* that one can grow up
in the heart of a thriving American metropolis and yet remain as insular, as ignorant, as undeveloped as an inhabitant of Pikesville or Dawson's Landing or any of Twain's backwoods communities. And thus Farrell reaches back beyond Dreiser to unite with Twain in raising his voice against the cultural narrowness that characterizes American society. In the tradition of Twain, he emphasizes how the city suffocates human nature rather than acculturating it; Studs the "iron man" sitting on the fire plug is an image of how human nature is repressed by the ugliness and inflexibility of the urban environment. But while Huck Finn is a mythic creation, a boy whose developed human nature is impossible to account for given the social environment to which he has been exposed, a boy who is less a victim of than a challenge to the deficiencies of American culture, Studs is a realistic version of arrested adolescence, an honest portrayal of the pitiful human product of American urban life. For this reason, Studs has none of the charm Farrell ascribes to Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer; nevertheless, he stands with them as a symbol of "the possibilities in human beings... as a test not only of ourselves but of the whole of American society." He, no less than they, asks "why has this promise not been realized? Why is it so rarely that the man becomes what the boy gave promise of becoming?"

26

There are several points of similarity between the Studs Lonigan trilogy and Flaubert's Sentimental Education; indeed, Studs resembles nothing so much as a poor man's Frédéric Moreau. Like Frédéric, Studs

is a classic case of arrested adolescence with all the symptoms of this condition: a paralysis of workmanship, identity diffusion, and an inability to surrender tentativeness for adult commitments. Like Frédéric, Studs lives in a world of illusion, dream, reverie, fantasy, and no person, vocation, or ideology can enlist his energies or turn his attention away from himself toward the world outside. Like Frédéric, Studs's career, encompassing in the novel the period from his fifteenth to his thirtieth year, records the transformation of "what might be" into "what might have been." As Farrell describes his hero, "... Studs's dream of himself changes in character as the story progresses. In the beginning, it is a vision of what he is going to be. He is a boy waiting at the threshold of life. His dream of himself is a romantic projection of the future, conceived in the terms and values of his world. In time, this dream of himself turns backward. It is no longer a romantic projection of things to come. More and more, it becomes a nostalgic image turned toward the past."  

Besides the resemblance between the heroes of these two novels, there is a striking similarity in the method of each author. Like Flaubert, Farrell dramatizes his hero's failure to grow up by juxtaposing Studs's adolescent mind, entirely preoccupied with his own insignificant triumphs and failures, with the full and dynamic life of his times from which his self-centeredness isolates him. On the one hand, there is the dreary and stultifying world in which Studs dwells mentally, a world in which boozing, sexual exploits, and proving manliness

through acts of violence are the only valued activities and in which the emotions of envy and self-pity predominate; on the other hand, there is the world of Chicago from approximately 1916 to 1931, years which include such historic events as World War I, the armistice, the struggles of the working class to organize itself, race conflicts, the growth of the communist movement, and the depression, a world of violence, change, upheaval, and challenge. In both novels, this juxtaposition emphasizes the hero's total lack of connection with the significant events of his era, the failure of life-history to intersect with history. Farrell's method, however, differs from Flaubert's in that this juxtaposition is not continuous throughout *Studs Lonigan*. In the first book of the trilogy, little attention is given to the larger social world which lies outside the particular concerns of the adolescent hero; thus, Studs appears as a normal boy with health, energy, a capacity for achievement, and a positive desire to assume a place in the adult world. While it is true that he exhibits weaknesses common to adolescence, these weaknesses seem amusing just because they are normal and should be overcome through increased contact with the outside world. Gradually, through the next two books of the trilogy, Farrell enlarges the scope of his novel to include, first, the primary cultural environment which Studs inhabits, that of Southside Chicago, and later, the larger society in which he lives, the historic world described briefly above. As the compass of the novel is extended, however, Studs's mind fails to grow correspondingly, and his originally amusing weaknesses become inadequacies of tragic pro-
portion. The reader slowly comes to understand and be absorbed by the world which invites Studs's participation, but to Studs it remains a mystery and a bafflement and an increasing threat to his potential manhood rather than the arena in which his manhood will be realized. The effect of this method is to dramatize in a climactic way the human waste that results when one is condemned to live by adolescent values into adulthood.

The trilogy begins with Studs's graduation from grammar school at the age of fifteen. As he enters the crucial period of his adolescence, Studs is dominated by the desire to win independence from the adults of his world and to achieve recognition as a man; however, he is vague about how this is to be done. His positive impulses are expressed through his sensitivity to nature and to the rituals of the church and through his tentative groping for love in his relationship with Lucy. He wishes to establish his independence through work although the only occupation he can imagine is working for his father as a house painter. His eagerness to commit himself to some ideology is expressed through his religious and patriotic feeling; when America enters the war, he thinks that he would like to fight for his country and take his place among "those who'd died in the other wars to make America the great land it was."28 Of course, Studs is also a prey of adolescent weaknesses. He substitutes fantasies of achievement for genuine productive activity and derives satisfaction from mere dreams of future suc-

cess; moreover, his fantasies are grandiose, far removed from realistic expectations; they feed his childish need to revenge himself on those who have hurt him and to convince himself that he is superior to those whose accomplishments are real. He dreams of "Dough-boy Studs Lonigan wearing a steel helmet, his bayonetted gun levelled, crossing No Man's Land Over There" or of Major Lonigan returning from war and snubbing Lucy "as if she was a flea" (Studs Lonigan, pp. 179, 189). His adolescent egotism prevents him from acknowledging that a world exists outside of him with purposes of its own or from making educative contact with that world; to Studs, the outside world is merely the audience of his own life, existing to applaud or criticize his actions. Perched on the fire plug at the corner of 58th and Prairie, Studs eyes the crowds passing by: "They saw him, looked at him, envied and admired him, noticed him, and thought that he must be a pretty tough young guy" (Studs Lonigan, p. 108). When his country joins the war, Studs thinks that this historic event was designed particularly to publicize his own worth to the world: "It was great to think that kids in the future might be reading about the times when Studs Lonigan had lived" (Studs Lonigan, p. 163). And when he awakens the morning after Armistice Day, he feels personally betrayed by history: "The thought that the war was over struck him almost like an unexpected club on the head . . . Now, he'd have to figure out what he'd do with himself" (Studs Lonigan, p. 191). Although Studs is anxious to assert himself in the adult world, he has no conception of the specific means by which recognition may be won and no developed skills by which to earn it.
Thus, he waits passively for the rewards of life which he feels are his due; one of his most persistent feelings is the sense that his life has approached a significant turning point. Of course, he is continually disappointed when no change occurs, and he defends himself against his frustration by retreating into nostalgic memories of the past. At the end of *Young Lonigan*, he wanders through the park on a gray November day, and although he is only fifteen, the best he can wish for is a return to earlier days and to the small triumphs of his childhood.

Between the adolescent boy with his vague longings for adult recognition and the world in which that recognition must be won stands the Irish-Catholic neighborhood in which Studs grows up. This neighborhood should mediate between Studs and the outside world, assisting him to replace the fantasies of adolescence with the realities of adulthood. However, the neighborhood, provincial and insular as it is, cannot perform its educative role and release Studs from the prison of his childish egotism because it simply mirrors the adolescent attitudes of Studs. According to Farrell, "the important institutions in the education of Studs Lonigan were the home and the family, the church, the school, and the playground. These institutions broke down and did not serve their desired function . . . the social milieu in which he lived was one of spiritual poverty." 29 Studs's parents are second-generation immigrants who believe in the American dream and who have to some extent realized it by working themselves into the American bourgeoisie.

Paddy Lonigan is a self-made man who measures his worth by the distance he has traveled from his lowly origins and by his competitive edge over the companions of his youth; his one desire for his son is that Studs should assume his father's values and climb "so many more rungs up the economic and social ladder." Although he believes in the work ethic, Paddy can communicate to his son no sense of fulfillment through labor; work is simply a means by which to gain money and raise one's status in the world, and Paddy's own job as a painting contractor depends more upon bribery and the cultivation of political contacts than it does upon effort and skill. Moreover, he has no mature ideology to pass on to Studs; his patriotism is as adolescent as his son's, and his philosophy is merely a collection of platitudes borrowed from the cultural success ethic or from the church, platitudes which express no fought-for beliefs but simply mental emptiness. His maxims serve him well in times of prosperity, but during the depression, they fail him miserably. Since he has no grasp of the political, social, and economic forces that rule the country, when times are bad Paddy can neither question nor derive comfort from his system of belief; all rational thought collapses under stress, and he reverts to the narrow range of adolescent responses which characterize Studs: nostalgia, self-pity, envy, fantasy, and scapegoating. At the end of the novel, old man Lonigan stands watching a radical parade, confused and broken by the death of his son and the collapse of his fortune.

Bewildered, he tried to force himself to understand what was happening to him, what was happening in the world, why so many things should be crunching down on the shoulders of Paddy Lonigan... What had he done? He wanted to know. Here he was, a man who had always done his duties. Hadn't he earned his place in the world by hard work? Hadn't he always provided for his family to the best of his abilities, tried to be a good husband and a good father, a true Catholic and a real American? ... Lonigan thought that he had a bigger squawk than these people because he was losing more. And still he wasn't a red, was he? ... He just couldn't make anything out any more. Too many things had been happening to him. He couldn't piece them together, and he felt that the world had passed him by, and he was no longer able to deal with it... Just an unhappy old man, and even these people, anarchistic Reds, Communists, niggers, hunkies, foreigners, left-handed turkeys, even they seemed happier than he. (Studs Lonigan, pp. 787-803)

The church and the parochial school equally fail as institutions which should assist the development of Studs by providing the tools of achievement by which he can earn a place in the adult world. The church is worldly and hypocritical; it too expresses itself in platitudes which it consistently betrays before the children. It can raise money for a new building, but it cannot give spiritual guidance; indeed, it perpetuates the ignorant bigotry of its parishioners and hinders them from adjusting to the social changes brought about by the movement of other minority groups into the Irish-Catholic neighborhood. Education, in the hands of the nuns and the priests, is indoctrination; the school distrusts all ideas that deviate from narrow adherence to the dogma of the church, and it regards intellectuals with disdain and fear. Father Shannon speaks to Studs and the other youths of his neighborhood of the moral decay of America expressed in such movements as "jazz, atheism, free-love, companionate marriage, birth control," and he lambastes the "godless" universities and such "Anti-Christ
modern authors" as Sinclair Lewis, H. G. Wells, and H. L. Mencken (Studs Lonigan, pp. 414-15). Thus, the parochial school cannot stimulate Studs's mind nor promote his intellectual growth since it is basically hostile to independent thought. And with its exclusionist societies and secret initiations and generally condemnatory attitude toward non-Catholics, the church only strengthens the adolescent's fear of the outside world; it does nothing to nurture his positive impulses toward joining and mastering this world.

Thus, the immediate environment in which Studs lives is "highly unfavorable to the production of full and happy lives, to beauty of thought and sentiment, or any of those spiritual values that characterize human civilization at its best ... it is like some poisonous gas that blights and discolors all living things which it touches."31 There is no ideal of vocation other than the models provided by the ward politician and the complacent priest; there is no ideal of thought but a positive suspicion of all ideas that reach beyond the level of platitudes; there is no awareness of art as a nourishing lifestyle. In this world, there is nothing for Studs to do and nothing that he can be. As Blanche Gelfant has observed, the "environment" characters, the priests, the parents, and the politicians, dramatize the failure of the neighborhood by their personification of sterile sentiments, brutal prejudices, hypocrisy, distrust of the imagination, and hostility to freedom of thought and action. But it is through

Studs and his gang, most of whom are dead, in prison, or inhabiting mental institutions by the end of the novel, that Farrell makes his most severe indictments of his society; they are its victims, and they dramatize its failures by what they become.  

Studs is sensitive enough to recognize the sterility of his environment and to want to escape it. He perceives the emptiness of his parents' life, and he fears that it will be his own fate; when he considers marrying Catherine, he wonders if they too will "sit night after night the same way, listening to the radio, with hardly a word to say, and would they have children of their own to feel sorry for them in the same way that he was feeling sorry for his mother and dad, and would he seem to his children to be ready for the ash-heap as he dozed half-awake at night?" (Studs Lonigan, p. 521). Although he is responsive to the mysteries of his religion, he perceives the rhetoric of the priests to be false and scorns their "bull." Studs rebels against the values of his environment by erecting a life-style and a code of his own with his companions of the poolroom. However, since this code arises out of the negative need to repudiate the adult world, it affirms only that there is nothing worth doing and thus condemns Studs and his friends to a life of idleness. Moreover, this code in actual practice tragically mirrors and even exaggerates the values and attitudes which it pretends to reject. The gang's belief that manhood is asserted by a continual round of drinking, fighting, and laying girls

is secretly shared by the fathers of the community whose fondest memories are of their own days of sowing wild oats. The poolroom youths express the same platitudinous sentiments, the same pugnacious patriotism, the same narrow bigotry that characterize the older generation. As a mirror of the larger community, the gang exhibits the same emptiness; there is no real communion or intimacy among its members under the surface camaraderie, and its competitive code fosters only secret resentment and envy and a fear of appearing inadequate before the others. Because none of the boys has developed personal skills or "control of the tools of achievement," their competition is brutal and degrading rather than productive and self-enhancing. Thus, the gang becomes the means by which Studs's adolescence is perpetuated to the age of thirty; his young manhood is marked by the steady and "relentless dissipation of energy, idealism, and intelligence in the futile and purposeless activities of a young man who does not know what to do with his life." At the end of the second book of the trilogy, The Young Manhood of Stude Lonigan, Studs lies in a gutter where he has been dumped by his friends following a wild party:

"The dirty gray dawn of the New Year came slowly. It was snowing. There was a drunken figure, huddled by the curb, near the fire plug at Fifty Eighth and Prairie. A passing Negro studied it. He saw that the fellow wasn't dead. He rolled it over, and saw it was a young man


with a broad face, the eyes puffed black, and nose swollen and bent. He saw that the suit and coat were bloody, dirty, odorous with vomit.

It was Studs Lonigan, who had once, as a boy, stood before Charley Bathcellar's poolroom thinking that someday, he would grow up to be strong, and tough, and the real stuff" (Studs Lonigan, p. 459).

As his need to develop sources of strength within himself is repeatedly thwarted by a social environment which can only prolong the weakness of adolescence, Studs's desperation increases; he is plagued by the insistence sense that he has missed something essential, and he drifts through life waiting passively but urgently for some miracle of change, some unlocked-for opportunity to discover his worth and assert it before the world. He takes a job with his father, but the work provides no satisfaction or fulfillment despite the fact that it reveals in Studs a basic instinct for accomplishment: "He wasn't at all interested in the damn work. He liked to look at it when it was finished, and see that it was a good job, and he always took pains to do a good job ... but God damn it, he hated to think of going on, painting walls day after day ... until he got old and a big belly like his old man, and then to go around bossing other guys who painted walls day after day. Goddamn it, yes, there was something more to life. There had to be" (Studs Lonigan, p. 276). Always moved by the rituals of the church, Studs finds no solace in religious experience, for it seems only to intensify his perception that his life is empty. As he takes communion, he feels "that there was something more in life that he could never seem to get and couldn't even name," and "he was
sad because he had grown up, and because the years passed like a river that no man could stop" (Studs Lonigan, pp. 305-06). Unable to find a vocation or a belief capable of enlisting his energies and rescuing him from the terrible self-absorption of adolescence, Studs seeks self-fulfillment through love. But even this fails for Studs is afraid to risk intimacy; even with Catherine, "his thoughts and feelings were padlocked, completely padlocked in his mind, and when he talked, most of the time, instead of expressing them he was using words to prevent himself from letting them out . . ." (Studs Lonigan, p. 719). As Walcott observes, "one of the profound insights in Farrell's book is the knowledge that communion between individuals demands a medium . . . politics, art, creative work, literary background, or social conventions and traditions." 35 Since society cannot provide this medium, the personal relationships that Studs develops are as empty as the environment in which they are formed. And this explains the irony of Studs's recurrent memory of Lucy and the day they spent together in the park when he was fifteen; there is nothing substantial to this memory since his relationship with Lucy, like all of his relationships, was trivial and insignificant, and it is pitiful that Studs should cling to it so tenaciously. Nevertheless, it is also the truth that this memory, empty as it is, represents one of the most intimate and satisfying moments of his life.

So Studs's adolescence persists to his thirtieth year, and each year that it continues beyond the normal time for terminating the ado-

35 Walcott, p. 242.
lescent moratorium, Studs becomes weaker, less able to cope with the demands of adulthood. Because he feels threatened by those whose achievements are real rather than imagined, he turns more and more to the consolations of fantasy; however, the reduction of his life to mere fantasies of achievement only ensures Studs's failure to define himself by action and thus increases his "conviction that he is nobody."36

The final period of his life, as recorded in Judgment Day, is a nightmare of unreality; the envy and frustration that are aroused in Studs by every contact with the real world can only be relieved by the pitiful daydreams of one who remains, emotionally and mentally, a child. Passing a newsstand, Studs notices a headline featuring the name of Charles Lindbergh; immediately, "he began to feel measly and insignificant" and to seek refuge in fantasies of beating up a passing panhandler: "a long and gruelling battle... Until Studs would put every ounce of spirit and energy into a last haymaker and the bum would tumble backward, fall over the curb into the street, and know that he had met a better man" (Studs Lonigan, pp. 478-79). When the depression puts him out of work, Studs sits idly in the park watching the golfers. "Envy of them grew in him, because they had something to do, and he hadn't;" again, he consoles himself with daydreams of "smashing records in tournaments, with a large gallery following to cheer him as he made impossible shots and drives with ease" (Studs Lonigan, pp. 598-99). On the last day of his active life, Studs wanders through the

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36Gelfant, p. 199.
Loop, half-heartedly searching for work; depressed by the sight of the hurrying crowds with places to go and purposes to accomplish, he envisions himself as "a business man wearing a classy suit, getting up from a glass-topped desk, turning to a pretty stenographer and saying with an air of authority, Lucy, I'll be back at two-thirty. And then walking out of an office with WILLIAM LONIGAN painted large on the glass window" (Studs Lonigan, p. 732). Defeated by the futile search for work, by the impossibility of making his fantasies come true, defeated by life itself, Studs finds escape from reality in a burlesque house where he experiences an orgasm watching the stringy girls. This final act of dissipation, an act as "void as his thirty years," is a fitting conclusion to his life; it "has climaxed in exactly nothing ... and his life is spent." 37

It is significant that Judgment Day, the final book in the trilogy, records not only the personal nightmare that Studs's life has become, but the national nightmare of the depression as well. It is in this book particularly that Farrell widens the scope of his novel to concentrate almost equal attention upon the portrait of a young man whose life is a symbol of tragic waste and the portrait of a bankrupt America collapsing under the weight of social and economic pressures with which it is unable to cope. Not only does the author achieve, through this enlargement of his canvas, the effect of emphasizing Studs's isolation from reality and from the events of his

time; it is clear that he also means to suggest a connection between the blighted promise of his youthful hero and the blighted promise of America itself, to imply that the national breakdown both mirrors Studs's personal failure and, to some extent, explains that failure; thus, he includes in his indictment of the social forces responsible for Studs's tragedy the American culture at large as well as the specific Irish-Catholic neighborhood in which Studs grows up. It is from this larger culture that Studs learns to value violence as a means of accomplishment and to regard the gangster as a national model of manhood; Al Capone rules Chicago, and the movies celebrate the gangland king. Studs watches the hero of Doomed Victory enviously: "Ah, that was the kind of guy Studs Lonigan wanted to be, really hard and tough, afraid of no goddamn thing in this man's world, giving cold lead as his answer to every rat who stepped in his way... Why hadn't Studs Lonigan lived like this?" (Studs Lonigan, p. 509). The culture nourishes and encourages Studs's fantasy life with its own susceptibility to false optimism and delusion; the national response to the depression crisis is seen in newspaper headlines predicting the imminent arrival of prosperity and in newsreel accounts of mock-funerals at which Old Man Depression is buried by public-spirited citizens. The competitive success ethic which poisons Studs's life by condemning him to a shallow existence of adolescent self-proving is also derived from his culture, and its deficiency as a national as well as a personal code is exposed by the collapse of society recorded daily in the newspapers Studs reads, by the accounts of business failures, bank clos-
ings, stock-market crashes, suicides, unemployment riots. The de-
basement of the ideal of an American society open to a competition
of talent is the meaning of the popular dance marathons and endurance
contests; one newsreel that Studs watches features a young man who has
received $500 for rolling peanuts with his nose at a record speed, and
at the dance marathon which Studs and Catherine attend, the exhausted
winner is extolled for demonstrating the "real spirit of the hardy old
pioneers who made America what it is today!" (Studs Lonigan, p. 686).
As Judgment Day makes clear, the triviality and waste which mark
Studs's career are endemic to his society as a whole. Studs's foolish
investment in the watered Imbray stock which costs him his life-
savings is an act which symbolizes his squandered life, but it also
mirrors the folly of a nation which tragically invests its human re-
sources in enterprises that are worthless and degrading and that waste
the lives of those engaged in them.

As the institutions and ideologies which gave America a distinct
cultural identity became firmly established in the nineteenth century,
a group of American writers; following in the tradition of Balzac,
Stendhal, and Dickens, began to use the Bildungsroman as an instru-
ment of specific social criticism. In their effort to identify those
features of their culture hostile to the full development of American
youth, Twain, Dreiser, and Farrell; like their European counterparts,
directed their criticism primarily toward the nation's betrayal of mid-
dle-class and democratic ideals. Their novels argue that America had
not fulfilled the hope of Henry James, Sr. for a democratic society
capable of ushering in the "manhood" of the human race or of ensuring "a far freer and profounder culture of his [man's] nature than has ever yet illustrated humanity." 38 On the contrary, from Huck Finn to Studs Lonigan, the youthful heroes of these Bildungsromane experience growing up in America as a diminution of personality and adulthood as inarticulate impotence. Indeed, the social indictments made in the novels of Twain, Dreiser, and Farrell are much more severe than those made by Balzac and Dickens, and this is expressed not only in the powerless drift of characters like Carrie, Clyde, and Studs, but also in the monolithic monotony of the society which engulfs them, a society which articulates but a single standard of material achievement and which single-mindedly imposes this standard upon each of its inhabitants. Yet, however mute and unresisting their youths have been made by the pressures of American society, Twain, Dreiser, and Farrell conduct a powerful and articulate argument against this society on behalf of their heroes; employing the Bildungsroman in the best tradition of the nineteenth-century European novelists discussed in Chapter Two, they continue to be moved by the ideal of a fulfilling and socially responsible adulthood and by the vision of a society which makes such an adulthood possible. As my final chapter will suggest, among those twentieth-century writers who experiment with the form of the Bildungsroman, there is little evidence that this ideal has survived.

38 Henry James, Sr., The Social Significance of Our Institutions (Boston, 1861), pp. 28-29, 6.
At the end of the eighteenth century, Franklin recorded his life to celebrate the New World as the perfect social environment in which an ambitious and idealistic middle-class youth might undertake his self-cultivation; Franklin's fulfillment of private goals, his development of personal capacities and skills, and his remarkable record of public achievement affirm the benefits of growing up in an emerging nation which needs the energies of its youth and encourages the potentialities of the common man. In the following century, however, America's leading novelists used the Bildungsroman to conduct the kind of judicial social analysis which Franklin's work had omitted and to view critically a society that Franklin had helped to create and that was culturally dominated by his model. Some of these novelists, like Cooper, Melville, and James, questioned the model itself and the progressive and optimistic assumptions upon which it rested; others, like Twain, Dreiser, and Farrell, examined the social facts of American life which seemed to make imitation of the model an impossibility in their own time. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Henry Adams united both strains of criticism by presenting a record of his own education and development, a record which contrasts sharply with the affirmative tale of self-making penned by Franklin a century earlier.
Franklin, he offers his career as an example to youth but as an example to be avoided rather than imitated. While Franklin recorded a life of achievement, Adams emphasizes a life devoid of achievement, a life devoted chiefly to the task of understanding its own failures. Although Franklin could view his success "as an inspiring example of man's ability to direct his own life and to direct the course of the world as well," Adams sees his career as drift and characterizes himself as "a lifelong witness to history without ever influencing it." Thus, The Education of Henry Adams (1918) stands as a rebuttal of the Autobiography; a "testimony to effectiveness" is answered a century later by "a tale of ineffectiveness."¹

Ironically, Adams explains his failure to follow Franklin's example in terms of the eighteenth-century heritage they shared; having been trained for Franklin's world rather than his own, he could "scarcely have been more distinctly branded, and not much more heavily handicapped in the races of the coming century, in running for such stakes as the country was to offer . . . starting a twentieth-century career from a nest of associations so colonial - so troglodytic - as the First Church, the Boston State House, Beacon Hill, John Hancock and John Adams, Mount Vernon Street and Quincy . . . what could become of such a child of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when he should wake up to find himself required to play the game of the twentieth?" The answer to this question, Adams admits, is that "he never got to the point of playing the game at all; he lost himself in the

study of it." Equipped only with the faith of his ancestors in the 
harmony and order of the universe, Adams spends his life adjusting 
to his discovery that "Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the 
dream of man."²

Thus, Henry Adams grows up believing that "what had been would 
continue to be" and doubting not "whether a system of society which 
had lasted since Adam would outlast one Adams more" (Education, p. 
16); as a young man he assumes the duty enjoined upon him by his an-
cestors, that of attempting to bring the world into relation with 
their ideal vision of it: "For numberless generations his predeces-
sors had viewed the world chiefly as a thing to be reformed ... the 
duty was unchanged" (Education, p. 7). While Franklin shrewdly asses-
sed the demands of his age and educated himself to fulfill those de-
mands, Adams is content to prepare himself for life in the manner of 
his forefathers, through formal education, travel, and apprenticeship 
in the diplomatic service, for, as Adams states, "at any other moment 
in human history, this education, including its political and literary 
bias, would have been not only good, but quite the best. Society had 
always welcomed and flattered men so endowed." But at the end of his 
apprenticeship, he must admit that "the education he had received bore 
little relation to the education he needed" (Education, pp. 52-53). 
Thus, at an age when Franklin had already insured his personal pros-
perity and was beginning to devote himself to the disinterested pur-

²Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (Boston and Cambridge, 
1961), pp. 3-4, 451. Subsequent references to this work cited in text.
suits of scientific investigation and social organization, Adams finds himself cut off from the likelihood of success either in private enterprise or in public service. Returning from Europe to an America managed by Grant and the monopolies, Adams discovers that "his so-called education was wanted nowhere," that he had not "the power of earning five dollars in any occupation," and that the ideal of service to his country was "a delusion" (Education, pp. 209-11). While America responds to the scandals "which smirched executive, judiciary, banks, corporate systems, professions, and people, all the great active forces of society, in one dirty cesspool of vulgar corruption" by laughing "its vacant and meaningless derision over its failure" and then "going to work harder than ever on their railroads and foundaries" (Education, pp. 271-73), Adams can neither laugh nor tend the forces of coal and steam, for these forces had "ruthlessly stamped out the life of the class into which Adams was born" (Education, p. 345). Thus, Adams withdraws from the race, devoting himself to upholding a standard of moral civilization which his country no longer values; at the end of twenty years, he can say only that "he had worked in the dark," that hardly hoping for "success in raising the standard of society," he had found the effort to do so "exhausting" (Education, pp. 314-15). And while Franklin spends his final years enjoying the honor bestowed on one who has been a prime mover in the affairs of his time and place and records his life as an inspiration to posterity, Adams, a century later, is driven at the end of his life to examine his career only because it failures provide eloquent testimony of "what the world had
ceased to care for" (Education, p. 352).

The explicit theme of the Education, then, is Adams's betrayal by the faith of his ancestors; its deeper meaning, however, is the way that faith had been betrayed by nineteenth-century America. Regarding Franklin as the best "working model for high education" that America had provided (Education, p. xxiii), Adams grows up assuming that a world so eager to use and reward the talents of a Franklin could not be inhospitable to an Adams. But, as he discovers, the world had changed, and he never recovers from the shock of its indifference; thus, if Adams begins life with the assurance of Franklin, he ends it like Studs Lonigan, a powerless and passive spectator of a world he can find no means of entering. He is, like Carrie and Clyde and Studs, a victim of his times, and his life, no less than theirs, provides bitter commentary on the values of an age that could find "no use for Adams because he was eighteenth century" but that "worshipped Grant because he was archaic and should have lived in a cave and worn skins" (Education, p. 266). Nevertheless, Adams differs sharply from these fellow victims of nineteenth-century America; the difference is that Adams represents his martyrdom as self-chosen and articulate, a calculated criticism of the way pragmatic politics, commercial standards, and industrial force had come to dominate the national life. If he views with dismay an age that worships only expedient, impersonal, and amoral power, then he can view his own ineffectiveness, his inability to pursue and exercise power in his own time, as a badge of honor, a guarantee of his integrity in the moral wilderness of the
Thus, the truth is that Adams means his readers to judge as success what he presents as failure; his confession that he had never held office, never made money, never enjoyed social consideration, the common formulae for success in America, becomes an affirmation of his strength in refusing the power bestowed by a corrupt age. And thus, his posture of estrangement is a sign of his determination to maintain the standards of his ancestors in an age equally determined to obliterate them. The tradition that Adams honors is not the crippling inheritance he makes it out to be; he regards it, in actuality, as "fortifying, a guiding light, a barrier to surrender to the 'contagion of the world's slow stain.'"  

When Adams records the history of his development, he does so because he finds in it social significance, because he believes his successes and his failures provide valuable commentary both on the obstacles to maturity which his culture has erected and on those cultural influences which have positively assisted his growth. And because he finds in the examination of his unfolding life history a legitimate way of making judgments about the society in which his development has taken place, he shares a common tradition with the American writers examined in this study from Franklin to Farrell. Moreover, by viewing himself both as victim and hero, he provides a connection between the "romantic" Bildungsromane of Cooper, Melville, and James and those of the realistic writers discussed in the previous chapter. For

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his estrangement from a society which cannot respect and use his education becomes, like the failure of Studs Lonigan, an indictment of his world; yet, by representing this estrangement as deliberate, a gesture intended to criticize certain cultural values in the interest of preserving others which he considers more profoundly American, Adams becomes, like Natty Bumppo and Isabel Archer, a model of adulthood himself, one by which the immaturity of his culture may be measured and exposed. At the same time, Adams's attempt to have it both ways, to characterize himself as at once a tragic victim of his society and a heroic resister of its brutality and corruption, seems somehow duplicitous. The fact is that in the end, neither image is credible; Adams too much enjoys his role as "public figure manque" to convince the reader either that he is a martyr or that his martyrdom makes a meaningful criticism of his times. Indeed, there is something adolescent about his disgust with the world's impurity and with its indifference to his special value as an Adams; his self-absorption, his determination to preserve his own highly private standards, and his suggestion that renunciation of the world is heroic seem to connect him more with Holden Caulfield than with Huck or Clyde or Studs whose isolation is both painful and unwilled. By making a virtue of his failure to "play the game" of his century, Adams points forward to those twentieth-century American authors who continue to use the form of the Bildungsroman but who are far too committed to the special virtues of adolescence to provide a serious criticism of

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4 Sayre, p. 199.
the adult society with which their heroes must come to terms.
II

The American Bildungsromane surveyed in Chapters Four and Five of this study share one dominant concern: the difficulty of moving beyond adolescence in a culture which is itself committed to adolescent values and postures. From Redburn to Studs Lonigan, these American initiates remind us of the human waste engendered by our social immaturity and of the loss to our nation as a whole; their suffering challenges America to undertake its own transformation into a society capable of nurturing the potential adult strengths of its members. Since the Bildungsroman continues to be widely employed as a genre among twentieth-century American novelists, we might assume that they value this tradition, that they would not willingly let its challenge die. Yet, while the form of the Bildungsroman continues to interest modern American novelists, its primary function of providing social analysis and judgment through the development of its hero is, by and large, abandoned. The authors of such novels as Winesburg, Ohio, Look Homeward, Angel, Other Voices, Other Rooms, and The Adventures of Augie March are no longer prepared to recognize the social implications of their heroes' struggles to grow up; indeed, they are frequently unable to acknowledge that adolescence is not the proper end of growth. When our finest novelists seem to fear adulthood, to view it as limited and "grotesque," then we have surely arrived at the social condition described by Bruno Bettelheim: if adult society is itself a "vacuum," "if existing manhood is viewed as empty, static, obsole-
then becoming a man is death, and manhood marks the death of adolescence, not its fulfillment." Under such conditions, it will seem "better not to give up the promise of youth with its uncertainty, its lack of definite commitment . . . better to be committed to such uncommittedness than to commit oneself to spending the rest of one's life as a hollow man."5

In most of the twentieth-century American novels mentioned above, the collapse of the Bildungsroman, or at least of its function of conducting social criticism through the initiation of its youthful hero, is quite evident; indeed, it is their most salient feature. In novels like Look Homeward, Angel and The Catcher in the Rye, for instance, the author is too engaged in celebrating the intensity of adolescent experience to honestly portray the adult world of his hero. Because of this lack of objectivity, we see the hero and the society he must enter entirely through the medium of the adolescent mind; there is no background, other than the one which adolescence creates for itself, against which the drama of self-discovery and growth can be played. Describing Wolfe's technique in the Kenyon Review, John Pealse Bishop, consciously or not, describes as well the adolescent mode of experiencing life. "Everything for Wolfe is in the moment . . . and once it has passed from his mind, he can do nothing but recall another moment . . . for Wolfe, the rewards of experience were always such that he was turned back upon himself, isolated in his sensations, there was

no way out."6 This Wolfian gusto, typified in the novel by his cat-
alogues of tastes and smells and sounds, is a "grandiose illusion ex-
pressing itself in random and futile violence of word," a spirit
which is "justified as a form of adolescence," but not representative
of "a mature attitude."7 Wolfe, then, is prevented by his own novel-
istic techniques, his "rhetoric of fiction," from portraying anything
but the adolescent experience of life. The same defect mars Salinger's
novel, The Catcher in the Rye, for we are asked to take Holden
Caulfield's version of adult "phoniness" for the whole truth. Yet
Holden has even less authority for the reader than Eugene Gant since
he is in retreat even from the present, from the suffering of ado-
lescence; his commitments, and they are slender, are all to childhood -
to Phoebe, his little sister, and to his nostalgic dream of becoming
a "catcher in the rye," a kind of big-kid protector of little kids.
One may argue for Holden's integrity in refusing to grow up into an
adult world that is phony and ugly and without love. But we cannot
forget that this is Holden's interpretation of the world, one which is
unsupported by outside evidence. That he has no authority for making
such an interpretation is aptly noted in Ihab Hassan's remark that
"his sallies into the world are feigned."8 In Other Voices, Other

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7 Edwin Berry Burgum, "Wolfe's Discovery of America," The Enigma

8 Ihab Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," Salinger, ed. Henry A.
Rooms, Truman Capote does not demonstrate that attachment to adolescence which prevents Wolfe and Salinger from authentically portraying the process and end of growth. Indeed, although adulthood is represented in Capote's novel by a collection of freaks and "grotesques," Joel Knox has the courage to accept this nightmare world and to make a positive journey towards it. Thus, the force of Capote's novel lies in its ironic reversal of values, for Joel's growth occurs when he can exchange his childish dreams of normalcy, of a "real world of manhood," for the grotesque limitations of adulthood. By making this exchange, he affirms the dark side of himself, and in this affirmation "there is relief and exhilaration and no regret." Yet, at the same time, Capote's interest lies exclusively in the interior, private world of the self; in Other Voices, Other Rooms, he deliberately excludes the public, social world, the world of "demonstrable values" and "otherness" from his account of Joel's initiation in order to pursue his highly private vision of the nightmare world within. There can be no intersection of life-history with history when the historical world is simply not available to the initiate.

I have dealt summarily with the novels of Wolfe, Salinger, and Capote because I believe little analysis or argument is required to establish their authors' indifference to the function of the Bildungsroman. That they do not share a common tradition with the


10John Aldridge, After the Lost Generation (New York, 1951), p. 203
writers examined earlier in this study seems to me obvious. But Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) cannot be so easily dismissed for it is equally clear that Bellow does value this tradition and that the careers of Huck Finn, Carrie Meeber, and Studs Lonigan lie inescapably behind Augie's adventures. For one thing, by taking Augie from childhood to adulthood in the context of a specific and changing historical and social situation, Bellow displays his concern with preserving the form of the *Bildungsroman*. Moreover, in his portrait of Chicago, Bellow handles social facts as adroitly as his predecessors, Dreiser and Farrell; indeed, the social world depicted in *Augie March* far surpasses that of *Sister Carrie* and *Studs Lonigan* in the richness and breadth of its detail. Finally, the characterization of Augie suggests Bellow's interest in the process of self-development and in the way this process may give rise to social commentary. Augie's rootlessness is motivated by his search for a "good enough" identity and fate; not only is he eager to experience the adult world and to find in it a means of activating his own potentialities, but in his resistance to having his culture's standard of success imposed upon his life, a potential criticism of that standard is made. Moreover, it is Augie's historical consciousness, his awareness of belonging to a human community infinitely larger than that of twentieth-century Chicago or even twentieth-century America, that in large part motivates his resistance; this consciousness is not only one of the most positive features of his character, but one that connects him with the articulate heroes of Balzac and Stendhal. Thus, when Richard
Chase observes that Bellow seems to follow "in the line of the natural-
list novelists," he actually minimizes the author's indebtedness to the tradition of the Bildungsroman that has formed the object of this study.

"A man's character is his fate," Augie proclaims to open the story of his search for "a good enough fate." With this assertion of middle-class self trust, Augie places himself squarely in the tradition of all those apprentice-heroes whose careers have been examined in this work. However, while Augie exhibits the same spirit of self-mak-
ing that has propelled his predecessors toward the centers of social power and pleasure, he insists upon his freedom from their goals of economic success and social influence. Thus, his career becomes a deliberate "evasion of rising," and his failure to make his mark on the world is really the strategy of success. As a child growing up in a North-side Chicago ghetto, Augie perceives the world to be divided between the simple and innocent and the shrewd and complex. His ill-
used and uncomplaining mother and his idiot brother Georgie demonstrate "where it led to give your affections too easily" while Grandma Lausch, "one of those Machiavellis of small street and neighborhood... mindful always of her duty to wise us up" (Augie March, pp. 13).


10), and his older brother, Simon, a latter-day Julien Sorel in his single-minded pursuit of greatness, articulate for Augie the rewards of hardness. Although Augie sympathizes with Simon's will to power, he opts to stand with his mother and Georgie as a disciple of simplicity and love. For, while he can state with admiration, "What did Danton lose his head for, or why was there a Napoleon, if it wasn't to make a nobility of us all? And this universal eligibility to be noble, taught everywhere, was what gave Simon his airs of honor" (Augie March, p. 31), still Augie will not violate his own "larky and boisterous" nature: "I didn't take permanent inspiration from... success," and as for the "lessons of hardness... I had the kind of character that looked for ease and places where I could lie down" (Augie March, pp. 31, 36). Thus, when Augie concludes the account of his childhood with the remark that "all the influences were lined up waiting for me. I was born, and there they were to form me, which is why I tell you more of them than of myself" (Augie March, p. 43), he does not contradict his opening affirmation that character is fate.

Rather, he is referring to those influences, American, democratic, and bourgeois, which have given him the authority to resist the very goals they would urge upon him. Like Wilhelm Meister, he seeks a fate better than that which his culture holds out to him although, paradoxically, it is from that culture that he derives the belief that a better can be found and is his due.

Thus, the first discovery that Augie makes about his character is its power of resistance; this discovery comes through Augie's encount-
ers with a parade of grotesques, would-be adopters who share a compulsion to force their own goals upon Augie, to remake him according to their own "highly private standard." Among the grotesques are Einhorn, petty Chicago swindler and cripple, who drills Augie in the "lessons and theories of power" and urges him to implement those lessons in the arenas of life denied to Einhorn's operation, and Mrs. Renling, bent on refining and schooling Augie for a life of ease among the fashionably rich. Simon, a modern Napoleon looking after the fate of his brothers, seeks to justify his drive toward a million dollars by dragging Augie with him to the pinacles of fame and fortune; opposing Simon is Mimi Villars who resents Augie's amiable amorality and would force him to adopt her strenuous standard of social justice: "She shot it off in my face that I wasn't mad enough about abominations or aware enough of them, didn't know how many graves were underneath my feet, was lacking in disgust, wasn't hard enough against horrors or wrathful about swindles" (Augie March, p. 209). Thea Fenchel tows Augie to Mexico assuming that he shares her enthusiasm for the cruelties and dangers of the hunt; Robey and Basteshaw see in Augie a potential recruit for their insane causes. To all of these fanatics, Augie responds with generous admiration but also with persistent opposition to their schemes for his life. Einhorn is the first to see and name Augie's resistance: "All of a sudden I catch on to something about you. You got opposition in you. You don't slide through every-

thing." And Augie admits, "This was the first time that anyone had told me anything like the truth about myself. I felt it powerfully that, as he said, I did have opposition in me, and a great desire to offer resistance and to say, "No!" (Augie March, p. 117). When Mrs. Renling tries to adopt him, Augie rejects her offer: "Why should I turn into one of those people who didn't know who they themselves were? . . . I was not going to be built into Mrs. Renling's world, to consolidate what she affirmed she was" (Augie March, p. 151). Explaining his resistance thus, Augie avoids adoption, resists Simon's plan to marry him to the daughter of a coal magnate, throws up his work as union organizer: "I couldn't just order myself to become one of those people who do go out before the rest, who stand and intercept the big social ray, or collect and concentrate it like burning glass, who glow and dazzle and make bursts of fire. It wasn't what I was meant to be" (Augie March, p. 310).

It is on his Mexican adventure with Thea Fenchel that Augie discovers the source of his resistance, the good-enough fate that he is holding out for. Each of his would-be adopters, in accordance with the urgings of his character, has chosen a fate that narrows by its very election; all illustrate the compulsiveness and rigidity of passionate commitment, all are led to grotesqueness by the denial of reality and truth that their private visions require, all suffer as a consequence of this denial and, to ease their suffering, try to see to it that their fate is shared. Thus, Augie begins the story of his Mexican trip with this inscription from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra:
"And strange it is / That nature must compel us to lament / Our most persisted deeds" (Augie March, p. 343). Or, in Augie's version:

External life being so mighty, the instruments so huge and terrible, the performances so great, the thoughts so great and threatening, you produce a someone who can exist before it... And this is what mere humanity always does. Its made up of these inventors and artists, millions and millions of them, each in his own way trying to recruit other people to play a supporting role and sustain him in his make-believe... That's the struggle of humanity, to recruit others to your version of what's real. Then even the flowers and the moss on the stones become the moss and flowers of a version... Everyone got bitterness in his chosen thing. It might be in the end that the chosen thing in itself is bitterness... (Augie March, pp. 401-02)

With these words, Augie reports his discovery that to choose is to suffer, that to commit oneself is to diminish the possibilities of the world and of the self. He has learned that if a man's character is his fate, the reverse is also true since his fate "or what he settles for" puts boundaries to his being and closes off forever the untapped resources of the self. It becomes a determination of Augie's life, then, to avoid bitterness by not choosing, to maintain his "limitless possibilities in a limiting world of fact by postponing final self-definition."15 But Augie's avoidance of entanglements also expresses his generous and positive devotion to something outside himself, to the real, created world. "Everyone tries to create a world he can live in, and what he can't use he often can't see. But the real world is already created, and if your fabrication doesn't correspond, then even

if you feel noble and insist on there being something better than what people call reality, that better something needn't try to exceed what, in its actuality, since we know it so little, may be very surprising! If a happy state of things, surprising; if miserable, or tragic, no worse than what we invent" (Augie March, p. 378). Delighted by the shocks and surprises the world forever hands him, Augie will not devote himself to one corner of it when that means losing sight of the whole; his resistance to "fatesharing" is a refusal to join those who would reduce the scale of life to something manageable and small. A disciple of no one, Augie becomes instead a disciple of life and elects himself to be the Columbus of the world. And thus, while he is "in the bondage of strangeness for a time still" at the novel's close, his joy is undiminished: "Look at me, going everywhere! Why I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand, and believe you can come to them in this immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze. I may be a flop at this line of endeavor, Columbus thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which doesn't prove there was no America" (Augie March, pp. 523, 536).

Augie's refusal to commit himself to narrow goals and ambitions "is represented as a positive advantage, leading . . . to a readiness to explore the world, a generous openness to experience." 16 His richly allusive and expansive style, so essential a part of his charm, marks his freedom from the limitations of space and time, his eagerness to define himself against no less a background than that which

all of human history can provide. Yet his policy of remaining loose and available does foreclose one crucial possibility for him, that of his own growth into adulthood. As Mintouchian warns him at the end of the novel, uncommittedness leads also to an unwelcome fate, that of perpetual adolescence: "You must take your chance on what you are. And you can't sit still. I know this double poser, that if you make a move you may lose but if you sit still you will decay. But what will you lose? You will not invent better than God or nature or turn yourself into the man who lacks no gift or development before you make the move" (Augie March, p. 485). Thus, while Augie’s determination not to close up life for others by becoming "representative or exemplary or head of my generation or any model of manhood" (Augie March, p. 485) is in many ways magnanimous, the result is that he remains less than a man, a shadowy character, invulnerable to and undefined by the experience he so relishes, one "who never changes or develops, who goes through everything, yet undergoes nothing." Like Wilhelm Meister, Augie is a generous seeker of his own self-cultivation, but he fails to learn the lessons of Wilhelm’s career, that there is "no vague, general capability in men," that to grow up means to accept the "limited condition" for which "man is intended," that the most one may ask with responsibility is to choose for himself the boundaries which must inevitably confine his being.

The exuberant and affirmative tone of Bellow’s novel cannot dis-

17Podhoretz, p. 217.
guise the fact that as a study in Bildung, Augie fails; what is puzzling is that Augie's failure, unlike those of Studs or Carrie, is un-instructive and apparently without social meaning. While Augie's "evasion of rising" is potentially a criticism of the American success ethic, a "rejection of power and commitment and success" in a materialistic and amoral world, the fact is that Augie is committed to nothing, certainly not to gestures of social revolt. As Leslie Fiedler observes, Augie's "denial of the values of capitalism" is invalidated because it is accompanied by no "corresponding allegiance," only by "a desire to flee success from scene to scene, from girl to girl, from father to father - in favor of what?" But it is unclear that Augie's cheerful resistance to the imperatives of American society is intended even as an attack upon capitalism; rather, it is a sign of his belief "that to commit oneself to any sort of function in the going concern of society is a form of death." Moreover, while Bellow's novel is frequently praised for the richness of its historical detail, for its convincing rendition of the social environment in which Augie's adventures unfold, the social facts of the novel have no significance. They provide merely a colorful background since they do not impinge upon the hero in any way, neither assisting his development nor retarding it. In this novel society is simply not a force to be reckoned with; Augie's encounters with it produce no consequences for himself.

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18 Fiedler, p. 6.
19 Fiedler, p. 7.
20 Chase, p. 28.
and none for the world where he enters it. In the final analysis, we can find no social significance in Augie's failure simply because Bellow does not regard his hero as having failed. By the evidence of the novel, the author approves of Augie's tentativeness, of his determination not to limit himself by choice; the entire weight of his "rhetoric of fiction" is employed in justifying Augie's joyous embrace of multiplicity. Indeed, we are asked to celebrate, not Augie's growth, but the simple fact that at the novel's end "he remains unattached and free, although to what end we never fully learn."^21

It has been my intention in this study to illuminate generally the relationship between the Bildungsroman and social criticism and to explore specifically the content of this criticism in a number of writers representing various cultures and historical eras. I believe that this approach has enabled me to make useful distinctions among the authors I have considered while, at the same time, identifying their common ground and the literary tradition which they create. Bellow's novel is of special interest because more than any other contemporary American writer that comes to mind, the author of The Adventures of Augie March demonstrates his indebtedness to this tradition for he consciously borrows from it in designing the terms of his novel. In many respects, Augie is fashioned after the apprentice-heroes described throughout this work; he exhibits their middle-class self-trust, their curiosity about the adult world, and their eagerness

^21Chase, p. 28.
to experience its pleasures, and like them, he is conscious of the necessity for resisting social pressures which would violate his inner nature and its needs. Moreover, Bellow's depiction of the social milieu in which Augie's development should be accomplished is detailed and masterly, and his novel focuses on the critical stage in Augie's growth, the point where life history intersects with history and the hero launches his assault upon the social world in which he must find his place. Yet, for all of these similarities, Bellow's novel bears only a surface resemblance to the books studied in this work, and however consciously he may use the tradition which they have created, he does not share the concerns of their authors. For Bellow is not really interested in Augie's development; as Richard Chase has noted, in fact Bellow belongs to the tradition which includes Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau since his novel asserts the belief that character is the essential core of selfhood which cannot be fundamentally affected by environment. Thus, "the plot of Augie March is that of Whitman's Song of Myself - the eluding of all identities preferred to one by the world, by one's past, by one's friends."  

And since Augie's identity is not even partially created by his social experience, no social commentary can be implied by his career. Thus, whatever ideal Augie is intended to represent, it is not the ideal of growth which has provided the framework through which the novels considered in this study have been interpreted. In the last analysis, perhaps this collapse of the Bildungsroman in twentieth-century American literature is the

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22Chase, pp. 28-30.
ultimate effect of America's continued resistance to cultural manhood. For that resistance has not only proven itself invulnerable to the criticisms of the writers studied in the last two chapters; it has triumphed by destroying the ideal of individual and social maturity which motivated them.