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OUT OF KINGS:

A Inquiry into the Americanness of the Classic American Novel

"Sometimes I wish we could hear of a country that's out of kings."
- Huck in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

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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1976

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October, 1940

1962

1966

1966-1970

1970-1974
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When Alexis de Tocqueville predicted in Democracy In America that the United States would produce a native literary tradition that would be unique, he could only guess at the shape that tradition would take. In the hundred years following the appearance of his book America has produced a novelistic tradition and in fact novels which could be considered of classic proportions, yet our greatest and most representative works, from The Scarlet Letter and Moby-Dick to The Great Gatsby and Light In August, have taken on a character that Tocqueville would probably find puzzling. One of the central paradoxes of American culture is that this country, the land of opportunity, the seat of optimism, has produced a novelistic heritage marked by tragic, defeated characters. This thesis is an attempt to explain this development. By calling attention to the affinities that present themselves among the characters in classic American novels and by demonstrating that their plight is related to distinctly American cultural developments, I hope to make some general conclusions about the "Americanness" of the American novel.

The society of Hester Prynne is vastly different from the one that torments and finally executes Joe Christmas, but in some important respects these and other characters of American fiction suffer a common fate. The hero or heroine of that fiction characteristically suffers defeat because he or she is driven by a vision imparted by society that
as their own, views that lead to their disorientation and disintegration. In place of individual, integrated and fulfilling positions, the American character embraces extreme, distorted or at least imbalanced visions that account for the contradictions and "extreme ranges of experience" that Richard Chase among others has identified as characterizing the American novel.

The central characters of classic American novels act in ostensibly independent ways, yet each is drawn to adhere to a personally alien, yet socially sanctioned, vision from which he or she cannot liberate him or herself. The character called "Captain America" in the film *Easy Rider*, which carries on this tradition of the American novel, voices a self-awareness that his forerunners like Huck Finn and Gatsby never reached when, near the end of his tragic quest, he admits: "We blew it, man." Captain America realizes that his and Billy's trip, their quest for freedom, was compromised from the beginning. The means they used, the vision of an ideal America that was Somewhere Else, Somewhere down the road, was imparted to them by their culture. The external forms of their freedom, their dress and speech, while blatant enough to enrage the majority, were only forms; their freedom was an illusion. Captain America's "We blew it," is a recognition of this illusion.

I said earlier that I hope to establish that the compulsion to internalize society's views in the classic American novel is related to a pervasive pressure within American culture. Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* first suggested to me that some central tension in our culture has led to the form American novels have taken. In attempting to account for the fact that the American novel has
leads not to liberation and fulfillment but to frustration or death. The disorientation suffered by the characters of our novels directs our attention not so much to their inability to ward off alien influence (Hester, Ahab and Gatsby are hardly weak characters) as to the compulsive power of the socially sanctioned views they come to accept. And while the visions that drive the characters to be discussed are as varied as their different personalities and situations, certain affinities ought not to be neglected. Hester's exaggerated appraisal of her guilt, Ahab's messianic sense of mission, Huck's inability to liberate himself from the social codes he holds sacrosanct, Carrie's chimerical belief in material wealth, Gatsby's adherence to a compromised and corrupting ideal and Hightower's and Christmas' betrayal of present reality for the sake of anachronistic values of the past, all bear a distinctly American cast.

My study will attempt to establish two main points regarding the American novel: first of all, that the major characters of our fiction are compulsively led to comply with the dictates of their societies or at least act in ways that would indicate compliance, and secondly, that each comes eventually to cloud his or her present with visions that render him or her incapable of adequately dealing with reality. This tendency reflects a propensity in American culture which will be delineated in this and in the following chapter: a tendency to idealize and mythologize the nation's past and its destiny so as to obscure the present in veils of mystification and idealization. This tendency in the culture inclined the American imagination to create characters who lose touch with what is most unique and distinguishing in themselves and to adopt
tended toward romance and can best be described as a "romance-novel," Chase points out that the imagination that inspired this tradition "has been shaped by the contradictions and not by the unities and harmonies" of American culture. Chase's book is justifiably acknowledged as the most important critical study of the American novel yet the crucial section on "The Broken Circuit," which deals with the "historical facts" which account for the splits and tensions which fired the American imagination, is perhaps its most underdeveloped portion. I wish to push Chase's analysis further and here briefly sketch the cultural conflict that I think has formed our novelistic tradition, leaving to the next chapter a more thorough explanation of the roots and effects of this conflict.

The classic American novel is informed by a cultural tension so basic to American life as to influence our political attitudes and our view of ourselves, as well as the content of our fiction. To be American is to inherit a vision of America that reality cannot sustain. Americans learn to think of their country as the ideal land, the propagator of liberty, the Prometheus among nations. America has from its earliest days been smitten with a corporate illusion that it is not only unique in the world, but in fact superior to its neighbors.

What is here being described goes far beyond what is normally meant by "pride in one's country." "Country" is not an adequate term in this context. Americans have never been content to view their country as a mere political entity. The postage stamp that now adorns American letters bound for other parts of the world reflects what I am getting at. Against a red, white and blue background, the air mail stamp displays
the main outlines of Mount Rushmore. Beneath the faces of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt are words meant to indicate what this site signifies to Americans: "Shrine of Democracy." The blend of religious and political sentiments in that phrase is unique in the modern western world; it reflects the extent to which Americans tend to mythologize their nation. America's over-blown, idealized self-image has been a determinant in our affairs with other nations in that our belief in our superior virtue has at times inclined us to an expansionist politics, an aggressive missionary effort to extend American institutions throughout the world; at others, toward an isolationist defense of our native values through withdrawal. But of special relevance to this study are the internal effects of this tendency.

The nation's propensity toward an exuberant, self-congratulatory vision of itself inclines the individual American not only to adopt the values of the majority, but to endow them with disproportionate significance. When, as will be argued in a following chapter, Hester comes to accept the bondage of her society's scarlet letter, when she learns to reject herself and the result of her and Dimmesdale's "sin," Pearl, as tainted and unacceptable, she demonstrates the wisdom of Tocqueville's warnings concerning a "tyranny of the majority." Her capitulation demonstrates that the compulsive power of the majority can be every bit as insistent as the decrees of a despot. Moreover, her defeat, when considered in conjunction with the fates of other characters in major American novels, points out how directly the hyperbolic idealizations of the culture result in the acceptance of abstract and estranging visions
by individuals. In Hester's case the depth of her sin is so magnified as to lead to her alienation; in Carrie Meeber's late nineteenth century setting the importance of material wealth is similarly exaggerated, and both women accept the dominant values of society, allow them to grow to grotesque proportions, and suffer similar fates: lack of fulfillment and disorientation.

In the chapters that follow I will attempt to flesh out this summary statement of my thesis by applying it to six novels. The novels were chosen on the basis of merit and their representative nature. All are recognized classics, three from the nineteenth, and three from the twentieth century: The Scarlet Letter, Moby-Dick, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Sister Carrie, The Great Gatsby, and Light In August. I by no means wish to suggest that my reading is the only possible one or to make of these novels didactic tracts on the limitations and imperfections of America. Rather, I hope that a consideration of these books in succession will establish a common angle of vision that we can confidently label as distinctly American.

The student of the American novel must of course acknowledge a great debt to those critics who in the twenty years since Lionel Trilling's "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," have explored the problem of the Americanness of the American novel. R.W.B. Lewis' The American Adam was perhaps the first noteworthy study. Lewis' important effort was followed by a number of other notable works including Richard Chase's The American Novel and Its Tradition, Marius Bewley's The Eccentric Design, and Leslie Friedler's Love and Death in the American Novel. Each of these has enhanced our understanding of elements of the American
experience—religious, cultural, and artistic—that have contributed to the development of the American novel.

For my purposes Lewis' book was useful, indeed, indispensable, yet ultimately unsatisfying. The study is in the first place restricted to the nineteenth century. Further, commentary on complex works such as The Scarlet Letter and Moby-Dick is regrettably thin. Mark Twain is scarcely mentioned. But for all its limitations, The American Adam has one undeniable virtue: its view of our literature is based upon patently relevant notions concerning the uniqueness of the American experience. Lewis views nineteenth century American literary figures as involved in a debate over the validity of America's Adamic aspirations: was the American appropriately symbolized as Adam or not? Fiedler's book is likewise dedicated to showing how the American novel grows out of cultural developments, but his obsessive thesis that the inability of American writers to deal with heterosexual love is their distinguishing trait constricts his view when he is dealing with individual works.

Marius Bewley's The Eccentric Design offers cogent discussions of classic American novels, yet his analysis, like Fiedler's, is hampered by the contention that there is something wrong with the American novel. Chase, Bewley and Fiedler are agreed that the American novel, like American culture, is marked by unresolved tensions and splits. This contention, one which I accept, leads Fiedler to examine our novels for warped sexuality, and Bewley to see in them reflections of the clashing ideologies of Adams and Jefferson. Chase sees in our "culture of contradictions" an explanation for the predominance of the romance in America, but does not really explain the nature of the contradictions or
show how they have bestowed a unique American flavor to our fiction. Chase's otherwise incisive criticism is finally weakened by his failure to convincingly relate American novels to a particular current or concern of American culture. It seems that the time is ripe to push Chase a step further. In the chapter that follows I shall attempt to sketch the development of the American propensity toward self-idealization and discuss the first "literary" reaction to this basic element of our national character.
NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

THE BACKGROUND

In this chapter I will attempt to point out how various traditions have contributed to the formation of the American self-image that was outlined in the Introduction. The idealization of the New World by early explorers began the process of myth-building about America. The New England Calvinists contributed a distinctly moral dimension, and the Enlightenment extended the idealizing impulse into the secular political sphere. The apologists for the Westward Movement and the leading spokesmen for budding American industrialism will be shown to have further broadened the ramifications of the American myth. Even the main outlines of America's stance in twentieth century world politics can be viewed as based upon an assumption of national superiority. Finally, I will show why Letters From an American Farmer can be seen as a critical examination of the tension implicit in this myth and establish why I believe that Crèvecoeur's response to America is the beginning of a tradition that our greatest writers have followed.

In February of 1493 Columbus feared that his return voyage would be terminated at sea by a severe storm. Faced with the possibility that the knowledge of the spectacle he had seen would perish with him, he submitted a sealed account of his accidental discovery to the angry waves. The cask and its contents, the first written account of America by a
modern European, never reached the Old World. But in a sense Europe needed only to be informed that America in fact existed; she already "knew" what would be found there. Europe's vision of "America" had found expression in Plato's Dialogues and in scores of writings since the Greeks. The image, a complex one, was compounded, as Howard Mumford Jones has written, of "wonder, terror, wealth, religious perfection, communism, utopianism or political power."¹ But the dominant association was with the ideal. Toward the west, Europe believed, was the earthly paradise. To the European imagination, as F.S.C. Northrup has pointed out, "America existed not merely as a vision but also as a necessity."² There had to be a utopia, an actual place awaiting discovery that would fulfill Europe's thwarted expectations. This impulse, aptly termed "the American exoticism" by Alfonso Reyes,³ insinuates itself into the very first account of the New World that Europe did receive, the famous "Letter to Luis de Satangel" by Columbus. Describing the island he called "Espanola," Columbus wrote: "There could be no believing, without seeing, such harbors as are here, as well as the many and great rivers, and excellent waters, most of which contain gold (italics, mine).⁴ With his concluding words, Columbus reveals more about Europe than about America: the waters had to contain gold, since America, the perfect utopia, would necessarily be rich in the most precious of metals. Time allowed further exploration, further penetration into the American land mass, but this contact altered only details of the image of America; Europe remained focused on the reflection of its own imagination, rather than on what was there in fact. Bernard DeVoto's The Course of Empire traces the prevalence of myths and ideal conceptions that limited the
European's ability to contend with the reality of America. One such persistent conception was the belief in cities of gold in the American heartland. Of Spanish activity in the American interior DeVoto writes:

No European, no white man, knew anything about the Great Valley or the West. They were as completely beyond the reach of knowledge or conjecture as the Americas had been till Columbus touched the island screen. They existed in men's minds like a dream born of a high fever. They were a dream, but were born of mythology and desire. The Spanish entered the Valley from the East; after Cabeza de Vaca they entered the West from the south and the west. They were looking for what steel-fingered compulsion told them must be there but was not there. Romantic, histrionic, cruel, and trance-bound, they marched in rusty medieval armor toward the non-existent.5

From the beginning, then, America was an idea; it was the hope of Europe. For the religious zealot it represented an opportunity for the establishment of a pure church; for the more secular-minded, it promised wealth beyond comprehension. Certainly a majority of the earliest settlers who reached New England were more interested in God than Mammon. Just as Columbus saw gold in waters that had none, just as Spanish explorers maintained that they would eventually reach cities made of precious metals, the Pilgrims and Puritans saw not a rocky wilderness but a new Jerusalem. Totally committed to the Covenant of Grace,6 they presumed themselves to reside under the direct gaze and guidance of God. This basic conception was given additional weight by the parallels they found in the Old Testament. They had undertaken, as had the Israelites, an Exodus; England was their Egypt, the Atlantic their Red Sea. Their settlement was to be a "city upon a hill," a new Jerusalem, a model which God would employ in His work of reforming His people.7 Here in the rugged New England landscape, communities were formed that would have an
inestimable impact on the development of the American mind. The New Englanders added a religious dimension to "European exoticism." These sturdy and well-disciplined men and women habitually invested with moral significance not only their daily actions but the very land they tilled.

In this respect Charles Sanford scarcely exaggerates when he calls America "a product of the Protestant Reformation" which required "an earthly paradise in which to perfect a reformation of the Church."8

The earliest New England settlements came to succumb to the irresistible temptation of all reformist groups: the assumption of moral superiority. Splinter groups had of course existed in Europe ever since the Reformation, but the Calvinists who sailed to America thereby became associated with the long-standing habit of associating the New World with the ideal. "European exoticism," when meshed with the Protestant sense of mission and moral elitism, created a blend that resulted in the formation of a unique world-view and a lofty self-image.

The world-view was perceptively analyzed by George Santayana in "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy." Santayana began by asserting that at its beginning "the country was new, but the race was tried, chastened, and full of solemn memories." Even from its earliest days, America had a "distinct vision of the universe."9 Santayana referred to this vision, one that has maintained its hold on the American mind ever since the Puritans, as "Calvinism." He used the term in a way that extends beyond the formal theology of John Calvin or of Jonathan Edwards. Like Hawthorne he realized that the spirit of Calvinism haunted the American mind long after the hold of formal Calvinism had weakened. The "Calvinist" outlook, he maintained, is "an expression of agonized
conscience" and is characterized by an intense self-consciousness. Affinities to formal Calvinism are of course immediately apparent. Calvin, as well as Edwards, had taught that the life of the individual is a dramatic struggle for salvation, a struggle that most men will lose. On the other hand, the chosen remnant is an active participant in the working out of the Almighty's inscrutable plan. The paradox that individually conceived, man remained a pool of corruption, yet when viewed as a member of God's Elect, was an active participant in history, created a cohesiveness and sense of moral supremacy in the American Calvinist community. This aspect of Calvinism was to remain a salient aspect of the American character.

Their belief in their superior moral position in the world did not, of course, deter the Puritans from berating themselves and indulging in orgies of self-criticism. But even in the caustic denunciations and fiery exhortations of an Increase Mather can be detected a thinly veiled sense of moral supremacy. Since colonial times there has been a marked tendency among Americans to regard themselves as heirs to great obligations and hence to view their omissions as all the more heinous. The habit of viewing America as the land singled out for some special destiny remained, and as time passed we took to investing all our accomplishments with moral significance. As one commentator on the American mind has put it: "the superiority of the United States in quantitative achievements and political skills has consistently been blazoned forth in moral terms." The revelance of such early developments to an investigation of classic American novels, the first of which would not appear until 1850.
may not be apparent until one considers how profoundly this moral ego-centricism has affected our cultural and political development. It is important, for example, to see that the moral value that America has attributed to its political institutions is not alone the produce of the Revolutionary struggle; the habit of mind was already well entrenched by 1776. The rational idealists who engineered our break from England and guided the Republic through its early and difficult years may have saturated themselves in Locke, but at frequent turns the established propensity to idealize America and to relate her development to her moral purity reveals itself. John Adams, for example, wrote these words in 1765:

I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scheme and design in Providence for the illumination and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.¹²

The deist Jefferson was characteristically American when he proposed as a seal of state for the Republic, a representation of the sons of Israel led by a pillar of light.¹³

The American moral imagination encourages a restiveness, a compulsive drive to extend the benefits that God had bestowed upon his Chosen. Nowhere is this expansiveness more evident than in the westward movement and the myth building that it spawned. The sense of mission generated and sustained by the earliest Puritan settlers necessarily took on new forms, yet the idealistic drive and the national self-image renewed itself as it adapted to new times. Particular goals changed, but the sense of mission remained intact.¹⁴ The West, raw and untamed, fell sway to the compulsive American desire to mythologize and idealize itself.
Henry Nash Smith has chronicled the American imagination's creative interaction with the far West. In his study of the West as symbol and myth he cites a host of eighteenth and nineteenth century writers, and of the many revealing statements quoted, none is more indicative of both the myth-building process and American self-idealization than is the following one written in 1784:

The West is, grandly and abstractly, a place where afflicted humanity raises her drooping head; where conscious ceases to be a slave, and laws are no more than the security of happiness. In the great wilderness nature makes reparation for having created man; and government, so long prostituted to the most criminal purposes, establishes an asylum . . . for the distressed of mankind.15

Such rhapsodic ruminations were undoubtedly influenced by mercantile motives, yet here the native belief in moral superiority played its part. The drive to the West eventually came to be viewed as a development ordained by God to spread the superior institutions of America throughout the globe: Manifest Destiny. The man who was probably the movement's leading apologist, William Gilpin, wrote Mission of the North American People, Geographical, Social, and Political, in which he proclaimed that

the untransacted destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent--to rush over the vast field to the Pacific Ocean--to animate the many hundred millions of its people, and to cheer them upward--to confirm the destiny of the human race--to carry the career of mankind to its culminating point.16

Lofty sentiments like these would eventually lead to a crude political chauvinism, but the original impulse reaches back to the colonial experience.
Even the introduction of the factory system, seemingly the product of the pragmatic, Yankee side of the American character, was affected by the prevalent moralizing impulse. Near midcentury Henry James Sr., cosmopolitan that he was, gave voice to characteristically American sentiments when he saw in "our steamboats, our railroads, our magnetic telegraphs . . . the throbblings wherewith dumb nature herself confesses the descent of that divine and universal spirit, which even now yearns to embrace all earth's offspring in the bonds of a mutual knowledge and a mutual love."\textsuperscript{17} The earliest textile manufacturers found it necessary to assure New Englanders that the prevailing moral standards of the communities involved would not be endangered.\textsuperscript{18} Even more indicative of the abiding presence of the American moral pose is the paternalistic and philanthropic image cultivated by many early industrialists. This moral self-consciousness, in the estimation of one scholar, probably resulted in an avoidance of the extreme exploitation that was to be the mark of the industrial revolution elsewhere in the Western world.\textsuperscript{19}

In the twentieth century rapid urbanization and improved communications systems have somewhat tarnished the American self-image. Since 1900 the enormous problems occasioned by the technological revolution have become apparent, as have the shortcomings of our once sacrosanct political system. Yet even as the changes in the way we view ourselves are acknowledged, it must also be insisted that many of our former habits of thought still retain their hold on us. In the realm of foreign affairs, for example, the traditional American moral self-righteousness is clearly evident. In the vigorous excesses, both oratorical and diplomatic, of Theodore Roosevelt, or in Woodrow Wilson's Biblical
exhortations to arms, backed by only the most idealistic principles and aims, the moralizing impulse is present. The Cold War jargon of that paradigmatic American diplomat, John Foster Dulles, laced through with an Apocalyptic flavor that only a sense of besieged virtue can spawn, shows that in the 1950's our self-concept had not undergone drastic change. In the sixties, truly the nation's most tumultuous era since the Civil War, a profound self-analysis and self-criticism has left our belief in our superiority in disarray. Yet the refusal of countless whites to recognize the obvious facts of our national policy of racial discrimination, which at first sight appears to be only callous bigotry, is in reality the defensive reaction of people who are being forced to reconsider their image of themselves. The widespread support given the Vietnamese War during the late sixties is further evidence that for a majority of Americans their country remains primarily a moral force in a world of nearly degenerate neighbors. We have, millions maintained, given our word, made a "commitment," and thereby placed our moral stance in jeopardy; we must stay even if the gesture will bear no real fruit. The attacks on the War by the young and the intellectuals for so long fell on dead ears because they did not take into account that for "middle Americans" this costly military venture was moral and not political at base. In short, then, the dominant tradition of American moral superiority remains intact even as it is besieged by the "outsiders," militant blacks, revolutionary youth, and the intellectuals.

The tradition will maintain itself despite the bruises inflicted by the Vietnam experience, so long as the majority of Americans continue to regard their country as the foremost defender of freedom and liberty
in the world. So long as they continue to believe that our blend of the republican political system with free enterprise capitalism does the most to assure social advancement and individual liberty, the majority will undoubtedly continue to believe in American moral supremacy. America will remain, in the popular imagination, the Prometheus among nations, ever striving to extend the gift of freedom among men.

Americans, as Charles Feidelson has convincingly demonstrated, are a symbol-prone people, and so it was inevitable that eventually the American mind would seek to create a rather distinct image with which to represent itself. By about the time of the formation of the Republic, America was equipped with a symbol that would be exploited by scores of literary figures in their efforts to produce an American literature. R.W.B. Lewis calls this symbol the American Adam. He was "a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities poised at the start of a new history."20

Crèvecoeur's Letters From an American Farmer is one of the first "literary" representations of this mythic figure. Throughout the Letters Crèvecoeur employs as his persona a semi-educated farmer named James to express his reflections on America. In the early letters above all in Letter III, "What Is an American?," James' voice is impersonal and philosophic. Here he functions as an apologist for America as an ideal. Enamored with the Edenic myth, he sees America as the New Beginning. He is free to transcend the here-and-now and indulge in unbridled praise for his new home. However, in the later letters, especially the last, "Distresses of a Frontiersman," the voice of the spokesman takes on a personal tone as James gives vent to his bitter disappointment in America.
Here he is a man involved in history and vulnerable to its bruising realities. The following comparison of early with the later letters is meant to show that the extreme disillusion at the end of the Letters is related to, in fact, grows out of, James' (or Crèvecoeur's) initial acceptance of the American myth. Here, as in the classic novels which will follow, the seductive appeal of the American myth is shown to be not only compelling, but ruinous. In that the book focuses attention on what I regard as the critical tension that imparts an "American" cast to our classic novels, I think that Letters From an American Farmer can be viewed as America's proto-novel.

Some of the main props of the American claim to superiority arise out of comparisons with Europe in which the New World appears favorably. Crèvecoeur does precisely this as he has James contrast "this new man," the American, with his European counterpart in an oft-quoted portion of Letter III:

\[
\text{We have no princes for whom we toil, starve and bleed; we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be, nor is this pleasing equality so transitory as many others are.}^{21}
\]

The letter continues in this vein and one can only conclude that the transplanted European who penned the Letters was under the complete sway of the American superiority syndrome. But in Letter IX, "On Charlestown and Slavery" the American reality begins to intrude upon his ideal; in fact, the cruel spectacle of slavery impels the writer to cast fiery questions at the universe. His disgust and indignation are apparent as he asks, "Oh, Nature where are thou?", or as he agonizes later:
Is there, then, no superintending power who conducts the moral operations of the world as well as the physical? The same sublime hand which guides the planets round the sun with so much exactness, which preserves the arrangement of the whole with such exalted wisdom and paternal care, and prevents the vast system from falling into confusion -- doth it abandon mankind to all the errors, the follies, and the miseries which their most frantic range and their most dangerous vices and passions can produce (p. 167).

It may be no more than an unpremeditated accident, but a revealing one nonetheless, that Crèvecoeur uses a term with Biblical roots as he castigates those who reside in the town and reap the benefits of slavery:

The cracks of the whip urging these miserable beings to excessive labour are far too distant from the gay capital to be heard. The chosen race eat, drink and live happy, while the unfortunate one grubs up the ground, raises indigo, husks the rice ... without the cordials of any cheering liquor (p. 162, my italics).

The same letter describes an encounter with a bound and dying slave, left to be revaged by parasites which peck out his eyes and feed on his face and arms.

No sooner were the birds flown than swarms of insects covered the whole body of this unfortunate wretch, eager to feed on his mangled flesh and drink his blood. I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror; my nerves were convulsed; I trembled; I stood motionless, involuntarily contemplating the fate of this Negro in all its dismal latitude (p. 172).

The fact that this incident is fictitious and that Crèvecoeur probably had no direct experience with Southern slavery leads one to speculate on
his motives for including it in his sketch of America. Certainly his ironic use of Christian terminology ("eager to feed upon his mangled flesh and drink his blood") indicates an obviously critical intent. At any rate he cannot have failed to appreciate the discrepancy between statements made in "What is an American?" and the scene he sketches in "On Charlestown and Slavery." In the former he announces that

The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions (p. 64).

In the latter he perceives that America is no exception to the universal corruption that leads men to exploit their fellows: "Almost everywhere, liberty so natural to mankind is refused, or rather enjoyed but by their tyrants" (p. 170). Crèvecoeur's ordering of his materials forces his reader to reassess the grandiose claims he had previously made in the New World's behalf. But even as he reports on the brutality that he has "witnessed," the disparity between America as an idea and America as a reality is only suggested. Only in his last letter does Crèvecoeur openly question America's image of itself.

Letter XII opens with a directness that is astounding: "I wish for a change of place" (p. 194). The man who had called America man's greatest hope, now finds that he must leave. As the War of Independence breaks out, James, the once proud and self-reliant farmer, finds that he must align himself with one of the contending factions. Circumstances force upon him the realization that a man "cannot live in solitude; he must belong to some community bound by some ties, however imperfect." He continues, "I had never before these calamitous times formed any such ideas" (p. 195). The "calamitous times" awaken him to the fact that he
does indeed function within a society, and that he is not free to dis-
regard its demands. As a member of "a large society," the British
Empire, and "a smaller society," America, he finds that he must choose,
must declare his allegiance to one or the other. England is too far
away, too removed from his immediate situation, yet he cannot find it
in himself to embrace the revolution. His hesitancy, he quickly dis-
covers, is not tolerated:

As a member of a smaller society, I find that any
kind of opposition to its now prevailing senti-
ments immediately begets hatred (p. 197).

And so James finds himself an alien in a land he had embraced as his new
home. America promised liberty, promised a fresh start, but now would
have him submit to its official position. In its quest for Independence,
America abrogates the independence of its sons, and Crèvecœur perceives
the paradox. Caught in the clutches of this contradictory situation,
James no longer sees himself as an "American," as a "new man," but
rather as a pawn of others who control his destiny every bit as thoroughly
as would the court, king or bishop if he were in Europe.Formerly, in
"What Is an American?" he had asserted: "We have no princes for whom we
toil, starve, and bleed; we are the most perfect society now existing in
the world" (p. 61); with more experience he has sobered: "It is for the
sake of the great leaders on both sides that so much blood must be
spilt" (p. 198).

I have been suggesting that the vision of America presented by the
book makes the Letters America's proto-novel. It could further be said
that James' passage from his early and unqualified acceptance of America
and its promise to his final frustration marks him as the model for the
central characters of novelists like Hawthorne, Twain and Faulkner. James' bitterness as he discards his former ideas about American supremacy reflects a kind of awakening, and while later American protagonists will not attain this perspective (most remain unenlightened and unable to locate the source of their discomfort), it is clear that the depth of his despondency is in direct reaction to his initial adherence to the American myth.

His earlier idealization of America has left him ill-prepared to deal with the political realities that impinge upon him. His situation is made all the more difficult since the very belief in American infallibility to which he had so heartily subscribed now arms those around him with an oppressive power. A similar set of dynamics will present themselves when we examine, for example, *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester Prynne's acceptance of an exaggerated version of her self-righteous society's condemnation could only occur in an atmosphere of hyperbole and idealization and in a culture where the judgments of the majority are awarded exaggerated and unquestioned merit. Even James' solution is prototypical. When he declares his intention to flee civilization and live among the Indians, James announces a course of action that Hester Prynne and Huck Finn will later embrace. When James finds that America has reneged upon its promise, a promise that once claimed his passionate adherence, he decides, as Huck will put it, "to light out," to look for freedom in a simpler society:

> I will revert into a state approaching nearer to that of nature, unencumbered either with voluminous laws or contradictory codes, often galling the very necks of those whom they protect (p. 205).
Hester and Huck will voice these same sentiments and will in fact propose the same "solution" for their difficulties. Even Joe Christmas, a twentieth century man for whom there is no "frontier," will elect to flee, to run, to try to escape the forces that have made his life unbearable. Some seek refuge in physical flight; some, like Sister Carrie, simply endure their quiet desperation; still other characters, like Ahab and Gatsby, meet violent death; yet all are victimized by their society's debilitating belief in its own superiority, and their identification with its mania for idealization. Their acceptance of the visions imparted to them renders them unable to contend satisfactorily with their present. The alienation that characterizes the American novel grows out of, is in fact nourished by, America's vision of itself.
NOTES OF THE TEXT


3. See Northrup, Chapter Eight, "The Meaning of Western Civilization."


10. See Sanford, p. 134; Miller, pp. 33-34.

11. Sanford, p. 117.


13. Sanford, p. 98.


18 Sanford, p. 157.

19 Loc. cit.


21Letters from an American Farmer (New York, 1963), Signet Edition, p. 61. All future references to Letters are from this edition and will be noted in the text.
CHAPTER THREE

THE SCARLET LETTER

Hawthorne's greatest novel and America's first book of classic proportions deals with a distant seventeenth century past, yet the impulse which led Hawthorne to explore Puritan New England was not that of an antiquarian. In analyzing the cradle of American culture Hawthorne pointed out tendencies that had taken firm root in the American character by the nineteenth century. Hawthorne's examination of two guilt-ridden characters at the mercy of the self-righteous and repressive society established in early Boston dramatizes the pressures that were outlined in the previous chapters. Hester is engaged in a life-long dialectical struggle with her society, a struggle she will lose. We are given enough glimpses of the "natural" Hester to appreciate her as an admirable, even exemplary woman. Yet as the verdict leveled upon her by her community gnaws away at her spirit she begins to see herself as her vindictive neighbors do. Dimmesdale, on the other hand, moves freely about the community and enjoys the normal associations that are denied Hester, yet he too is shown to be a captive of his society. Just as Hester comes to accept her role as Sinner, Dimmesdale is impelled to act the part of Saint; both are unfree. It is beyond the power of Hester and Dimmesdale to liberate themselves from society's view of them, to confront their guilt and be forgiven and healed. Both come to accept their culture's visions, internalize them and suffer deep psychic wounds for their
servility. It was certainly no accident that the symbol-prone Hawthorne began his tale with a chapter entitled "The Prison Door." He shows that early America shared many of the features associated with the gaol.

Since Hawthorne's ideas on Puritanism are complex and since Puritanism figures so centrally in this novel, I will begin by discussing his view of Puritanism and his assessment of its role in forming the American character. After these general considerations I will comment on the story proper by focusing on the careers of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. The disorientation of both Hester and Dimmesdale can be ascribed to the dual pressures outlined in the previous chapters. Hester and the anguished minister are not only unable to resist the social power which forces guilt upon them but are heir as well to exaggerated versions of the dimensions of their transgression. Both their compulsive acceptance of their society's views and the extravagance of their guilt reflects the developments outlined earlier.

Much has been written on the subject of Hawthorne's attitude towards Puritanism and in this matter, mention is often made of unresolvable ambiguities. Hawthorne's ambivalence about the Puritans is reflected in the oft-quoted line from "Main Street":

> Let us thank God for having given us such ancestors [the Puritans]; and let each successive generation thank Him, not less fervently, for being one step further from them in the march of ages.

The ambivalence seems to arise from Hawthorne's awareness that conditions in the New World called for colonizers who were above all vigorous, hearty, and equipped with a fervent belief in their mission. Further, in much that Hawthorne wrote about the early Puritan community there is a
recurrent indication that while he abhorred its severity and harshness, he saw it, in the words of Larzer Ziff, "as symbolic realization of the inescapable portion of life which those who would live life as if men were perfectible and evil an error in calculation must accept." The Puritans, in other words, recognized the universal fact of sin -- at least they affirmed a reality that Hawthorne saw as the firmest foundation for a humane social order. When a society helped its members recall that all of them were alike in their imperfection and incompleteness, that society was facilitating the formation of the "magnetic chain" that bound men together in a community of mutual forbearance and love.

On the other hand, Puritanism in action seems to fracture the ties linking man to man. It equips believers with a sense of imperfection, but more often than not the faithful identify themselves with the cause of righteousness and piety and project evil upon a dissenting minority or a deviant individual. When this happens, the system's essential wisdom has been perverted and bigotry and hate replace freedom and love. The Scarlet Letter, writes one critic, calls into question "a scheme of regeneration which on the one hand allots to sin the universal status of death and on the other reserves for it the special shame of the prison-house." In this light the beadle's call near the novel's opening takes on a crushing weight of irony: "blessing on the righteous colony of the Massachusetts, where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine." He speaks for a society which has directed its critical gaze outward and, while neglecting sin's universality, pins its stigma on selected individuals. In so isolating evil, the accusers have disengaged themselves from the community of sinners and numbered themselves among the righteous.
In much of his fiction dealing with Puritanism, and especially in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne is exploring one of the sect's central antinomies and, in so doing, he is uncovering the fundamental contradictions of American culture. One commentator on Hawthorne touches upon these deeper issues:

> From Hawthorne's point of view the Puritan way of life, their denial of civil liberty for others, and their theology combined to give an unfavorable aspect to the national character. It created a social system, based upon an identification of law and religion, that trammeled itself as it did the people who lived under it.\(^5\)

Here Joseph Swartz makes two very significant points. First, he asserts that for Hawthorne the Puritan vision had impressed itself deeply into the American character. The Puritans, Hawthorne knew, had not only indelibly marked him personally but had profoundly influenced the formation of the American mind. Swartz also indicates the nature of this influence. By identifying law and religion, the Puritans created an essentially closed and repressive social order. Those who kept the law were holy; those who broke it were sinners. Here, in nascent form, is the habit of mind outlined in the previous chapter. When the majority comes to view its tenets, not merely as the guidelines for insuring the highest good for the greatest number, but as imperatives invested with deep moral significance, a deep-reaching pressure arises. And when such a constraining atmosphere grows up in a nation declaring itself at times the New Zion, at others the New Eden, the tensions at its heart bring forth critical comment. *The Scarlet Letter* was America's first great novel and was also the first to point out the New World's contradictions.
Hawthorne begins his novel with a quick glance at the flint-faced men and women who await the appearance of Hester Prynne, but as the chapter title indicates, he would have his reader concentrate on one of the first buildings these townspeople were moved to raise. In introducing us to the prison house, Hawthorne takes care to contrast this sign of both human imperfection and societal power with America's grandiose self image:

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison (p. 47).

Here on the opening page we are faced with the first of many ambiguities. On one level, of course, the quotation would seem to reflect Hawthorne's "conservative" reaction against the optimism of the Transcendentalists, the members of Emerson's "Party of Hope." Man's mortality and basic imperfection can be overlooked only at great eventual cost. The perfect man or the perfect society is a myth. But the passage might also be read as a condemnation of the Puritans. Charles Feidelson, for one, sees Hawthorne's words in this light:

Though they are "founders of a new colony," they have based it upon the oldest facts of human experience -- crime and death. Though they would cultivate "human virtue and happiness," they have no faith in any direct approach to this end. The jail and its companion-place, the burial ground, are their proper meeting houses.

It is of course valid to maintain that Hawthorne intended both readings. His ambivalent mind could at the same time appreciate the essential wisdom of the Calvinist world-view, and lever criticism at Puritan rigidity and excesses. But still another interpretation suggests itself.
America, which at mid-nineteenth century still conceived of itself as a "Utopia of human virtue and happiness" has a history that is anything but utopian and ideal. The American republic which announces to one and all that it is the protector of liberty and the guardian of freedom has grown in soil whose "virginal" nature was early violated by the introduction of tyranny and repression. The wild rose bush that thrives in an otherwise desolate landscape may, Hawthorne hints, have "sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson," an early victim of Puritan intolerance. From its earliest days, announces "The Prison-Door," America has been implicated in the denial of true freedom.

That Hawthorne intended to level caustic criticism at the Puritans is clear from the early chapters. A "grim rigidity... petrified the bearded physiognomies" of the crowd that stands outside jail. But Hawthorne does not merely indicate that these early Americans were severe and gloomy; he is at pains to show that they are self-righteous and thoroughly vindictive: "meagre, indeed, and cold, was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for, from such bystanders" (p. 50). In a previous sentence he alerts us to the origins of their stance. Here the alert reader may see an intimation by Hawthorne that moral self-righteousness accounts for their viciousness. A female member of the crowd can say, "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die" (p. 52). because the accuser is part of a society for whom "religion and law were almost identical" (p. 50). In such a society law took on a mighty weight. A transgression was regarded as all the more serious since the culprit was not merely guilty of an offence; he or she had committed a heinous sin. Such a framework creates an intolerable and
crushing tyranny, and also goes far toward establishing a habit of mind that can and did insinuate itself almost imperceptibly into the nation's character. The majority who keep the laws, who reverence the dominant values, are holy; those who dissent are immoral, sinister and evil.

Faced with such a society, the reader can feel only sympathy for Hester. As she meets her accusers, she was "never...more lady-like." Her beauty "made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped" (p. 54). But "the point which drew all eyes and...transformed the wearer" (p. 54) was the "fantastically embroidered" letter on Hester's breast. The embellished letter, claims Feidelson, transfigures her, but only because of her own efforts at "converting the isolation of a criminal into the free self-determination of an individual." Yet as the tale unfolds it becomes clear that Hester's efforts at establishing an individuality, at forging a vision that would transcend the restrictions of her society, are doomed. As she embellishes the letter she inadvertently gives testimony to the power the letter has over her. Her one clear gesture toward independence reflects how seriously she takes the symbol of her society's judgment. At the very beginning, when the Reverend Mr. Wilson offers to free her of the burden of the scarlet letter if she will identify her accomplice, Hester replies: "Never...It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off" (p. 67). She recognizes that "her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil" (p. 77). She must remain in Boston, there to be rejected forever as unworthy because "the chain that bound her...was of iron links, and galling to her inmost soul, but could not be broken" (p. 77). She remains, not as some have suggested, because of
her attachment to Dimmesdale, although this link is not without power, nor in an effort to expiate her sin. Hester stays among her persecutors because she has come to accept their judgment of her. Further, as we shall see, so heightened is her sense of guilt that she comes to regard herself and even her daughter as contaminated and beyond redemption. It is apparent that the letter's most obvious effect is anything but positive; the emblem, Hawthorne writes, "had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself" (p. 54). Hester is forever doomed to a withering isolation. The wearing of the letter is in fact the extension of her original penance, mounting the scaffold to be gazed upon by the town.

Of this brand of punishment Hawthorne writes:

There can be no outrage, me thinks, against our common nature...no outrage more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face for shame; as it was the essence of this punishment to do (p. 56).

Instead of recognizing their kinship with Hester, the Puritan community sought to isolate her and inflict upon her the burden of guilt. In this effort, they succeed. Hester is reminded at each turn that she is an outcast:

In all her intercourse with society...there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed, that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere (p. 81).

By locating sin in one person and satisfying themselves that thereby iniquity was revealed, the Puritans, Hawthorne realized, were perverting their own doctrine. Such an action thereby broke the "magnetic chain" that linked all of humanity by way of a mutual recognition of imperfection.
and fallibility. Such treatment, such enforced isolation was for Hawthorne the ultimate violence.

It is with Hester's isolation and alienation steadily in mind that one ought to view her movement toward "a freedom of speculation" (p. 156). that was all but unknown in America. Her imaginative flights serve in the context of the tale to underline her psychological captivity. Hester's "freedom of speculation," which the conservative Hawthorne most certainly viewed as dangerous, is shown to be occasioned above all by her society's intransigence and self-righteousness. She is led to move, in her fancy, beyond the ideological limits of her society because she is cut off from communion with it. Isolation, especially forced isolation, impels one to construct a private interior world. To put it another way, Hawthorne seems to be saying that when the "magnetic chain" is broken, excluded individuals will be driven to undermine the society that has shunned them. But it must be remembered that Hester is rendered incapable of enacting these vague ideas. Hester is driven to explore new realms in her imagination, yet so truncated is her self concept that sharing them or even accepting them as valid is beyond her. Even her needlework, the one avenue of self-expression in which she took delight, she came to "reject . . . as sin" (p. 81). Hester is caught in an excruciating "double-bind." She is goaded to speculate by her isolation and then must reject as unworthy her thoughts because she has been stripped of self esteem. Even at the novel's end when Hawthorne would seem to be indicating that at least some of Hester's notions would lead to a more open and humane social order, her self rejection leads Hester to view herself as tainted and hence unworthy of introducing reform.
In the deepest levels of her mind and heart Hester has adopted society's view of her. The torment she endures and to an extent intensifies by acquiescing to the moral condemnation of the community drives almost all feeling out of her: "Some attitude had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman" (p. 156).

Hester so doubts her own worth that she comes to view Pearl in the same gloomy, guilt-ridden light. Pearl, who as one critic has pointed out, represents something of a positive moral force both in her interactions with the Puritan children and with the hesitant Dimmesdale, demonstrates time and again her immunity to the repressive restrictions of Puritanism. The graveyard scene in particular would seem to indicate that she is, as Feidelson has written, "the very principle of freedom." There she skipped and danced, "like a creature that had nothing in common with a bygone and buried generation, nor owned herself akin to it. It was as if she had been made afresh, out of new elements" (p. 129). Yet Hester cannot appreciate Pearl's positive qualities:

She knew that her deed had been evil; she could have no faith, therefore that its result would be good. Day after day, she looked fearfully into the child's expanding nature; ever dreading to detect some dark and wild peculiarity, that should correspond with the guiltiness to which she had owed her being (p. 85).

When Pearl counters the Puritan children, "being of the most intolerant brood that ever lived," with a justifiably violent outburst, Hester sees only further proof that the town is correct in its assessment of her:

It appalled her, nevertheless, to discern here, again, a shadowy reflection of the evil that had existed in herself. All this enmity and passion had Pearl inherited, by inalienable right, out of Hester's heart (p. 90).
Again it is perhaps necessary to underline the fact that such judgments are the product of Hester's and not Hawthorne's mind, and that her thoughts have been profoundly altered by her society. The "red ignominy" has so deeply scorched her brain, "that all her conceptions assumed its form" (p. 97). Hawthorne later employs similar imagery in describing the destructive effects of the emblem of shame on Hester.

The effect of the symbol -- or rather, of the position in respect to society that was indicated by it -- on the mind of Hester Prynne herself, was powerful and peculiar. All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this redhot brand, and had long ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline (p. 115).

The "red ignominy" has not only separated Hester from society; it has altered her mind, body and spirit. She comes not only to believe in her guilt but to accept a version of her transgression that is so intense as to be self-alienating and destructive. The extremes to which her feelings of guilt develop and grow are directly related to the pressures within American culture that were earlier outlined. Hester's response to the pressures exerted upon her illustrates Chase's contention that the American novel tends to concentrate upon "extreme ranges of experience" but further, her thoughts, like the distorted views of Ahab, suggest that something inherent in the American situation -- the inclination to hyperbole -- is making its presence felt. An alien and an outsider, Hester yet faithfully reflects some of her culture's most salient features.

But although society has isolated her, Hester retains, through her own efforts, some links with humanity. "She was quick," we are told, "to acknowledge her sisterhood with the race of man, whenever benefits
were to be conferred" (p. 153). Her sense of personal guilt grants her at isolated moments an intuitive glance into the hearts of others. This sense of universal frailty, "the magnetic chain," could, if it were shared by others, form the basis of true community. But since Hester has been coerced by society's self-righteousness to see only her own guilt, she must repress "her new sense," even though "it gave her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sins in other hearts" (p. 83). "In the end, Hester Prynne yet struggled to believe that no fellow-mortal was guilty like herself" (p. 84). Hester does not revolt; she is too deeply immersed in the values of her society. It is also significant that she resists the temptation to join the "counter-culture" presided over by the "Black Man." Mistress Hibbins' offer would have afforded Hester a way of striking back if she had thoroughly disengaged herself from the hold of the Puritan majority. Hester's experience is a tormented amalgam of anguish and guilt, yet as an American she espouses, in the forest, with the pitifully weakened Dimmesdale, an ideal and absolute freedom. Her exhortation to Dimmesdale gives expression to that aspect of the American mind that one scholar has called the belief in an "extended genesis," but for Hester and for Dimmesdale, products of a debilitating society, such thoughts must remain only tantalizing illusions.

In the forest scene Hester, breaking briefly from the gloom that characterizes her, sees to echo Crévecoeur or even Thoreau when, attempting to propel Dimmesdale to flight, she says of the wilderness:

There thou art free! So brief a journey would bring thee from a world where thou hast been wretched, to one where thou mayst still be happy (p. 187).
For a few moments Hester gives free reign to the American impulse to hope, to posit a new mode of existence once the old is forsaken. "The past," she cries, "is gone" (p. 191); and in so doing seeks to enliven both the weakened minister and her own abbreviated capacity for hope. Casting aside her emblem of shame she believes she is free. She had, in Hawthorne's words, "flung it into infinite space" (p. 199), yet when Pearl who intuitively perceives that Hester's scheme is inadequate and resists she is forced to begin to acknowledge the limits imposed by her fate. Compelled to accept that the forest cannot "hide" the scarlet letter, in desperation she asserts that "the mid-ocean shall take it from my hand, and swallow it up for ever!" (p. 199). Yet as she returns from her brief, atemporal excursion she takes up the scarlet letter and once again "her beauty, the warmth and richness of her womanhood, departed, like fading sunshine; and a gray shadow seemed to fall across her" (p. 199). Hawthorne's intent here is complex yet clear. On the one hand he demonstrates that an "extended genesis" is no more than a fanciful flight from reality. Hester (and Dimmesdale) must seek reconciliation with themselves, with each other and with Pearl, within society -- a New Beginning elsewhere is nothing more than an enticing myth. At the same time he provides unmistakable inflections of doom in describing Hester as she retrieves the scarlet letter. Reconciliation is impossible in her society; she cannot leave, but will never be forgiven and hence will never forgive and accept herself.

Hester's suffering, intense as it is, is at points in the novel overshadowed by the anguish of Dimmesdale. Henry James, in fact, was of the opinion that The Scarlet Letter was principally taken up with the
minister's struggle. That struggle is of course intensified by Dimmesdale's concealment of his transgression. Constantly praised for his piety he is ever aware that he has sinned and cannot find the strength to reveal his secret to the town. His "hypocrisy" has led some critics to see Dimmesdale, even in his final utterances, full of self-deception, and even to label him "A Small Man Gone Wrong."\textsuperscript{10} I shall attempt to establish that Dimmesdale's situation is nothing less than tragic because given his virtue and his limitations and especially his circumstances, there is no way out. The discussion that follows will focus above all on his position in society. Dimmesdale's struggle is ultimately waged not with Hester nor even with Chillingworth, but with the public image that his society demands he maintain. In my discussion of Hester, I emphasized the extent to which her self-image was molded by her society; Dimmesdale's situation is much the same. While he does not offer his soul to the public's gaze until the very end, he has in a very real sense submitted to its judgment all along, and in offering even less resistance than did Hester, is ultimately annihilated. I also suggested that Hester's assessment of her culpability took on distorted and exaggerated form because of the existing climate in early America, and a similar pattern will be pointed out with regard to Dimmesdale. As we shall see, especially in "The Minister's Vigil," Hawthorne explicitly associates "the disease" in the "eye and heart" of the minister with tendencies in his culture.

In a society that has identified, as the early American one had, religion with law, a minister is the cornerstone of the social order. His adherence to the law, his probity, supports and insures the value
system the society has adopted. The Puritans, in identifying themselves as God's Elect, thereby imposed an imperative upon their ministers. The minister's sanctity reassured the society he served that it was righteous. In "The Interior of a Heart," Hawthorne stealthily yet systematically brings to light the latent hypocrisy of Dimmesdale's society. One of the youngest clergymen of Boston, he was surrounded by ministers who possessed a "sturdier texture of mind." Further, there were still others,

true saintly fathers, whose faculties had been elaborated by weary toil among their books, and by patient thought, and etherealized, moreover, by spiritual communications with the better world, into which their purity of life had almost introduced these holy personages, with their garments of mortality still clinging to them (pp. 135-136).

Hawthorne ventures to say that had it not been for his terrible burden, Dimmesdale would probably have joined the ranks of these inhabitants of the "high mountain-peaks of faith and sanctity." But his sin "kept him down, on a level with the lowest." His sense of his unworthiness gave him sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind; so that his heart vibrated in unison with theirs, and received their pain into itself, and sent its own throb of pain through a thousand other hearts, in gushes of sad, persuasive eloquence... The people knew not the power that moved them thus. They deemed the young clergyman a miracle of holiness (pp. 136-137).

He is distinguished among the clergy by his ability to move a congregation. He is, in the estimation of his flock, "the mouthpiece of Heaven's messages of wisdom, and rebuke and love" (p. 137). His power they attribute to his holiness, yet its wellspring is his "sinfulness" and resulting sympathy for fellow transgressors. The discrepancy between
his private and public image is of course a source of intense torment for Dimmesdale, but the paradox Hawthorne is touching upon here, one that occurs elsewhere in his fiction, should not be overlooked. Recognition of personal guilt can and should lead one to a sense of brotherhood with all men, yet this is the very "lesson" that Dimmesdale's self-righteous society will not appreciate. He speaks with the "tongue of Flame" so he must be "holy." Thus reassured of their own over-inflated sense of moral superiority, the Puritans can feel justified not only in locating evil in someone like Hester, but in punishing her mercilessly. Dimmesdale's hypocrisy and private torture and the public agony of Hester are thus ultimately related. The situation of each is unthinkable without the pressure of their society's moral self-righteousness and of their acceptance of the visions meted out to them. Critics who maintain that Dimmesdale creates his own problem by submitting to Chillingworth rather than to the entire society assume that the society of which he was a part would have responded with forbearance to his confession; but the experience of Hester Prynne proves otherwise. Even his final confession was misinterpreted by a crowd that would have him be only what they want him to be: the examplar of their values.

Dimmesdale's suffering is deeper than that of Hester primarily because his adherence to the societal code is more intense. Hester resists; her resistance is muted but she resists. Dimmesdale, on the other hand, cannot resist. Unlike Hester, he has not looked from an "estranged point of view at human institutions, and whatever priests and legislators had established" (p. 189). He "had never gone through an experience calculated to lead him beyond the scope of generally received
At the head of the social system, as the clergymen of the day stood, he was only the more trammelled by its regulations, its principles, and even its prejudices. As a priest, the framework of his order inevitably hemmed him in (p. 189, my italics).

At several points Hawthorne reiterates that the value system maintained by the Puritan community restricts the emotional development of its members. Sympathy cannot flourish where unyielding principles control the mind and heart.

But it was especially the "rulers, and the wise and learned men of the community," that were tardy in recognizing Hester's benevolence. Their prejudices, we are told, were "fortified... by an iron framework of reasoning" (p. 154, my italics). Hester, while still under the sway of societal norms, can see and deplore their cramping effect on Dimmesdale and so is moved to cry out to him: "What hast thou with all these iron men and their opinions? They have kept thy better part in bondage too long already!" (p. 187, my italics). Dimmesdale is in bondage, as Hester claims, and it is his vulnerability to his society's "iron," coercive power that goes far toward "redeeming" him in our eyes. His "hypocrisy" is mitigated by his sensitivity.

Poor, miserable man! what right had infirmity like his to burden itself with crime? Crime is for the iron-nerved, who have their choice either to endure it, or, if it press too hard, to exert their fierce and savage strength for a good purpose, and fling it off at once! This feeble and most sensitive of spirits could do neither... (p. 141, my italics).
Even as Hawthorne admits that Dimmesdale's is a "highly disordered mental state," he is careful to associate his stance with that of his society. In a subtle yet highly provocative passage in "The Minister's Vigil," Hawthorne comments at length on Dimmesdale's reaction to the appearance of an immense red "A" etched against the night sky. People of New England, he explains, often imagined that a spectacle of nature was providentially arranged for their information. As he elaborates on this habit of mind, a searching comment on the culture of New England emerges:

It was, indeed, a majestic idea, that the destiny of nations should be revealed in these awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven... The belief was a favorite one with our forefathers, as betokening that their infant commonwealth was under a celestial guardianship of peculiar intimacy and strictness (p. 148). Hawthorne goes on to add that the habit of the New Englander to see in natural occurrences signs from the Divinity, when practiced by an individual was nothing less than an extension of one's "egotism over the whole expanse of nature" (p. 148). Hawthorne's commentary triggers associations with Melville's Ahab for the twentieth century reader, but his obvious intent is an ironic critique of the habit of mind which spawns such impositions upon nature. The critique is intensified when on the following day the old sexton reports to Dimmesdale that others also sighted a celestial "A" but saw it as a sign of divine approbation occasioned by the death of Governor Winthrop. Dimmesdale, then, is not the only one who extends "his egotism over the whole expanse of nature." Such a practice, Hawthorne demonstrates, is endemic to the culture. Dimmesdale's "highly disordered mental state," caused by his intense
guilt, leads him to see in the heavens a mirror of his interior world, but both his gnawing guilt as well as his inclination to inflate it to cosmic dimensions reflect the same cultural pressures we saw acting on Hester Prynne and will later see inclining Ahab to launch his fiendish crusade. Dimmesdale's anguished vision is shown not to be a private one -- his fate like Hester's is related to his Americanness.

As Dimmesdale expires he retains his deprecatory self-image as well as the thoroughly dismal vision of God that his society's brand of Calvinism has impressed upon him. Of himself and Hester he can only lament: "The Law we broke! -- the sin here so awfully revealed! -- let these alone be in they thoughts! I fear! I fear!" (p. 241). Here Dimmesdale reflects the socially sanctioned identification, earlier pointed out as such by Hawthorne, of law and sin. The minister's response, fear, is likewise part of the crippling social legacy that is his and Hester's. To the end he likewise embraces the image of God that American Calvinism offered. His "mercy" as Dimmesdale points out, "He hath proved...in my afflictions." According to Dimmesdale, the grim, vindictive God of New England Calvinism manifests his concern by sending tortures. God, he claims, proves his mercy "By giving me his burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me heither ...to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people" (p. 241).

But the story does not end with Hester, Dimmesdale and Pearl together on the scaffold. The final chapter provides two vital services: it pulls together some loose ends in that we learn of subsequent
developments in the lives of Hester and her daughter; but more, we are shown that the effects of the scarlet letter wear on.

The Hester Prynne who returns to New England is hardly a renegade guilty of pride, neither is she bitter. She "had no selfish ends, nor lived in any measure for her own profit and enjoyment" (p. 246). Disturbed and burdened women sought her solace and "Hester comforted and counselled them, as best she might" (p. 246). She attracted the suffering and became at once leader and symbol for those who are victims of society's repression. At times her imagination was fired by a hope-inspiring vision and she assured her charges that at some future day "a new truth would be revealed" (p. 247). Her suffering, Hawthorne indicates, has resulted in a higher wisdom; Hester sees beyond her time to a brighter future for America. Once Hester had even imagined that she might be "the destined prophetess" of this new order but

had long since recognized the impossibility that any mission of divine and mysterious truth should be confided to a woman stained with sin, bowed down with shame, or even burdened with a life-long sorrow (p. 247).

She still believes in a vague future freedom that others may enjoy, yet for herself there is no hope. Further, her submission to the dictates of society's scarlet letter spells defeat for her generation and for generations to come. Her vision, the outlines of which would seem to correspond to Hawthorne's "magnetic chain," is ultimately forsaken. Certainly, Hester is the optimistic American par excellence as she looks forward to the arrival of "The angel and apostle of the coming revelation;" and yet as she "glanced her sad eyes downward at the scarlet letter," she is reminded of America's reality and can hope only that the ideal will someday be realized.
The scarlet letter's "deep meaning" unfolds only in the novel's final pages. The faded cloth emblem reminds Hawthorne's day, when it is found by the Surveyer, that Hester's defeat, her capitulation to her society, is, like the defeat of a mythological hero, a defeat for the culture. America's hopes for an ideal social order have been turned back. America's first great fictional heroine is broken and dies in the belief of her unworthiness. The deep emotion contained in the final words of the novel reflect the acknowledgement of the defeat of a woman, and of a nation's dream of itself.
NOTES TO THE TEXT


4. The Scarlet Letter, edited by Lazar Ziff (Indianapolis, 1963), p. 55. All future references to the novel are to this edition and will be noted in the text.


7. Ibid., p. 53.


MOBY-DICK chronicles the education of Ishmael; the novel begins and ends with our attention focused on him. But Ahab is the center of the novel's action as well as the source of its compelling appeal. Ahab's is a tragedy of epic proportions, the tragedy of the American mind. Like Hawthorne, Melville was intensely interested in America's Calvinist legacy, and through Ahab, he subjects that tradition and its effects to withering scrutiny.

In this chapter I shall argue that Ahab's diseased plan grows out of his and his culture's theological premises. Ahab, it will be shown, accepts the Calvinist assumptions that were current at the middle of the nineteenth century, and because of the hyperbolic climate that was discussed in the opening chapters and reflected in the saga of Hester and Dimmesdale, is led to press them to monstrous extremes. Like Hester he accepts his culture's notions and like Dimmesdale he makes himself a tool in service of the system that has deformed him. Ahab's world-view, despite his pretense of adopting an occult religion, reflects American Calvinism's emphasis upon a close relationship between the Divinity and occurrences in the world of nature. Like Hawthorne's sexton who sees in a nocturnal event a sign of heavenly blessing, or like Dimmesdale who interprets the same incident as divine condemnation,
Ahab traces the actions of Moby Dick to his Creator and views the whale's malevolence as indicating an essential corruption at the heart of the universe. His voyage is an unholy crusade against the Creator who, he reasons, is responsible for the wily beast that lamed his body and shattered his spirit. In short, both his ideological position and the extremes of his reaction reflect the pressures within American culture we have been examining. I shall begin the chapter by sketching the theological climate of Melville's America before passing on to an examination of Ahab.

Howard Mumford Jones has written that "the central problem in American thought, at least until late in the nineteenth century, is the problem of the moral order of the universe"; this problem has its roots in America's intellectual and emotional involvement in the Calvinist cosmology. A clarification of the orthodox Calvinist position on evil as it evolved during the first half of the nineteenth century offers promising avenues both for identifying the issues that are explored in Moby-Dick and for interpreting the significance of Ahab and his quest.

Calvin's thought is marked by a critical tension that liberal movements of the nineteenth century—especially Unitarianism—were to expose. Calvin posits an all-powerful God who, while transcendent, is intimately involved in the workings of the world of men, a God worthy, above all, of obedience. On the other hand Calvin lays heavy stress on the rampant forces of evil on earth. For Calvin there was no contradiction here; he used the fact of evil and even the prospect of damnation for all but the Elect to underscore the sovereignty of God. To
question the scheme of God, was, in his words, "carnal stupidity" and "vain speculation." In the *Institutes*, Calvin can claim that God's ways are so inscrutable as to be beyond the grasp of man, and yet maintain that "the excellence of divine wisdom is manifested in distributing everything in due season,...conducting all things in perfect accordance with reason." While American Calvinist theology from the Puritans to the founding of the Andover School adhered strictly to the idea of a sovereign, omnipotent God, there was a considerable metamorphosis in the treatment of evil through the years. As the effects of the Enlightenment and the Unitarian movement forced themselves on the Calvinist mind, orthodox theologians were forced to accommodate the new thought in various ways.

The general mood of optimism, the inroads made by rationalism, and the prestige of Channing and others accounted for alterations in the traditional Calvinist vision of God. Channing had attempted to banish forever the notion that the God of Christianity was wrathful, jealous and arbitrary. In its place he offered a benign and paternal God:

> To give our views of God in one word, we believe in his paternal character. We ascribe to him not only the name, but the dispositions and principles of a father. We believe that he has a father's concern for his creatures, a father's desire for their improvement...4

Leonard Woods of Andover Seminary at first reacted to Channing mostly by accommodation. He maintained that all representations of God as angry and full of wrath were metaphorical.5 But Woods' efforts to accommodate the wayward Unitarians proved futile. On one issue compromise
was impossible: Calvinist apologists of the first four decades of the nineteenth century were forced to insist (against Unitarian claims) upon the ruined, depraved state of man. Channing had found the doctrine repugnant above all because it implied that man was incapable of moral action. For Calvinists like Woods, universal depravity was a necessary and indispensable buttress of the system. Calvinism "needed" universal depravity to defend the justice of God, but even more, to explain the presence of that most perplexing of all realities, evil. The following excerpt from Joseph McCarrell's "Answer" to a sermon preached by Channing in 1826 illustrates the tortuous workings of the Calvinist mind seeking to enlist "experience" in defense of crucial dogmatic position being assailed by the Unitarians.

If a deadly taint of corruption have not pervaded the mass of humankind, why do the innocent suffer? It is not required by the justice of God, but forbidden by it: for to inflict unmerited pain, is the very essence of injustice. It can do no good to those intelligences who may look into the divine administration of human affairs; for it confounds the distinction between good and evil, by treating the righteous and the wicked alike. And surely it is the reverse of goodness to inflict unnecessary misery on an innocent creature.6

"Unmerited pain," the cause of Ivan Karamazov's atheism, is for the Calvinist McCarrell, proof not that God, the dispatcher, but that man, the recipient of suffering, is imperfect.

The propensity of Calvinism to insist on the close association of God with activities of men on earth had led another nineteenth century champion of orthodoxy to counter vigorously the inroads of deism. Otis Thompson argued that God did not distantly rule over the affairs of man by more "permission"; indeed, in his efforts to prove God's direct
Involvement in the world, Thompson was led to acknowledge that God is more frequently shown causing men to sin in the Scriptures than in leading them to good works. Given then that God is just and that He is directly involved in creation, blame must be placed upon man whenever evil takes place. The belief in "the ruined state of man," proved indispensable to the orthodox defense. But as I have previously pointed out, this notion was antithetical to the image of man enunciated by Jefferson, Jackson, Channing and Emerson. The American democratic spirit found this central tenet of Calvinism unacceptable.

Of course as the century wore on orthodox theologians and preachers were impelled to make more frequent mention of those aspects of Calvin's thought that acknowledged the harmony between nature and man. God, who became gradually a mere benevolent and reasonable Governor of the natural order, had created an orderly world and his Divine Government resulted in recognizable unities. But this tactic resulted in further complications for the Calvinist position. Once God became identified with the harmonies and not the disparities, the problem of evil became especially distressing. The contradiction involved in positing a sovereign God and, at the same time, the existence of sin and evil working beyond his dominion was clear to many and the controversy or at least its effects could not have gone unnoticed by a seeker like Melville. We do know that the church Melville's family was associated with prided itself on its strict adherence to Calvin's teachings, yet the contradictions that the nineteenth-century American zeitgeist uncovered in Calvinism had a discernible impact on Melville. He realized, as Santayana was later to point out, that in the "higher things
of the [American] mind . . . in the moral emotions . . . the hereditary spirit," the spirit of Calvinism prevailed. Even while seemingly ignored and abandoned by the exuberant spirit of enterprise that engulfed nineteenth-century America, Calvinism was still a haunting presence. While the problem of evil remained an insoluble one, the Calvinist insistence of God's continual involvement in the world of creation retained a firm hold on the American mind. So Melville was moved to create a wanderer, Ishmael, who, as we shall see, is to led to puzzle over the problem of evil and God's ordinance. He lists to a traditional Calvinist spokesman, Father Mapple, is exposed to an alternative view through Queequeg, scrutinizes the whale, the largest of God's creatures, for some hint as to the workings of the Divinity on earth, and observes the maniacal response of his captain to evil. Ahab's inverted Calvinism finally destroys him, his ship and crew, and from the experience Ishmael is led to a new and informed skepticism.

On opening the novel the first character we meet is, interestingly enough, a follower of Calvin, a Presbyterian, but one whose skepticism and mental plasticity make him a wayfarer: Ishael wanders like his Biblical namesake. He is a self-exiled seeker cut off from the securities and the traps of any ideological system. When we are introduced to him, he is plagued by what he calls "a damp, drizzly November" of the soul. Even before going to sea, he is exposed to a powerful influence when he visits a Sunday service presided over by Father Mapple. In the chapel he finds a gloomy complement to his interior state:

A muffled silence reigned, only broken at times by the shrieks of the storm. Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable. (p. 63).
The minister's sermon is a moving plea for abnegation and submission to a God who oversees the world with severity and who demands strict obedience. "And if we would obey God, we must disobey ourselves" (p. 72), this is the essence of Father Mapple's theology. Moreover, this sermon makes clear that creatures such as whales are the instruments of God's design and that the slightest movements of man and beast are under His gaze. Father Mapple's all-knowing and exacting Governor is not unlike the inscrutable Lord described in Calvin's *Institutes* who manifests His power by

at one time making heaven reverberate with thunder, sending forth the scorching lightning, and setting the whole atmosphere in a blaze; at another, causing the raging tempest to blow, and forthwith in one moment, when it so pleases him, making a perfect calm.  

Father Mapple's Calvinist world view appears to have had little effect on Ishmael and the pagan Queequeg who leaves before the minister's final benediction. As we shall see, Ishmael's vision of the universe, partly through the influence of Queequeg, differs significantly from that of Father Mapple or Ahab.

In fact, Ahab's stance owes much to the theological tradition that is reflected in the words of Father Mapple. Nathalia Wright, for example, sees a relationship between the theological positions of Father Mapple and the maddened Ahab in that both, in contrast to Ishmael, conceive of the universe as a "moral creation," in other words, a place in which the identifiable forces of good and evil are locked in combat and where the struggle is governed by a demanding and mysterious Creator. Both accept the Calvinist affirmation of a close relationship between God and the workings of nature, even those which appear to be
evil and destructive. Father Mapple, of course, maintains that such a world makes sense only if man resigns himself to God's inscrutable plan, whereas Ahab, inverted Calvinist that he is, finds defiance rather than submission the most fitting response; yet the extremes of Ahab's reaction to evil ought not obscure the cultural roots of his world-view.

In turning now to Ahab, I hope to demonstrate that while Melville often cloaks his captain's utterances in oriental or heretical Western religious categories, Ahab is involved in the dilemma posed by orthodox American Calvinist thought of the nineteenth century. Ahab's assault on Moby Dick signifies more than the opposition to evil. It is more than an assault on evil because evil is but an effect and Ahab is concerned with its cause: "be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him" (p. 221). The basis of Ahab's position is illuminated by the answer he gives when Starbuck protests that "vengeance on a dumb brute...seems blasphemous:

All visible objects, man, are but pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the mask (p. 220).

Starbuck is of course a Christian, a believer in God and in moral order in the universe. But as his words in a later chapter, "The Gilder," reveal, Starbuck is able to somehow separate God from evil in His world. There, he asks that "faith oust fact," that his conception of a good God remain intact despite "the kidnapping cannibal ways" of some of His creatures. So it is that Starbuck can view Moby Dick as merely a beast guided by his own instincts, and regard Ahab's attribution of premeditated malevolence as "blasphemous." Such a compromise is impossible for
Ahab precisely because he takes seriously the Christian notion, so
stressed by classical Calvinism, that the relationship between Creator
and creation is real and can be interpreted. God shows his hand through
Nature. The "reasoning thing" that Starbuck hopes to maintain immune
from questioning is viewed by Ahab as Cause and hence directly responsi-
ble. Ishmael will look upon a whale's head and seem to ascertain from
it that God has no plan, no rationale, at least not one accessible to
man. Nature, at times sunny and benevolent, at other stormy and
destructive, tells him little about God. In contrast, Ahab attributes
knowledge to the whale, moreover a knowledge which would overturn the
faith of the strongest believer: "O head! thou hast seen enough to split
the planets and make an infidel of Abraham" (p. 406). The experience
of evil has done just that to Ahab--made him an infidel; he has broken
with God. But it is important to realize why Ahab has turned against
God. A few lines later he once again betrays the basis of his position:

O Nature, and O Soul of Man! how far beyond all
utterance are you linked analogies! not the smallest
atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning
duplicate in mind (p. 406).

Ahab again insists on the relationship among all elements of the universe,
and from this pattern God is not exempt. The "linked analogies" show
Ahab that the God who created the world and who as Calvin and his
disciple Father Mapple taught, sustains and governs the world, must be
held responsible for the evils that plague man. The presence of evil,
the existence of the apotheosis of evil, Moby Dick, therefore leads Ahab
to shout his question to the heavens: "Where do murderers go, man!
Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?" (p. 685).
How, Ahab asks, can one speak of order and justice when the orderer is implicated in evil? Significantly, his shrill challenge was preceded by a renewed assertion of God's involvement in the world. The "great sun . . . is as an errand-boy in heaven," and not "one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power" (p. 685). God stands, in his view, guilty—He is responsible for Moby Dick.

After the fateful encounter with Moby Dick in which the whale "reaped away Ahab's leg . . ." the White Whale "swam before him [Ahab] as the monomaniac incarnation of all these malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them" (p. 246). Yet Melville makes it clear that the plan of revenge, as well as Ahab's theological rantings, are products of a disoriented mind. Ahab himself is on occasion forced to acknowledge his demented state: "Now in his heart, Ahab had some glimpse of this, namely: all my means are sane, my motive and my object mad" (p. 250). In his defense Ahab can counter only with the claim that he is not mad but rather "madness maddened," that is, he is mad but conscious of his condition and so not a mere fool. Put another way it is his mad scheme that saved Ahab from madness. Before he arrived at his plan and before he had constructed his theological rationale, Ahab was in desperate straits; he was in Melville's words, "a raving maniac" (p. 248). His outbreaks immediately after his dismemberment were so severe that his mates were forced to bind him in a hammock. There as the ship rounded stormy Cape Horn, Ahab, "in a straight-jacket, . . . swung to the mad rockings of the gales" (p. 248).

Ahab's initial insanity cannot be fully accounted for by his physical suffering. Conditioned to view the cosmos as under the ordinance
of God, Ahab suffers much more than the loss of a leg. The product of a culture that insisted on a discernible order in the moral universe, an order presided over by a benevolent if sometimes mysterious God, the God of Father Mapple and John Calvin, Ahab is undone both physically and spiritually by Moby Dick. What Ahab undergoes is nothing less than a sudden and total reordering of his world-view. He verges on total lunacy because, like the madman who proclaims the death of God in Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, he is left empty -- until he hits on his plan of revenge. The rantings of the Nietzschean prophet express the maddening void that loss of faith brings when no substitute is available.

Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? And we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? 13

Ahab's frenzy is rooted in the same metaphysical angst. The evil embodied in Moby Dick cannot be satisfactorily accounted for within the traditional Christian framework.

Ahab's spiritual bifurcation is ended when he chooses to follow out a course of revenge against Moby Dick. From submission he turns to violence, and thus provided with a pattern he recovers -- at least externally:

> the old man's delirium seemed left behind him with the Cape Horn swells, and he came forth from his dark den into the blessed light and air; even then, when he bore that firm, collected front, however pale, and issued his calm orders once again; and his mates thanked God, the direful madness was now gone; even then, Ahab, in his hidden self, raved on (p. 248).

Upon leaving the Pacific and entering Western waters the new Ahab
emerges: "there is was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another, and so interfusing, made him mad" (p. 248). The body of Ahab, representing his horrible experience, merged with his mind and crowded out former ideas about God and His world. Ahab assumes, or at any rate tries to assume, a Manichean position, but this tactic can best be appreciated as the frantic effort of a thoughtful man, one thoroughly committed to viewing the world as the handiwork of an omnipotent God, to find a way out of metaphysical absurdity. In stalking Moby Dick, Ahab opposes

that intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east reverenced in their statue devil;—Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it (p. 247).

Here Melville intimates that Ahab's position is related to the doctrine of Manichaeism, that the captain is something of a Messiah acting against evil with hate instead of love. Ahab, for his part, identifies himself with Zoroastrianism and therefore as a combatant in the eternal struggle between the powers of good and evil: "On these seas I as Persian once did worship" (p. 641). Later in "The Candles" Ahab's standpoint becomes even more complex as he taunts the "clear spirit," the object of his defiant worship: "There is some unsuffering thing beyond thee" (p. 643). From these and other remarks scattered throughout the book, it becomes clear that Ahab has created a theology to support his "audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge" (p. 251).
Ahab seems to opt finally for a new vision of God, a polytheistic, at least Manichean-tinted stance. His theology is in reality a reflection of the musings of Pierre Bayle who was educated in Calvinist Geneva and drawn, as Millicent Bell puts it, "to consider the alternative of a duralism which acknowledges the separate existence of evil, but removes responsibility for it from the God of goodness." Bayle, whose influence on Melville has been thoroughly established, returns time and again in his articles on aspects of Christianity to the discrepancy between Christian ideas of God and our experience of His world:

The most certain and most clear ideas of order we have, teach us, that a Being, which exists by itself, which is necessary and eternal, must be one, infinite, almighty, and endowed with all kind of perfection.  

But, he continues,

Man alone, that masterpiece of his creation, among things visible, Man alone, I say, affords the greatest objections against the unity of God.

Bayle's often cleverly veiled point is here exposed: our traditions tell us of an almighty and just God, but man, as he interacts with the world, is so struck by the blatant injustice that runs through creation that he is divided within himself. The mind, with its ideas of order, is confronted with the vicious experience of violent disorder. Bayle wisely never revealed his final position, if he in fact ever arrived at one. But several of his articles dramatize clearly enough that he found the problem of evil the greatest obstacle to an acceptance of orthodox Christianity's vision of God; and the discrepancy at times drove him toward something like a Manichean stance. Ahab's experience, his own deep reflective nature, and above all, his culture's habit of representing
the Supreme Being as intimately involved in the goings-on of His creatures cast him into an untenable position. Starbuck can hold on to this idea of God despite the world's cruelty; Queequeg can resign himself to the existence of a god who has created the vicious shark: "Queequeg no care what god made him shark... wedder Fejee god or Nahtucket god; but de god wat made shark must be one damn 1ng1n" (p. 396); and Ishmael can remain skeptical of all efforts at a final answer; but Ahab needs an answer. His mental rigidity does not allow for such alternatives.

In the symbolic gesture of leaving Starbuck and crossing the deck to join Fedallah in gazing into the sea ("The Symphony"), Ahab seems to express his disengagement from Western culture and ideas. But although he employs Orientals to draw his boat and pagans to cast harpoons at Moby Dick, he is not at home in the East either. Fedallah's resignation in the face of the superior hostile forces of the universe is not possible for Ahab. In "The Quadrant" Ahab is seen calculating the ship's position with his instrument. This gesture and the subsequent smashing of the quadrant suggest that while Ahab once depended on the concept of an ordered universe guided by a benign God, he has now rejected it. Fedallah, on the other hand, looks directly at the sun, and his countenance is described as "subdued to an earthly passionlessness" (p. 633). Later his face is "mute and motionless" (p. 634). His mind is not enraged at a chaotic world; he accepts it in much the same way that Queequeg does. While Ahab considers himself in league with pagans, he is in reality waging a war against an idea of his own
creation, but an idea whose basic outlines have been proposed and propagated by the Calvinist tradition.

In reality, it is Ahab's profoundest wish that God prove Himself benevolent: "But war is pain and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee" (p. 641). But Ahab's experience disallows any such conception, and he seizes upon revenge. Ahab's new synthesis is at times weakened, but never supplanted by his former world-view. On occasion Ahab's "humanities" surge up within him only to be repressed by a renewed act of the will. We are told as much in "The Chart." Ahab, we learn, is racked by "intolerably vivid dreams." Melville's exploration of these dreams is quite revealing. He describes them as the opening of an interior chasm from which Ahab's being is heaved up. As the commentary continues we begin to appreciate the dreams as the expression of Ahab's repressed former self:

For, at such times, crazy Ahab, the scheming, unappeasedly steadfast hunter of the white whale, this Ahab that had gone to his hammock, was not the agent that so caused him to burst from it in horror again. The latter was the eternal, living principle or soul in him; and in sleep, being for the time dissociated from the characterizing mind, which at other times employed it for its outer vehicle or agent, it spontaneously sought escape from the scorching contiguity of the frantic thing, of which, for the time, it was no longer an integral (p. 272).

At times the conflict within Ahab is expressed in this body: "And had you watched Ahab's face that night, you would have thought that in him . . . two different things were warring" (p. 310). Perhaps the most moving and profound testimony to the now all but departed "humanities" that formerly led Ahab is contained in his own words to Starbuck in "The Symphony": 
God! God! God! -- crack my heart! -- starve my brain! -- mockery of grey hairs, have I lived enough joy to wear ye; and seem and feel thus intolerably old? Close! Stand close to me Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. (p. 684).

Clearly, Ahab conceives of himself as the bearer of extraordinary responsibilities. At one point he seems to assume the burden of mankind's suffering as he declares: "I feel deadly faint, bowed and humped as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise" (p. 684). His consuming devotion to his mission marks him off, isolates him: "Ahab stands along among the millions of peopled earth, nor gods nor men his neighbors!" (p. 697). Ahab imagines himself an Adam, and so he is. Not the American Adam imagined by Thoreau, confidently turned westward, advancing resolutely toward the New Eden, nor the new man sketched in the essays of Emerson. He is not even the Adam of the Judeo-Christian tradition who has experienced paradise, who knows a benevolent God. He is rather the bearer of the accumulated grief of mankind. The Pauline epistles of course often refer to Christ as the new Adam and in several passages Ahab is associated with Christ, but always with his suffering. When their Captain first stands before the crew of the Pequod, Ishmael describes him in the following terms: "moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face" (p. 170). In "Sunset" Ahab imagines that he wears the "Iron Crown of Lombardy," but this crown, which tradition held to contain one of the nails from the True Cross, galls his skull and so recalls Christ's crown of thorns.
Ahab is Christ reversed. Instead of submission and hope, he has seized upon defiance and despair. In much popular Christian writing Christ is seen as a victim who must, in his innocence, suffer indignity to satisfy the incomprehensible demands of his Father. Ahab is likewise conscious of the demands that God's scheme makes on him and in response he revolts. In a world with such a creator, there is no blasphemy, and true worship is expressed in striking back.

Despite his periodic vacillations, the world Ahab has finally resigned himself to see is a static world of fixed categories. While Ishmael's reflections on Moby Dick and the "elusive" quality suggested by his whiteness lead him into inexplicable subtleties, Ahab is convinced that Moby Dick is evil. While Ishmael regards the sea with caution, he is at home on the water; its vastness and indefiniteness suggest to him the complexity and ambiguity at the heart of existence. Ahab rarely submits to the intimations of relativity that the sea offers. For him the ocean is a gate through which lies "the route to his vengeance" (p. 491). Under the influence of his mind the sea has narrowed into a hardened plain bordered by "iron rails" which he must compulsively follow (p. 227). The mad quest finally ends with Ahab breathing one final curse upon the creature whose introduction in the opening extract how takes on an ominous dimension: "And God created great whales."

Still it is beyond doubt that the Captain is, to an extent, admirable. His intensity and consistency reflect a mighty soul. His heroic dimensions are furthered by the depth of his awareness of human misery. Ahab is "above the common" (p. 119), "a mighty pageant creature" (p. 111).
whose "greatness must be plucked at from the skies and dived for in the deep" (p. 199). The apparent ambivalence of Melville's treatment of Ahab has led some to make of him an embodiment of Melville's attitudes toward God and others to regard him as a self-willed man who, for all his immensity, is pitifully lacking in Christian humility.

It seems more consistent with the complexities of the entire novel to regard Ahab in relation to an exploration by Melville of the breakdown of the Calvinist synthesis. By 1850 it became clear to Melville that the world may be regarded as orderly only at the cost of twisting experience to conform with a given pattern of ideas. Cultural conditions being what they were, he was moved to reject the dominant tradition of his country. The traditional Judeo-Christian world-view with Calvinist overtones that formed the basis for America's fundamental convictions about the universe was no longer able to sustain itself against the corrosive power of experience. Melville was forced to jettison his former cosmology, but as Hawthorne observed of his friend, he was not satisfied with his unbelief; he remained a restless seeker. The tragic career of Ahab enabled Melville to dramatize the plight of the thoughtful man cut off by his experience of evil from a God-centered Calvinist view of the world. As a man of integrity, Ahab is put in a more favorable light than Starbuck, who adheres to his inherited creed rather than confront the horrible facts of nature. In a previously mentioned passage in crucial chapter, "The Gilder," Starbuck looks upon the sea and thinks:

Loveliness unfathomable, as ever lover saw in his young bird's eye! — Tell me not of thy teeth-tired sharks, and thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let faith
The "facts" of Ahab's life will not be ousted; he must live with them, his every painful step is a reminder of man's fate. His position is tragic because he has no way out but defiance, a defiance he knows will eventually be unsuccessful. His culture had predisposed him to discover in life a plan, a rational order, but Moby Dick has obliterated this pattern and Ahab has no alternative but a kind of grandiose suicide.

Melville realized that he had written a "wicked book." He regarded the book as wicked because he realized that through the tragic plight of Captain Ahab he revealed the perversions that the Calvinist world-view has spawned. Melville appreciates the heroic in Ahab; he also clearly demonstrates that Ahab is demonic -- and this a result of his ideas, the ideas provided by his culture. In the final analysis, Ahab is more spokesman than demon.

Ishmael, on the other hand, manages to avoid the Calvinist web and its aberrations. With the affinities between the world-view of Father Mapple and that of Ahab in mind, Ishmael's early preference for Queequeg over Father Mapple can best be viewed as foreshadowing his ultimate rejection of Ahab's neurotic vision. It should be remembered that the "simple heart" of Queequeg had the profoundest effect on Ishmael: "No more," he tells us, "my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it" (p. 83) Queequeg performs the task normally ascribed to and claimed by the Church: redemption. Queequeg's calm is of this world -- his god is a "little negro idol" upon whom he feels free to whittle (p. 81) -- but
its profundity suggests the qualities attributed within Christianity to supernatural "grace." Queequeg's integrated and peace-inducing stance contrasts markedly with the stress and anxiety attending Father Mapple's position. The anguish and isolation of the minister ("Shipmates, God has laid but one hand upon you; both his hands press upon me" (p. 78) is mirrored by the members of his congregation who sit apart "as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable" (p. 63) and so Ishmael is drawn instead to the serenity of Queequeg:

I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most other, they thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy (p. 84).

Ishmael finds such comfort in the presence of Queequeg that after leaving the racked Father Mapple's service he is moved to draw his bench near him and make "friendly signs and hints" (p. 84). The chapter, "A Bosom Friend," closes with Ishmael and Queequeg in close communion. Melville even uses the metaphor of the marriage bed to convey the intensity of their bond: "Thus, there, in our heart's honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg -- a cozy, loving pair" (p. 86). The juxtaposition of the Calvinist West in Father Mapple with pagan East in Queequeg is, as Vincent has pointed out, no accident. Yet I think Vincent, like many other critics, overlooks much of the significance of the contrast. After acknowledging that Queequeg is "by all odds the most attractive character in the novel" and that his poise is "a criticism of the neurotic divagations of 'civilized man,'" Vincent contents himself with observing that the scene involving the harpooner and Ishmael after the latter returns from church should be viewed as a parody of Western
missionary zeal. Vincent neglects to note that Queequeg's influence is nothing short of liberating. Ishmael is redeemed. He is freed of the theological vision that oppresses Father Mapple and drives Ahab to embrace a mad scheme of cosmic revenge.

While Ishmael never loses sight of the fact that Yojo is merely a piece of wood, his admiration of Queequeg's conception of his god and attendant cosmology is apparent. Yojo is a "rather good sort of god, who perhaps meant well enough upon the whole, but in all cases did not succeed in his benevolent designs" (p. 103). Belief in such a god, Ishmael seems to realize, avoids the intellectual problems created by adherence to Father Mapple's Calvinist system, one which professes an all-powerful, all-knowing Architect responsible for a drastically flawed universe. For Ishmael, God is like the sea in that both evade exact description: "in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God" (p. 149). The sea, even the turbulent sea lashed by fierce winds, is for Ishmael, in its formlessness and untold depths, the true home of the thinking man. Ishmael admires "the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea" (p. 149); his "highest truth" is freedom, the freedom that allows for a true confrontation with reality. Such a freedom is shunned by both Father Mapple and Ahab. Each has a system, a rigid world-view, that while offering intellectual security, enslaves him. "So, better is it," declares Ishmael, "to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!" (p. 149). 'Father Mapple's "safety" is resignation, while Ahab is driven to the contrary pose of defiance, but both impose their theologies upon the universe.
Ishmael displays a similarly skeptical stance with regard to the sea's most prodigious creature, the whale. Ishmael's profound fascination with the whale occasions several meditations which reflect the affinities, but more clearly, the differences between him and Ahab. In one of his frequent musings on whales Ishmael puzzles over the Leviathan's tail:

Dissect him how I may, then, I can but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will. But I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? Much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face (p. 486).

It was certainly no accident that had Melville base this crucial statement on whales on a Biblical text in which God describes his interactions with his people to Moses: "And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:23). In other passages Ishmael likewise indicates a propensity to associate whales with God as, for example, when he says that the whale must forever remain beyond the images of man (p. 352), is silent (p. 448), inscrutable (pp. 450, 478, 578) and finally, eternal (p. 582). In doing so he accedes to the Calvinist propensity to directly link Creator and creature. But when he comes finally to see that "he has no face" Ishmael opts for a conception of God, or rather a world-view, that is marked by a skeptical hesitancy -- he sees that the universe is at best mystery, at worst meaninglessness. He sees, and here he is closer to Queequeg than to Father Mapple or Ahab, that the whale like the sea must remain a puzzle to man.
It is of course true that Ishmael shows an inclination to relate
God and the whale. And when he at one point identifies the dangers that
the sperm whale represents with "the interlinked terrors and wonders of
God" (p. 151), Ishmael reveals himself as a spiritual descendant of
John Calvin. So it is that Ishmael is partially susceptible to Ahab's
vision. After Ahab had presented his lurid portrait of Moby Dick and
announced his scheme of revenge, Ishmael felt "a wild, mystical
sympathetical feeling . . . with greedy ears I learned the history of
that murderous monster" (p. 239). But Ishmael is only temporarily
enrolled in Ahab's Holy War to rid the universe of what he conceives of
as its fatal moral blemish. He ultimately works free. He finally does
not accept Ahab's (and Father Mapple's) association of creature and
creator. His point of view, as Nathalia Wright suggests, is ultimately
unlike that of Father Mapple and Ahab in that for him "the White Whale
is symbolic of a universe which, for all its marvels is not only amoral
but inscrutable--perhaps, indeed, a complete illusion." \(^{17}\)

Of the four basic theological alternatives that are presented in
the novel -- rejection and defiance of God, belief in a Manichean-like
dualism, submissive acceptance of God and his world, or a skepticism with
regard to the prevailing conception of God accompanied with a desire and
willingness to learn whatever the universe can tell--Melville is in
closest sympathies with the last, the position of Ishmael. Through his
contact with Queequeg, and his reflection on the ambivalence of the sea
and the incomprehensibility of the whale, Ishmael recognizes the
relativity of all human conceptions. His experience and thought have
led him to be balanced position he articulates in "The Fountain."
Doubts of all things earthly and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye (p. 480).

If the world is, as he elsewhere hints, "an empty cipher" (p. 549), and beyond the reach of man's grasp, its source of creator is even more elusive. The career of Ahab has alerted him to the dangers that a static concept of the Divinity holds. Ishmael's alternative to a rigid, fixed position is given in "The Gilder."

There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause: - through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence's doubt (the common doom), then skepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally. Where lies the final harbor, when we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it (p. 624).

Ishmael realizes that, short of death, there is no "final harbor" for him. In the last glimpse given us by Melville, Ishmael, the orphan, is adrift on the restless, indefinite sea.

There is of course no "proof" that Ishmael's views were shared by Melville. But the logic of the dramatic action, the demise of Ahab and the response of Ishmael, when compared with Melville's remarks on the ultimate questions, indicates clear convergence. The intellectual currents set into operation by the cultural conditions of mid-century American created a tension that found supreme expression in the crazed Ahab. Like Hester and Dimmesdale he is driven to compulsively embrace
and immoderately express the dominant tenets provided by his culture. Ahab is quintessentially American not only in that he explores the "extreme ranges of experience" written of by Richard Chase but because his malady is a result of the ideas and tendencies insisted upon by his culture. Both the content of his vision and his exaggerated loyalty to it mark that as a product of the American imagination.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR


5. See Haroutunian, p. 211.

6. Quoted by Haroutunian, p. 219.

7. Quoted by Haroutunian, p. 255.


10. *Moby-Dick*, edited by Charles Feidelson (Indianapolis, 1964), p. 23. All future references to the novel are in this edition and will be noted in the text.


CHAPTER FIVE

ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

In dissecting the American Calvinist framework Melville critically examined his society's intellectual basis and through Ahab's excesses made clear its dangers. Ishmael's experiences lead him to appreciate the inadequacies of the dominant world-view of his culture and we leave him adrift, a sobered realist who finds skepticism the highest wisdom. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn for all its boisterousness and apparent celebration of youthful innocence is also a serious assessment of American life. Begun, symbolically enough in America's centenary year, Adventures is a corrective to James' earlier assertion that here "man is free as he ought to be."

Huck's journey demonstrates that hard edges circumscribe one's freedom in America's heartland. But Twain did more than set up a raft/shore dichotomy. Like Hawthorne and Melville before him, Twain makes evident that society's values have been thoroughly internalized by his character. Huck, like Hester, Dimmesdale and Ahab, has been induced to accept the tenets of his culture even as he revolts. And while it is true that the overall tone of Adventures is lighter than that of The Scarlet Letter or Moby-Dick and its thematic design is more disjointed than is the case in the novels of Hawthorne and Melville, still the themes sounded and the central intent of the novel suggest unmistakable convergences when compared to the other two works. All three of these classics
reflect the unique dilemma that possessed the American literary imagina-
tion -- personal bondage in a nation that claimed to offer political
and economic freedom. This dilemma induced Twain to create an epic-
like quest for freedom by a character who proves incapable of freeing
himself. Huck, even while adrift on the Mississippi, remains bound to
the values he has been taught and his perplexing quandary mirrors the
fates of Hester and Ahab, who, like him, cannot be liberated from the
abstract visions that divide them against themselves since they carry
an intractable social inheritance within.

Hester, Dimmesdale and Ahab all reflect American traits and
thought patterns, yet Huck, as Hemingway has pointed out, is our first
radically American character. And he reflects some typically American
sentiments when in Chapter Fourteen of Adventures he instructs Jim on
the ways of "kings, and dukes and Earls and such." After Huck provides
an unflattering sketch which focuses on European nobility's arbitrary use
of power and mentions that the "dolphin" is said to have come to America,
Jim asks: "dey ain' no kings here, is dey, Huck." Huck answers with
an unqualified "No," and his instinctive response calls to mind the
famous claim James had made for America in Letter III: "We have no
princes for whom we toil, starve and bleed." Yet later in the novel
Huck is impelled to alter his opinion. After the Duke and Dauphin have
shown their true colors, Jim, saddened by the exploits of the only
royalty he had ever known, sighs: "Well, anyways, I doan' hanker for no
mo' un um, Huck. Dese is all I kin stan" (p. 130). Huck, of a similar
mind, answers: "it's the way I feel, too, Jim . . . Sometimes I wish we
could hear of a country that's out of kings" (my italics). Here, in contradicting his earlier assertion about the absence of "kings" in America, Huck is of course wishing he could extricate Jim and himself from the clutches of the greedy swindlers who are exploiting them. But Huck's hope goes beyond his present situation. All "kings," in Huck's view, are like his Henry VIII, who "never gave anybody a chance" (p. 139). Kings control and exploit others; they thwart the freedom of those under their power. Huck hopes for a country "that's out of kings," that allows each man the liberty to pursue his own vision. His experience, not only with the Duke and Dauphin, but with Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, with Pap, the Grangerfords, and Tom Sawyer, has shown that he is surrounded by "kings," by persons and institutions which circumscribe his freedom. Huck, like James before him, dimly senses that America is not "out of kings," but is in fact a society that insists on its values even as it poses as the Land of the Free. Even Huck himself, so often hailed as embodying the principle of freedom, is shown to be incapable of liberation. In fact it shall be one of the main aims of the discussion that follows to demonstrate what is so often neglected in critical examinations of Huckleberry Finn, namely, that not only is Huck not a symbol of the free spirit, but that Twain repeatedly points up how severely limited Huck really is. At moments Huck, like Hester Prynne, is on the verge of breaking out of his confinement, yet time and again he reverts to the accepted patterns of thought and action dictated by his culture. His periodic departures from the thought patterns of his ante bellum society, like Hester Prynne's words in the forest scene, serve above all else to remind us of the strength
of the surrounding social climate to which he is normally subject. Huck may from time to time revolt against his "upbringing" yet his hesitations and predictable lapses into established modes of thought demonstrate the tenacity of society's hold upon him.

Rather than repeat the already widely known details of Huck's journey and catalogue the societal forces that threaten to engulf him and Jim, I would like to focus on the so-called "flawed ending" of the book. I am led to take this approach by two considerations. First, the early portions of The Adventures have been thoroughly examined and I have nothing radically new to add to the formidable mass of critical comments on them already in print. Secondly, it is beyond question that the interpretation given to the problematic final chapters is crucial in establishing the meaning of the entire book. In viewing the conclusion of the book in relation to the pattern I have been sketching in other American novels, I hope not only to account for the "flawed ending" but to show the relevance of my approach in interpreting our classic fiction.

To be sure, the final chapters pose a problem. Even Bernard DeVoto has observed that "in the whole reach of the English novel there is no more abrupt or more chilling descent." Further, the conclusion involves issues that go beyond formal and structural considerations. As Leo Marx has noted:

To bring Huckleberry Finn to a satisfactory close, Clemens had to do more than find a neat device for ending a story. His problem, though it may never have occurred to him, was to invent an action capable of placing in focus the meaning of the journey down the Mississippi.
Marx contends, and here he is only one of many, that the last fifth of the novel not only fails to bring into focus "the meaning of the journey down the Mississippi," but actually obscures or even compromises it. Twain, he claims, "did not acknowledge the truth his novel contained,"4 and stands guilty of a "failure of nerve."

Since Marx's celebrated article, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling and Huck Finn," contains the major criticisms that have been leveled at the book's conclusion, an examination of his objections offers a convenient review of the subject. Marx's objections can be distilled to two distinct yet interrelated ideas. First, he objects to the farcical tone of the final chapters. Huck and Jim, who the reader has come to respect, are reduced to comic characters whose roles are demeaning and in fact strip them of their dignity and moral power. Huck's image especially suffers as a result of his involvement in Tom Sawyer's machinations. Marx claims that Huck has "grown in stature throughout the journey" and that "his mood gradually shifts to a mood of rebellion which dominates the novel until he meets Tom Sawyer."5 In Huck's final submission to Tom, Marx sees an unaccountable retrogression in the novel's hero. Related to this flaw is Twain's method of bestowing freedom on Jim through Miss Watson. According to Marx, the device vitiates the thematic logic of Huck's adventures prior to his arrival at the Phelps farm. Huck's journey down river had one objective: freedom for Jim. When that freedom is attained, but attained irrespective of the journey, the novel's logic collapses. Miss Watson's beneficence effects a reconciliation between raft and society that the novel has shown to be impossible. Twain's "failure of nerve," a result of his divided mind, is manifest in what Marx considers to be a rapprochement
between Huck and Jim and "respectable society." Then through Huck's final announcement that he must "light out for the Territory," Twain, so to speak, attempts a last minute rescue of the novel's integrity, but only after the preceding chapters have done irreparable harm.

Marx's lucid analysis is compelling, even convincing up to a point, but to both his major objections I am able to give only partial assent. When, for example, he contends that the farcical tone of the final chapters "detracts from the urgency and dignity" of the journey of Huck and Jim, I must agree. Much of the burlesque seems to contribute little beyond frivolous entertainment and is a source of annoyance. The absurd machinations of Tom Sawyer go on too long and make the Phelps farm episode tedious. Twain was guilty of a "flaw" in allotting Tom too much time. On the other hand, Tom's reappearance and partial control over Huck can be seen as furthering the main idea developed throughout the book: freedom is an illusive, unattainable dream. No one in the book is free, not even Huck. He is not a symbol of the free spirit; rather, Twain had consistently called attention to the extent to which Huck was incapable of liberating himself from the grasp of "kings." Huck cooperates with Tom only grudgingly because he sees that Tom's extravagant plots are irrelevant to the specific goal of freeing Jim; yet he does not rebel against him. Once, as Huck and Tom are engaged in digging with "case knives" under the foundations of the shed that holds Jim because as Tom puts it, "it don't make no difference how foolish it is, it's the right way . . . and I've read all the books that gives any information about these things" (p. 204). Huck tries to get Tom to revise his plan. Only after recognizing that his way would be a
"thirty-eight year job," does Tom agree to allow the use of picks even though, as he says, "it ain't right and it ain't moral." Huck is jubilant as he responds:

Now you're talking!...your head gets leveler and leveler all the time, Tom Sawyer.... Picks is the thing, moral or no moral; and as for me, I don't care shucks for the morality of it nohow. When I start in to steal a nigger, or a watermelon or a Sunday-school book, I ain't no ways particular:how it's done so it's done. What I want is my nigger; or what I want is my watermelon; or what I want is my Sunday-school book; and if a pick's the handiest thing, that's the thing I'm going to dig that nigger or that watermelon or that Sunday-school book out with; and I don't give a dead rat what the authorities thinks about it neither (p. 206).

The incident reflects, among other things, an important aspect of Huck's character: his innate pragmatism. Nearly every commentator on Adventures makes mention of this basic orientation in Huck. What is not so often mentioned, and here we must acknowledge our debt to Marx, is that Huck does dig with the knives. He senses that the plan is absurd: "confound, it, it's foolish Tom" (p. 204), yet does what Tom tells him. But while Marx would have us see in such a scene an inconsistency and even a degeneration in the Huck who "has grown in stature throughout the journey,"6 in fact, it reflects traits which are entirely consistent with Huck's behavior throughout the book.

In order to establish that Huck's stance in the final chapters is not at variance with the attitudes he manifests throughout the rest of the journey it will be necessary to refer in the following pages to some material from the earlier episodes. Huck is time and again shown to be under the sway of patterns of thought that the reader comes to regard as foreign to him.
The most significant of these is, of course, his attitude toward Jim and slavery. At one point, mid-way in their journey, Huck notices Jim "with his head down betwixt his knees, moaning and mourning to himself "over his wife and children, who were taken from him in response to the needs of the slave market. Huck's reflections on Jim reveal the extent to which his values, his humanity, his freedom to respond to reality, are inhibited by his society: "I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so" (p. 131, my italics). Naturally open and just, Huck is not entirely free of his conditioning. Statements like the above prepare us for Huck's later horror, on the Phelps farm, at the thought of tampering with institution of slavery and alert us to the fact that even as he acknowledges Jim's humanity, Huck views Jim in terms of the categories of a slave society which he never completely discards.

Once, even after realizing Jim's generosity and depth of concern for him, Huck still falls prey to his ideological inheritance and makes Jim the butt of an elaborate joke. When Jim sees that Huck has victimized him, he turns away in justified disgust. Jim's totally human response brings Huck to a realization of his cruelty. As Jim leaves him, Huck thinks: "It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back" (p. 73). The sentence that follows reflects Huck's ability to recognize and appreciate Jim's humanity, but at the same time reveals the powerful sway still exerted by his society's values: "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger-but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither" (pp. 73-74). Further,
when Huck reflects on the fact that he is helping Him secure his freedom, the realization makes him "all over trembly and feverish" (p. 75). And Twain is careful to underscore the fact that it is Huck's upbringing, his society, that accounts for his limitations:

And then think of me! It would get all around, that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was to ever see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame (p. 178, my italics).

Earlier, Huck's human sensitivity nearly moved him to kiss Jim's foot; now his conscience conjurs up a similar, yet terribly different gesture!

The juxtaposition of these two thoughts points to the conflict that Henry Nash Smith, among others, sees as central to the novel: Huck's conscience is simply the attitudes he has taken over from his environment. What is still sound in him is an impulse from the deepest level of his personality that struggles against the overlay of prejudice and false valuation imposed on all members of the society in the name of religion, morality, law, and refinement.7

Religion, as Smith points out, plays a role in suppressing Huck's humanity. Still musing over his role in Jim's plan of escape, Huck thinks:

The more I studied about this, the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling. And at last when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence, slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm...I almost dropped in my tracks I was so scared (p. 178).

When Huck finally decides not to turn Jim in, he imagines that his action will merit not reward but damnation: "All right, then, I'll go to hell" (p. 180). Huck will eventually, although never with full consciousness, recognize the discrepancy between his heart and the
conscience of society and so will continue his flight and "light out for the territory" (p. 245). But it is important to insist that Huck never works completely free of his "upbringing," never fully becomes, in the jargon of modern psychology, "self-actualized," or "inner-directed." To the very end, Huck like Hester and Ahab, is engaged in a losing struggle with his culture; he never attains personal liberation. Huck's recalcitrant conscience is but an illustrator of the soundness of Ishmael's sobering question: "Who ain't a slave? Tell me that."

Ahab, as we have seen, was a "slave" to a cosmology that he had inherited from his civilization and, despite the "humanities" that intermittently surfaced, he served that abstract vision faithfully. Similarly, Huck cannot break cleanly and irrevocably from the world-view of his society even as from time to time he deviates and listens to the humane promptings of his sound heart.

True, Huck's adherence to his culture's codes is not as constricting as Hester Prynne's nor as coercive as Ahab's, and the destructiveness that is so much in evidence in the earlier works is muted in Adventures. Nonetheless, the restrictions within Huck that impede what the reader instinctively and correctly perceives as his movement toward liberation alerts one to parallels with The Scarlet Letter and Moby-Dick. Huck is another reflection of one of the central obsessions that haunts the American imagination and is expressed through characters who compulsively adhere to values and visions that constrict and disorient them.

And so it is that Huck voices genuine shock when Tom tells him that he will help Huck free Jim; Huck still believes that his desire to free Jim is "wrong." He has not become an "abolitionist," has not embraced a principle of his own:
Well, I let go all holts then, like I was shot. It was the most astonishing speech I ever heard—and I'm bound to say Tom Sawyer fell, considerable, in my estimation. Only I couldn't believe it. Tom Sawyer a nigger stealer! (p. 189).

Later Huck ponders Tom's involvement in the affair to the same effect: "I couldn't understand it, no way at all. It was outrageous, and I knewed I ought to just up and tell him so" (p. 196). Marx neglects this very important material in his comments on the final chapters. He is led to overlook the division in Huck's mind because he believes that Huck harbors "a mood of rebellion" and that *Adventures* represents a positive quest for freedom. The tone of the final chapters, discomfiting to all who read the book, is painful for Marx since he wants Twain to make of Huck the champion of some positive position. Huck's involvement with Tom and seeming neglect of Jim seems to Marx to undermine Huck's moral stature. But Marx is trying to make of Huck something that the logic of the novel simply will not allow. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the conception of freedom presented in *Adventures* is essentially negative. Freedom means liberation from the cramping, disorienting effects of the civilization that has developed in America. Largely because of the American propensity to imagine itself as freer than other countries, Twain, like other writers we have examined, was moved to demonstrate the severe limits of freedom. Beyond this negative comment, Twain has nothing to offer. When Twain fails to provide some positive message in the final chapters of the novel, Marx credits him with a lack of courage, but Marx has simply missed the point.
He even attributes to Huck (and to Jim) a "creed" whose object is "harmony among men," and which should result in the assumption by Huck of a more critical stance with regard to the values in society than he possesses in the last fifth of the book. But often enough Huck demonstrates that his "creed" is a thoroughly pragmatic one that has little to do with principle. When, for example, the raft is invaded by the Duke and the Dauphin, Huck quickly recognizes them as "just low-down humbugs and frauds," yet decides not to expose them: "If they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn't no objections" (p. 106). He elects to allow them their illusion because "it would have been miserable business to have any unfriendliness on the raft" (p. 106). He wants things on the raft to go smoothly so he allows the imposters their illusion—even if Jim and others must suffer because of it. Huck, like the frail raft, drifts with the tide and both float deeper into "slave" territory.

A little later Huck asks Jim to be patient with the "rapscallions," the Duke and Dauphin, and his reasoning is enlightening: "All I say is, kings is kings, and you got to make allowances.... It's the way they're raised" (p. 130). The lines echo a favorite and abiding theme in Twain's work: the influence of environment on the formation of an individual's values. Later he will examine this notion more extensively in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. There he will demonstrate that a person is almost entirely at the mercy of social pressures and expectations. The "white" boy, Chambers, thought to be Negro, gradually takes on the habits, especially the self-image of a "nigger," while Tom, who is in reality part Negro, assumes all the vices of a slave-holding aristocrat. Huck's
actions on the raft and on the Phelps' farm reflect this deterministic view. The admirable and human feelings Huck from time to time expresses never completely put to flight the rigid patterns of thought he has taken from his environment. He never takes the step of discarding as invalid or irrelevant the values inculcated by his society. One part of him, the part we applaud and admire, would lead to liberation and a new consciousness, but we are never allowed to forget the real restraints imposed by Huck's "civilized" side.

Marx claims that Huck is a contradiction because his creator's mind was a contradiction. It is more appropriate to say that Huck's mind is divided against itself as was Crevecoeur's, Hester Prynne's, Ahab's, as is America's. Huck is to a great extent passive in the final chapters, but this is only consistent with the character we have observed throughout the trip down river. In short then, Marx's first objection regarding the destructive effect of the tone and content of the last chapters merits only partial acceptance. The length of the Phelps farm episode is anything but an asset; the lightness and even frivolity there do represent an aesthetic failure on Twain's part. But Twain did not violate the integrity of the book's logic; Huck is still Huck even as he is once again implicated in Tom's romantic web.

The other major objection of Marx concerns what he calls "the flimsy contrivance" employed by Twain to set Jim free. Miss Watson's decision to release Jim from the tie that he has already unilaterally and illegally dissolved suggests, in Marx's view, "a resolution of the novel's essential conflict." Miss Watson, he insists, is "the Enemy," she "pronounces the polite lies of civilization that suffocate Huck's
spirit." Twain's final maneuver asks us, according to Marx, to believe "that somehow freedom can be achieved in spite of the crippling power . . . of the social morality." 

In claiming that the **dues ex machina** defeats the logic of the novel and vitiates its moral vision Marx is making two important assumptions. First he assumes that the book is about black slavery, and that the journey down the Mississippi is an attempt at deliverance: **Huck** wants to free **Jim** from bondage. Huck, he points out, identifies himself with Jim on Jackson's Island when he cries to the fugitive slave: "Git up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain't a minute to lose. They're after us!" (p. 54). Their fates are joined and their journey is a search for freedom, yet this freedom, shown to be impossible of attainment, is arbitrarily conferred. Marx's second corollary is that the raft and the shore societies represent in a nearly absolute way the division of the novel's moral terrain" (p. 36). When the two worlds reach what Marx considers a reconciliation through Miss Watson's deathbed gesture, the novel betrays itself.

Again, Marx's perceptive comments require at least partial agreement. The use of the device of freeing Jim is tactically indefensible. It has about it the flavor of a similar device which Twain, in a fit of self-mockery, describes in his "Author's Note" to **Those Extraordinary Twins**. Acknowledging what many critics have since echoed, Twain recalls the structural problems the tale presented. "When the book was finished," he writes, "I came to look around to see what had become of the team I had originally started out with." He found several characters "stranded, idle, forgotten, and permanently useless," particularly one character.
named Rowena. After much thought, he tells us, he saw that he had to give her "the grand bounce." The "grand bounce" amounted to an announcement to this effect: on one Fourth of July, "Rowena went out in the backyard to see the fireworks and fell down the well and got drowned." The tactic was so satisfying, he facetiously reports, that he considered using the well as the method of disposing of about half dozen or more characters. "But," he continues,

I gave up the idea, partly because I believed that if I kept that up it would arouse attention, and perhaps sympathy with those people, and partly because it was not a large well and would not hold any more anyway.

Twain's jocose attitude disguises, but does not conceal, his life-long difficulty with plot construction. Yet to say that Twain made use of an artificial mechanism is one thing, and to claim that its employment suggests a "failure of nerve" is quite another.

Marx errs, it seems to me, by connecting the fates of Huck and Jim too closely. Twain has Huck attempting, against the advice of his conscience, to free Jim, but the scope of his book is much broader. Thoreau had earlier suggested what the book in its totality demonstrates, that black slavery, horrible as it is, is only one form of the profound bondage in American life. Bondage of mind and heart, not of body, was Twain's main concern in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The book was written well after the abolition of slavery and Twain's purposes were understandably different from, say, Harriet Beecher Stowe's in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Twain could allow Jim his freedom from institutional slavery while still keeping intact his searching attack on the unofficial slavery practiced by society in the United States. As any rate, because of what we have seen to be the fate of an individual who desires freedom,
we appreciate the unspoken qualifications and penetrating irony implied by Tom's announcement that Jim is "as free as any creature that walks this earth." The "victory" is hollow at best.

Finally, there is the issue of the raft; what is its significance, and does Huck's return to the shore represent a kind of moral defection on his and Twain's part? It is important, first of all, to remember that Huck and the reader find that even the raft is vulnerable to encroachment. The Duke and the Dauphin are free to invade the raft and to manipulate both Huck and Jim. As has already been pointed out, Huck, even while on the raft, is not free in any absolute sense—drifting down the Mississippi at times scarcely able to see land, he is nonetheless a product of the shore society and remains so. Yet Marx regards the raft as the "symbolic" locus of the novel's central affirmations, and he is of course correct. But in demonstrating the frailty, the ephemeral nature of the raft, Twain, so to speak, warns against the step Marx takes, namely, viewing the raft as a realistic alternative to life on the shore. It is an ideal, one that could only occur to the American imagination but clearly an ideal whose promise is beyond realization. The raft is America's vision of itself. Marx, in assuming that the raft represents the key thematic image of the novel and that the freedom it promises represents its thematic core, is disturbed when the raft is forsaken and his expectations are not fulfilled. But this frustration is part of Twain's design. Yet the reader ought to be frustrated not at a "failure of nerve" on Twain's part, but rather because he is confronted with a deeply disturbing insight. The raft, and all our American dreams of freedom, are doomed. Marx frets that "the
raft patently was not capable of carrying the burden of hope Clemens placed upon it,"¹⁴ but the book, like other classic American novels, is meant to demonstrate precisely that: the ideal has not and perhaps cannot be realized.

Near the end of his article Marx states that the "ending of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn remains an important datum in the record of American thought and imagination"¹⁵ and he is certainly correct. But Huck's capitulation to Tom and above all his final decision to "light out" say far more than Marx realizes. Huck has learned something about this country as a result of his journey through its heartland. Huck has "been there before," he knows society and realizes that escape, while promising little, must be attempted; his restless, uniquely American quest must go on. Jim is now "free." As "free" as are Tom and all the others who dwell upon the shores and so Huck must leave even though civilization will catch up with him. Huck's modern day counterpart, Captain America, acknowledges, near the end of his journey, that he is and will remain a reflection of the culture with which he thought he had broken while Huck, too young to clearly articulate his dilemma, merely announces a resolve to "light out." Yet Huck's famous parting statement offers intimations of frustration that are every bit as strong. The tragic illogic of "lighting out" leads one to the core of the book's bleak message: Huck's quest, his uniquely American quest, cannot succeed. It was only a few years later that Twain penned lines in Pudd'nhead Wilson that might well serve as the Epilogue to Huck's adventures:

October 12, the Discovery. It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, ed. by Henry Nash Smith (Boston, 1958), p. 65; all further references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

2Quoted by Leo Marx. "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn," p. 27.

3"Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Huckleberry Finn, ed. by Claude M. Simpson, p. 23.

4Marx, p. 39.

5Marx, p. 34.

6Ibid., p. 30.


8Ibid., p. 36.

9Ibid., p. 29.

10Ibid., p. 36.


12Ibid., p. 171.

13Ibid., p. 38.

14Ibid., p. 38.

15Ibid., p. 39.
Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* would on first consideration seem to offer only contrast when placed alongside *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—Twain has Huck "light out" while Carrie moves from the country to the city and from West to East—yet the two novels in fact reflect a common intent. Along with *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*, they chronicle the disorientation of their central characters and suggest that their difficulties are related to a too ready adoption of abstract views derived from their societies. The values Carrie embraces are those of her environment, the modern American city. It was fitting that the late 1890's produce a classic novel with an urban setting since by that time, as Arthur Schlesinger has noted, "it was the city rather than the unpeopled wilderness that was beginning to dazzle the imagination of the nation."¹ Carrie like her creator was indeed dazzled by the city and its promise. As she steps off the train in Chicago she mirrors the hopes of the youthful Theodore Dreiser; both expect to find a "land of promise, a fabled land of milk and honey."² Dreiser would come to judge critically the American city and the myth of the New Eden that it embodied, but his hapless heroine does not. In *Dawn*, recalling with hindsight the splendor of the burgeoning Chicago of his young manhood, Dreiser made this incisive comment:

> The city, as I viewed it then, seemed like a lithe young giant, unkempt in the main and befogged with the
unintelligence of youth, but smooth-limbed, direct, powerful, hopeful. There was actually...a note of not only hope but faith -- yet in gold only, I fear (my italics).  

The American Dream, the myth of the New Beginning, had, he perceived, become an illusion that was sustained by what he once called "that American pseudo-morality which combines a pirate-like acquisitiveness with an inward and absolute conviction of righteousness." Carrie succumbs to this attenuated myth and in so doing acts out what Dreiser perceived as the tragedy of the modern, urban American.

In the pages that follow much will be made of the seductive power of wealth and its destructive influence on Carrie and to an extent, Hurstwood. But my intention will not be to berate the evils of materialism. Viewing the novel with respect to the development in American fiction that I have traced through earlier works reveals that Dreiser is up to much more. The careers of Carrie Meeber and George Hurstwood represent a searching look, as did those of Hester Pynne, Arthur Dimmesdale and Huckleberry Finn, at the potential for destruction contained in the American tendency toward idealization and mystification. Carrie falls victim not merely to things but to a kind of secular religion that promises ultimate happiness, The New Life, once certain possessions are acquired.

Dreiser is at pains to demonstrate that Carrie, in possession of a unique individuality marked by "emotional greatness," that is, a potential for profound self expression and actualization, is stunted by her acceptance of the values of the modern city and the idealized and romanticized myth that formed about it. Carrie, a true believer -- like Hester who accepts her society's judgment of her, like Ahab who adheres
to his culture's theological premises, or like Huck who accedes to the conditioning he has been subjected to -- embraces a world-view which will ultimately lead to frustration. So pervasive is the social pressure and so insistent are its demands that she acquiesces. Surrounded by a society which in Dreiser's phrase combines "a pirate-like acquisitiveness with an inward and absolute conviction of righteousness," she submits; and her submission leads her astray.

The title of the first chapter sounds a note that resonates through the entire novel: "The Magnet Attracting: A Waif Amid Forces." The city has acted as a magnet upon Carrie; as she approaches Chicago she experiences its vitality and mystery. The scene moves Dreiser to one of his rhapsodic and melancholy asides:

Ah, the promise of the night. What does it not hold for the weary! What old illusion of hope is not here forever repeated! Says the soul of the toiler to itself, "I shall soon be free."

But Dreiser knows that night obscures the city's indifference and its frightful power. The city has "its cunning wiles" and seethes with "large forces which allure with all the soulfulness of expression possible in the most cultured human" (p. 4). The city is seen as "superhuman"; it attracts Carrie and engulfs her. In the metropolis she was "a lone figure in a tossing, thoughtless sea" (p. 11). Carrie gives herself up to the sway of the city's rhythmic power. She is a waif, a naive and in many ways representative young woman who comes to the city hoping to find the realization of hers and the nation's dream. Carrie's reaction to Chicago reflects her total absorption in the romance of the city, and the dream of success that the metropolis
represented to her generation. But the tone of his asides assures us that Dreiser likewise perceived the frustration implicit in the urban quest; and it is the sense of impending tragedy that predominates.

Carrie quickly adapts to the prevailing values of the city. As she leaves the shoe factory after her first day of employment, she painfully recognizes the distance between herself and the rest of the crowd. Her sense of alienation results, above all, from her perception that material possessions indicate social acceptance and her ready belief that these possessions result in happiness and fulfillment.

There were the crowds, hurrying with the same bustle and energy-yielding enthusiasm.... She felt ashamed in the face of better dressed girls who went by. She felt as though she should be better served, and her heart revolted (p. 40).

Carrie suffers what the reader might view as a self-inflicted wound. Later Dreiser seems to hint as much when he somewhat ironically defends the elaborately decorated saloon that Hurstwood manages. If, Dreiser writes, the sumptuous decor stirs in "the material-minded an ambition to arrange their lives upon a similarly splendid basis...that would scarcely be the fault of the decorations, but rather of their innate trend of mind" (p. 45). Still later, in a rather extended depiction of Hurstwood's and Carrie's arrival in New York, Dreiser forcefully asserts that America's identification of worth with material goods coupled with the ever apparent disparities between rich and poor create a nearly irresistible pressure which ultimately "produces the tragedies of the world":

The great create an atmosphere which reacts badly upon the small. This atmosphere is easily and quickly felt. Walk among the magnificent residences, the splendid
equipages, the gilded shops, restaurants, resorts of all kinds; scent the flowers, the silks, the wines; drink of the laughter springing from the soul of luxurious content, of the glances which glem like light from defiant spears; feel the quality of the smiles which cut like glistening swords and of strides born of place, and you shall know of what is the atmosphere of the high and mighty. Little use to argue that of such is not the kingdom of greatness, but so long as the world is attracted by this and the human heart views this as the one desirable realm which it must attain, so long, to that heart, will this remain the realm of greatness. So long, also, will the atmosphere of this realm work its desperate results in the soul of man (p. 265).

The "desperate results" of the depleted American myth that Carrie embraces and Hurstwood implicitly accepts are illustrated by their final frustration.

Carrie's absorption of society's materialistic values is pointed up time and again. Although the multifaceted life of the bustling Chicago streets fascinated Carrie, her imagination "trod a very narrow round, always winding up at points which concerned money, looks, clothes, or enjoyment" (p. 49). Carrie's understanding of the "moral significance of money" was, Dreiser points out, "the popular understanding, nothing more" (p. 60). Carrie, encouraged by those around her, assumes that money must be had; it is the key to all happiness. Dreiser dubs her "an apt student of fortune's superficialities," (p. 93) and so she is. Acquaintances like Mrs. Hale incline her to believe that money and a luxurious home are the only worthwhile goals. For a considerable period, Dreiser tells us, Mrs. Hale was Carrie's only companion and "the gossip of the manager's wife formed the medium through which she saw the world." Mrs. Hale's world-view, marked by "praises of wealth...and conventional expression[s] of morals...", fell upon Carrie and for the
while confused her" (p. 96). Riding with Mrs. Hale through one of Chicago's more affluent areas,

She [Carrie] imagined that across these richly carved entrance-ways, where the globed and crystalled 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 (p. 107).

Such asides call attention to Carrie's propensity to idealize the trappings of wealth and to invest them with a significance that is patently out of proportion. Her susceptibility to such mystification is illustrative of the pressure we have seen in earlier American novels and will meet in *The Great Gatsby*.

Clothes, we learn, are virtually significant to Carrie. Given money by Drouet to buy herself a jacket, Carrie "delighted to convince herself that there was nothing she would like better" (p. 64). At the moment she is totally taken up with the acquisition of an article of clothing. As she passed the store's jewelry department and observed the sparkling wares displayed there, she believed she "would look fine too, if only she had some of these things" (p. 64). Carrie has almost complete confidence in the capacity of money and fine clothing to bring her happiness, yet at the same time the city, whether it be Chicago or New York, presents standards against which her own economic plight seems deficient. While on Broadway with Mrs. Vance, whose appearance and financial security provide her with social approval, Carrie could only imagine that it must be evident to many that she was the less handsomely dressed of the two. It cut her to the quick, and she resolved that she would not come here again until she looked better. At the same time she longed to feel the delight of parading here as an equal. Ah, then she would be happy! (p. 281).
New York's affluent create in Carrie an irrepressible restiveness despite the obvious gains she has made. She cannot reconcile herself to her economic position because she has totally accepted the values of the culture that surrounds her. To content herself with anything less than wealth is to invalidate the vision that has guided her quest: "It ached her to know that she was not one of them--that, alas, she had dreamed a dream and it had not come true" (p. 282). Carrie's dream, the now banalized dream of America, impels her to continue her quest. Carrie's failure demonstrates perfectly what Blanche Gelfant maintains is the central truth by the American city novel. "City fiction," she writes,

has portrayed man searching for a complete self in an urban world where personal integration or completeness seems to have become impossible.

Miss Gelfant goes on to show that most of Dreiser's fiction offers us characters whose tragedy is "the tragedy of the dissociated personality." His heroes and heroines conform to the basic values of their society even as they apparently defy convention. "But in doing so," she continued, "they fail to satisfy their peculiar temperamental yearning for beauty.

Carrie, we eventually come to see, has an abiding "temperamental yearning for beauty." Even under the influence of Mrs. Hale's materialistic view, Carrie's "own feelings were a corrective influence" (p. 96). Her most personal and innate feelings inclined her to "something better," but this inborn sense is almost totally frustrated by her culture's materialistic orientation. Here parallels with Hester, Ahab and Huck present themselves. Hester's needlework, Ahab's "humanities" and Huck's natural goodness -- all reflections of an inner, private and authentic
self that society, its values and standards will frustrate --- point out how closely Carrie is related to previous figures of the American fictional tradition.

Only from the stage and in her infrequent conversations with Ames does Carrie receive the smallest encouragement of her deepest inclinations. Her acting career reveals much about Carrie and makes, as well, an oblique yet caustic comment on the culture that the American city has produced. As Donald Pizer puts it:

Carrie's career on the stage symbolizes both the emotional intensity she is capable of bringing to life and the fact that she requires the intrinsically extraordinary and exciting world of the theatre to call forth and embody her emotional depth.8

The stage, Carrie's equivalent of Hester's embroidery, is the only environment that permits the expression of her truest self. The other world of mansions and furs, of carriages and fine clothing, of Mrs. Hales and Mrs. Hurstwoods, offers little encouragement to the development of Carrie's sensibility. Dreiser uses the stage in still another way. By showing us Carrie's power to transport herself imaginatively on the stage, he can indicate the presence of a quality that defies precise identification. Dreiser makes an effort to label this capacity, but can do no more than call it "emotional greatness," As we see Carrie move an audience we intuitively apprehend her special gift even though we cannot explicitly define it.

Ames serves to further clarify Carrie's interior world for us. To Carrie he seems "wiser" than Hurstwood and "brighter" than Drouet. At any rate, "there was something in him, or the world he moved in, which appealed to her" (p. 293). Ames' reactions to the imposing
surroundings at Shery's, the restaurant to which Mrs. Vance takes him and Carrie, contrast dramatically with Carrie's. The sumptuous decor and elegance lead Carrie to think, "What a wonderful thing it was to be rich" (p. 289). Ames, on the other hand, is anything but awed: "I sometimes think it is a shame for people to spend so much money this way" (p. 291). His attitudes were "new" to Carrie; before Ames she had never encountered anyone who was not mesmerized by the glitter of wealth. Never before had anyone said to Carrie: "I shouldn't care to be rich," or even asked the basic question he poses: "What good would it do?" (p. 293). Ames represents an alternative to the world-view that Carrie has accepted. But beyond merely functioning as the opposite pole to people like Mrs. Vance, Ames' presence suggests what Carrie might have become had she not been misdirected by the prevailing materialistic weltanschauung that surrounds her on every side.

Ames not only offers to Carrie an alternative vision but encourages her theatrical ambitions. When Ames says, "I think the theatre a great thing," (P. 294) Carrie is greatly moved by the endorsement. After leaving him she turns to her rocker, as she does at several crucial points in the novel, and reflects on the event:

Through a fog of longing and conflicting desires she was beginning to see.... She was rocking, and beginning to see (p. 294).

Dreiser's inability to portray the psychological dimensions of his characters is manifest here. When he asserts that Carrie was "beginning to see" Dreiser is attempting to suggest that on some deeper subconscious level Carrie instinctively feels that something is wrong but that she is incapable of grasping the problem. What Dreiser would have us realize
is that Carrie's acceptance of society's values has stunted her natural desires. She exists alienated from her deepest natural learnings; she has lost herself. The only beauty sanctioned by her society is the beauty found in luxury and pomp. Her vague and fluid yearnings have been forced into pre-established molds and thereby pressed into the service of goals that are not really hers. She will never fully recognize her plight, but the reader has by this point begun to realize with Dreiser that, in the words of one critic,

the American Dream, and the precepts that safeguard it put before Americans false goals which estrange them from Nature and left them unfulfilled.\textsuperscript{10}

That Dreiser intended more than a study of a particular young woman's career and has in fact presented us with an analysis of a cultural disease is indicated by the treatment given to Hurstwood. Especially in the latter portions of the novel his situation nearly overshadows Carrie's. Hurstwood's career at times contrasts, at others parallels, Carrie's, and certainly his disintegration broadens the novel's scope.

The brief discussion of Hurstwood that follows will attempt to point out just some of the ways his pathetic deterioration casts light on Carrie's situation and further clarifies the source of her troubles. An attempt will likewise be made to demonstrate that he is, in many ways, the victim of the same subtle yet pervasive forces that affect Carrie.

When Hurstwood first entered Carrie's life he represented something more elevated than Drouet. His clothes, of course an important element in Carrie's estimation, were finer than Drouet's. He at least dimly perceived qualities in Carrie that Drouet would never appreciate. But
although he compares favorably with Drouet, Hurstwood's salient characteristic is his conventionality. In order to hold his position he has to maintain "a dignified manner, a clean record, a respectable home anchorage" (p. 83). Ever conscious of his role and of society's expectations, he follows a rather staid but altogether respectable life style:

Whenever he appeared in the public ways in the afternoon, or on Sunday, it was with his wife, and sometimes his children. He would visit the local resorts, or those near by in Wisconsin, and spend a few still, polished days strolling about conventional places doing conventional things (p. 83).

He succeeds as manager of Fitzgerald and Moy's because he always does the proper thing and addresses each regular visitor of the saloon in the manner appropriate to his position on the social pyramid. He was above all "capable of creating a good impression" (p. 42). Like Willy Loman, for whom he is in many ways a prototype, Hurstwood is "well liked."

While Hurstwood manifests considerable pleasure over his snug position somewhere above the midpoint on the social ladder, his wife's avarice and hunger for social prestige create unending turmoil and dissatisfaction in her. She is, Dreiser tells us,

the type of woman who has ever endeavored to shine and has been more or less chagrined at the evidences of superior capability in this direction elsewhere (p. 80).

Her vision of life is severely circumscribed, focused as it is on matters of wealth and social position. Her attention is limited "to that little conventional round of society of which she was not—but longed to be a member" (p. 80). Due primarily to her influence the Hurstwood household
is filled with materialistic gaggle. Jessica, her daughter, reflects her mother's attitudes perfectly when she reports how she entertained the friendly gesture of a certain young man:

What do you think...that Herbert Crane tried to make friends with me....He's just a student....He hadn't anything (p. 81).

She betrays the same narrowness and envy that animate her mother. Persons are categorized by what they have, and she chafes at the thought that certain of her friends are able to pursue activities that are beyond her father's means. In short, she and her mother are alive with an extreme version of the attitudes that control Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Vance, and Carrie. Hurstwood finds the situation unpleasant, but his commitment to propriety and societal guidelines precludes any thought of change. He attempts, unsuccessfully, to fit Carrie into his life without drastically altering his domestic situation; even his flight from Chicago with Carrie owes as much to chance as to his own desire. As he muses over the possibility of a life with Carrie and savors the smooth, neatly stacked bills in his employer's safe, the door accidentally closes and Hurstwood is catapulted into a new life.

Hurstwood attempts to forge a new life for himself but finds he cannot. He is not equipped with the inner resources to begin a new career. But as Hurstwood's decline begins we pity him rather than judge him as deficient. His previous experience has left him unprepared; his breach of trust has cut him off from the ordered, conventional world to which he owed his sense of security and worth. His rise was dependent upon his subservience to the dictates of convention; he is ill-equipped to function effectively outside its framework. Hurstwood
depended on a clearly defined code to guide his steps; once he removes himself from its aegis, he flounders. In fact Dreiser uses the metaphor of the sea to describe Hurstwood's plight as he enters New York just as he had when describing Carrie's initiation to Chicago.

In New York the roads were any one of a half-hundred and each had been diligently pursued by hundreds, so that celebrities were numerous. The sea was already full of whales. A common fish must need disappear wholly from view—remain unseen. In other words, Hurstwood was nothing (p. 265).

As the outlines of his circumstance become clearer Hurstwood falls prey to the same thoughts and longings that move Carrie and Mrs. Hurstwood. But while they crave material joys that others have, Hurstwood broods over what he has lost. A comparison of his new state with his old "produced a constant state of gloom, or, at least, depression" (p. 297). He imagines that he has been cast out and grows envious of those who are free to enjoy "ample raiment" and possess "money to spend." He begins to see, Dreiser writes,

as one who sees a city with a wall about it. Men were posted at the gates. You could not get in. Those inside did not care to come out to see who you were. They were so merry inside there that all those outside were forgotten, and he was on the outside (p. 297).

Carrie strains after the trappings of wealth that she thinks will bring her the happiness that she firmly believes is her due. Hurstwood is nagged by the realization that he has excommunicated himself from the fraternity of wealth forever. Carrie's discontent is a result of unfulfilled dreams, Hurstwood's a result of broken realities. Carrie lives in the future, Hurstwood in the past, yet both are infected with the same cultural disease: the desire for More Things. To Carrie, as one critic puts it, "It is the sphere above her which glows magnetically, to
Hurstwood, spiralling in the opposite direction, it is the sphere behind. Their lives, Dreiser implies, are but shadows of what they could have been if only they had not succumbed to the enticements, now drained of real human value, that America dangled before them.

But the full significance of Hurstwood's failure is only appreciated after one considers the historical background against which Dreiser places it. The street-car strike in which Hurstwood becomes involved actually took place in the winter of 1894-95. Hurstwood's decline then coincides with what was "the worst economic depression America was to know before the 1930's." The following spring saw the formation of Coxey's Army, a group of disgruntled, unemployed men who marched to Washington to demand relief from Congress. The economy was falling apart. When Dreiser notes that Hurstwood's newspaper informs him that 80,000 persons were without employment in New York he is scarcely exaggerating. It is estimated that nearly four out of five businesses in the country were failing. Hurstwood's economic and psychological decline thus mirrored the fate of the nation. Dreiser used the trauma of 1894 to demonstrate the frailty of the economic system but even more to reveal the emptiness of the dream that sustained it. Hurstwood, like Carrie, is a captive of the dream and a true believer, and his collapse indicates that spurious nature of values he has absorbed. His demise is more dramatic than Carrie's frustrated rocking but the lives of both characters point out the hollowness of the vision that bewitches them. When Hurstwood stands on a street corner in New York to be "auctioned" for twelve cents, the price of a bed for the night, he has been reduced to something closer to an unneeded commodity than to a man.
After witnessing this spectacle no reader can be shocked when Hurstwood, little more than flotsam cast from abroad the success-bound ship, America, stretches himself out in a fifteen-cent room filling with gas and asks: "What's the use?" (p. 452).

As Hurstwood plods slowly, painfully toward oblivion, Carrie is enjoying society's rewards. When her salary is raised to one hundred and fifty dollars per week she imagines she has at least found the door to "Aladdin's Cave."

Each day, her head almost turned by developments, her fancies of what her fortunes must be, with ample money, grew and multiplied. She conceived of delights which were not—saw lights of joy that never were on land or sea (p. 411).

Yet even in the midst of her triumph she finds herself admitting to a profound emptiness. She says to her friend Lola, "I get lonely; don't you?" (p. 413). Hurstwood expires in a cheap flophouse while Carrie sits rocking in an expensive apartment surrounded by fine furnishings and admiring friends, enjoying "that which in the beginning seemed life's object" (p. 452). Yet she might well have asked of herself the last half-hearted query to pass from Hurstwood's lips: "What's the use?" "It does not," Dreiser reminds, "take money long to make plain its impotence providing the desires are in the realm of affection" (p. 412). She had sought happiness and fulfillment in "fine raiment and elegant surroundings" because there "men seemed to be contented" (p. 452). But these things offered by "the world of fashion and the world of the stage—these were but incidents" (p. 452). She really longed for that reality evoked by the idealistic Ames. During her last conversation with him, she is deeply stirred and, as Dreiser puts it, "the old call of the
ideal was sounding" (p. 435). The "ideal" represents Carrie's unique but neglected self. She retains only the slightest contact with what is genuine in her and like Huck, who is led to neglect his "sound heart" for ersatz values, remains confused. Ames' face, like his voice, called to her deepest center, yet "it was not for Carrie to know the thing in it which appealed to her" (p. 436). As they sit together listening thoughtfully to music, Carrie attempts to give expression to her interior world, but finds speech inadequate: "I don't know what it is about music...but it always makes me feel as if I wanted something--I--" (p. 436). Carrie's longings are as profound and as mysterious as the power of music, yet they are unique and personal. They will remain forever unfulfilled, for she has followed the wrong star. Her beauty has been prostituted by her society. In accepting its empty values and pursuing its goals she has missed her calling: "Amid the tinsel and shine of her state walked Carrie, unhappy" (p. 453).

The image of Carrie seated at her window, rocking gently in her chair, looks ahead to the similarly meditative pose of Gatsby and is not easily forgotten. She sits alone; young, yet experienced, hoping, yet filled with woe. Only half-conscious of her plight and of the waste her life has become, only partially appreciating what she could have been, yet still looking for the fulfillment of her dreams for herself, she is the perfect symbol for America. Dreiser saw Carrie as he saw his country. He viewed America, in the words of Charles Shapiro,

as a country energing from its youth and he was concerned about a culture which was creating within itself goals which perverted the worthwhile institutions of society and robbed the individuals of the chance to live up to full inherent potentialities.
America as an ideal, the America that is in Frost's phase, "hard to see," has been sullied by a debilitating materialism that has polluted its soul. Carrie, like America, has been diverted from her unique destiny and has surrendered her treasure. Yet still she waits. Words on the final page of the book perfectly sum up Carrie's final stance, but can as readily be appreciated as representing Dreiser's view of America: "Though often disillusioned, she was still waiting for that halcyon day when she would be led forth among dreams become real" (p. 454).
NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX


3 *Sister Carrie* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 9. All future references to the novel are to this edition and will be noted in the text.


5 Ibid., p. 87.


8 Ibid., p. 1.

9 Ibid., p. 87.


12 Ibid. cit.

Only a few weeks before the publication of the novel that was to win for him a place among America's great writers, F. Scott Fitzgerald wanted to change its title. The book we know as The Great Gatsby very nearly became Under the Red, White and Blue. The aborted alteration would seem to indicate that Fitzgerald's novel was meant to be taken as more than a comment on a man, or even on an era, but on an entire culture. Gatsby, part crook, part poet, not only embodies American values and attitudes; his vision, his dream is shown in some essential ways to be one with his culture's. In the pages that follow, my primary aim will be to establish that Fitzgerald's classic belongs to the tradition that I have been sketching -- that Gatsby's career and tragic end are shown to be directly related to his uncritical adoption of an American world view. Through him Fitzgerald not only demonstrates the shortcomings of certain American values but shows that America's view of itself and its history is deluding and even destructive.

Although we are often inclined to see Fitzgerald behind Nick, Gatsby's chronicler, we are more often reminded that Nick's mind and sensibility are our immediate sources of information about Gatsby. Therefore, one of the first important steps in interpreting this complex novel is coming to a clear understanding of the basis of the relationship between Nick and Gatsby. Nick is at once repulsed and attracted.
by his subject. Gatsby represented, Nick tells us, everything for which he had "unaffected scorn," yet a bond of affection, even loyalty, is also evidenced in the final words Nick says to him: "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (p. 154).

The ambiguity of Nick's position with regard to Gatsby has of course been attacked as a "weakness" in Nick's moral perceptions. This is a serious objection, since if Nick's values are as distorted in their way as are those of the Eastern culture he encounters, then Fitzgerald's vision and the message of his book are severely compromised. Some are of the opinion that Fitzgerald somehow never gained control of his material and that the book betrays a major shortcoming: as one critic has written: "one of Fitzgerald's main weaknesses as a novelist is that he could create a world that was emotionally but not intellectually satisfying." More specific and certainly more critical is another commentator who maintains that Fitzgerald was forced to resort to metaphor when dealing with Nick's ambiguous attitudes toward Gatsby "because only metaphor will conceal the fact that the story as Carraway tells it is a paean to schizophrenia." The "schizophrenia" in Nick is of course seen as a reflection of his creator's somewhat muddled mind. I hope in the examination of Nick and Gatsby's relationship which follows to show first of all that Fitzgerald gives adequate grounds for Nick's acceptance of Gatsby, and, further, to demonstrate that, when rightly conceived, the source of his admiration goes far toward explaining the meaning of Gatsby's dream and the cultural roots of his malady.

Nick, coming out of America's heartland, is heir not only to his father's home-spun advice and a rather firmly defined moral code, but as
well to a deeply entrenched optimism. Santayana once said that in America there is a tacit optimistic assumption about existence, "to the extent that the more existence the better." Nick's at times grudging, but finally firm, allegiance to Gatsby stems in large part from his thoroughly American and wholly irrepressible belief in the possibilities. The relationship between Nick, a midwestern American Adam seeking paradise in the spoiled East, and Gatsby, the corrupted dreamer, is not merely based on a commonly-shared "romanticism"; they are both partakers in the American propensity to hope.

Nick goes to West Egg believing "that life was beginning over again." Like millions of Americans before and since, he moves in search of the fulfillment of the American Promise. He chooses West Egg because of financial reasons, but the significance of the name is evident. When a co-worker suggests renting a house outside the city, Nick finds it a "great idea." And when the other young man is transferred a few days before they were to move in, Nick, like a pioneer of old, "went out to the country alone" (p. 3). Later when someone asks for directions and Nick is able to provide help, he imagines himself "a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler" (p. 4). But the East and its corruption cannot sustain his Adamic hopes. He seeks a new beginning but reversing the historical pattern, he moves east in search of a "West." Further, his metaphors reflect an awareness that he is too late, that the land is already "settled," already spoiled. Long Island Sound has already become a "great wet barnyard" (p. 5); it has been thoroughly domesticated. He thrills to "the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees," but they develop "just as things grow in fast movies" (p. 4),
Gatsby, his neighbor, is alive with "some heightened sensitivity to the promise of life," but Nick is pressed to link him with "intricate machines that register earthquakes" (p. 2). The oval of land on which they live is, in a pregnant comparison, not like "the egg in the Columbus story," but is "crushed flat at the contact end" (p. 5). The metaphors reflect the fact that the freshness is gone; Nick's New World is old and his hopes will be thoroughly dashed. The New Beginning is impossible here.

Yet even though he is a thoroughly displaced person (he once imagines he is about to encounter a flock of sheep on Fifth Avenue), the East with its vitality holds an attraction for him: "I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (p. 36). Once, approaching New York in Gatsby's magnificently overdone automobile, he muses: "The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for... the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world" (p. 69). Elsewhere he calls metropolitan twilight "enchanted" and he admits: "I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night" (p. 57). The words Nick employs here are telling: "Promise," "mystery" "adventurous." They are much like the words he uses when explaining to his reader the grounds of his admiration for Gatsby. Admitting that Gatsby's life moved him to "scorn," Nick goes on to say that "there was something gorgeous about him," some "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (p. 2). Both the city and Gatsby hold a similar attraction for Nick. Both embody a richness, an abundance of inexplicable purpose that calls to him. The city's life at once repels
and enchants him, and his attitude toward Gatsby is marked by the
same ambivalence. But a clarification of the basis of Nick's attitude
that does not go beyond the mere evocation of the term "romantic"
cannot do justice to the treatment Fitzgerald gives his narrator.
Fitzgerald suggests that Nick's Adamic impulses, frustrated by the
moral climate he finds in the East, incline him to side with Gatsby.

Nick quickly senses, as Thomas Hanzo points out, that the differ-
ence between Gatsby, and, say, Tom or the myriads of visitors who come
to Gatsby's parties and conduct themselves "according to the rules of
an amusement park," (p. 41) is that Gatsby "found a way to live as men
had once lived, with a purpose and a meaning which transcended
personal fate." Even Wolfsheim's "gonnegtions," repugnant as they are
to Nick—he had even tampered "with the faith of fifty million people"
(p. 74) by fixing the 1919 World Series--do not move him to reject
Gatsby. Nick's moral sensitivity never lets him forget Gatsby's involve-
ment in deceit and corruption, but Gatsby's belief in an ideal, a
dream, wins Nick. Gatsby's dream, Daisy, proves to be chimerical,
unworthy of his tremendous efforts, but his quest takes him beyond the
cramped confines of the accepted banality and so in Nick's eyes he is
worth more than "the whole damn bunch."

Nowhere is the distance between Gatsby and the others in the East
more poignantly dramatized than on the night of Myrtle Wilson's death.
While Gatsby observes a lonely, chivalrous vigil outside Daisy's window,
seeking thereby to protect her from her husband, Tom and Daisy sit as a
kitchen table "with a plate of cold fried chicken between them, and two
bottles of ale" looking as though "they were conspiring together" (p. 146).
The egocentric immorality of the Buchanans and Wolfshelm finally serves to point out to Nick Gatsby's saving element. When he compares Gatsby with his surroundings, when he hears free-loaders at Gatsby's party spread rumors about him as they gulp down his liquor, Nick is drawn to Gatsby in spite of his deep involvement in the underworld.

Nick's first glimpse of Gatsby has him "stretching out his arms toward the dark water" which was lighted only by a "single green light" (pp. 20-21). And this gesture, with its obvious suggestions of hope, takes place shortly after Nick is introduced to the Buchanan household on East Egg. There Daisy shares her seemingly terrible burdens with him, but soon her lovely, smirking face "asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged" (p. 18). Her "insincerity" is complemented by Tom's hypocrisy and by the maddeningly superficial and thoroughly bigoted views he voices as he poses as guardian of the "Nordics" who have "produced all the things that go to make civilization—oh, science and art, and all that" (p. 14). Nick, it should be remembered, will not actually meet Gatsby until after he has attended the "party" hosted by Tom and Myrtle and attended by his sister and the McKees. In this scene, one of the novel's most successful, Fitzgerald creates an atmosphere of such striking and insistent bleakness and banality that one is moved to compare it with similar scenes in Eliot's The Waste Land. Nick is forced above all to listen to the babble of Myrtle: her recounting of her disillusionment with her husband over a borrowed suit, her "courtship" with Tom aboard a commuter train, her complaints about a bill from a Mrs. Eberhart, who "goes around looking at people's feet in their own homes" (p. 31); and even her
recital of a "shopping list" that includes an ash tray, a dog collar, and a wreath for her mother's grave "that'll last all summer" (p. 37). In the midst of such crassness and meaninglessness Gatsby's gesture offers Nick an oasis of meaning. Gatsby's ability to dress, ill-directed though it may be, inspires Nick; it keeps his fading dream alive.

Nick, then, is not, as has been said, "short on moral perspective," or a purveyor of thoroughly false values who "fails to learn anything from his story," or a "hypocrite." Like the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, Nick looks over a wasteland, a spiritual valley of ashes, but he not only sees, he responds in the end. When everyone else deserts Gatsby, Nick feels himself "responsible." He wanted, he tells us, to reassure the dead man: "I'll get somebody for you, Gatsby. Don't worry. Just trust me and I'll get somebody for you" (p. 165).

Nick's disheartening efforts at collecting a funeral party serve to weld the destinies of these two men together. When Wolfsheim platitudinously intones his excuse: "Let us learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead," (p. 173) or when Kilpspringer begs off attending and then asks Nick to send on a pair of tennis shoes, the distance between the believers, Nick and Gatsby, and the others is painfully underscored. Nick and his friend are not part of the "secret society" to which the Buchanans and even Jordan Baker belong. Nick guesses, somewhat incorrectly, that Tom, Daisy, Gatsby and Jordan, all, like himself, products of the West, "possessed some deficiency...which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life" (p. 177).

In reality only Nick and Gatsby fail; the others have done quite well
in the East. They are immersed in the destructive element and they have shed nearly all traces of what Nick calls his "provincial squeamishness" (p. 181). Tom and Daisy are, he recognizes, "careless people" (p. 180) --appropriately enough, Nick uses the word "careless" to describe Jordan Baker as well (p. 59). But he cannot throw "carraway" and join them. "They [the Buchananas]," he thinks, "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness...and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (p. 180). Nick is one of the "other people"; he erases the obscene word left on Gatsby's steps.

The young but chastened man who leaves the East at the end of the novel "wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever," (p. 2) and he speaks of his father's prosaic miswestern advice as though it really meant a great deal. His experiences have tired him; he wants a simpler, securer world. Nick has found that the "world beyond the Ohio," the East, is "distorted" (p. 178). The East, Nick tells us, became "haunted" after Gatsby's death and so when the "blue smoke of brittle leaves" signaled the end of the season and, for Nick, so much more, he left. Gatsby's death has revealed to Nick the destructive potential of the position his friend had assumed, even personified. Gatsby's pathetic end, brought about by his dream, offers as does the death of any mythical hero, the opportunity for self-awareness. The lesson of Gatsby's demise is not lost on Nick--he gives up his attempt to establish a "West" in the East and retreats. He has learned not to allow dreams to blind one to present realities.
To this point I have been attempting to establish that Fitzgerald would have us see the bond between Nick and Gatsby based on the ability, the willingness to hope. Clearly this power, this "romantic readiness," is meant to be taken as positive and enlivening. I now hope to show that Gatsby's failure was brought about not by his propensity to hope and dream but rather by the form his dream took on. Put another way, Fitzgerald focuses us on Gatsby's inability to avoid the fatal American inclination to mystify and distort reality in order to keep dreams and hopes alive. What we shall see is that Fitzgerald, by linking Gatsby with the early explorers and what we earlier called "American exoticism," associates his hero with a long-standing and still present tendency in the American cultural experience: America's ahistorical view of its past and present. Gatsby, like his country, idealizes his past to bring it into congruence with his dream, thereby disabling himself to confront the present realistically. Unlike Nick, who learns through Gatsby's experience, Gatsby refuses to subject the idealized object of his hope to scrutiny and for this he must die. It now remains to examine Gatsby more closely and to analyze the content and significance of his dream. The emphasis here will be on pointing up Gatsby's Americanness and, further, on demonstrating in what ways his dream is to be taken as the dream of America.

When Gatsby calls on Nick for the first time and invites him to lunch in the city, he speaks to Nick while balancing himself on the running board of his car with a "resourcefulness of movement" that Nick notes as "peculiarly American" (p. 64). But it is not only in appearance that Gatsby's Americanness is evidenced. The schedule the young James
Gatz printed on the fly-leaf of his copy of *Hopalong Cassidy* reflects the influence that Ben Franklin's ideals had on him. Like that prototype of the hard-working, clean-living, right-thinking Yankee, Gatsby divided his day between work and study, allowing only scant moments for recreation and pleasure. The Gospel of Success was his Holy Word. "He'd of helped build up the country," comments his grieving father later, "he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill" (p. 169).

In several other ways Fitzgerald makes a point of associating Gatsby with the American cultural experience. Like the nation he inhabits, Gatsby "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (p. 99). He ceased to be James Gatz the day he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor in Lake Superior. That yacht represented to Gatz "all the beauty and glamour in the world" (p. 101). At that point Gatz's wild fancies took shape--his life took on direction. He became Jay Gatsby and learned from Cody. His belief in his unique destiny will remain but he will imitate Cody in the attainment of his dreams.

Gatsby's *modus vivendi* is shown to be a compound of uniquely American influences. His mentor was "a product...of every rush for metal since seventy-five"--silver in Nevada, gold in the Yukon, and finally copper in Montana (p. 100). He "brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon" (p. 101). Cody extracted wealth from the land: he represents that aspect of the American character that in the nineteenth century sought the "Big Strike" and in the twentieth, the "Fast Buck." His very name seems to suggest corruption of an originally pristine American impulse. In it Daniel Boone, the pioneer, is linked with Bill Cody, slaughterer
of buffalo and carnival man. He rapes the land, siphons off its wealth, and then cruises rootlessly about the edges of the country he has helped to despoil. His raw brand of ruthlessness is an anachronism in the twentieth century, but his successor, Wolfshelm, partakes of his ethic. 10 So for Gatsby the transition from Cody to "gonnegtions" in New York was not really too difficult. Gatsby's identity is formed by these influences and so it follows naturally that he employ Cody and Wolfshelm's methods in attempting to win Daisy. In his quest for his ideal, Gatsby utilizes deception and illegal transactions--his uniquely American venture combines both dream and corruption.

His great parties, designed above all to attract by their gorgeous light his illusive ideal, bring instead the hordes of guests that Nick once records on an old timetable dated July 5th. The date is not a coincidence. Gatsby's parties and the illegal pursuits that support them are meant to be seen as the wayward development of the freedom America announced on the 4th. The fall from the heights that Gatsby's undertakings represent reflects how pitifully America has performed since the foundation of the Republic. Even the moon that shines on the superficial gaiety of Gatsby's fests came, Nick supposes, "out of a caterer's basket" (p. 43). And then in an image that suggests the connection between Gatsby's parties and the historical attitude that produced the exploitation of America's natural wealth, we are told that each weekend a machine in Gatsby's kitchen reduced five crates of oranges and lemons to a "pyramid of pulpless halves"--at the rate of two hundred oranges per half-hour (p. 39). So closely associated then is Gatsby with economic activity of a uniquely American kind that when Fitzgerald,
echoing the New Testament, writes that Gatsby was "a son of God...[and] must be about his Father's business," one is led to wonder if perhaps the Founding Fathers are meant as well. Small wonder then that Lionel Trilling suggests that Gatsby, "divided between power and dream, comes inevitably to stand for America itself." Certainly the book's final poetic paragraphs identify Gatsby and his dream as products of the American experience. But before attempting to interpret the novel's final important lines, we should direct our attention to Gatsby's dream and its concrete manifestation, Daisy.

Daisy has been described as possessing a "wonderfully representative quality" that marks her unmistakably as a member of the Jazz Age, and she certainly belongs to that age. But even more is she American. Her name, a wholly American name, provides hints of an almost symbolic significance. She is gay, "sophisticated" (that is the word she herself uses in a fit of self-irony), insincere, selfish and thoroughly tarnished. Corrupt is appropriate as well since Fitzgerald provides glimpses that would indicate some initial value, some basic goodness that is now blighted.

Metaphor plays an important role in coloring the reader's reaction to Daisy. During Nick's first visit he notes the impression made on him by Daisy in the fading light of day:

> For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened—then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk (p. 14).

The suggestions here defy precise definition, but noting that the sunshine falls with "romantic affection" on her "glowing face" and deserts
her with "regret," one is moved somehow to submit to her charm. And yet the glow does desert her; the tone is a mixed one, suggesting, above all, loss. Later Nick will correctly detect an unmistakable "insincerity" in her, but nevertheless he recognizes a certain depth that Jordan, for example, lacks. An innate and now-banalized romanticism in Daisy is reflected when she says: "I always watch for the longest day in the year and then miss it" (p. 12). Jordan, for her part, responds by yawning and suggests: "We ought to plan something." Daisy's faded, now dimly perceptible value almost makes us sympathize with her cry of despair: "that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (p. 17). But later, as Gatsby displays his shirts in a gesture obviously meant to impress her, Daisy responds accordingly: "they're such beautiful shirts," she weeps, "it makes me sad because I've never seen such--such beautiful shirts before" (pp. 93-94). Here again a basic sensitivity is demonstrated, yet it is a sensitivity so thoroughly compromised by the banality of its object that the scene is shot through the bathos. Daisy, whose "carelessness," and "insincerity" will later bring about Gatsby's death, is shown to be implicated in corruption, yet is not as shallow as Jordan nor as crass and boorish as Tom. She has, even as we recognize her terrible flaws, a residuum of ineluctable beauty.

But finally this almost ambivalent image of Daisy is exploded, and deliberately so, by Fitzgerald himself. As he has Nick and others discuss her, he deftly chooses to focus on the power of her voice. A voice, in that it is ephemeral, immaterial, and able to misrepresent its source, served his artistic and thematic purposes well. At first we learn that
Daisy's was a "low, thrilling" voice and even more that it possessed an "excitement," a singing compulsion, a whispered 'Listen,' a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour" (pp. 9-10 my italics). Here Nick's remarks serve to associate Daisy's voice with promise, with the future, with hope. Later Jordan adds a cryptic comment that enriches its significance: "—and yet there's something in that voice of hers..." (p. 79). After Daisy is finally reunited with Gatsby, Nick ponders its power: "I think that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be overdreamed—that voice was a deathless song" (p. 97). Daisy's voice is here even more directly linked to dreams and to Gatsby's dream. All these references do more than describe Daisy's manner of speech. They suggest the qualities that render Gatsby awestruck, while drawing her, as a disembodied power rather than as a person, into close relationship with Gatsby's and ultimately America's Dream. Her voice is suggestive of promise: mysterious, seductive, a summoner of dreams. And then after so enriching his subject, Fitzgerald has Gatsby himself deliver a final comment which, because of the development traced above, takes on the resonance of thunder. Nick sets the stage:

"She's got an indiscrete voice," I remarked. "It's full of—" I hesitated. "Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly (p. 120).

With a stroke, a single sentence, Fitzgerald draws the elements of his design together. Daisy, whose hold on Gatsby's imagination is linked to her voice and its association with hope and American hopefulness, is, in the end, "full of money." As the object of Gatsby's quest she represents
the American Dream, but, Fitzgerald says, the dream has become a dream of money. She motivates Gatsby, in fact, Daisy is the very reason for Gatsby's life -- and finally for his death. And this dream is now shown to be money! Daisy is then the perfect representation in fictional terms of the state of the American Dream in a degenerate era.

Gatsby's statement likewise demonstrates that he has accepted the values of Tom and Daisy's society. This acceptance is underlined by the calmness he demonstrates when a disturbed Nick asks how Wolfsheim was able to "fix" the World Series: "He just saw the opportunity," was his reply (p. 74). Yet even as he recognizes the true nature of its object, he continues to believe in his dream. Now certainly this double vision indicates a moral obtuseness in Gatsby, or as Marius Bewley has put it, "a failure of the critical faculty," a failure that, "seems to be an inherent part of the American Dream." But Gatsby's failure is not merely that he does not, in Bewley's words, "understand that Daisy is as fully immersed in the American world as Tom himself." Gatsby's failure, and here his fate is even more closely related to America's, is a result of a deficiency in his attitude toward time and history.

Gatsby wants Daisy in the present, but even more wants her in the past. Failing that, he seeks to destroy the past that existed and recreate it to fit his vision of the future. In the presence of Tom, Nick and Jordan, he urges Daisy to help him obliterate the past she has shared with Tom: "Just tell him the truth--that you never loved him" (p. 132). Daisy at first reluctantly submits to Gatsby's Quixotic attempt at impressing his vision on reality, but finally cries out in protest: "Oh, you want too much...I love you now--isn't that enough?
I can't help what's past." Gatsby wants "too much," he seeks to deny time, the concrete past, history. Like Quentin Compson he tries to kill time because it threatens his vision. Quentin's desperation leads him to twist the hands off his watch and Gatsby, in a manner more suited to him, almost breaks Nick's clock during his conversation with Daisy. Leaning against the mantel *the pressure of his head* (p. 87, my italics) causes the clock to "tilt dangerously." And as he nervously rights it he blurts out an apology abundant with significance: "I'm sorry about the clock." Gatsby is not only "sorry about the clock," he is determined to deny its existence. When Nick cautions Gatsby about Daisy with: "I wouldn't ask too much of her.... You can't repeat the past" (p. 111), Gatsby cries out "incredulously": "Can't repeat the past? Why of course you can!" The "Daisy" that Gatsby seeks doesn't exist in the present; instead, she partakes of the past and is informed by the future. Gatsby's dream, to put it another way, is an unrealizable amalgam of idealized past and unattainable future. He hopes that by recapturing a past he will thereby find a key to his own identity and then will be able to move on to some "orgiastic" future. Nick hints at such an interpretation:

He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy...if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was...(pp. 111-12).

The song Klipspringer plays for Gatsby and Daisy on the occasion of their reunion offers in its way a comment on Gatsby's stance. The last line quoted is: "In the meantime, In Between time---." The last
phrase of the line, "ain't we got fun?" is suppressed by Fitzgerald, and to good purpose. Gatsby is caught "in between time;" he lives both in a past he has created and in a future that is likewise unattainable. As Kenneth Eble has put it:

His vision creates both the mystic past and the orgiastic future; the present time has sullied and one and the other is always beyond reach.15

And so Gatsby's "in between time" is a present that he cannot accept. His dream, formed by the future out of the substance of the past, stands between him and the present.

The "meaning" of Gatsby's dream is directly related by Fitzgerald to the dream of the early settlers of America, a dream, he goes on to say, that is shared by their descendents. In the previous pages I have tried to outline the content and the background of Gatsby's dream. What remains to be explained is the relationship suggested in the novel between Gatsby's dream and the American Dream. Gatsby, like the early Dutch sailors, is smitten with a "capacity for wonder." In the past the now "vanished trees" that have made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to "the last and greatest of all human dreams" (p. 182). At that "enchanted moment" in the past the Dream was inspired by the "fresh, green breast of the new world." It was grounded on a hope, but it was a hope with a real, if untried, basis: the great untested, and as yet unspoiled Continent. The central message of the book's final page is that the attitude toward America of the Dutch sailors still flourishes in a historical present to which the dream no longer bears any significant relationship. The Great Gatsby is then, in Bewley's words, "an exploration of the American dream as it exists in a
corrupt period. And yet Fitzgerald's book is not only a satire, and Gatsby is more than "a tragic-comic figure in a social comedy"; his death, despite his corruptness and superficiality, affects us in a tragic way. Owl-Eyes' benediction at Gatsby's funeral bites deep: "The poor son-of-a-bitch," he says. The book is, in short, a serious statement about America's attitude toward itself. Once we see that Gatsby's dream and America's are essentially the same, then his death must be viewed as a serious and significant event.

With this novel Fitzgerald "created his own version of national tragedy." That is, he shows not only that the Dream is anachronistic, seductive and powerful, but that it is destructive as well. The "capacity for wonder" is not condemned, in fact, it is praised. But the particular manifestation that this attitude has taken in America is shown to be dangerous. The Dream has become a confused mixture of spiritual and material elements. It was just such a confusion that Thoreau had earlier warned against. In the "Baker Farm" chapter in Walden he holds up the Irish farmer, John Fields, as an example of the men who had come to America for the wrong reasons. Fields was wasting his life, Thoreau exclaims, "and yet he had rated it as a bargain in coming to America, that there you could get tea, and coffee, and meat every day." "The only true America," he continued, is a place where one is free of such things and the economic and political net that they indirectly draw around one. America, for Thoreau, meant freedom from material goods and not a more accelerated quest for them. Dreiser had, as we have seen, commented in his own way on this vulgarization of the American Dream. Fitzgerald's position is a variation on the theme
sounded by Thoreau and Dreiser. His novel demonstrates that when such a confusion develops, and develops unrecognized, its seductive power is deadly. Gatsby succumbs to it and the Dream kills him. The demented Wilson pulls the trigger, but it is finally Gatsby's own vision that causes his end.

Gatsby's attitude toward time, when placed in a cultural perspective, can be seen as a manifestation of America's long-standing view of her destiny. The American belief in the future is fed by an idealized view of her past. She stands for hope because she has stood for hope. Her early leaders are enshrined in white marble monuments like secular saints and her main harbor is guarded by a symbol of Liberty. The past was glorious and the future will be as well—the "in between time," the present, is obscured by the myths of Past and Future. Nick learns, and presumably, the reader along with him, that dreams must be examined. An individual, and a culture, must evaluate its dreams and ideals in the light of experience and the present viewed on its own terms. Daisy, the perfect representation of America's ambiguous yet undeniably sullied present, is so thoroughly colored over by Gatsby's imagination that he cannot cope successfully with reality. He tries to convert Daisy, to force her into his idealized world and he dies in the attempt. Gatsby, in so many ways the paradigmatic American, failed to realize that the Dream "was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night" (p. 182). He was "preyed" upon by "the foul dust [that] floated in the wake of his dreams" (p. 2). Possessed by his and his nation's vision, he acts out his culture's dictates and is sacrificed to
them. The American Dream, still alive in a newer, more complex age must, suggests the novel, be re-evaluated.
NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN


2. The Great Gatsby (New York: Scribners and Sons, 1925), p. 2. All future references to the novel are to this edition and will be noted in the text.


7. Scrimgeour, p. 78.


15. Eble, p. 97.


CHAPTER EIGHT

LIGHT IN AUGUST

While the relationship between the two main characters of Light In August, Gail Hightower and Joe Christmas, was held by early critics of the novel to be little more than tenuous, many studies have since established that, different as they are, the somnolent minister and the violence-prone Christmas are closely linked in that both are ostracized scapegoats of an intolerant and bigoted community. Hightower falls victim to the South's religious values while Christmas is killed because he violates its racial and sexual codes. Seen in this light the novel could be read as a tract in which Faulkner flails at the Calvinist inspired aberrations so much in evidence in Jefferson. Such a reading is of course congruent with one of the main thrusts of the American novelistic tradition that has been highlighted in this study. Here is further evidence of the inflexibility and intolerance that distorts Hester Prynne and constricts Huck Finn. Yet it has not been the aim of this survey merely to point out an intolerance or constraint in American society (a charge that might be leveled at any culture) but rather to establish that the unique national self-image described in the opening chapters is related to the tendency of the American imagination to create characters who gravitate toward extreme positions.

Characters in classic American novels are compulsively led to adapt themselves to society's views by what has been called the "tyranny
of the majority." But what is of at least equal importance is that the marked propensity in America to idealize and mythologize the country's present as well as its destiny insinuates itself into the characters of its fiction in a direct fashion. Hester's grotesque guilt, or Ahab's aggressive effort to eradicate Moby Dick, the hostile element that does not fit his culture's cosmology, Huck's inability to work free of the "kings" that constrict his views, beliefs and to an extent, his actions, Carrie's illusory belief in material wealth, and Gatsby's adherence to a compromised and corrupting ideal, all grow out of American roots. These characters fall prey to idealized and abstract visions that confuse and disorient them. Similarly, both Hightower and Christmas are distorted by the extreme visions and codes that they embrace. Hightower is mesmerized by an event in his family's past, while Christmas embraces and is destroyed by the anachronistic and destructive racial categories of his culture; both are slavishly bound to visions that cripple and distort them.

Gatsby, preyed upon by "the foul dust [that] floated in the wake of his dreams," offers convenient points of comparison with Hightower and Christmas. Like Gatsby, both of Faulkner's characters are dislocated men who are rendered incapable of satisfactorily contending with the present because of adherence to visions that estrange and fragment them. Hightower resembles Gatsby in that his life is dominated by an inadequately evaluated event in the past. A further parallel is suggested by the fact that the dreams of both men are shown to be unworthy of the allegiance they command and in both cases serve to intrude upon the present and render the characters they control incapable or unwilling to
deal effectively with reality. Gatsby, for all the glitter of his many parties, is, it should be remembered, as much a hermit as is the brooding anchorite Hightower. Focused on an image of Daisy every bit as compulsively as Hightower remains riveted on the military raid on Jefferson, he develops a private world that like Hightower's revery, serves to isolate him. Finally, just as Gatsby's idealization of Daisy was shown to be supported by his culture's tendency to romanticize its past, Hightower's immersion in his grandfather's dubious Civil War escapade grows out of his Southern society's obsession with its past.

Christmas, like Hightower and Gatsby is compulsively led by a vision but the one that drives him derives even more clearly and directly from his society. Gatsby's romantic dream and the crude means employed to realize it reflect long-standing tendencies in American culture and Hightower's self-induced encapsulation in the past is supported as we will see by his environment, but Christmas' accommodation to the racial categories of his society is so complete that he can think of himself only in their terms. The grip of the hate-inducing but socially-sanctioned code becomes so complete that he comes to prize violence and finally welcomes self-annihilation. His self-alienation reminds one of Hester and even more of Dimmesdale while his single-minded absorption in his adopted vision and self-destructive tendencies invite comparisons with Ahab. Christmas, in a word, becomes what the rigid racial code of his society demands: the ultimate outsider. He is the external antagonist because he accepts his society's black/white dicotomy but fits into neither world. Hester was able to retain at least a degree of self-esteem and Ahab had his "humanities," but Christmas, believes so
thoroughly in his adopted code that he represses all traces of affection and sympathy and tolerates only hate. There is nothing romantic about the callous Christmas nor is his vision in any way associated with an ideal, and so he distinguishes himself from Carrie or Gatsby, but through his unbounded preoccupation with the vision he has chosen he reveals an essential affinity with all of the characters we have been analyzing.

Hightower becomes the scapegoat of Jefferson, Mississippi because he violates the community's religious ideas, and in his alienation he resembles Joe Christmas. Yet to a fuller extent than Joe, he seems to welcome his role; in a sense, his social martyrdom is self-ordained. He rejects the Jefferson of his day in favor of a past moment, "a single instant" of darkness in which a "horse galloped and a gun crashed."

Hightower never really encounters the present, but lives as though "the seed which his grandfather had transmitted to him had been on the horse too...and time had stopped there..." The finite world of the present can not equal his image of what ought to be, so he opts for an embellished recollection of his grandfather's Civil War raid. Hightower's alienation arises from his adherence to the past rather than to the present. Sherwood Anderson, to whom Faulkner acknowledged a debt, employs a term in his introduction to Winesburg, Ohio that seems to describe Hightower: "grotesque." The old man writing "The Book of the Grotesque" expresses an insight that applies to Faulkner's minister:

It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.
Hightower makes a "falsehood" of both his religion and the memory of his grandfather. By twisting these truths to satisfy his needs, he makes a ghost of himself and at the same time reveals inherently destructive elements in the Southern tradition. "Truth" becomes for Hightower anything which will serve his dream. He accepts only those aspects of present reality that complement his design. He exploits the woman he marries, the Church, and the town of Jefferson in the name of his truth.

Hightower's relationship with his wife reveals the extent to which he has been absorbed by his grotesque vision. We learn not only of his neglect during their marriage, but are also told that on their first meeting "he did not see her at all because of the face he had already in his mind" (p. 420). He imposes his notions on her and uses her to obtain a position in Jefferson, the scene of his grandfather's episode. Soon after his arrival the congregation begins to listen to him

with something cold and astonished and dubious, since he sounded like it was the town he desired to live in and not the church and the people who composed the church, that he wanted to serve (p. 52).

Hightower comes to Jefferson not to move among "the blind passions and lifted hands," or to attend to the "voices of men," (p. 426) but to await the visitations of the galloping ghost. And when his wife's "scandalous" death moves his congregation to desert him, Hightower greets their rejection with an attitude akin to relief: "his lips were drawn back as though he were smiling" (p. 59). At this point his decision to serve his dream rather than the world about him is confirmed. Hightower's alienation, or as he calls it, "immunity," follows from his loyalty to his dream.
The gospel he proclaims while a preacher reflects his interior world. His guiding idea is compounded of vague remembrances of Civil War heroism and Christianity:

It was as if he couldn't get religion and that galloping cavalry and his dead grandfather shot from the galloping horse untangled from each other, even in the pulpit (p. 53).

This "gospel" and the nightly visitations of the "galloping hooves" that sustain Hightower trouble many readers, and justifiably so. The content of the vision is so fantastic, so unreal, that one is almost tempted to cease believing in this character. Still it is important to realize that Hightower's dream is nurtured by a certain nostalgic attitude toward the Civil War in the South and therefore the illusion is grounded in the Southern tradition. One of Faulkner's characters, Shreve, perceives the extent to which the Southern present is marked by memories of the War Between the States as he contrasts his Canadian environment with Quentin Compson's Southern background in Absalom, Absalom!:

> We don't live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves...and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? something you live and breath in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago?3

Yet this cultural backdrop lends scant credulity to a vision so obviously out of touch with reality. In fact, one of Hightower's reveries seems to reveal that he, himself, recognizes that the action does not merit the value he has conferred upon it.

They didn't know who fired the shot: They never did know. They didn't try to find out. It may have been a woman, likely enough the wife of a Confederate soldier. I like to think so. It's fine so. Any soldier can be killed by the enemy in the heat of battle, by a weapon approved by the arbiters and rulemakers of warfare. Or
by a woman in a bedroom. But not with a shotgun, a fowling piece, in a henhouse (p. 425).

Hightower's mythologizing imagination, his attitude toward the past, rather than the content of the memory, is what Faulkner seems to be focusing our attention on. To put it another way, the fact that the vision is so absurd would seem to indicated that Faulkner's major thrust is made not against the martial spirit in the South, but against his character's orientation toward myths of the past as against present realities.

Late in the novel Faulkner supplies the reader with information on Hightower's childhood to elucidate the stance of the character in his mature years. His father's severity created a distance between the two that "not even the decades of years could measure" (p. 411). The fear that his father inspired in him caused the sensitive boy to skip a generation and look for paternity in his dead grandfather or rather, in the image of him projected by the tales of an old Black servant. As a child he discovers that life among "ghosts, never seen in the flesh, heroic, simple, warm," is far less painful and threatening than one with his father, "who was a phantom which would never die" (p. 418).

Hightower accepts, however, his father's Calvinist Christianity and enters the seminary. He takes up this vocation because "he believed with a calm joy that if ever there was a shelter, it would be the Church" (p. 419, my italics). The ministry is an extension of the protective tactic of his childhood:

When he believed that he had heard the call it seemed to him that he could see his future, his life, intact and on all sides complete and inviolable, like a classic and serene vase, where the spirit could be born anew sheltered from the harsh gale of living (p. 419, my italics).
It is the "harsh gale of living" that Hightower seeks to escape. But the Church not only offers Hightower protection from the present, and even a platform from which to proclaim his vision, it also provides him with an attitude toward the world and life among men that furthers his scheme of withdrawal. The Calvinist value system of Doc Hines and Mr. McEachern leads them to prize suffering, and generally, to depreciate the mundane. Hightower's world-view is similarly tainted. It allows, even encourages, him to denigrate the reality of the present for an ephemeral ideal, an ideal that calls for self-crucifixion. As he sits at his dark window, he listens to the singing of his former congregation:

the music has still a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon... (p. 231).

Death, deliverance from social realities, becomes a positive good. The music, appreciated as an expression of the religion's tenets, leads Hightower to reflect: "and so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?" (p. 322). Hightower's thoughts, coming years after his expulsion from the Church, reveal that he perceives the potential for intolerance and violence in the sect's position, but what is beyond his grasp is that his exile, his alienation from the present, "had been his desire since before the seminary" (p. 428). He has seized upon elements of Calvinism to bolster an earlier rejection of his surroundings in favor of a malleable past world open to his manipulation. The notions of self-crucifixion and martyrdom are convenient tools for Hightower; they justify his disengagement from the present.
I by no means intend to discount Hightower's indictment of Calvinist Christianity. In fact, I am in full agreement with critics like William Van O'Connor who hold that in this novel Faulkner puts Calvinism in a damming light. Calvinism's destructive elements are convincingly demonstrated through Hines, McEachern and Joanna Burden. Hightower, like these characters or for that matter like Dimmesdale or Ahab is dislocated by this tradition. But Hightower's dissociation from the present as well as his consciousness of the aberrations of his religious tradition suggest that Faulkner's broader purposes range beyond a critique of Calvinism. Hightower's radical alienation from the present shows that a number of sanctioned American traditions, applied inappropriately and adhered to compulsively, are disruptive forces in that they induce characters to create extreme inner worlds. In Hightower's case both religion and reveries of martial glory encourage him to reject his present and the people around him. The availability of these cultural influences complicates his ability to cope with reality. And while neither Calvinism nor tales of the Civil War can be said to have directly caused his alienation, they have contributed to his dissatisfaction with the present by offering imagined worlds that enfeeble it. Hightower is alienated from the present because instead of viewing the past as a burden to be borne, contended with and interpreted, he allows the past and its traditions to control him.

Byron Bunch, reflecting on Hightower's situation, expresses this idea metaphorically:

Yes. A man will tell about how he'd like to escape from living folks. But it's the dead folks that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and don't try to hold him, that he can't escape from (p. 65).
The "dead folks" that hold Hightower captive are phantoms, concocted memories of the War, images from the past which obscure, even blot out the present. I will later attempt to show how Christmas' stance reflects a similar orientation and thus demonstrate how closely the fates of the two central characters are related.

But in the end, Hightower is "restored," if only for a short time. The process of his liberation is, of course, climaxed in the penultimate chapter with his vision of the revolving wheel, a vision in which even moral opposites, executioner and victim, Grimm and Christmas, blend as part of a new harmony. But Hightower's illumination is not easily won. He must first suffer the realization that his disengagement from the present has harmed others: his wife, his congregation, even Christmas.

Both Lena Grove and Joe Christmas are to an extent responsible for Hightower's salvation. After contact with Lena Grove, whose natural existence in the present avoids the aberrations that plague him, Hightower evidences the first signs of improvement.

He moves like a man with a purpose now, who for twenty-five years has been doing nothing at all between the time to wake and the time to sleep again. Neither is the book which he now chooses the Tennyson: this time he chooses food for a man. It is Henry IV (p. 355).

Immediately previous to this encounter Bryon found Hightower asleep. As he approaches the bed he hears the sound of Hightower's sleep. Even the minister's snoring reflects the half-life he follows in his conscious moments:
There was a quality of profound and complete surrender in it. Not of exhaustion, but surrender, as though he had given over and relinquished completely that grip upon that blending of pride and hope and vanity and fear, that strength to cling to either defeat or victory, which is that I-am, and the relinquishment of which is usually death (p. 345).

But Lena only begins the process; it is Hightower's involvement with Christmas that brings him back, if only briefly, to the living.

Byron is the mediator between Hightower and reality; he facilitates, even arranges his involvement with Lena and then Christmas. As Mrs. Hines haltingly invites Hightower's participation in Christmas' fate, Byron thinks:

It's right funny. You'd think they had done got swapped somewhere. Like it was him that had a nigger grandson waiting to be hung (p. 339).

Even though Hightower persistently seeks to avoid involvement with Christmas, he somehow senses that their fates are bound together. When the proprietor of the grocery store that Hightower visits tells him that "they found that nigger's trail at last," (p. 269) and goes on to relate that Christmas refuses to flee and is still in the vicinity, Hightower thinks: "I won't! I won't! I have bought immunity. I have paid. I have paid" (p. 270). He immediately and correctly anticipates the community's violent reaction: "and they have...," (p. 270) he gasps. Later as he listens to the singing of his former congregation, he says aloud: "And they will do it gladly...since to pity him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly (p. 322). Knowing that the community's racial hatred and its impregnable self-righteousness are sustained and sanctioned by the Church, he fears for Christmas and immediately senses kinship.
Christmas and he belong to the brotherhood of outcasts. The congregation's music is as "stern and implacable" as is their God. He demands crucifixion and they will mete it out. They, like McEachern and Doc Hines, look upon themselves as "instruments of His will," (p. 333) and they will do His work. Hightower has suffered at their hands and so as he hears of the pursuit organized to hound Christmas, he thinks, "And him too" (p. 271). Years in Jefferson have made him familiar with the "theology" that Doc Hines slobbers forth as he calls Christmas "a pollution and an abomination" (p. 338) and condemns "woman evil."

Doc does not meet Joanna Burden, but the reader easily appreciates the common bond between Hines' Southern and Miss Burden's New England form of Calvinism. Her association of guilt and damnation with sexuality (while in the throes of a neurotic sexual relationship with Christmas she once prays: "Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while" (p. 231)) coincides with Hines' aversion to "womanfilth and bitchery." The masculine God of Calvinism, along with the moral isolation she suffers as a Yankee devoted to the advancement of the Black in the South, has divested her of femininity: "There was no feminine vacillation, no coyness.... It was as if he [Christmas] struggled physically with another man... (p. 205). But it is her attitude toward Blacks that reveals the strongest affinity between Hines and her. Doc Hines sees on the face of Joe Christmas' father "the black curse of God Almighty" (p. 327), and Joanna lives under the "Burden" preached to her by her father:

The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own... (p. 222).
Although she uses them differently, she labors under the same abstract racial codes that Hines does. She sometimes awaits a sexual encounter with Christmas breathing "Negro! Negro!" (p. 227). And when Christmas finally realizes that in her eyes he is an abstract object to be formed into an instrument for God's work among His cursed race through prayer, when she demands that he pray, he kills her.

Joanna is of course only one of many who treat Christmas as an object. The culture's intolerance, fed, as Hightower's observations and the fanaticism of Hines prove, by its Calvinism, underlies the attitude of the crowd that forms at the scene of Joanna Burden's murder: "They believed aloud," Faulkner tells us, "that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro" (p. 251). Christmas falls victim to this culture's distorted values. He suffers while young at the hands of the Calvinist rigidity of Hines and McEachern and later is always the outsider, but as Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, there is an important sense in which Christmas is the severest "Calvinist" in the novel. He rejects McEachern's religion but imbibes from him a dependence on a simple, clearly-defined code of reward and punishment—a code, above all, of Law. So rigid in his mental framework that he comes to hate women since they threaten, by means of tenderness, to undermine his system. He could "depend" on "the hard ruthless man"—McEachern's injustice "neither outraged nor surprised him;" what he hated "was the woman," Mrs. McEachern. She represented.

that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men (p. 147).
Christmas' negative reaction toward women reflects his attitude toward himself and toward society in general. When he first appears at the mill in Jefferson and takes a job he is described in the following manner:

He did not look like a professional hobo in his professional rags, but there was something rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square inch of earth his home. And he carried his knowledge with him always as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud (p. 77).

Here we are alerted to one of the most bewildering aspects of Christmas, his insistence on his alienation, his flight from acceptance and love. The awareness of his alienation, he "carried...as though it were a banner"; he seems to thrive on rejection. This orientation cannot be fully accounted for by means of reference to an "inferiority complex." In fact it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that Christmas depends on rejection. In another novel, Quentin Compson, reflecting on "the Negro," touches on the truth that Christmas lives:

I realized that a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among.6

Joe Christmas is the obverse reflection of other men. He fears not pain or injustice, but love. When the prostitute Bobbie turns against him and screams her insults, Joe's fragile connection with humanity is all but broken: "Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man!" (p. 189). Afterwards, he is convinced that he is a "nigger," that he is unacceptable. Her condemning words and the beating he receives reinforce the stunning impact of the orphanage dietitian's words years before: "You little rat!... You little nigger bastard!" (p. 107).
When Joanna Burden offers Christmas a financial arrangement he thinks: "It would mean ease, security, for the rest of your life. You would never have to move again" (p. 232). But then another thought interposes itself: "No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be (p. 323, my italics). Here Christmas reveals an awareness of his inner life that is too often neglected: he has chosen his lot of outsider. Earlier, when Mrs. McEachern gave him food after her husband had starved and beaten the boy in an attempt to make a Presbyterian of him, Christmas responded, in characteristic fashion, by throwing her offering on the floor. As he flees after crushing McEachern's skull with a chair, Christmas takes the step-mother's earnings with these harsh words:

"I didn't ask you for it," he said. "Remember that. I didn't ask, because I was afraid you would give it to me. I just took it. Don't forget that" (p. 182).

Taking the money is not enough. Christmas must inflict pain as well, or rather, he must insist on his rejection of assistance and love. Once, after treating Joanna Burden in a particularly brutal way, he thinks:

"At last I have made a woman of her at last.... Now she hates me" (p. 207).

He despairs of love because he rejects himself. But his self-rejection is prompted by his acceptance of his society's rigid racial categories. He thinks of himself as "nigger" and therefore unacceptable. He hates himself and feeds that self-hatred with rejection by others. Much of Christmas' aggression is best viewed as an attempt to fortify a deep-seated self-rejection. In encounters with others he consistently seeks to stir up resentment and even violence. Time and again he tells prostitutes that he is black and seems to cherish the beatings and
ejections that follow. With men he employed a similar tactic:

Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white man into calling him a Negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; now he fought a Negro who called him white (p. 196).

The only response that enrages him is indifference to race, to his adopted value system. On the occasion of a prostitute's failure to react violently to his revelation, he nearly beats her to death. She does not reject him, is not disturbed by his disclosure, because race has no importance to her. With this reaction Christmas cannot contend. By assuming the role of eternal protagonist he keeps his own system of values intact.

He turns so totally to his society's racial categories because he lacks a sufficient sense of identity. Christmas does not know who he is. The Negro caretaker at the orphanage in which he spends his earliest years tells him: "You don't know who you are. And more than that, you won't never know. You'll live and you'll die and you won't never know" (p. 336). The shadowy, uncertain nature of his personal past inclines him all the more to acquiesce to inherited societal values. He, like Hightower, is victim of the past, and the distorted racial values of the past teach him to hate his "nigger blood." Of that much of his past he has decided, even without being sure about his father's race. When Joanna Burden asks how he knows that he is part Negro, he replies: "I don't know it," and then adds, "If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time" (pp. 222-23). And indeed he has "wasted a lot of time." Before coming to Jefferson Christmas spends a reckless, aimless fifteen years following a street that
ran into Oklahoma and Missouri and as far south as Mexico and then back north to Chicago and Detroit and then back south again and at last to Mississippi (p. 195).

He is "doomed with motion, driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair" (p. 197). He believes that "nigger blood" is detestable and so despairs. Further, he believes, like the distorted Calvinist Ahab, that he is "determined."

The dark was filled with the voices, myriad, out of all time that he had known, as though all the past was a flat pattern. And going on: tomorrow night, all the tomorrows, to be a part of the flat pattern, going on. He thought of that with quiet astonishment: going on, myriad, familiar, since all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be, since tomorrow to-be and had been would be the same (p. 246).

His future is sealed off; there is no hope. The "flat pattern" of the past extends into tomorrow.

His despair is deepened by the realization that, as a "marginal man," he can fit into neither the white nor the black worlds. He resents the white community because it stirs in him the hope of an acceptable inheritance that he so craves, but must repress.

On the other hand, he can not feel welcome in the black community. After leaving the "cold hard air of white people," he looks upon the section of Jefferson inhabited by Blacks. What he sees is
the black pit from which he had fled... No light came from it... It just lay there, black, impenetrable, in its garland of August tremulous lights. It might have been the original quarry, abyss itself (p. 101).

Christmas flees what he thinks is loneliness, but what he steadily wishes to escape is himself. He sees, on the day of his "capture," that the street he has followed has "made a circle":

"I have been farther in these seven days than in all the thirty years," he thinks. "But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo" (p. 296).

The "nigger blood," his unacceptability, has formed an inescapable ring and his flight from himself is finally seen as futile. The road to Mottstown is the only one left. His surrender is the inevitable conclusion of his self-destructive exodus. He realizes that "for thirty years he has lived inside an orderly parade of named and numbered days like fence pickets" (pp. 289-90). Life outside the fence, without the order that the racial categories represent, would be a denial of the previous thirty years, and a step into a new world in which the ominous shape of a new, as yet undetermined self lurks. Christmas cannot confront such a future. The past, the ring, encircles him. He cannot, he will not, escape his past. He sees that not only time, but "his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage" (p. 140). Christmas is the ultimate captive; like Hester, Ahab, Huck or Gatsby, he is at the mercy of ideas and values given him by his culture. Another place would not offer escape because "his own flesh," or rather the idea he has accepted about his supposed racial composition, is within him and he cannot escape himself. Rather than escape, he flings himself into the old established
world where he will be received as a "nigger" and be treated accordingly.

Percy Grimm, the man who will execute Christmas in the name of "order," is shown to be something other than a neurotic crank; he is in many ways Jefferson's representative. As he cruelly castrates Joe and hisses: "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell," (p. 407) he expresses some of the latent feelings of the town. But Grimm imagines himself in even more grandiose terms: a defender of America. He never forgave his parents for the fact that he was "too young to be in the European War," (p. 394) and his first real fist fight is with a disillusioned veteran of the First World War who announces that, were the war to be repeated, he would fight with Germany against France. Grimm's counter indicates much about the workings of his mind: "Against America too?". The signs of the beating he takes, after first striking the ex-soldier, he wore "proudly." Grimm suffers defeat, but is assured that he has defended his ideal of America. Later, given a chance to don the military uniform through membership in the National Guard, he happily assumes with it, what Faulkner calls, a "burden." Grimm's burden was as "bright, weightless and martial as his signatory brass": (p. 395):

*a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men... (p. 395).

For this "belief," Faulkner tells us, Grimm was ready to lay down his life. He is called "sincere," "indefatigable," and finally, "prophetlike" (p. 396-7). He is, in fact, like many of the characters in this novel,
a believer, a follower of a creed, an abstract system of ideas and values that blinds him to the needs of humanity and the present. It is Percy Grimm's ability to affirm his belief that wins him the town's admiration:

the town suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs (p. 400).

Through Grimm and the unspeakable cruelty of his violence on Joe Christmas, Faulkner broadens his novel's significance while maintaining his thematic focus. Once again we are confronted with a character who accepts values from the past and is distorted by them. But by his fanatical belief in his "America," Grimm proves wrong the assertion of one of the protesting Legion members who says, "This is Jefferson's trouble, not Washington's" (p. 397). The career of Joe Christmas and his terrible death is Washington's trouble; it holds a significance that goes beyond what Faulkner once called his "little postage stamp of ground," Yoknapatawpha County.

Light in August shows an America struggling under the heavy burden of a fully developed past. Its racial and religious ideas, as well as some of its deepest sexual attitudes, constrict men in the present. Joanna Burden, Hightower, and Christmas are, each in his or her way, martyrs; but they are martyrs to and for inherited ideas. They sacrifice themselves and others to these conceptions. Their society, peopled with men like Hines, McEachern and Grimm, is no less disoriented. It too demands, and receives, its victims. The personal histories of the Apostate Hightower, the "Negro" Christmas, and the Yankee Miss Burden reflect the same distortion that on a societal level characterizes
Jefferson: "a perpetual denial of life for the sake of empty rituals, each of which enshrines some abstraction." The indiscriminate acceptance of anachronistic values of the past is the heart of personal and social evil in Faulkner's world.

It can scarcely be denied that the novel offers a bleak account of the American social landscape. After viewing the repression, bigotry, and violence of Jefferson, the American reader can only wince as Grimm announces his desire to wear a uniform so that the town "can see that Uncle Sam is present in more than spirit" (p. 397). But viewed in comparison with the other classic novels dealt with here, the book presents a further avenue for our consideration. In *Light in August* we meet an America that has forfitted its historic claim as a new beginning. The past, a tradition, and more, a tradition involving anachronistic and distorted values is shown to be flourishing.

The full thrust of this critical assessment of the American reality if fully appreciated only when considered as a corrective reaction to the American self-image that was discussed in the early chapters. The ideal was, as we have seen, articulated by Crèvecouer and even more eloquently by Faulkner's Ike McCaslin in his dialogue with his cousin in Part Four of *The Bear*:

...and the five hundred years of absentee landlords in the Roman bagnios, and the thousand years of wild men from the northern woods who disposessed them and devoured their ravished substance ravished in turn again and then snarled in what you call the old world's worthless twilight over the old world's gnawed bones, blasphemous in His name until He used a simple egg to discover to them a new world where a nation of people could be founded in humility and pity and sufferance and pride of one to another.
In the "old world's worthless twilight," God gave man a new chance, a place where a "new nation could be founded in humility and pity and sufferance and pride of one to another." And Jefferson affords a glimpse of what has become of this new beginning. America as Huck dimly perceived, is not "out of kings," free of coercive forces which constrict and deform individuals. In fact the nagging problems created by the belief that the New World represents a distinct departure from the otherwise universal pattern of imperfection manifest themselves in Faulkner's Jefferson as they had in Hawthorne's old Boston, Twain's ante bellum Mississippi Valley and on Fitzgerald's Long Island in the twenties.
NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

1 Light in August (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p. 430. All future references to the text are from this edition and will be noted in the text.


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