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THE FALLIBLE NARRATOR IN NINETEENTH CENTURY

AMERICAN FICTION

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THE FALLIBLE NARRATOR IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

CHAPTER I

EXPLORATION--DEFINITION

The disappearance of the omniscient and ever-present author is a phenomenon accepted by twentieth century readers of fiction. This is the result of the development of the novel and the short story, including those in-between forms of the novella and the novelette, toward dramatic representation and away from the more epic or historical forms of the earlier novels. In the novels of Fielding, Hugo, or Thackeray, the author believed in intruding to the extent of whole chapters or sections of philosophical or historical digressions. These digressions were often interesting reading in themselves as, for example, Fielding on plagiarism versus lawful prize; Hugo on "Napoleon in Good Humor"; or Thackeray on "How to Live Well on Nothing a Year." Furthermore, they frequently gave to the novel a challenging intellectual content.

But as the deeply rooted complexities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century began to display the direction and rankness of their growth, novelists felt the

inadequacies of explicit statement, of dogma--except possibly the dogmas of art, which were within their own province. In this province of fictional art, moreover, differentiating between what was merely expository and what was representational, the artist began to see that artistically representation was worth more than telling, even if that meant a sacrifice of a certain content which had been associated with his form. Nevertheless, the novel must not be confused with drama. As Joseph Warren Beach indicates, the urge toward representation leads the author of fiction into a problem:

> The novel can never attain that immediacy of effect which derives from the direct appeal to the eye and ear. It must be content with the fainter appeal to the imagination. By way of compensation, it may cover infinitely more ground, may go in for comment and explanation which are not possible to the stage play. The novel has, accordingly, large means of intellectual appeal special to itself. It may have a richness and subtlety quite beyond the scope of drama.
>
> Only comment and explanation tend to weaken the imaginative appeal; they tend to remove the story one degree farther from direct experience. The novelist is thus landed in a dilemma. How can he keep his story "dramatic" without losing that intellectual appeal which is peculiar to his form?[1]

Gradually fiction writers became more aware of their problem of showing versus telling, as Norman Friedman terms it, and began to experiment with techniques--experimentation which has by no means yet exhausted its possibilities. They began to consider the novel, not only as a genuinely new

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[1]Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique (New York: The Century Company, 1932), pp. 182-183.

prose form and not a modern adaptation of an old one, a prose epic, but also as a literary form possessing rich potentialities not yet realized. The novel as an art form challenged its authors. They began to push for answers, for a solution to this problem, a solution which might avoid the dangers of an omniscient author, the intrusive personality, and the weakening of the imaginative appeal by too much telling and secure the advantages of the immediacy of dramatic representation. At the same time, they desired to keep the values of the intellectual content of comment and interpretation. In quite human fashion, they wanted to eat their cake and have it too.

It should be clearly stated here that in our discussion of fiction and the novel, the terms are to be interpreted to include the short story and other shorter forms unless definite reference to a novel or novels is made. In fact, since the short story was conscious of its specific concern with artistic effect very early in its history it offered unexcelled opportunities as a laboratory for experimental techniques. Short story writers such as Chekov and De Maupassant were among the foremost innovators. On the American scene, Irving was at his best in his sketches; Poe became an important innovator in the field of the short story; Hawthorne spent a long apprenticeship in the shorter forms; and Henry James spent years of his maturity writing only shorter fiction.

One solution to the problem mentioned above of increasing dramatic representation in fiction without losing telling power repeatedly suggested itself to many authors, and that solution lay within what is now called the point of view. Beach states that this solution consisted of using

> . . . the consciousness of the characters as a medium for explanation and comment. What the author tells us in propria persona is formal and official. It is often necessary, and accepted by us like any other practical necessity. But it is not of a piece with the story. What goes on in the minds of the characters on a given occasion is another matter. That is of the essence of the story itself. And the aim of the author who has chosen this solution for the novelist's problem is so to present what is going on in the mind of his character at a given moment that we shall forget the author and ourselves and have a sense of actually being there. The scene of action has been transferred to the character's mind . . . .
>
> In the process of experimenting with this method, it has been found that much of the information which was formerly passed on by the author can be gathered directly by the reader from the character's thoughts, thus dispensing very largely with undramatic official explanations.[1]

Other things being equal, the particular effectiveness of the use of revelation from within the story instead of from without depended upon its consistency. Whatever point of view was chosen was to be observed with all its limitations and the advantages peculiar to it to realize the potential of any given subject--again, other things being equal. Friedman, who has made an excellent analysis of this subject of point of view, has reminded us that

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[1] Ibid., p. 183.

> . . . consistency--within however large and diverse and complex a frame--signifies that the parts have been adjusted to the whole, the means to the end, and hence that the maximum effect has been rendered.[1]

William Foster-Harris in The Basic Formulas of Fiction has described for beginning writers some of the problems of holding to this consistency. After making a careful distinction between the subjective-objective direction in thought and emphasizing the importance of the subjective for the writer's forward-facing point of view he admonishes the writer to have one character in a story felt in the first person (this does not necessarily mean using the first person pronoun; the third person pronoun can present a character so felt); to describe all other characters objectively as seen by somebody else; to keep the running time of the story in the immediate present (this is done by writing in the past tense but thinking in the present and looking toward the future); to use emotions not facts to power the story; to avoid real breaks between paragraphs; to change no point of view from one character to another except by transition notice to the reader; and to make such transitions of point of view by means of an emotional bridge.[2]

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[1]Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction," PMLA, LXX (Dec., 1955), p. 1182.

[2]William Foster-Harris, The Basic Formulas of Fiction (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944), pp. 22-53.

These are matters of technical detail, but the important thing to note is that the result of such a process is a created fictional world which has as its circumference the consciousness of the point of view character. It is also important to note that the emphasis is on emotions, the raw stuff of drama, and that the author by placing the intellect and emotions of this fictional world in his point of view character has freed himself from an aesthetically crippling entanglement. Friedman, appraising Schorer's discussion of this fictional world in "Technique as Discovery", summarizes the matter thus:

> A novel, he [Schorer] says, normally reveals a created world of values and attitudes, and an author is assisted in his search for an artistic definition of these values and attitudes by the controlling medium offered by the devices of point of view; through these devices he is able to disentangle his own prejudices and predispositions from those of his characters and thereby to evaluate those of his characters dramatically in relation to one another within their own frame.[1]

The question might be asked as to whether a world realized and described by a character within a fiction, a world created and modified subjectively, possesses the validity of the world of reality. Does this kind of limitation lose to art its tie with nature? Perhaps the answer to this question can be at least suggested by the newer definitions of reality. Science, which once was regarded as facts and fixities--unchangeable, indisputable, discoverable by logical

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[1]Friedman, p. 1167.

processes and established as "laws"--no longer is so construed. In this connection Beach has this to say:

> Reality we say naively, is constituted by the facts themselves, without regard to what we may think about them. But a brief initiation into metaphysics--or even, in these days, into physics--is sufficient to show us that of the primary facts themselves we know absolutely nothing. A physical scientist like Eddington will tell you that scientific knowledge consists of a series of formulas, all of them creations of the human mind, which serve very well the practical purpose of controlling certain processes of nature and predicting what will happen under certain circumstances, but that this series is a closed circle, entirely distinct from the presumable reality to which it corresponds, and never at any point bringing us actually in contact with that reality.[1]

By analogy then the projected world of a fiction like The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, a creation of the human mind, can be as definitely in contact with a correspondent reality as can a series of scientific formulas. Though its purpose is aesthetic rather than practical, it can predict and reveal what will happen to characters under certain circumstances and infer from these happenings significant meaning for reality. This analogy is not offered to suggest that the novelist is striving to parallel science. That particular heresy of Zola's probably gained its sole adherents because Zola was first of all a writer of extraordinary power and fervor--a good novelist--if not a good theorist.

The possible points of view are many and capable of great variation. Friedman has suggested an interesting

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[1] Beach, p. 221.

classification of the modes of point of view, categories which are combinations varying the proportions between "telling and showing." Admitting that his categories are not exhaustive, he has included: editorial omniscience, the unlimited point of view; neutral omniscience, an impersonal wandering at will of the narrator between the reader and the story without authorial comment; the "I" as witness, in which the reader views the story from a wandering periphery; the "I" as protagonist, in which the reader is limited to the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the involved character; multiple selective omniscience, in which the story comes directly through the minds of several characters as it leaves its marks there; selective omniscience, in which the story materials are transmitted directly through the mind of a single character; the dramatic mode, in which mental states are inferred only from dialogue and action; and the camera mode, the "slice of life" of a recording medium.[1]

The writer's task then, at least in one important part, is to choose such a point of view as will best present the possibilities of his particular subject with an effective proportion of showing and telling. A reader need not be a critic to discover the native attractiveness of the dramatic elements in literature. Benjamin Franklin, speaking of <u>Pilgrim's Progress</u>, makes the observation:

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[1]Friedman, p. 1168.

> Honest John was the first that I know who mixed narration and dialogue, a method of writing very engaging to the reader, who in the most interesting parts finds himself, as it were, brought into the company and present at the discourse. Defoe in his Crusoe, his Moll Flanders, Religious Courtship, Family Instructor, and other pieces, has imitated it with success; and Richardson has done the same in his Pamela, etc.[1]

The authors of prose fiction have been moving toward an increasingly heavy emphasis on the dramatic presentation of their stories as is evidenced by the studies of Lubbock, Schorer, Friedman, Wright, and others.

To gain this effect the author eliminates certain of the points of view listed by Friedman above, such as editorial omniscience and neutral omniscience, for in these, the authoritative voice, whether it comments or does not, is present and heard. Some of the others such as multiple selective omniscience and selective omniscience do not refer to the omniscience of an author but to the dramatizing of the mental states either of a group of characters in turn or of a single character. This results in a direct presentation, and so they can be included among the more dramatic points of view. The others--witness-narrator, protagonist-narrator, dramatic, and camera--definitely aim at the direct method without apparent interference of the author and so are related to the dramatic method of presenting a story.

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[1]Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography, ed. Dixon Wecter ("Rinehart Edition"; New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1948), p. 21.

Within these considerations of point of view there is a single type of narrator who represents the farthest remove from an author. Whether he is telling the story in first person or it is told in the third person, this narrator is called the fallible narrator. His fallibility consists both in the limitations of his access to knowledge and comprehension of the events he relates and also in his distance from the author himself. Presumably the author is the infallible creator of his fictions. The fallible narrator obliges the reader to fill in between the lines, to draw inferences, and to come to conclusions that are beyond the narrator or even contrary to the character's interpretation. Two well-known examples of the last-mentioned type of conclusions are Lardner's "Haircut" and Porter's "Magic."

In addition to the fallibility of his limited access to knowledge and distance from the author, a narrator's fallibility may consist of his manner of telling a story--a deliberate illusion of not knowing cultivated for the purposes of irony as in Hemingway's "Che ti Dice la Patria" or possibly for withholding of some information for a more dramatic discovery effect as in Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." This last-named story is also an illustration of the fallible narrator presented in the third person, a variation of the type which, as already mentioned, depends on the strict adherence of the author to the limited point of view. As Austin Wright describes it:

> A third choice of narrator which makes for the dramatic effect is that of the narrator whose point of view is confined throughout the story to a single character. Ideally, he tells only what that character might know, think, or judge. The reader will tend, in such a case, to identify the narrator with that character, thus receiving an effect similar to that given by a first-person narrator.[1]

A character of the limited third person point of view who is identified as the narrator by the reader can show then the same characteristic fallibility that a first person narrator can. In fact, many stories could be transposed from one to the other without loss in logic.

However, there might be other losses from an artistic standpoint. James, who often used the first person in his short stories, was, however, quite articulate in his criticism of it for the "long piece." In his "Preface" to The Ambassadors he wrote: "Suffice it, to be brief, that the first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness, and that looseness, never much my affair, had never been so little so as on this particular occasion."[2] He spoke slightingly of the "large ease of autobiography" and likewise disposed of objections to his concern with method:

> It may be asked why, if one keeps so to one's hero, one shouldn't make a mouthful of "method," shouldn't throw the reins on his neck and, letting them flap there as free as in "Gil Blas" or in "David

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[1] Austin McGiffert Wright, The American Short Story of the Twenties (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 285-287.

[2] Henry James, The Art of the Novel (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 321.

> Copperfield" equip him with the double privilege of subject and object--a course that has at least the merit of brushing away questions at a sweep. The answer to which is, I think, that one makes that surrender only if one is prepared not to make certain precious discriminations.[1]

There are certain bits of knowledge, revelations and impressions, which the confession form of the "I" cannot use without giving the sense of an exaggerated ego to the narrator and a distorted picture to the incidents. What James was objecting to, however, for The Ambassadors was that if he had made Strether both "hero and historian" it would have constituted, as he put it, "the menace to a bright variety."[2] For the author who wants to avoid then "the terrible fluidity of self-revelation,"[3] to introduce sophisticated complexities, and to gain the effect of the direct impact of the situation upon the narrator as that situation develops--a sort of eternal present--the third person point of view fallible narrator may well be the preferred one.

This discriminative choice seems to be especially important to those novelists who conceive their fiction in terms of scene and picture and who, like James, are interested in intimacy, penetration, and psychological subtleties. Beach quotes Gide as writing, "In these latter confession type novels, one is somewhat handicapped by the "I", there

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 320. [3] Ibid., p. 321

are certain complexities which one can't expect to unravel, to develop, without seeming to force things."[1]

Another advantage of the limited third person narrator is that the point of view can be more skillfully divided among a number of such personages, and the author can use the mode of multiple selective omniscience, thus sweeping his scene with a variety of colored spotlights. Where the personalities of several narrators are projected upon the narrative subject, additional perspective is gained by the reader and possible depth added to the meaning. This has become such an accepted mode in the work of modern writers like Faulkner in As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury that it is hard to recall it as experimentation.

At this point, it might be well to consider what particular attraction in the fallible narrator point of view has led so many authors to submit themselves to the exigencies of its rigidity. First among these attractions, though artistically not the most important, is the opportunity it provides the writer for losing his self-consciousness in a disguise. Perhaps the earlier Victorians were the last authors who could confidently rely on their own heard presences to charm readers. They were followed by an increasingly skeptical group of writers and readers. After psychology had pinned

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[1]Joseph Warren Beach, quoting Andre Gide, p. 451.

men down and analyzed and psycho-analyzed them, authors distrusted the intrusive disclosures their talk could reveal.

John Dodds in his introduction to Vanity Fair has described the way Thackeray took care of point of view, and, with variations, this description could apply to Dickens, Meredith, or Trollope. Dodds writes:

> It is important to notice the point of view which Thackeray, as author, takes in delineating this irony of things. His method is the seemingly casual, chatty soliloquizing of a man sitting in his armchair by the fireside and telling a story. It is of all narrative manners the most flexible, but also the one most likely to lead into windy digression. Thackeray keeps the digressions under reasonably good control in Vanity Fair, although his approach allows for a variety of moods and comments. Typically it permits him to pluck the reader by the sleeve and draw him off into a corner, there to comment familiarly upon the passing scene. The comments usually take the form of an amused, whimsical aside, often with an ironic twist. In the dramatic novel such interpolations would be quite out of place, but in the discursive novel of manners they indicate the mood of the story and intensify the mellow, retrospective tone which is the very tissue of a Thackeray novel. It is true that occasionally the moralist defeats the artist, and upon the characters are poured the vials of Thackeray's ethical indignation. Still worse are the places where, in a fervor of sentimental adoration, Thackeray releases a flood of sensibility about some character who, on Thackeray's own showing, is not worth the emotion. Yet for the most part his interpolations add to the illusion of reality, certainly to our enjoyment of the story.[1]

Such a familiar approach is precisely what James and artistically conscious authors of his ilk would not want--the pose of the moralist outside his work, the danger of

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[1] John W. Dodds, ed, Vanity Fair ("Rinehart Editions"; New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1955), p. xi.

contradiction between what is shown and what is told, and the display of superior knowledge toward the reader. While such personality display as Dodds mentions in the above quotation makes an author to blame for much, it does not make him responsible enough, responsible, as James put it, "for every inch of his surface and note of his song."[1] Behind his fallible narrator, the artist, as Schorer indicated, can free himself of his own prejudices and predispositions and secure a proper objectivity for representing life. In proportion as he can see consistently, so he will reveal truthfully. After all, it is not himself he seeks to represent in his fiction but life. If he presents his vision in terms of a narrator whom the readers actually reconstruct from the work of art itself they can have at the same time the pleasure of adjusting the distortions of the particular angle of sight and of recognizing how near this comes to being the complexity of life itself which no two of us see exactly alike. Beach, again quoting Gide in the passage previously alluded to, says,

> I should like, in the account which they [his point of view narrators] give, for these events to appear slightly deformed; there is a sort of interest for the reader in the simple fact of making his corrections. The narrative demands his collaboration if the drawing is to be right.[2]

Thus the fallible narrator can provide for the author a proper objective distance at the same time as it results in

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[1] James, p. 328.

[2] Beach, p. 451.

an intensification of interest for the reader. James has stated in his preface to "The Golden Bowl" his experience with these advantages thus:

> Again and again, on review, the short things in especial that I have gathered into this Series have ranged themselves not as my own impersonal account of the affair at hand, but as my account of somebody's impression of it--the terms of this person's access to it and estimate of it contributing thus by some fine little law to intensification of interest. The somebody is often, among my shorter tales I recognise [sic] , but an unnamed, unintroduced and (save by right of intrinsic wit) unwarranted participant, the impersonal author's concrete deputy or delegate, a convenient substitute or apologist for the creative power otherwise so veiled and disembodied.[1]

Dodds' summary of point of view in Vanity Fair contains one view that must be contradicted--his statement that the interpolations of Thackeray add to the illusion of reality of the story. The illusion is exactly what is shattered by the authorial presence. Perhaps the worst examples of this are to be found in Trollope, who insists on reminding the reader that he should not be disturbed by these make-believe fictions. Drama, in contrast, even when the subject matter is fantastic in a high degree as in Strindberg's "The Dream Play" persuades the spectator, during the time of the performance and after, that he is having an experience of reality, though its illusory quality is perfectly evident to his intelligence. It is not the modest realism of a Howells nor the heavily documented realism of a Zola which is

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[1]James, p. 327.

necessary to the sustaining of the illusion of reality in a fiction; it is the interplay of character and action, the representation of a living world. Every great fiction, regardless of its faults or the theories of its author, has displayed this quality of "felt life." In other words, fiction must approach the dramatic to come alive; it cannot rely on its intellectual content, which brings it closer to history and philosophy, for that effect. Any unnecessary interruptions which break into the dramatic representation of a story then are so many dangers to the illusion of reality.

The fallible narrator contributes to this illusion of reality. In the first place, he at times possesses a kinship with the reader; he does not completely understand what he observes or even participates in. His wisdom must come piecemeal through experience, sometimes after false starts as in Great Expectations.

At other times the narrator may be younger or more naive than the reader. One of the sources of delight for the reader in the stories told by a fallible narrator is his discovery (this with the author's connivance, of course) of knowledge superior to that gained by the narrator himself. It is the same old pleasure which the audience of a play experiences when "let in" on discoveries the characters themselves are yet unaware of. "I Want to Know Why," and Huckleberry Finn supply this kind of enjoyment.

A third possibility is a narrator who may know and be considerably less than the reader with only the greater articulateness of his author to make him comprehensible, like Benjy of the first section of The Sound and the Fury. Nevertheless, in all these groups, the fallible narrator is recognizably human and lives in a world which seems real because of its very imperfections and confusions.

The fallible narrator, frequently the best-realized character of a story, helps to present a solid sense of reality, in the second place, because he himself is an imagined fiction. This may sound like a contradiction of the first point that the reader in a measure identifies himself with the narrator because of his fallibility--but it is only superficially so. The first point relates to his seeming reality as part of humanity in general as the second relates to his illusioned reality as a character within the total work. Whether the fallible narrator is a character in the frame device for introducing the story as in Lord Jim or is involved in the action itself as witness or protagonist as in The Ambassadors he is of the identical fictional world of the rest of the people of the action. His is no cold breath which dissolves the illusion of the reality of the story itself but seems rather to offer a testimony or corroboration.

The device of point of view, the fallible narrator, seems indeed to be woven of such close texture with every aspect of its fiction that its total effect is hard to indicate

either by analysis or a synthesizing metaphor. Once chosen--Poe's conscience-stricken or horror-struck unnamed narrators, Miles Coverdale of The Blithedale Romance, Strether of The Ambassadors, or Huck of Huckleberry Finn--he is inseparable from the work. The tellers of tales are organic elements of the integrated organic art. More than devices (if by devices we think of tricks of the trade or expediencies), they are frames to contain the web of the Jamesian definition of experience as "an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spiderweb of the finest silken threads suspended in the chambers of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue."[1]

In his "Preface" to The Portrait of a Lady James varies his metaphor; he characterizes his point of view as "the pair of eyes or a field glass at one of the million possible windows in the house of fiction."[2] He then further elaborates his analogy:

> The spreading field, the human scene, is the "choice of subject"; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconies or slit-like and low-browed, is the "literary form"; but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher--without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist.

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[1]Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," Literature of the United States, ed. Walter Blair, Theodore Hornberger, and Randall Stewart, (rev. single vol. ed.; New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1957), p. 924.

[2]James, Art of the Novel, p. 46.

In this metaphor the distortions of the window would be in part due to the fallible narrator, but this is not a satisfactory image of him because it images a dead distortion of the "spreading field" whereas the fallible narrator constitutes a living one. James's other pictures of his narrator include that of "the most polished of possible mirrors,"[1] used for Rowland Mallet of Roderick Hudson, and he adds a long list of such characters--Newman, Isabel Archer, Merton Densher, Lambert Strether "(hé a mirror of miraculous silver and quite pre-eminent, I think, for the connexion)."[2] And, when James comes to the narrator of "The Turn of the Screw" on his list he modifies his metaphor by mentioning "the small recording governess."[3]

Probably no one metaphor could perfectly embody the relationship of the fallible narrator both to the story and to its author. Suffice it to point out that, as Mark Schorer in his "Technique as Discovery" has so convincingly indicated, the point of view when creatively inspired and truthfully and consistently worked out can result in a discovery of meaning for the reader which escapes by its very objectivity from what may have been personality limitations in its author. His demonstration is drawn from Emily Bronte's Wuthering

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[1] Ibid., p. 70. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

Heights.[1] The Littlepage trilogy of Cooper is an example in American Literature.

But right here it is necessary to note what Wayne Booth has said of the danger of confusion of the distance between the author and his narrator for the reader and critic. This constitutes the opposite side of the coin--the disadvantage which is the contrast to the advantage represented by Schorer's idea of discovery. The evidence which Booth presents of confusion due to uncertainty of the exact ironical distances, for example, in the fourth book of Gulliver or Defoe's "The Shortest Way with Dissenters," proves that unless the author gives sufficient clues as to where he stands in relation to his narrator, our discoveries can be made at the expense of the book. As Booth says:

> The reader who is untroubled by such problems may argue that his opinion of the book does not depend on whether the artist was on top of its ironies. But for most of us the question is an important one: if we find ourselves laughing at the author along with his characters, our opinion of the book as art must suffer.[2]

Such confusion has multiplied as modern fiction has gloried in the supposed neutrality, impartiality, and "impassibilité" on the part of its authors. Booth has estimated the difficulty thus:

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[1]Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," Forms of Modern Fiction, ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), pp. 11-15.

[2]Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 322.

> If a master puzzle maker had set out to give us the greatest possible difficulty, he could not have done more than has been done in some modern works in which this effect of deep involvement is combined with the implicit demand that we maintain our capacity for ironic judgment.[1]

What Schorer is commending, however, is the use of a point of view which makes such discoveries not only possible but inevitable. The fallible narrator is just such a creative point of view; though apparently restrictive, he can be in truth liberating both to the writer and the reader.

To summarize our definition then, the term "fallible" for the character providing the particular way of entering and seeing an action means that the point of view will be limited, shaped, and colored by the conceptions of this narrator, and, furthermore, that these conceptions, faulty as they may be, will be projected upon the fictional world created within the story.

The exploration of the use of the fallible narrator in this dissertation will be restricted to the field of nineteenth century American fiction. By the opening of the 19th century when fiction could properly claim to be coming into a position of some importance in America, the single narrator was already an old device. All the familiar forms, fiction and non-fiction, which could use the "I" point of view were its legitimate grandparents. There were the confessions and

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[1] Ibid., p. 324.

autobiographies, which, as Northrop Frye points out, merged with the novel by a series of gradations.

> Most autobiographies are inspired by a creative, and therefore fictional, impulse to select only these events and experiences in the writer's life that go to build up an integrated pattern. This pattern may be something larger than himself with which he has come to identify himself, or simply the coherence of his character and attitudes. We may call this very important form of prose fiction the confession form, following St. Augustine, who appears to have invented it, and Rousseau, who established a modern type of it. The earlier tradition gave Religio Medici, Grace Abounding, and Newman's Apologio to English literature, besides the related but subtly different type of confession favored by the mystics. . . .
>
> After Rousseau--in fact in Rousseau--the confession flows into the novel, and the mixture produces the fictional autobiography, the Kunstler--roman, and kindred types. There is no literary reason why the subject of a confession should always be the author himself, and dramatic confessions have been used in the novel at least since Moll Flanders.[1]

By a quite similar process of change the journals, the letters, and the diaries developed into fiction, and we have Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year and Richardson's Pamela. The difficulty of accounting for all the information needed for the story by these extremely limited means early led to a multiplication of the single narrators to fill in gaps. Letters which were written by the friends of the protagonist in answer are used in addition to relevant correspondence by others involved in the action. The change of the point of view is often an awkward device, admittedly the

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[1]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 307.

resort of an author who needs to reinforce or introduce material other than that presented by the most important narrator. Legal depositions, newspaper accounts, chance encounters of minor characters, or even supplementary fictions bridge gaps in the narrative sequence, throw more light on character, or emphasize significance. Brown's "Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist" and its relation to Wieland is but one example.

All of the four strands which Frye recognizes as forms of prose fiction, the novel, the romance, the confession, and the anatomy[1] were soon to be represented in a prolific spring blossoming in American literature: Brown's Wieland was a passionate confession-romance, Cooper's Littlepage novels placed aristocratic and frontier societies in juxtaposition for novels of manners; Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter provided a brilliant example of romance; and Hugh Henry Breckenridge's Modern Chivalry furnished an early anatomy, combining the materials of a long and varied political experience with a satire of stumpland society. The problems of form plagued these early writers, and among these problems was the important one of point of view. And the particular point of view which is our concern is that of the fallible narrator as these American authors conceived him.

Although novels from both Charles Brockden Brown and Henry James will be considered in this study, the organization

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[1] Ibid., pp. 303-314.

will not depend upon chronological development within the period but upon a division of the fallible narrators according to the functions they serve within their stories. These functions do not provide us with a scientific classification for our narrators because they are not mutually exclusive, but they do provide a working basis for grouping them.

The chapter headings, which represent this division, are: Chapter II, "The Narrator as Nom de Plume"; Chapter III, "The Narrator as Observer of Manners"; Chapter IV, "The Narrator as Explorer of Emotional Depths: 'The Terror of the Soul'"; Chapter V, "The Narrator as Youth"; and Chapter VI, "The Narrator as Dramatization of Theme: The American Idealist in Danger." It can be readily observed that a single narrator, A. Gordon Pym or James Strether, for example, could be included under more than one of these divisions, but for purposes of analysis these groupings furnish us with means of comparison and contrast which have proved fruitful.

There has been no attempt to make a survey study of the fallible narrator within the period specified, but rather to choose representative selections from good authors and to evaluate and judge these to learn, if possible, from the analysis how the fallible narrator affects the fiction in which he occurs.

In general, the procedure, which varies somewhat according to the particular problems of the work involved, follows two steps: first, a characterization of the fallible or

unreliable narrator of the fiction and an examination of the means by which he is realized within the story and, second, an assessment of his impact upon the whole--style, structure, and theme. With full recognition that interpretation should be based upon more than a single approach, we have not attempted to be dogmatic where there are obvious critical disagreements. Our judgments have been based, for the purposes of the dissertation, on bringing to light the excellences or failures of a given piece of literature chiefly in terms of the fallible narrator.

CHAPTER II

THE NARRATOR AS *NOM DE PLUME*

The fallible narrator who demonstrates the smallest possible distance between himself and his author is the more or less authoritative narrator who masks as the *nom de plume*. Regardless of whether he is given the key of complete privilege and knows everything or functions only as a restricted point of view, this type of narrator projects the author's own opinions and reactions and narrates the story in his style.

The *nom de plume* is an old device, a name often adopted as by Defoe and Swift for the very useful purpose of protection against the hazard of expressing dangerous opinions. It proved itself a protective coloration for early women novelists and poets like the Bronte sisters and George Eliot who wanted to be taken seriously as writers. And besides its attraction for practical purposes, the fact of the existence of the *nom de plume* provides evidence that authors have always realized that the "I" of their essays and stories was really someone other than the personal self of their everyday lives. He was truly a second self, a role performed

in connection with the act of writing. Thus he should have his own name.

Wayne C. Booth has explored this peculiar relationship between an author and his writing self:

> As he [the author] writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal "man in general" but an implied version of "himself" that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works. To some novelists it has seemed, indeed, that they were discovering or creating themselves as they wrote. . . . Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the different relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the need of particular works.[1]

This relationship has little to do with what is called sincerity in a work of art, but it highlights the danger of reading too much biography into a work or trying to draw autobiography from it. Melville, Poe, and Twain, among others, have embarrassed their critics in this respect.

However, unless the implied narrator has been projected farther from the author than this "second self" and has been conceived as a limited and distinctly separate person from the author and so functions in the telling of the story, he can hardly fall within the category of the fallible narrator.

All of which, by way of introduction, leads us to the first author we shall consider--Washington Irving.

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[1]Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 70-71.

At first glance, Washington Irving would seem to be a perfect source for finding examples of the fallible narrator. His earliest newspaper pieces, submitted like the "Do-Good" essays of Franklin to a brother's newspaper, were signed Jonathan Oldstyle. The Salmagundi papers, small yellow-backed pamplets, purported to be "The Whim-Whams and Opinions of Launcelot Langstaff" with his associates Will Wizard, Anthony Evergreen, and Mustapha. And not too many years later came the best-loved of Irving's narrators, Diedrich Knickerbocker, whose name became synonymous with typical Old New York. Geoffrey Crayon, we recall, was the author of the justly famous Sketch Book, Bracebridge Hall, and The Tales of a Traveller. The final narrator whom Irving used is not so well known nor so successful; he was the ecclesiastical sage who wrote The Conquest of Granada, Fray Antonio Agapida.

Among such a wealth of narrators, discrimination becomes imperative. The early ones were commonplaces of Irving's school days, easily traced to Addison, Steele, and Goldsmith. They were pseudonyms behind which the cocky young satirists could impudently comment on the foibles of New York society of their day, enjoying the comments of others on their writings in protected anonymity. Stanley T. Williams classifies the subjects of the Salmagundi essays under three headings: (1) satires on politics and national shortcomings, (2) satire on New York society in 1807, and (3) the essays or sketch,

which developed as the work progressed.[1] The only artistic purpose served by such journalistic narrators was that of providing a certain slant or point of view for the different types of content and thus of adding the variety of comic humor characters to the familiar essay. Though such crude devices are scarcely significant, they point up the attraction which a special fictitious point of view has always possessed for satirists, the scapegoat substitute author who is hardly to be taken seriously and yet effectively draws off the blame.

Fray Antonio Agapida, according to Stanley T. Williams, was a more desperate invention, but one that failed of its purpose. Irving wanted to avoid criticism for his mingling of fact and myth, his tiresome repetition of battles, and his style so reminiscent of the medieval storytellers. He had hoped to add a certain tone to The Conquest of Granada by having the garrulous old monk comment satirically on each event. His hope was that it would be considered a new type of historical writing, romantic history. Williams, however, objects:

> The truth is that Fray Antonio commemorates ridiculously Irving's dread of criticism, and also his foolish desire to be acclaimed in a single book for the antithetical virtues of historian and storyteller. Had he written the conquest after the manner of his Columbus, or had he, on the other hand, disavowed all connection with fact and romanticized

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[1]Stanley T. Williams, The Life of Washington Irving (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), I, 81.

> without restraint, he would, in either case, have been on stable ground. His subterfuge, defeated, in the end, both his aims. . . . Yet one minor benefit of this inconclusive approach to a great subject was, strangely enough, the gossipy, humorous friar himself, a caricature done in Irving's best comic manner and less boring than any other character in the book--save one.[1]

The strength of an imagined narrator is illustrated in this judgment, but a warning is also implicit. An author cannot superimpose a topheavy content upon a fallible narrator; the subject as well as the style must proceed organically from the imagined narrator. Otherwise he remains merely an ingenious device.

Geoffrey Crayon is another matter. The name became so intimately associated with Irving's own identity that, in Europe, criticism of Irving's work was frequently associated with the fictional name rather than his own. In a sense, Geoffrey Crayon is a name Irving chose for his own image of himself as author. Both the name Geoffrey Crayon and the title The Sketch Book grew from Irving's lifelong interest in and association with artists. As a lad he received a sketchbook and instruction from one of his sisters' beaus, and for a short time under the persuasion of Allston in Rome almost deluded himself into studying art seriously. Both name and title are also appropriate to Irving's descriptive style, one of his strong points. He had developed in his notebook (besides his sketches, in which he had been encouraged by

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[1] Ibid., I, 347.

Robertson, John Anderson, and Allston) a parallel art--that of verbal sketching of landscape. At the period when his friend Payne thought he had done with literature, Irving was developing his technique. "To these vignettes of the Hudson he was to return in imagination, if not to this very notebook, when, in the lonely room at Birmingham, he composed 'Rip Van Winkle.'"[1]

There yet remains Irving's most popular and most original narrator, Diedrich Knickerbocker. Not only the youthful and exuberant History of New York, but Irving's two classic tales "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" are supposed writings of this little man in black. The physical appearance of a fallible narrator and his personality quirks are usually drawn by indirection from materials within the story itself, but Diedrich Knickerbocker is unique in this respect. He was introduced to the readers of America by one of the most elaborate literary hoaxes ever perpetrated in this country.

Irving warned two of his friends, one of them his brother-in-law, James K. Paulding, to assist him in preparing newspaper "squibbs etc. to attract attention to the work when it comes out."[2] He had in mind some stately humbug of a narrator like Swift's Gulliver for his history. His fellow conspirators of the Salmagundi papers were equal to the occasion

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[1] Ibid., I, 123. [2] Ibid., I, 112.

and under the heading Distressing in the New York Evening Post was noted the disappearance of "a small elderly gentleman, dressed in an old black coat and cocked hat, by the name of KNICKERBOCKER. As there are some reasons for believing he is not entirely in his right mind, and as great anxiety is entertained about him, any information concerning him left either at the Columbian Hotel, Mulberry Street, or at the Office of this paper will be thankfully received."[1]

This descriptive notice occurred on October 26, 1809, and on November 6, an answering notice signed by A. Traveller reported seeing such an old gentleman "resting himself by the side of the road, a little above Kingsbridge--He had in his hand a small bundle tied in a red bandana handkerchief; he appeared to be travelling northward, and was very much fatigued and exhausted."[2] The third newspaper entry, purportedly from Seth Handaside, Landlord of the Independent Columbian Hotel, Mulberry Street, announced the seizure of a "very curious kind of a written book"[3] found in Diedrich's room which would have to be disposed of to pay for his board and lodging.

This series of announcements was so successful that some people were actually taken in by it, and the advance publicity of the book assured its sale.

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[1] Ibid., I, 113. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

Further descriptive details concerning the historian Knickerbocker are given in prefatory material to the history itself. The "Account of the Author" by Seth Handaside reveals that

> He was a small, brisk-looking old gentleman, dressed in a rusty black coat, a pair of olive velvet breeches, and a small cocked hat. He had a few grey hairs plaited and clubbed behind. . . . The only piece of finery which he bore about him was a bright pair of square silver shoebuckles, and all his baggage was contained in a pair of saddle bags, which he carried under his arm . . . my wife at once set him down for some eminent country schoolmaster.[1]

His traits are also sketched in this "Account." Knickerbocker was worthy though a "little queer"; kept a disorderly room where mouldy books and scraps of paper lay about just where he wanted them; was very inquisitive "continually poking about town, hearing all the news, and prying into everything that was going on."[2] He loved to argue, which he called philosophizing, and possessed an able opponent in the city librarian, who revealed to the landlady that her boarder was one of the <u>literati</u> of the city. Knickerbocker was insulted by the landlady's request for payment and reassured her by pointing to his saddlebags wherein he claimed to have a "treasure." These same saddlebags when searched after the old gentleman's mysterious departure contained "a few articles

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[1]Washington Irving, <u>Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New York</u> (New York: The Heritage Press, 1940), pp. xxiv-xxviii.

[2]<u>Ibid</u>.

of worn-out clothes and a large bundle of blotted paper."[1] The bundle of papers, "which was his History of New York," constituted Knickerbocker's claim to the "immortality" he had told his curious landlord and wife he was seeking.

In a second piece of prefatory material "To the Public" Knickerbocker explains his objective "to render a just tribute of renown to the many great and wonderful transactions of Dutch progenitors."[2] He describes his lifelong researches among "learned authors . . . but to little purpose";[3] his findings in "an elaborate manuscript written in exceedingly pure and classic low Dutch";[4] his gleanings from the "chests and lumber garrets of our respectable Dutch citizens";[5] and his gathering of a "host of well-authenticated traditions from divers excellent old ladies of my acquaintance, who requested that their names might not be mentioned."[6] His final acknowledgment is sincerely Irving's own for assistance by "that admirable and praiseworthy institution, the NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY."[7]

The imagined historian preens himself on his "bold excursive" manner, like that of his favorite Herodotus, extols his "faithful veracity carefully winnowing away the chaff of hypothesis, and discarding the tares of fable,"[8] and congratulates himself on snatching the history of New

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid. [7] Ibid. [8] Ibid.

York "just in the nick of time"[1] from the "wide-spread insatiable maw of oblivion."[2] This bit of prefatory writing then completes the extraneous picture of "myself--little I--at this moment the progenitor, prototype, and precursor of them all [all future historians of New York] , posted at the head of this host of literary worthies, with my book under my arm, and New-York on my back, pressing forward, like a gallant commander, to honor and immortality."[3]

In tribute to Irving's imagined historian it must be admitted that his little "I" pictured here has in truth become the figure emblematical of New York. Seldom has a fallible narrator obtained so solid a reality, even including the buckles on his shoes, as has the very fallible historian of The History of New York.

In thus setting forth the author of his book, Irving prepared his readers for the unique content of the History, which is a mixture of fact and fable that has been painful both to old Dutch families of New York and to genuine antiquarians, but hilariously funny to others. Sir Walter Scott had been given a copy of Irving's friend Henry Brevoort and reportedly laughed until his sides ached. Dickens wore out a copy carrying it about, and Coleridge and Bryant were said to have enjoyed it.[4]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Williams, I, 116.

Characterized by the mock-heroic tone which was evident in such papers in Salmagundi as "Of the Chronicles of the Renowned and Ancient City of Gotham" this "shambling, windy book"[1] was composed of too diverse materials to be truly the story of its fallible narrator. There is in some of the disquisitions like those on the trials of historians, the breakdown of the good old days, and the numerous theories of the creation something like a history Diedrich might have written. But rejecting the rest would be to quibble at the very best of the light-hearted satire and burlesqued episodes like the famous battle between Jan Risingh and Peter Stuyvesant.

In many such passages as these quoted below we discover the author himself and not Diedrich:

> And now are the hearty men of the Manhattoes, and their no less hearty comrades, all lustily engaged under the tress, buffeting stoutly with the contents of their wallets, and taking such affectionate embraces of their canteens and pottles, as though they verily believed they were to be their last. And as I foresee we shall have hot work in a page or two, I advise my readers to do the same, for which purpose I will bring this chapter to a close; giving them my word of honor, that no advantage shall be taken of this armistice to surprise, or in any wise molest, the honest Nederlanders, while at their vigorous repast.[2]

> . . . the Ten Breecheses and the Tough Breecheses, with a host more of worthies, whose names are too crabbed to be written, or if they could be written, it would be impossible for man to utter--all fortified with a mighty dinner and to use the words of a great Dutch poet, "Brimful of wrath and cabbage."[3]

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[1] Williams, I, 114. [2] Irving, History, p. 272.

[3] Ibid., p. 275.

> In commemoration of this great exploit, they erected a pole on the spot, with a device on the top intended to represent the province of Nieuw-Nederlands destroying Great Britain . . . but either through the sculptor, or his ill-timed waggery, it bore a striking resemblance to a goose, vainly striving to get hold of a dumpling.[1]

The truth of the matter is that Diedrich Knickerbocker might have written a very dull book indeed. Actually he bears all the marks of being constructed after the history and tailored as much as possible to fit its requirements; he is a piece of the rest of the buffoonery but artistically extraneous to the point of view of the history.

The next question for us to answer is whether Diedrich fared any better as narrator in those two tales supposedly found among his posthumous papers, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle." Both of these tales--better written than the History, which Irving confessed in the explanation preceding "Rip Van Winkle" was "not a whit better than it should be"[2]--have special devices which give the narrator a closer tie-in than that of the historian.

At the introduction to "Rip Van Winkle" Irving has re-emphasized in narrator Knickerbocker those traits which fit him particularly for this tale--his love of doing his research among old Dutch inhabitants, especially their wives, and his prevailing interest in manners. These traits tend to

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[1] Ibid., p. 319.

[2] Henry A. Pochmann, Washington Irving: Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes (New York: American Book Company, 1934), p. 79.

place narrator and tale in conjunction just as Chaucer's Knight's Tale is suitable for the knight of his prologue. In "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," because of the need for a sense of humor, which Diedrich and his absurd claim of authenticity do not possess "the pleasant, shabby, gentlemanly old fellow, in pepper-and-salt clothes, with a sadly humorous face"[1] is interposed as the narrator whose words Diedrich repeated almost precisely. The added episode of the answer of the gentleman-narrator to the man who wanted the moral of the story, with the sly poke at those who insist on logical outcomes for any story containing an element of the supernatural or a joke, reminds one of Hawthorne's multiple choice conclusions. It furnishes the reader with a conclusion for the story and a more definite knowledge of the story-teller and demonstrates his suitableness for this story. Here too the story and the narrator are suited one for the other.

So much for the narrators of these two tales--Diedrich is adequate for "Rip Van Winkle," and the gentleman in the salt-and-pepper suit as reported by Diedrich is suitable for the "Legend." Tales and short stories seldom develop characters of the breadth and complexity of those in novels, and the same is true of their narrators. Besides, what we know of Irving's methods indicates that character was not his main interest. His well-known letter to Brevoort speaks of "the

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[1] Washington Irving, The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. (New York: The Heritage Press, 1939), p. 390.

weaving in of characters, lightly yet expressively delineated."[1]

But beyond the suitability of a given narrator for a certain type of subject matter there must be a consideration of the style and the treatment of the material. Is it an approximation of the heard voice of the imagined narrator? Does the story actually represent in both content and style the impression of the narrator? The point of view is actually not restricted consistently because the narrator moves from the outside of his characters: "Rip had but one way of replying to lectures of this kind, and that, by frequent use, had grown into a habit. He shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, cast up his eyes, but said nothing." And then he moves to the subjective side or inside:

> Rip now felt a vague apprehension stealing over him; . . . He was surprised to see any human being in this lonely and unfrequented place, but supposing it to be someone of the neighborhood in need of his assistance, he hastened down to yield it.

The same inconsistency is apparent in the "Legend." "Ichabod stole forth with the air of one who had been sacking a henroost rather than a fair lady's heart."

> Then, he thought, how soon he'd turn his back upon the old schoolhouse, snap his fingers in the face of Hans Van Ripper, and every other niggardly patron,

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[1] Washington Irving, Letters of Washington Irving to Henry Brevoort, ed. George S. Hellman. Library Edition; pp. 398-401, quoted in Henry A. Pochmann, Washington Irving; Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes (New York: American Book Company, 1934), p. lxxxi.

> and kick any itinerant pedagogue out of doors that should dare to call him comrade!

The narrator, consequently, is not the fallible narrator despite Irving's care in giving suitable characteristics to him for his story. He is merely an alias for Irving himself. Two of the "I" passages in the "Legend" particularly bear this out, and there are others. "If ever I should wish for a retreat whither I might steal from the world and its distractions and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life, I know of none more promising than this little valley." In view of the fact that Irving did establish a home here in Sleepy Hollow, this passage sounds like the author speaking. So does this comment after Irving's description of the loaded table at Old Baltus Van Tassel's.

> Heaven bless the mark! I want breath and time to discuss this banquet as it deserves, and am "too eager to get on with my story." Happily Ichabod Crane was not in so great hurry as his historian, but did "ample justice" to every dainty.

Two examples will suffice to illustrate the sketch-like quality and the romantic coloring of Irving's descriptions.

> From an opening between the trees he could overlook all the lower country for many a mile of rich woodland. He saw at a distance the lordly Hudson, far, far below him, moving on its silent but majestic course, with the reflection of a purple cloud or the sail of a lagging bark here and there sleeping on its glassy bosom, and at last losing itself in the blue highlands.

> His stronghold was situated on the banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks in which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling. A great elm tree spread its broad branches over it, at the foot of which bubbled up a spring of the

> softest and sweetest water in a little well formed of a barrel, and then stole sparkling away through the grass to a neighboring brook that bubbled among the alders and dwarf willows.

These descriptions are too consciously literary for such narrators as Irving chose to connect with his tales.

The only restricted point of view to be found in Irving is in the Geoffrey Crayon sketches where the identification between author and "I" is so close as to amount to identification. Even before the term public image was invented and received its slightly discolored publicity connotations, Washington Irving had his in Geoffrey Crayon. One sketch among this group deserves a careful glance because of its demonstration of the autobiographical reference and its realization of the dramatic within the restricted point of view. That sketch is "The Stout Gentleman" of Bracebridge Hall, which Irving assigns in customary introductory setting to a "thin, pale, weazen-faced, extremely nervous gentleman,"[1] whom the reader promptly forgets as Geoffrey Crayon writes the man's story down to the best of his recollection.

The real genesis is interesting. Leslie and Irving had set off from London on the top of a stagecoach, both of them hunting for subjects. When they woke on a Sunday morning at Oxford they were confronted with a dismal, rainy day--the day which furnished Irving with the view of the stable yard from his sitting-room with its crest-fallen cock,

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[1] Pochmann, p. 180.

steaming cow, wall-eyed horse, kitchen wench in pattens, and the unforgettable and riotous ducks. Later when they again were on their way "Leslie laughed at the memory of a certain 'stout gentleman' who had been in the Oxford coach."[1] Irving was immediately caught by the possibilities of a title in Leslie's description and started writing, enjoying his own effort and reading it to Leslie as he made progress with it.

It was exactly the subject for his best manner and was rewarded with such renown that he needs must include a subsequent sketch "The Great Unknown" about this mysterious gentleman in the Tales of a Traveller. The whole of the sketch is in the point of view of the listless, bored traveller goaded by the rain to a desperate catching at straws for interest. Piling up the details, the traveller builds the mystery of the identity of "The Stout Gentleman" till the climactic frustration of that last glimpse of "a full view of the broad disk of a pair of drab breeches."[2] The illusion was perfectly kept from beginning to end, leading so successfully to reader identification that the tale set off a flurry of guesses as to who the gentleman could have been.

Although the point of view is not consistently followed in the two tales which use the American local color material which Irving grouped with the Knickerbocker writings, the sense of drama is present in the narrative and descriptive style.

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[1]Williams, Life, I, 204. [2]Pochmann, p. 190.

Wright has pointed out that such devices as economy of dialogue in actual scenes, which suggests more than it tells, and specific detail in description of setting and objects and description of customary action constitute an aid to dramatic representation.[1] In these respects, at least in the tales we are considering, Irving's work is a decided improvement over much of eighteenth and early nineteenth century prose fiction.

In early fiction, description of scene and character was too likely to be generalized. Brown, following eighteenth century practice, was guilty of this when Clara describes her brother: "He was much conversant with the history of religious opinions, and took pains to ascertain their validity. He deemed it indispensable to examine the ground of his belief, to settle the relation between motives and actions, the criterion of merit, and the kinds and properties of actions."[2] The bulk of this type of characterization is large in Brown's novels. Cooper in Precaution, admittedly a poor work, writes:

> On reaching the Hall every one was rejoiced to see their really affectionate and worthy relative, and the evening passed in the tranquil enjoyment of the blessings which Providence had profusely scattered

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[1]Austin McGiffert Wright, The American Short Story of the Twenties (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 325-362.

[2]Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland or the Transformation, Introduction by Fred Lewis Pattee ("American Authors Series"; New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1958), p. 26.

> around the family of the baronet, but which are too often hazarded by a neglect of duty that springs from too great security, or an indolence which renders us averse to the precaution necessary to insure their continuance.[1]

And even the incomparable Jane presents her heroine in Emma to us first:

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.[2]

It must be granted that these authors had virtues which overbalanced these flat monotonous quotations. In the case of Jane Austen, whose dialogue and conciseness of action just narrowly miss a restricted point of view presentation in the novel mentioned, the paragraphs like the above were few; but both Brown and Cooper could describe character for pages in terms of generalized abstraction.

In contrast, Irving's description of his characters is given in memorable details. Ichabod was the community "singing-master."

> Certain it is, his voice resounded far above the rest of the congregation; and there are peculiar quavers still to be heard in that church, . . . which are said to be legitimately descended from the nose of Ichabod Crane.[3]

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[1] James Fenimore Cooper, Precaution. The Ways of the Hour (Boston: Dana Estes and Company, n. d.), p. 21.

[2] Jane Austen, Emma (New York: Nelson, n. d.), p. 1.

[3] Irving, Sketch Book, p. 362.

He was also a good dancer:

> Not a limb, not a fibre about him was idle; and to have seen his loosely hung frame in full motion and clattering about the room, you would have thought St. Vitus himself, that blessed patron of the dance, was figuring before you in person.[1]

Rip Van Winkle's classic character description can be illustrated briefly with this example:

> Rip Van Winkle, however, was one of these happy mortals, of foolish, well-oiled dispositions, who take the world easy, eat white bread or brown, whichever can be got with least thought or trouble, and would rather starve on a penny than work for a pound.[2]

Examples of Irving's depiction of landscape having already been given, its superiority to Brown's in clarity and specific details can best be illustrated by this portion of Wieland:

> The river bank is, at this part of it, and for some considerable space upward, so rugged and steep as not to be easily descended. In a recess of this declinity, near the southern verge of my little demesne, was placed a slight building, with seats and lattices. From a crevice of the rock to which this edifice was attached, there burst forth a stream of the purest water, which, leaping from ledge to ledge, for the space of sixty feet, produced a freshness in the air, and a murmur, the most delicious and soothing imaginable. These, added to the odours of the cedars which embowered it, and of the honey-suckle which clustered among the lattices, rendered this my favorite retreat in summer.[3]

First this description is not seen from any physical point of view on the part of an observer, and second, it abounds more in impressionistic and typical rather than observed details.

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 36. [3] Brown, Wieland, p. 70.

Brown's scenery, like Poe's, is constructed to inspire a mood, and in Edgar Huntly it is very effective for that purpose. One of his most powerful descriptions is of a pit in total blackness where the mental impressions and interpretations of sensory stimuli are the sole media of observation. Irving's sense of the picture and the lighting are missing.

In addition to Irving's use of the specific in observed details in description of setting and character, his similar method in handling narration which depicts customary or continuing action is worth noting, for it helps to increase the sense of the dramatic. In "Rip Van Winkle," as far as narration goes, there are really but two scenes--that is, incidents which happen once at a definite place and time. The first one is his meeting with the little man in the mountain on an autumnal afternoon and the adventure in the glen; the second is his waking up, descent to the village, and final recognition there. All the rest of the action is general or customary action.

Rip plays with the children, flies kites and shoots marbles, tells them long stories of ghosts, witches, and Indians; the children hang on his coat skirts, climb on his back, and play tricks on him. He would fish with a pole as "long and heavy as Tartar's lance" and carry a "fowling-piece on his shoulder for hours together . . . to shoot a few squirrels or wild pigeons" and all this despite inability to keep up his fences or weed his crops. He was first on hand

for all "country frolics for husking Indian corn, or building stone fences" and always at hand for running errands for the women of the village. Rip's customary justifications for not working his farm are given in equally vivid terms. His dog, his children, and his wife are presented. Of her it is said "Morning, noon, and night, her tongue was incessantly going, and everything he said or did was sure to produce a torrent of household eloquence." This putting the finger on definite character-revealing, habitual actions was a new and charming trait in fictional style. Irving was to have the reward in seeing his fictions replace those of Addison, Steele, and Johnson as textbook classics during his lifetime. Hawthorne, Cooper, and Poe all studied his style.

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" displays this same generous revelation of pictured detail in the setting, the customary action, and the scene. So vividly dramatic do the scenes become under Irving's magic touch that the reader is scarcely aware of the fact that neither at the party at Van Tassel's where Ichabod loses his suit with Katrina nor on the wild ride home, racing with the headless horseman is there any dialogue. Dialogue in narration then is not equivalent to a sense of drama.

In "Rip Van Winkle" the dialogue is used with almost modern economy. It is certainly in sharp contrast with dialogue which includes greetings and farewells as well as moralistic and philosophic comment as found in Cooper and

Simms. Rip hears his name called by the little man who is slowly toiling up the mountainside. The "odd personages" playing at nine-pins play in silence, and he serves them in silence. The next bit of dialogue is the opening to the second scene when Rip bemoans his use of the flagon of the little men and wonders what he can say to Dame Van Winkle. Aside from further bewildered comments, and these are few, the dialogue is reserved for the climactic scene when the old man meets the villagers and claims he is "a poor quiet man, a native of the place, and a loyal subject of the King, God bless him!" This, of course, sets off the by-standers and leads to Rip's recognition by his buxom daughter who takes him home with her.

Irving was later to try his hand unsuccessfully at writing drama. "Rip Van Winkle" was his only writing that was dramatized, and it became very popular. Irving resembled James in his interest in drama, but save in his skill with the dramatic particularities in his best writings, its only influence seemed to be this interest in the dramatic effect.

Not counting Irving's early use of the humor characters of the Addisonian essays, Irving's narrators seem more like a group of aliases for himself, of poses he maintained. In his satire, the practice gave him a prized anonymity and added to his youthful love of a hoax. After The History of New York when his identity was discovered Irving found himself famous as Diedrich Knickerbocker. He enjoyed this type

of discovery. In Geoffrey Crayon, Irving may have wanted to fly a trial balloon. Publishing the Sketch Book in England was a daring feat, for British and Scottish critics were formidable even to their own countrymen. Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, and others could well testify to this truth. Whether this habit of pen names was due to "the author's deep-rooted fear of his critics"[1] as Williams thinks, or not, Irving was pleasantly flattered when Geoffrey Crayon was identified by some as Sir Walter Scott. Geoffrey Crayon is actually Irving himself in the same intimate fashion that Irving's style is so excellent a reflection of his personality.

Irving had spent a lifetime of writing to develop his famous style and probably had no idea of substituting a narrator to take over in the work itself in a style suitable to that narrator. His concept of a narrator was someone to hide behind, not someone to work through. He was heartily disgusted with Fray Antonio Agapida, a possible attempt at a fallible narrator, and resented it when his publisher John Murray added "By Washington Irving" to the title-page which read: "A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada. From the Mss. of Fray Agapida."[2] His angry letter to Murray protested: "By inserting my name in the title page as the avowed author, you make me personally responsible for the verity of the facts

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[1]Williams, The Life, II, 346.

[2]Quoted by Williams in The Life of Washington Irving, II, 346.

and the soundness of the opinions of what was intended to be given as a romantic chronicle."[1] So little did Irving have the concept of the responsibility of an author for everything in a work as James had it and so small a realization of the artistic possibilities in exercising that responsibility.

Diedrich Knickerbocker became associated in Irving's mind and the mind of his public with a certain type of subject matter and a satiric tone which ranged all the way from the hilariously comic of The History of New York to the gently nostalgic of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." But, as we stated, Diedrich is actually extraneous to the action and theme of the fiction though the content at times is appropriate for the plodding, scholarly antiquarian of folk legends. It is interesting to note that in "The Legend" the story material was supposedly filtered through an old farmer, the seedy gentleman in pepper-and-salt, and Diedrich Knickerbocker, and yet it comes out in Irving's best manner.

Although nothing new had been added to the development of the restricted point of view in Irving, he presents us with at least one comic sketch "The Stout Gentleman" which is an excellent example of the familiar "I" and proves that Irving's skill might have been equal to a fallible narrator if his imagination had conceived it. The hands may have been

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[1] Ibid.

the hands of sundry "nervous" or other type gentleman, but somehow the voice always came out Irving's.

Significantly, the contribution Irving made to possibilities of the dramatic in fiction were best realized in that element in his writing which he felt was his strongest--in his style. Our analysis would tend to demonstrate that Irving's best work, which moved away from the imitative excesses of sentimentalism and generalization of his poorest writing to a concern for particulars which makes it a delight to modern readers, was influenced by his eye for picture, his love for social small talk, and his keen appreciation of the dramatic.

CHAPTER III

THE NARRATOR AS OBSERVER OF MANNERS

Certain types of fictional subject matter lend themselves more congenially to the personal impressions of a single observer, and one of these is the subject of manners, the way of life of any particular group of society.

The narrator in such fiction may be an observer and frequently is a visitor, for a difference in manners is more keenly studied by someone to whom they are new and freshly discovered. De Toqueville, Dickens, and Mrs. Trollope are only a few of the reflectors of American manners among the visitors to our shores. James Pendleton Kennedy used the visitor as narrator in Swallow Barn. William Gilmore Simms varied the procedure in the short tale studied in this chapter by having his narrator be a visitor to whom the true narrator relates the story. In either the short or the longer fiction, however, the visitor is the means of observing the way of life in a community different from his usual one.

The observer of manners may be both witness and protagonist in the little drama he is watching, and that is the type of narrator-observer Cooper used in the Littlepage trilogy with Cornelius, Mordaunt, and Hugh Littlepage. The reader is

definitely more engaged in the story, less detached at least, when the narrator-observer has a part in the action. Cooper's young men who serve as observers are not at all times visitors; they vary this point of view by re-visiting familiar scenes. To the latter, they bring a fresh point of view, which is likewise effective for comment on manners.

Though each of these narrators, with the possible exception of the "I" in Simms's tale, is projected at a distance from the author, there is no question of hidden ironies. The norms of the authors and the narrators are obviously identical, and the principal allowance to be made is for the difference between youth and maturity.

Since manners are definitely related to morals, it is usually the moral order of society which is dramatized for the reader in a fiction which emphasizes manners. The author solicits our judgment for or against, and sometimes both for and against, this world which his narrator-observer has reconstructed for us. It is not too surprising then to discover that Cooper exploited his materials for propaganda purposes--for a cause which is now as extinct as the dodo. But his honesty of presentation was such that in spite of his bias, the truth of the principles involved in this early battle of democracy are effectively alive in the observations made by his three young men.

The order of the works studied in this chapter is one of the complexity of the narrators. First, in "The Last

Wager," the observer of manners is merely a device for getting the real story told; in Swallow Barn, the observer-narrator regales the reader in leisurely fashion with a series of sketches bound by a loose narrative thread; and third, in the Littlepage novels, the narrators become protagonists in the complete action of their stories.

Though the output of William Gilmore Simms is prodigious, for him the story was the all-important element in fiction, and he enjoyed incorporating as much of authentic historical fact into his novels as was possible in line with his narrative purpose. This concern led him to choose the point of view most common to summary narrative and to ignore the fallible narrator in his longer work.

In Simms' series of short tales collected under the title of The Wigwam and the Cabin, however, he has provided for narrators to tell some of his tales, especially those which are implausible when not told by one who was actually there. Two of these are "Two Camps" and "The Last Wager." Both are told by narrators whom Simms describes and sets before the reader with some care before the tales begin with a leisurely introduction by the author. The following quotation is taken from the introduction to "The Last Wager" and is interesting for what it reveals of contrast between his attitude and Hawthorne's.

> It is not the policy of a good artist to deal much in the merely extravagant. His real success, and the true secret of it, is to be found in the naturalness

> of his story, its general seemliness, and the close resemblance of its events to those which may or must take place in all instances of individuals subjected to like influences with those who figure in his narrative. . . . Except in stories for example--in which the one purpose of the romancer--that of exciting wonder--is declared at the outset--except in such stories, or in others of the broad grin--such as are common and extravagant enough among the frontier raconteurs of the West, it were the very worst policy in the world for a writer of fiction to deal in the marvelous.[1]

The "I" of "The Last Wager" is an eighteen-year-old youth, presumably Simms himself, who has taken refuge for the night in a rather unusual frontier cabin which has a pack of cards nailed above the fireplace. The host, a fine specimen of frontier manhood, when asked about the cards tells a tale which, if not marvelous in the sense of anything supernatural, is certainly unbelievably romantic.

The frontiersman also tells his tale by means of the first person. His language is appropriate to his character and education. He tells of the "plunder" delivered hit-or-miss on the bank by the steamboat, records his suspicion that the strange old man "had only been running his rigs upon me,"[2] and describes the supper he and his father served their guests. "Supper went forward. You know what a country supper is, out here in Mississippi, so it don't need to tell you

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[1] William Gilmore Simms, The Wigwam and the Cabin (New and revised edition; New York: W. J. Widdleton, 1856), pp. 71-72.

[2] Ibid., p. 103.

that cornbread, and a little eggs and bacon, and a smart bowl of milk, was pretty much the amount of it."[1]

By using these realistic details of local color and a narrator believable within the setting of "the dreary and dangerous wastes of the Mississippi border"[2] Simms is attempting to add plausibility to this story of a fortune in gold coins and a beautiful young wife won with the pack of cards above the fireplace from the desperate Mr. Eckhardt, a man who later committed suicide.

Stories like these are a part of the wave of local color literature which rose so high in the nineteenth century, but, as was true with Irving, the connection between the narrator and his story seems fortuitous. Simms must be credited with some good fiction, but he added little of importance to the use of the fallible narrator.

John Pendleton Kennedy's Swallow Barn, on the other hand, is an excellent novel of manners, though the author disclaimed for it any unity save that of a series of sketches. Frequently compared with Irving's Bracebridge Hall it has the advantage of being more authentic. Kennedy's world of rural Virginia "is a world to and from which he passes without any sense of effort, but always with an uninterrupted awareness of the passing."[3] In Mark Littleton, Kennedy has a fallible

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 72.

[3] Edith Wharton, The Writing of Fiction (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 120.

narrator in the first person who is as well-realized as the other characters--Frank Meriwether, genial head of the farm, Philly Wart, eccentric but capable lawyer, or Bel Tracy, the heroine in love with feudal days. Mark is the cousin of Ned and Lucretia Hazard; he visits Swallow Barn for the summer where he is not only included in their activities, but also becomes Ned's confidant in his wooing of Bel Tracy. This love affair, which see-saws throughout the book and reaches a conclusion only after Mark has returned North and the tale is told, comprises the narrative thread. Mark has an informant in Harvey Riggs, a cousin of Bel's. Other characters express their opinion of Mark or remark on his appearance. He jests and argues with them, and they with him.

Although a remnant of the epistolary form is suggested by an introductory letter from Mark to Zack Huddlestone, Esq., dated June 20, 1829, the device is not emphasized. We soon forget Mr. Huddlestone for the more important business at hand which includes among other events a family feud over the Apple Pie Branch as boundary line between The Brakes and Swallow Barn; a County Court Session; a Coon Hunt; a visit to Quarters; and a search for a tamed hawk. All the separate events are woven together with the continuity of interest in the season, the state of the weather, the passing of the time of the visit, the outcome of the boundary suit, and the success of the lover. An air of casualness, of living from day to day, of good humor and good living filtered

through the consciousness of this cousin who is outsider enough to savor its essence, but not outsider enough to pass judgment on this Virginia farm community and its people give to Swallow Barn a more valid position in literature than the mansion and magnolia portraits which succeeded it.

Cooper used fallible narrators, as he did everything else, in a fashion consistent with his individualistic purposes. He had received a very bitter dose of criticism after Home as Found when he was identified with Effingham. His rebuttal, which was confined to pointing out such minor differences as dates, never convinced anyone--possibly not even himself. It is quite probable, therefore, that in taking sides on the very controversial subject of the Anti-Rent disturbances he intelligently concluded to separate himself completely from the fiction by using fallible narrators and masking his design by presenting his trilogy as a group of novels of manners--rather than history. Having discovered in a novel published in 1844 under the title Afloat and Ashore, or The Adventures of Miles Wallingford that he could use a gossipy old man to present his ideas on many subjects, he later projects narrators from three different generations of the Littlepage family to present a critical social battle of the Republic in New York state--the Anti-Rent struggle. Each narrator has a separate novel: Corny Littlepage for Satanstoe (1845); his son Mordaunt for the The Chainbearer (1845); and Mordaunt's grandson Hugh for The Redskins, or Indian and

Injin (1846). These three narrators will be used for comparison and contrast in this dissertation, but the one who will receive the most concentrated study will be Mordaunt Littlepage of The Chainbearer.

Criticism has agreed that Satanstoe, the first of the trilogy, is the least spoiled by Cooper's propaganda purposes, and this avowedly nostalgic novel of manners in colonial New York certainly possesses a charm, which is lacking in Redskin and pushed into the background of The Chainbearer. A great share of the attractiveness of Satanstoe lies in the character of Cornelius Littlepage, the narrator and hero of the story.

Corny is a naive young provincial, only son of the well-to-do owner of Satanstoe, a rich Westchester County farmer and part owner with his friend Colonel Follock of an extensive land patent called Mooseridge located northeast of Albany. The boy had been sent to college at Old Nassau in order to escape pernicious Yankee influence, and by Chapter IV he has survived the dangers of college life which included, much to his gentle mother's horror, the crossing of the river on each journey to and fro. His college had possessed, he boasts, a telescope that "showed us all four of Jupiter's moons"[1] and a second-hand copy of Euripides.

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[1]James Fenimore Cooper, Satanstoe: or The Littlepage Manuscripts (Mohawk Edition; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n. d.), p. 23.

Beginning with this period after graduation when Corny and Dirck Follock, the son of his father's friend, make their first trip to New York on their own as young men of twenty, the hero has many experiences much more exciting than crossing Hudson River at Powles' Hook Ferry, including participation in the social life of colonial New York and Albany, fighting before Ticonderoga as a volunteer, pursuit of hostile Hurons, defense of a blockhouse, and winning the hand of Anneke Mordaunt, a beautiful heiress, in competition with a British lord who is a high-ranking officer in the British army.

The boys Corny and Dirck have two companions with them during their adventures--Jason Newcome, the Yankee schoolteacher, new in the Satanstoe community at Corny's return, and Rev. Thomas Worden, the former schoolteacher and rector of the church there. Jason Newcome is an important character whose descendants are featured in the third book of the Littlepage Manuscripts. The prime responsibility of Jason, who is an avid seeker of the golden fleece, as a character is to prove that narrow bigotry and covetousness persist even unto the fourth and fifth generation. Jason himself has some redeeming qualities; his first logical assault against the property of others, however, comes during the Indian siege in the blockhouse when he suggests to Corny that if they take back Mr. Mordaunt's property from the Indians then it should belong to the new conquerors. He

degenerates from the time he receives his mill site from Hermann Mordaunt by favorable lease, and as Squire Newcome becomes the "respectable" villain of The Chainbearer. His descendant, Seneca Newcome, an unmitigated scoundrel, is one of the leaders of the "Injins" in the Anti-Rent War of The Redskins.

The narrators of the three books show a comparable shrinkage in stature. Cornelius Littlepage and his father and grandfather are romantic figures of an heroic past, in which gentlemen were honored for their superior training and ability and character as well. The anarchistic and materialistic tendencies of the egalitarian process of America were just beginning to make their threat against the civilizing forces represented by Corny and his group.

Mordaunt Littlepage, the only son of Corny and Anneke Mordaunt, comes to manhood during the troubled days of the Revolution with a college career lengthened to six years because of intermittent service in association with his father and grandfather in the campaigns of that war. Mordaunt is a more cynical and wary young man than Corny was, though as fully capable of both love and loyalty. His commission from his father and his bachelor uncle Dirck after the war is to finish the surveying and begin the settling of Mooseridge (which had been interrupted by the war) and to check on conditions at Ravensnest (also his father's after the death of grandfather Mordaunt) where Jason Newcome is agent. Mordaunt

possesses the character of a young and wealthy landlord; the real hero of the book is his friend Andries Coejemans, The Chainbearer, a captain of the Revolution and a poorly educated but honorable Dutch gentleman. Mordaunt falls into the clutches of Old Aaron Thousandacres and his numerous "squatter" family brood, and, though he is brave and defiant, his own role as defender of his property rights is a lesser one.

Hugh Roger Littlepage, an angry young man of the 1840's, is the narrator in the manuscripts of the times contemporaneous with Cooper, who poses as the editor of these papers. Absent in Paris with his Uncle Ro (for Roger) on his grand tour, which had consumed five years, at the time of the mounting tensions of the Anti-Rent War, this grandson of Mordaunt Littlepage hastens to return to Ravensnest where violent unrest exposes him to the possible humiliation of tar and feathers or even more serious injury from mob violence. Persistence has degenerated into obstinacy, generosity into condescension, family pride into arrogance, and plain dealing into subterfuge with this final narrator of the Littlepages. The character of the past is the most heroic figure.

Cooper was always interested in the novel of manners. His first novel Precaution reveals such an interest, though it is guilty of practically every vice of imitative extravagance. The Pioneers is a great improvement in this respect; at least, it shows that Cooper recognized the possibility of a subject within his own experience instead of within a false

English setting ornamented with more dukes and earls than appear in all of Jane Austen. The Littlepage series is particularly fortunate in its portrayal of the life of the times it represents: Cornelius Littlepage's viewing of theatrical performance in New York and of the Pinkster holidays and his comments and descriptions of houses, streets, clothes, and modes of conveyance are both authentic and interesting. His notation of the difference between Dutch customs in Albany, where grown young men coast at breakneck speed down the streets on sleds, and English ones in New York, where young women walk to almost every entertainment, is a source of the charm of Satanstoe.

Mordaunt's interested observations on the contrasts between the now populous lower counties of New York State and the crude roads, trails, inns, houses, and churches of the stump land society of Ravensnest and his detailed descriptions of the squatter's cabin and activities at Mooseridge are an important element of The Chainbearer.

In Redskins Hugh Littlepage, just home from Europe, sees home--which is the 'Nest (Ravensnest), now a prosperous upstate New York farm community--as mean and unpretentious in spite of its natural beauty and the parklike effect of the American farms with their woodland patches spread out at the foot of the eminence on which the old blockhouse once stood. He speaks of customs of dress and eating, of the changes in modes of conveyance, how coaches-and-six have disappeared

since his boyhood, styles of houses and gardens, but all with the disapproving eye of a traveler from Europe who is distrustful of "progress." Hugh's observations on manners are seen with a prejudiced eye; but, allowing for this distortion, they give us a good picture of rural America toward the mid-nineteenth century.

There is evidence within the three novels that Cooper had planned them as interrelated parts of a whole. He wrote them rapidly and published the first two the same year and the third one the following year. There is continuity in the family lines, and at least two characters Jaaf, or Yop, Corny's nigger, and Susquesus, the upright Onondago, are allowed to live to a ripe old age of about a hundred and twenty to play a part in the final novel. The plot structures are similar, each novel reaching a climactic scene near the conclusion and then ending with the pairing off of happy couples. The climactic scenes, however, reflect the same shrinking scale of excitement and danger that the narrators portray in character and stature. In Satanstoe the scene is the defense of the blockhouse at Ravensnest from a marauding party of Hurons; in The Chainbearer the scene is the imprisonment and trial of Chainbearer and Mordaunt Littlepage by the squatter Thousand-acres; and in The Redskins, the climax occurs when the Indians from the prairies taking their ceremonial leave of Susquesus on the piazza of the landlord's home are interrupted by a howling mob of calico-covered Anti-Rent "Injins." The

total effect of the three books is one of pessimistic anti-climax.

Mordaunt Littlepage, though not the most attractive of the three narrators, is equally profitable for study and in some ways a more complex young man than the other two. Since, in general, Cooper uses the same methods in dealing with all three, a discussion of the way the reader realizes the story of The Chainbearer through Mordaunt Littlepage will be applicable to all of them. Cooper has shown some skill in handling the restricted point of view, but we shall begin our analysis of The Chainbearer by pointing out some of the crudities of treatment, which, it is only fair to concede, are not worse than those of most of his contemporaries.

In the first place, though Cooper intended and really did project a fallible narrator, he never could trust his young men sufficiently to turn loose their mental leading strings. This propensity worsens in the course of the three novels until with Hugh Littlepage we have a character with an old man's head on a young man's shoulders--a head that works suspiciously like Cooper's in his most controversial period. This distrust of his narrators led Cooper in his character as editor to sprinkle the pages of his trilogy liberally with footnotes. The first one of the following examples of footnotes is taken from The Redskins and illustrates the author intruding his argument into the narrator's and then emphasizing it in a footnote. The remaining examples are drawn

largely from The Chainbearer, showing the variety of his interpolations at the foot of the page, with one rather interesting one from Satanstoe.

(1) Hugh and Mary Warren have frustrated the attempts of Seneca Newcome to set fire to the 'Nest kitchen at night--an act of "Injin" terrorism; Hugh reflects:

> A fellow, who was almost an inmate of my family, had not only conspired with others to rob me of my property, on a large scale, but he had actually carried his plot so far as to resort to the brand and the rifle, . . . Nor was this the result of the vulgar disposition to steal; it was purely the consequence of a widely-extended system, that is fast becoming incorporated with the politics of the land, and which men, relying on the efficacy of majorities, are bold enough to stand up in legislative halls to defend.[1]

Footnote of Cooper:

> In order that the reader who is not familiar with what is passing in New York may not suppose that exaggerated terms are here used, the writer will state a single expedient of the anti-renters in the legislature to obtain their ends.[2]

And the footnote in small type takes two-thirds of a page explaining how the State in regulating the laws of descents had attempted to get around the Constitutional provision forbidding States to pass laws which would impair the obligations of contracts. There are not as many short footnotes in The Redskins as there are in the other two, but, unfortunately,

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[1]James Fenimore Cooper, The Redskins: or Indian and Injin (Mohawk Edition; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n. d.), p. 376.

[2]Ibid., p. 377.

in this poorest of novels the dialogues repeat ad nauseam the author's controversial opinions.

(2) Corny Littlepage on his visit to New York was describing his impression of Trinity Church: "It was a venerable structure, which had then felt the heats of summer and the snows of winter on its roofs and walls, near half a century, and it still stands a monument of pious zeal and cultivated taste."[1]

Footnote of Cooper:

> The intelligent reader will, of course, properly appreciate the provincial admiration of Mr. Littlepage, who naturally fancied his own best was other people's best. The Trinity of that day was burned in the great fire 1776. The edifice that succeeded it at the peace of 1783, has already given place to a successor, that has more claim to be placed on a level with modern English town church-architecture, than any other building in the Union . . . if the respectable architect who has built it had no other merit, he would deserve the gratitude of every man of taste in the country, by placing church-towers of a proper comparative breadth, dignity, and proportions, before the eyes of its population. The diminutive meanness of American church-towers has been an eye-sore to every intelligent, travelled American, since the country was settled--Editor.[2]

Sometimes these footnotes provide interesting historical data as here, but, as often as not, they are at the same time expressions of Cooper's opinions and prejudices.

(3) Mordaunt Littlepage on hearing of the punishment of Thousandacres' son for stealing sheep concludes that "one whipping-post, discreetly used, will do more toward reforming

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[1]Cooper, Satanstoe, pp. 28-29. [2]Ibid.

a neighborhood than a hundred jails, with their twenty and thirty days' imprisonment!"[1]

Footnote of Cooper:

> Mr. Mordaunt Littlepage writes here with prophetic accuracy. Small depradations of this nature have got to be so very common, that few now think of resorting to the law for redress. Instead of furnishing the prompt and useful punishment that was administered by our fathers, the law is as much adorned with its cavilling delays in the minor as well as in the more important cases; and it often takes years to bring a small depredator even to trial, if he can find money to fee a sagacious lawyer.--Editor.[2]

(4) Thousandacres is in his long debate with the Chainbearer about who owns the land, placing in opposition to law the right of possession, and he states: "We want land, when we are old enough to turn our hands to labor, and I make my pitch out here in the woods, say where no man has pitched afore me. Now, in my judgment that makes the best of titles, the Lord's title."[3]

Footnote of Cooper:

> Lest the reader should suppose Mr. Mordaunt Littlepage is here recording uselessly the silly sayings of a selfish, ignorant, and vulgar robber, it may be well to add, that doctrines of a calibre considered, in respect to morals and logic, similar to this, . . . are constantly published in journals devoted to anti-rentism in the State of New York, and men have acted on these principles even to the shedding of blood.[4]

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[1]James Fenimore Cooper, The Littlepage Manuscripts: or The Chainbearer (New York and London: The Co-Operative Publication Society, n. d.), p. 272.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid., p. 338. [4]Ibid.

Multiplication of examples would only pile up proof that Cooper could not trust his narrators to put his point across with sufficient emphasis and by means of footnotes allowed himself the privilege of authorial intrusion.

Another of Cooper's failures in the handling of the restricted point of view is a weakness displayed in his other work--the dialogue. The criticism of its inconsistency which Twain made of Natty Bumppo's speech in the Leatherstocking Tales is not valid in these three novels. Cooper took great pains, for example in The Redskins, to distinguish between the translations of the poetic ceremonial speech of Susquesus and the other Indians and the crude attempt at English which marked their communication with white men. In all three novels he followed the dialect of Dutch speech, stressing the tendency of such men to revert to Dutch accents under excitement, and he, or rather his narrators, ridiculed Yankee grammar and pronunciation to such an extent that it became tiresome. Obviously, Cooper considered language differences an important item in the American novel of manners and devoted considerable care to observing and commenting upon distinctions.

However, his manner of introducing dialogue is occasionally awkward. "Of course, the interval thus passed in waiting for the appearance of the Eagle was filled up, more or less by discourse,"[1] Mordaunt informs us as his family

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[1]Ibid., p. 87.

gathers on the lawn at Lilacsbush. Or, for another example--when Mordaunt calls out to Andries from his storehouse prison, he introduces his speech: "At this instant I first let him know my close proximity by speaking."[1] But these two examples are not as lacking in artistry as the flat pronouncements in The Redskins: "But there was one portion of his speech which was so remarkable, that I must attempt to give it as it was uttered,"[2] or "The conversation then, naturally enough, reverted to the state of the country."[3] Unfortunately for this last book of the trilogy the "state of the country" is the subject of the dialogue at meals, on the road, and almost every occasion except possibly in the short love scenes.

The inclusiveness and length of the dialogues is also a drawback. Cooper is always prolix and never more so than when he is interested in using his characters for propaganda purposes. Greetings, farewells, compliments or insults, random observations, attempts at humor, and moral judgments are all included in the speeches. These faults are less obvious in Satanstoe but flagrant in The Redskins. Some excuse for such inclusiveness is inherent in the form of the novel of manners, but preferably only to the extent to which it displays character and custom. Cooper's didactic purpose,

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[1] Ibid., p. 310. [2] Cooper, The Redskins, p. 253.
[3] Ibid., p. 313.

which grew stronger in each succeeding novel of the three, added a superfluity that crushed the work.

In spite of these faults in treatment, however, Cooper displays considerable skill in helping the reader to see his young men who serve as fallible narrators. Their physical appearance is presented (in each case with effective humorous disclaimer on the part of the young man involved) by the expressed opinions of the women of the family.

We see Mordaunt first during an interview with his doting grandmother Littlepage.

> My dear old grandmother, who was then in her sixty-ninth year, was so persuaded of my likeness to her late husband, the "old general," as he was now called, that she would not proceed in her communications until she had wiped her eyes, and gratified her affections with another long and wistful gaze. "Oh, those eyes!" she murmured--" and that forehead!--The mouth, too, and the nose, to say nothing of the smile, which is as much alike as one pea is like another!"
>
> This left very little for the Mordaunts, it must be owned; the chin and the ears being pretty much all that were not claimed for the direct line. It is true that my eyes were blue, and the "old general's" had been black as coals; and as for the mouth, I can only say mine was as like that of my mother's as a man's could well be like a woman's. The last I had heard my father say a thousand times. But no matter; age and affection, and the longings of the parent, caused my grandmother to see things differently.[1]

In fact, from the above the reader gets a more complete picture of Mordaunt than Cooper may have had in mind. He is the darling not only of his grandmother Littlepage but

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[1]Cooper, The Chainbearer, p. 71.

also of his mother, the beautiful Anneke Mordaunt of Satanstoe, and his two sisters (notice his insistence that his mouth is like his mother's.) Though Mordaunt is early immersed in the man's world of battles, he portrays a very confident smugness of his attraction for women. He looks upon Pris Bayard as a man trap set by his managing family; he feels that he is condescending a bit to propose to Dus Malbone; and he hesitates not at all to make use of Lowiny Thousandacres' preference for him in trying to escape. Only in the first of his narrators, Corny Littlepage of Satanstoe, does Cooper present the reader with a young man who is not plainly spoiled and smug. There is a capacity for wonder in Corny and a refreshingly pragmatic humility which saves him.

Mordaunt's thoughts and actions portray him as a good example of the class of Americans which Cooper idolized in the past and believed essential for the future of the country. He was one of the civilizers. He and his father and grandfather had all served with distinction in the American War for Independence, and Mordaunt, as representative of the younger generation, becomes their emissary to the frontier communities to re-build and project plans for the future. Cooper concluded The Chainbearer with a very effective bit of symbolism for his purpose when Mordaunt's father, Cornelius Littlepage, makes Mordaunt and Dus a present to replace the blockhouse at Ravensnest of a "good stone country house, such

as a landlord ought to build on his property"[1] because as he explained, "It is impossible for those who have never been witnesses of the result, to appreciate the effect produced by one gentleman's family in a neighborhood, in the way of manners, tastes, general intelligence, and civilization at large."[2] Such a belief also found expression in the work of Kennedy and Simms.

Among Mordaunt's reflections on his way up the Hudson to Albany is a bit of eulogy for another symbol of American civilization which strikes a note developed later by Whitman in his "Song of the Broad-Axe."

> More than a million of square miles of territory have been opened up from the shades of the virgin forest, to admit the warmth of the sun; and culture and abundance have been spread where the beast of the forest so lately roamed, hunted by the savage. . . . A brief quarter of a century has seen these wonderful changes wrought; and at the bottom of them all lies this beautiful, well-prized, ready and efficient implement, the American axe![3]

Both the laborer and the "gentry" are partners in the great expansive act of civilizing new lands in The Chainbearer.

Mordaunt displays the qualities requisite for a landlord of the best type. He is a demonstration of Cooper's "belief that republican leaders should be men of culture and responsibility."[4] His generosity in renewing the leases of

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[1] Ibid., p. 472. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 95.

[4] Howard Mumford Jones, "Prose and Pictures: James Fenimore Cooper," Tulane Studies in English, III (1952), p. 154.

his grandfather's tenants, even that of Jason Newcome, is the object of somewhat reluctant admiration on the part of the tenants. He lends a hand to help with the "raising" of the community's first church; he establishes a penniless young man Frank Malbone, the half-brother of Dus, as his agent at Ravensnest and assures Dus and her Uncle Chainbearer of a home in the Blockhouse. He considers giving a big dinner to celebrate the agreement on the leases for all his tenants until Frank advises him it would look too much like an act of condescension. After the death of Thousandacres and Chainbearer Mordaunt makes possible an unnoticed restoration of household property and mill machinery to the squatter's wife Prudence and the remainder of the family. His amnesty extends likewise to Jason Newcome, who is never quite sure how much of his rascality the young landlord knows.

Perhaps this last act of generosity is more a piece of calculated shrewdness than Mordaunt would want to admit. But a slightly cynical appraisal of human nature is also one of the traits of the young man. The scene in which the as yet unrecognized young landlord watches Squire Newcome get the majority vote of the community for making the church a Congregational Church, although the Congregationalists have merely a plurality of one at the first count, discloses the young man's cynical awareness that the processes of democracy can be shrewdly manipulated.

In quite typical fashion Mordaunt Littlepage appraises young American girls and pays them high tribute, explaining their "homely calicoes" and "gay rustic finery" as matters that were necessitated by frontier conditions. He draws a careful distinction between Ursula Malbone (Dus) who is a "lady" by birth and education and the rest of the farm community girls. Dus has been a chainbearer, though, for her uncle's surveying team, and Mordaunt has to overcome his own squeamishness on this subject by noting that she never had to do any menial labor and that she presides gracefully over a silver tea service which is her sole inheritance from improvident but noble ancestors. Since she becomes his sweetheart and later on his wife, these distinctions are given their due importance in Mordaunt's thoughts. The crisis of the story is brought on by Mordaunt's impulsive flight into the wilderness when he thinks Dus has refused his proposal of marriage, a mildly humorous situation in the eyes of the reader who has observed Mordaunt's scruples about asking her.

On the whole Cooper has created an imaginatively realized and believable young man for his fallible narrator, a narrator who represents a decided forward step from the narrators of Washington Irving. The chief effectiveness of Mordaunt Littlepage lies not in the detailed skill with which he presents his story--we have pointed out important areas in which such skill is lacking--but in the prophetic quality

which the whole that Mordaunt observes and so seriously participates in, bears for the thoughtful American reader.

The vital conflict Mordaunt sees dramatized during his imprisonment is, in truth, a conflict of "principles." These principles in Mordaunt's story are symbolized in the characters of two old men, both far beyond the average in vitality and courage--Old Aaron Thousandacres, the New England squatter and tribal patriarch, and The Chainbearer, Andries Coejemans, honest surveyor and friend of propertied men. Thousandacres stands for the principle of lawless, but expedient liberty upheld by force and the pressure of numbers; the Chainbearer represents the majesty and integrity of law, without respect of persons and impervious to the pressure of numbers.

Whether the reader agrees with Cooper's doctrinaire presentation in the debate between these two men or not, he cannot but be impressed by the confrontation of two forces which have not ceased their struggle in American life. De Tocqueville, Cooper, Thoreau are a few of the warning voices against the threat of the majority rule--the vox populi vox dei philosophy.

The issue is there in its ugly reality. Thousandacres is a character like Ishmael Bush with a name equally symbolical. His last name represents his voracious cupidity, his warped and single vision which kept the sawed and piled lumber before him in the hour of his death when his wife strove

in vain to prepare him to face God. His name Aaron recalls the priest who made the golden calf for the tribe to worship.

But the chains by which boundaries are established by law suggest slavery. James Grossman in discussing the theme of this novel and its general unpalatableness to our feelings writes,

> Nothing could be more suitable for Cooper's high purpose than the very title of the book, The Chainbearer, or than the chains that Coejemans endlessly drags across the land. These are flaunted before us, with a rhetorical fervor equal to Marx's three years later, as the conventional symbol of slavery; what we must learn, however, is not to rebel against them but to think of them as the necessary restraints to which men must submit if they would be free.[1]

Seen from the point of view of Mordaunt Littlepage, the young landlord, the struggle is ended with the killing of the two contestants. Though Mordaunt and Dus are grieved by the death of Uncle Chainbearer, they feel that his sleep is the sleep of the just and turn with confidence to build for the future. But anonymous violence--the reader, of course, shares Mordaunt's suspicion that Susquesus avenged Chainbearer's death by killing Thousandacres--is a dubious support for the principle of law, and the conflict does not end with the resolution of the plot. The same forces and the same arguments with different and less heroic protagonists are repeated in The Redskins when Mordaunt's grandson Hugh takes up

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[1] James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper ("American Men of Letters Series"; New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1949), p. 209.

the fight for Ravensnest. The conclusion at the end of The Redskins is yet more equivocal. What Mordaunt so joyously received as "perfect happiness" then was only a truce between the conflicting principles. Aaron Thousandacres had received a bitter answer to his lifetime quest for all the land a man needs in the grave which held his rough pine coffin.

What has happened in Cooper's trilogy is that meaning has spiraled up and out from the presentation as a genie escapes from his confining vessel. The fallible narrator has proved himself a valuable story-teller for the novel in which conflicts in manners reveal more serious conflicts in ideas.

CHAPTER IV

THE NARRATOR AS EXPLORER OF EMOTIONAL DEPTHS: "THE TERROR OF THE SOUL"

Introduction

Our first concern in this chapter is the question of what "the terror of the soul" is. "The terror of the soul" is made up of the fears which are so universally present in the human race that they are sometimes called instinctive or innate--such fears as the fear of darkness, of falling, of loud or piercing noise, of smothering closeness or entombment, and of strange or unfamiliar objects, terrain, or behaviour. Whether these fears are a part of man's inheritance, an effect of the traumatic experience of birth, or patterns learned from forgotten experiences, they are powerful, submerged emotions. Rationalists may attempt to explain them away, and the courageous learn to act in spite of them, but they are a part of the "old verities and truths of the heart"[1] which a long line of fiction writers in America--Brown, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Faulkner--have explored.

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[1]William Faulkner, acceptance speech before the Nobel Prize Committee and guests, quoted by Francis Connolly, A Rhetoric Case Book (2nd edition; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959), p. 38.

The selfsame qualities in the fallible narrator which add to the sense of immediacy and plausibility of a work of fiction also produce the peculiar intensity desired in writing which portrays the power lurking in emotional depths. An omniscient narrator could perhaps explain these reactions more astutely, but the fallible narrator, with his more human limitations, can feel them with all the anguish that accompanies man's soul in the grip of terror. He was there; he experienced it; he knows.

The particular emphasis of this fiction is the psychological effect of terror and horror upon mind and soul of an individual. Frequently the subject is madness or moral and spiritual disintegration and the angle of vision that of a helpless or bewildered but sympathetic bystander or witness; in rarer instances the angle of vision is that of the protagonist. Since it is the effect on a mind that is represented (Poe's "terror of the soul," and not merely the reactions of physical terror produced by either natural machinery such as creaking doors or supernatural means such as vampires or werewolves, as in "the terror of Germany") the restricted point of view of the fallible narrator is admirably suited to subject and emphasis.

Because the effect sought after in stories of this kind is an emotional shock which will dramatize the hidden realities as a lightning flash reveals a lurid landscape in hideous clarity, regardless of the author's own objectivity,

he seeks for a commitment, either sympathetic or antipathetic, on the part of the reader. The artistic distance between the author and the narrator may be great--may even be characterized by irony as it is in Benito Cereno or insanity as in Poe's "Tell-tale Heart," but the author relies on an imagintive identification of the reader with the narrator which springs from "seeing" and "feeling" the story through the single consciousness. Only an unimaginative reader can maintain a neutrality here.

The kind of mental activity in which the terror or horror is reflected is interestingly different in the examples under consideration in this chapter. Brown tends to rely on narrators like Clara and Constantin who are interested in self-analysis, who love to trace a thought through all the mazes of emotion even though the progress of the action is standing still in the meantime. Poe, as E. H. Davidson has pointed out, does little of this except when the tortured mind is forced by the circumstances to turn in upon itself like the activity of Pym's mind when he is shut up in the hold; even then the activity is more a record of a succession of sensations and images than an analysis. Davidson speaks of Poe's method as "entirely pictorial, as though external objects and the configuration of the intricate material world could themselves assume a psychic dimension."[1] A drama

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[1]Edward H. Davidson, Poe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 198.

of symbols is acted out before the horrified and suffering observer-actor whose key is in his subconscious mind, a drama in some cases actually a projection of that mind as in "The Man of the Crowd." Melville's narrator is a happy, well-adjusted man, an extravert whose mind is given neither to self-analysis nor to symbolic images. He thinks mostly after the fact and only enough to enable him to act in a given situation or to smother his intuitional warnings. Not that this lessens the effect! Quite the contrary. Davidson counts it a weakness in Poe that he so "seldom thrusts this drama of the haunted mind into the commonplace world"[1] as Hawthorne and Melville do.

Brown and Melville both practiced balancing their tales of subterranean terror with realistic detail. Brown's realistic materials were, in truth, rather sensational, but his intention was sound; psychologically, horror stretched too far toward the implausible can dissolve in hysterical laughter. For the unrelieved intensity of such tales as "Berenice," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Black Cat" Poe wisely chose the short form of fiction. When he wrote The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym he included whole sections on natural history, technical navigation, and other novel matters such as the curing of biche de mer for the China trade, materials which refused to be integrated with

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[1] Ibid., p. 260.

the rest of the narrative but may represent his sense of this need for ballast. Melville at his best is a master hand at presenting the reader with what seems like the familiar world in detailed specification but turns out to be a horror behind the masks.

The general organization which we shall follow with Brown and Melville in this chapter will be: First, a section on the narrators of the fiction, Clara Wieland and Captain Delano; second, a section on the world of the narrator in which the terror prevails; and third, a discussion of the whole of the work as affected by the restricted point of view. With Poe, the narrators of numerous short stories will be grouped, and then more detailed consideration given to the two narrators of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson." The concluding section of the chapter will briefly compare and contrast the treatment and the purpose of the exploration of these emotional depths by the three authors.

Charles Brockden Brown

The first American writer in our study of the fallible narrator as explorer of emotional depths is Charles Brockden Brown, the fore-runner of those writers whose "choice of manner and angle of vision"[1] has been designated as American Gothic.

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[1] Wharton, pp. 68-69.

Using American scenes and American characters and striving always to paint directly from nature Brown believed in exploiting sensational materials in order to invoke the heights and depths of emotional reaction and the peak of intellectual energy on the part of his characters and his readers. Savage attacks amid the wild scenery of the upper Delaware, the ravages of the plague in Philadelphia, murder by a religious fanatic, and intrigues of a fascinating subversive of the Illuminati are among the subjects of his best-known novels.

Brown's desire to stimulate his reader to an intense emotional pitch and to catch his curiosity in order that the moral lesson might have its greatest impact led him to combine the emotional devices of the Richardsonian school and the confession epistolary form. Possibly too, Brown's moody, introspective temperament, developed during school days because of poor health, an avid interest in reading, and habits of solitary wandering, naturally suggested a point of view which could so aptly analyze and display the inner workings of a mind. During the years of his frenetic activity in writing fiction, Brown's close association with William Dunlap, painter and dramatist, may have influenced him toward a more dramatic method of presentation. The more probable reasons, however, are those of natural temperament and aesthetic preference.

Since structure was a weak point with Brown, the epistolary device in Wieland, Ormond, Arthur Mervyn, and Edgar Huntly becomes so improbable that it practically disappears during the progress of the novels. There is the barest indication of any character to whom the letters are written: in Wieland, they are addressed "to a small number of friends"; in Ormond, to a German student of society and manners; and in Edgar Huntly, to the narrator's fiancee, the sister of his murdered friend. The letters are of impossible length. Ormond is presumably all one continuous epistle, and Edgar Huntly likewise. What is more to our purpose is the variation among the letter writers, the narrators. Clara Wieland and Edgar Huntly are the most deeply involved in their respective stories and so the best objects for study. Sophia Westwyn and Dr. Stevens, narrators of Ormond and Arthur Mervyn, respectively, are friends who rescue the beleaguered protagonists. In reality then, all Brown used the letter form of the novel for was the opportunity to approach his story through a restricted and analytical point of view.

Clara Wieland

As is always true of a narrator in the first person, he (or she in Wieland) is too apt to remain unrealized by the reader as an important character of the fiction. He is like the pane of glass through which the reader views a scene or an action. Even a grimy window pane or one with spots where

there should be none is often ignored until attention is called to it. Nevertheless, what the reader sees is dependent upon how he sees. But the metaphorical analogy breaks down when we are discussing the narrator of a fiction because of the living quality of the medium through which we look at the subject of a story.

The subject of Wieland or the Transformation is the horrifying progression of the insanity which seizes Wieland. As Harry Warfel points out, the significance of the sub-title "The Transformation" can be given a broader application.[1] It applies not only to Wieland but to Carwin, Clara, Pleyel and to the entire situation of the Wieland Family as Clara sets it forth in the third paragraph of the book:

> The storm that tore up our happiness and changed into dreariness and desert the blooming scene of our existence is lulled into grim repose, but not until the victim was transfixed and mangled, till every obstacle was dissipated by its rage, till every remnant of good was wrested from our grasp and exterminated.[2]

According to Brown's statement in the "Advertisement" which precedes the opening chapter, Clara Wieland is the narrator of this story which she claims should have the following effect if communicated to the world:

> . . . it will inculate the duty of avoiding deceit. It will examplify the force of early impressions,

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[1] Harry R. Warfel, Charles Brockden Brown (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949), pp. 106-107.

[2] Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland: or The Transformation, ed. Fred Lewis Pattee ("American Authors Series"; New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1958), p. 6.

> and show the immeasurable evils that flow from an erroneous or imperfect discipline.[1]

The revelations which Clara Wieland makes concerning herself are both direct and indirect. The direct revelations are statements concerning her qualities, attitudes, and history, and there are far too many of these for dramatic representation. She tells of her protected childhood, her education, and her accomplishments. Clara claims to be habitually indifferent to all the causes of fear. We learn, also from her statements, that she had a happy disposition, that she was loyal to her best friend, Catharine Pleyel, who was also her brother's wife, and that she both admired and loved her brother in spite of his tendency to "a thrilling melancholy." She and her brother were well-provided for after the death of both parents and led an idyllic life at their country estates. A certain independence of mind made Clara prefer to live at her own estate Mettingen rather than with her brother and his family after his marriage. Their pleasures, as Clara describes them, were intellectual as well as social and were intended for "delight and improvement." The total effect of these direct statements is heavily expository, and because they are general rather than specific the effect is also tiresome for the reader.

The indirect revelations of Clara's character are the most interesting and relevant to the action. First, she seems

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 5.

utterly without a sense of humor; in this trait she resembles her author. On the credit side, however (for example, in recounting the history of her father, his temperamental and religious development and the depression which seized him in the period before his death), she reveals both intellectual clarity and depth.

Another trait that is revealed indirectly is that of her extravagant emotional responses. Concerning the attractive fourteen-year-old Louisa Stuart, she testifies, "I have often shed tears of pleasure at her approach, and pressed her to my bosom in an agony of fondness."[1] At the first encounter with Carwin his voice causes her to dissolve into tears, and she is thrown into a state of painful embarrassment. These are the reactions in milder situations. When really frightened, she sinks down into fits, or indulges in long periods of depression, screams as long as she has breath, and contemplates defensive murder and suicide. In these last-mentioned reactions the cause is sufficient, however, to produce the effects, and these effects are authentic reactions of a woman under great stress.

The portrayal of Clara demonstrates convincingly that she too belongs to the Wieland family. Her tendency to repress emotion and brood over it, to suppress information for self-conscious reasons, and to exaggerate feeling display a

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

nature subject to some of the same irrationality which in her brother's more consistently depressed state results in his insanity.

Brown made use of scientific and medical journals in his preparation for writing this novel, even to the extent of footnoting some of the more unbelievable episodes like the death of the father by spontaneous combustion. He also talked over his materials with his friend, the brilliant young doctor Elihu Hubbard Smith with whom Brown later shared residence during the terrible yellow fever epidemic in New York. Although his scientific investigation resulted in the inclusion of some bizarre material, it also gave a convincing presentation of neurotic and psychotic behavior--an almost documentary approach to the establishment of a sufficient cause for Wieland's and Clara's behavior in the brief history of the three generations.

Clara, in fact, is the most fully developed character of the book. She professes to be an enlightened or rationalistic woman, one governed by sense rather than sensibility, but she shows a rashness in her unpremeditated acts and a perversity in holding fixed ideas which give the lie to her own picture of herself.

When she first sees Carwin, she is fascinated by his appearance.

> This face, seen for a moment, continued for hours to occupy my fancy, to the exclusion of almost every other image. I had purposed to spend the evening

> with my brother, but I could not resist the inclination of forming a sketch upon paper of this memorable visage . . . .
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> I placed it at all distances, and in all lights; my eyes were rivetted [sic] upon it. Half the night passed away in wakefulness and in contemplation of this picture.[1]

She has had a dream that her brother tempted her to destruction, and, shortly after, when she approaches the closet in her moonlit room to secure writing materials a powerful voice screams out "Hold! Hold!" Several pages of minute analysis of her thoughts and emotions intervene between this terrifying sound and her next action.

> Ideas exist in our minds that can be accounted for by no established laws . . . . My present thoughts were, no doubt, indebted for their hue to the similitude existing between these incidents and those of my dream. Surely it was phrenzy that dictated my deed. That a ruffian was hidden in the closet, was an idea the genuine tendency of which was to urge me to flight . . . . Why then did I again approach the closet and withdraw the bolt?[2]

After the shocking murders and the trial of her brother, Clara returns to the scene of the crime and suffers there the double confrontation of Carwin and the escaped Wieland. By the conclusion of the novel Clara has corrected her exalted opinion of her brother and herself. She moralizes on both the Conway and the Wieland tragedies:

> That virtue should become the victim of treachery is, no doubt, a mournful consideration; but it will not escape your notice, that the evils of which Carwin and Maxwell were the authors, owed their existence to the errors of the sufferers. If Wieland had framed juster notions of moral duty, and of the divine

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[1] Ibid., p. 61. [2] Ibid., p. 99.

> attributes; or if I had been gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight, the double-tongued deceiver would have been baffled and repelled.

Clara's intellectual pattern of moral rationalism evidently is yet intact, but she is a humbled and chastened woman.

There is in Brown's treatment of his narrator a freshness of conception which points toward this character of Clara Wieland as the first example of the American Girl of James's novels. Though Wieland is frequently classified as one of the novels of seduction, actually the only piece of the subject which relates to the seduction theme is Carwin's defensive plea of the motive of seduction to explain his presence in Clara's closet--a false plea at that, as he later explains. No doubt the fact that Clara considered and feared Carwin as a seducer through much of the story and that Pleyel is likewise deceived by Carwin on this point lends support to this tendency to group Wieland with the seduction novels.

On the other hand, Clara in her attractive candor, her large freedom as an independent young woman of means, her innocent potentialities for loyalty and love, her zest for knowledge and her presumption seems eminently fitted for this distinction as the earliest American Girl in fiction. Furthermore, the character opposing her, Carwin, has been portrayed as representative of Old World intrigue, mystery, and evil. In Constantia Dudley of Ormond, too, we have a good

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[1] Ibid., p. 273.

example of the new young American woman who unites integrity, resourcefulness, courage, and the presumption of high-spirited independence with beauty and sensibility. Against this young woman are also pitted the contrasting forces of greater experience and ruthlessness and a knowledge of evil represented by European characters.

This comparison cannot be pushed too far; it exists only in the broadest of perspectives, but there is also a resemblance between Brown and James in their concern with the subjective drama of their characters. Brown frequently stops action, and that in the most suspenseful moments, to analyze emotion. Pattee asserts that it became a mannerism with him which almost marks him as a forerunner of James.[1] Of his enthusiasms for analyzing and depicting the springs of action Brown once wrote:

> An accurate history of the thoughts and feelings of any man, for one hour, is more valuable for some minds than a system of geography; and you, you tell me, are one of those who would rather travel into the mind of a ploughman than into the interior of Africa. I confess myself of your way of thinking.[2]

Except for the mention of a "ploughman" this might also be a preference of James or of Hawthorne or Poe.

The World of Brown's Narrator

Clara Wieland's world, as we come to know it through her eyes, has a before and after sequence; she characterizes

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. xxxviii. [2] *Ibid.*

it in an early paragraph of Wieland first as "the blooming scene of our existence" which was transformed into "dreariness and desert." And that storm which changed it with its strange violence was the tornado of Wieland's insanity set in motion by Carwin's ventriloquism.

The type of a world which releases the subterranean terrors we are considering is important to the novelist and his readers because it assists in making the shock of horror believable and artistically effective. Clara's world, in our first glimpses of it, is an attractive leisurely world, adorned with quiet family scenes and pastimes, featuring books, music, and congenial, but stimulating friends. The Wielands are an American family of substantial and independent fortune which had been gained by the prudence and hard work of a gifted immigrant, Clara's father.

Significantly, much of the pleasant leisure of the family scenes is enjoyed in the temple, a garden house in a rather wild but picturesque spot which had been the scene of violence and death. Mysterious violence then lies hidden in the very precinct of their innocent joys and is reflected in the "thrilling melancholy" of the brother and son. The members of the household, however, as Clara demonstrates in her backward look, rather complacently consider the violence as merely an incidental part of a past, a past dead and gone. It is a past like that of Hawthorne's House of Seven Gables which does not seem to threaten in the sunlight of the bright

modern present. Wieland can afford to rest on his American inheritance which had been gained through tyranny and oppression in the Old World, or so he thinks.

Clara's world is not only one of bright, pleasant surfaces; it also possesses a healthy moral climate, and its inhabitants pride themselves on their behavior as rational human beings. Such a world resembles Eden too closely not to be a challenge to the serpent. Consequently, the reader is not unprepared for the advent of a mysterious stranger, Carwin, who both fascinates and repels the narrator by his gaze in traditional serpent fashion. All of Clara's response to this presence is secretive and irrational, much to her own annoyance.

A series of mysterious and inexplainable voices begins to plague the members of the family group, including the all-too-susceptible Wieland, the narrator Clara, and the skeptical Pleyel. Even the last-named is deceived by the apparently supernatural revelations, and where rational behavior has been the standard, delusions of jealousy, of persecution, and of insanity now prevail. Catastrophic and violent actions ensue, and when Clara finally regains enough of sanity and fortitude to write her story, her world is a shambles.

A kind of postscript is added after Pleyel becomes a widower, renews his attention to Clara, and wins her consent to marriage, but their happiness is a somber one, not at all the innocent ecstasy she had once anticipated.

The violence of the explosion of Wieland's insanity in the murder of all whom he held most dear and his irrational destruction of what he cherished is comparable to some eruption of a volcano whose streams of lava engulf the peaceful life on its slopes. The destructive power in Clara's world was only sleeping; it did not belong to a dead past but lurked there always beneath deceptive appearance. In the fiction characterized by the "terror of the soul" there is always this shock of the treachery of the world as it seems.

The Whole as Restricted by the Narrator

Clara as the fallible narrator of Wieland can be credited with much of the originality and the power of the novel. The particular tragedy of Wieland's insanity becomes heightened by being seen and realized by a younger sister who adores him, whose own sanity narrowly misses being toppled in the whirlwind of crimes and horrors which follow upon Carwin's production of mysterious voices. Her very plausible tendency to feel with Wieland, to enter even into his mental aberrations, to be torn with his struggles produces a similar empathy in the reader. This was the one merit Brown prided himself on: "that of calling forth the passion and engaging the sympathy of the reader by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors."[1]

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[1]Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Huntly or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker ("The Modern Readers' Series"; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. xlv.

There were, however, many disadvantages which Brown unfortunately neither took the time to consider or possibly had no precedents for helping him to overcome. Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa Harlowe were fairly simple characters with conventional problems to solve. Brown attempted a subject much more complex before the technical means to aid such attempts were developed. There are huge blocks of exposition to be handled in these unbelievable letters of Clara's, and Brown's method of handling them is to put them as first person narrative into the mouths of the characters involved. As a result, plausibility receives another violent stretch while Wieland, Pleyel, Carwin, or Clara's uncle provide the missing information--sometimes by summary narrative, but other times, as in Wieland's defense at his trial, with a word by word drama which includes the speeches of other characters. In effect, at these places in the novel the other characters take over as narrators though Brown has avoided any transition of point of view and has related it all to Clara.

Some of these expositions are necessitated by the limitations of the knowledge of the narrator, for instance, Carwin's long confession to Clara, but others, for example, the whole of the Conway sub-plot, are really vestigial remains of an imperfectly integrated plot. Carwin was originally planned as the seducer of Louisa Conway's mother. Brown seemed uncertain of Carwin's place in the story; apparently at first it was intended to be much more important to that of

the main subject--the transformation of Wieland under the sway of his mania. But, at the same time, Brown's overwhelming interest in the psychological aspects of the development of the insanity was apparently a stronger pull, and Carwin actually became little more than a precipitating cause. The story of Carwin was later begun as a separate and unfinished fiction called Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist, intended to be added to Wieland as a final document. The Conway sub-plot was in the final chapters given another villain, Maxwell, and the two plots were loosely tied together in the concluding moral. Since the first person point of view for the novel tends to looseness, as already pointed out in the first chapter of this dissertation, Brown's awkwardness with his plot emphasized this disadvantage. There is no attempt to achieve any economy of means or tightness in construction. One of Brown's best and most intimate critics, his friend Dr. Smith, early remarked on Brown's lack of concentration in narrative, "He starts an idea, pursues it a little way; new ones spring up; he runs a short distance after each; meantime the original one is likely to escape entirely."[1] This tendency of Brown's results in what Ernest Marchand calls his "nested narratives."[2]

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[1]Elihu Hubbard Smith, Manuscript Diary in possession of Miss Frances G. Colt. A record of Brown's long visits to New York City 1794-1798, December 14, cited by Harry R. Warfel, Charles Brockden Brown (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949), p. 76.

[2]Ernest Marchand, "Introduction," Ormond ("American Fiction Series"; New York: American Book Company, 1937), p. xix.

Brown specifically claimed examption from the requirements of unity in Ormond where his narrator writes, "My narrative will have little of that merit which flows from unity of design."[1] Edgar Huntly likewise pleads for freedom in order to keep the vividness of impressions. Actually, more concentration of plot would have helped the intensity.

There are other important deficiencies in the point of view, not the least of which is the style. There seems to have been no consistent effort to keep Clara's language and tone in line with her point of view. Her tendency to moralize on all events would be natural enough considering that hers was an eighteenth century education; a stilted literary style could likewise be overlooked in her letters as the attempted elegance of a self-styled intellectual. Her tone though (for example, in the first section in which she relates the family history) is too impersonal to be part of a personal letter. This first section comprises one of the longest blocks of summary narration of the book and bears no marks of the point of view. It reads almost like a case history. Furthermore, it is written in the short declarative sentences which Harold Martin has noted as characteristic of Brown's writing[2] and Pattee calls "his gaspingly short

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[1] Brown, Ormond, p. 3.

[2] Harold C. Martin, "The Development of Style in Nineteenth Century American Fiction," English Institute Essays, 1958 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 126.

sentence unit."[1] The first paragraph of Chapter II is an example of this "firecracker" effect.

> Early in the morning of a sultry day in August, he left Mettingen, to go to the city. He had seldom passed a day from home since his return from the shores of the Ohio. Some urgent engagements at this time existed, which would not admit of further delay. He returned in the evening, but appeared to be greatly oppressed with fatigue. His silence and dejection were likewise in more than ordinary degree conspicuous. My mother's brother, whose profession was that of a surgeon, chanced to spend this night at our house. It was from him that I have frequently received an exact account of the mournful catastrophe that followed.[2]

Not only does this reveal the author rather than the narrator; it also gives away his hurry to get this exposition over with and get on to his story. Equally disconcerting are the circumlocutions. Clara's uncle sees the temple apparently on fire from his window, and "He could not fail to perceive the propriety of hastening to the spot,"[3] or Clara reminds her mythical correspondents that they should not be surprised "that the renovation of our intercourse [hers and Pleyel's] should give birth to that union which at present subsists."[4] This is eighteenth century style at its most eccentric, and for a modern reader destroys the illusion by drawing attention to itself.

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[1] Pattee, "Introduction" to Wieland, p. xlii.

[2] Brown, Wieland, p. 15. [3] Ibid., p. 18.

[4] Ibid., p. 267.

Wright has pointed out the techniques which enable writers to gain dramatic effect, and Brown was more fortunate than some of his contemporaries in portraying "scene" in the Jamesian definition of the term. But here again, as in plot construction, he has no sense of economy. Nothing is left to be inferred in dialogue. The influence of the school of sensibility has left its mark. Wieland, as a whole is too heavily proportioned on the narrative side to be called any step toward representation in the novel. Only in the sections of the narrative where passion is raised to a high pitch do we become aware of a narrative voice, one of the means Wright mentions which gives a sense of drama to narration.[1] Brown's lack of concreteness reveals his kinship with eighteenth century writers and also works against any dramatic effect.

The point of view, as we have mentioned, as far as it is a part of the total structure is cumbersome; the separate "I" narratives are related to or read by the narrator under very implausible situations--for example, the written narrative of the defense of Wieland at his trial. Yet as scene, this defense is one of two or three possessing both the uniqueness and the coherence basic to dramatic particularity. Whittier's high praise of Wieland's defense as outstanding in all English literature does not seem too extravagant. The dramatization of Wieland's vision and subsequent murder of

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[1] Wright, p. 276.

his wife fills an entire chapter, but there is justification for this as climactic event similar to the scene in the pit and the cave in Edgar Huntly. As the passion swells and subsides, the language, here much simpler, reaches heights of intensity. At one point in his recital Wieland actually addresses his wife as he is, in his imagination, strangling her; so vivid to his deranged mind have become the struggles of his heavenly sacrifice:

> I was commissioned to kill thee, but not to torment thee with the foresight of thy death; not to multiply thy fears, and prolong thy agonies. Haggard, and pale, and lifeless, at length thou ceasedst to contend with thy destiny.[1]

Following this, Wieland narrates before the jury the reactions of his manic-depressive psychosis:

> This was a moment of triumph . . . I lifted the corpse in my arms and laid it on the bed. I gazed upon it with delight. Such was the elation of my thoughts, that I even broke into laughter. . . . My joyous ebullitions vanished, and I asked myself who it was whom I saw. Methought it could not be Catharine . . . . Where was her bloom! These deadly and blood-suffused orbs but ill resemble the azure and exstatic tenderness of her eyes. . . . Alas! these were the traces of agony; the gripe of the assassin had been here! . . . The breath of heaven that sustained me was withdrawn, and I sunk into mere man. I leaped from the floor: I dashed my head against the wall: I uttered screams of horror: I panted after torment and pain.[2]

The realism of the crises of the novel (such as this one presented in the first person) in dramatized scenes is the source of the vivid power of the work. Brown substituted real horrors, scientific and psychological ones, for the

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[1] Brown, Wieland, pp. 194-195. [2] Ibid.

artificial devices of the gothic romances. In these scenes his language, which becomes simpler as it rises in passion, fits his subject, and the short sentence units perfectly carry the content with climactic rhythms.

Actually it is only in these dramatic stretches that his choice of a fallible narrator then was sound; he chose to analyze and dramatize inner states and reveal mental processes, and this type of portrayal, as he recognized, was the strong point of his novels.

Edgar Allan Poe

Everyone has noted the prevalence of the emotion of fear as a "fixture in Poe's work," but, as Patrick Quinn has indicated, the important matter is to describe and define the kind of fear that is present in his stories and "the significance of the circumstances in which that emotion is called into play."[1] Quinn adds that the peculiar fear of Poe is the "sympathetic antipathy" of Kierkegaard or the "horreur sympathique" of Baudelaire and that the circumstances which bring it into play are circumstances of falling or entombment. These circumstances lead us directly back to the instinctive fears of mankind, the unreasoning terrors of the soul, which Poe claimed to deal with. That these terrors have a perverse attraction for mankind is amply evidenced by the avidity with

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[1]Patrick F. Quinn, The French Face of Edgar Poe (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 164.

which the original gothic literature and the present-day "horror" movies are consumed.

Though Poe's concern with morbid psychological states and feelings was influenced by the work of Brown and the stories of Blackwood's, the quality of his own imagination and such interests as that of the cultivation of the dream images which arise between sleeping and waking led him to an original means for dramatizing his terrors--the images which arise from the realm of the subconscious.

Poe's mind, and likewise his work, shows a split which has often been remarked; on the one side is his delight in keen, logical, and mathematical analysis, and on the other, is his fascination with dreamlike, vaguely indefinite romantic states and sensations. When Poe was working at his best he was able to fuse the two by projecting his perception of intense emotional states, vague as these are, in terms of symbols that were concrete, vivid, and beautifully definite.

Edmund Wilson has carefully defined Poe's type of symbolism and its difference from symbolism in the general sense in which

> the Cross is the symbol of Christianity or the Stars and Stripes the symbols of the United States. This symbolism differs even from such symbolism as Dante's. For the familiar kind of symbolism is conventional, logical and definite. But the symbols of the Symbolist school are usually chosen arbitrarily by the

> poet to stand for special ideas of his own--they are a sort of disguise for these ideas.[1]

Wilson also summarizes the doctrine of this school of symbolism.

> The assumptions which underlay Symbolism lead us to formulate some such doctrine as the following: Every feeling or sensation we have, every moment of consciousness, is different from every other; and it is, in consequence, impossible to render our sensations as we actually experience them through the conventional and universal language of ordinary literature . . . . Each poet has a unique personality; each of his moments has its special tone, its special combination of elements.[2]

We note that his type of language for experience is esoteric and that the one who has the experiences is unique. Translating these assumptions to the prose tale of imagination we see the need for the special narrator to receive and relate these unique impressions. We also perceive the need for Poe's manipulation of color and of decor and his fondness for that mixture of sensory impressions, which Baudelaire celebrated in his poem "Correspondances," to add symbolic tones that provide that sense of a world "Out of Space--out of Time."[3]

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[1]Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 20.

[2]Ibid., p. 21.

[3]Edgar Allan Poe, "Dreamland," Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Philip Van Doren Stern ("The Viking Portable Library"; New York: The Viking Press, 1949), p. 616.

Since the statement has often been made that Poe's fictions are monotonously alike, we should probably first consider his own testimony on their behalf. Disappointed in the Wiley & Putnam's edition of 1845, Poe in a letter to Phillip P. Cooke wrote:

> The last selection of my Tales was made from about 70, by Wiley & Putnam's reader, Duyckinck. He has what he thinks a taste for ratiocination, and has accordingly made up the book mostly of analytic stories. But this is not representing my mind in its various phases--it is not giving me fair play. In writing these Tales one by one, at long intervals, I have kept the book-unity always in mind--that is, each has been composed with reference to its effect as part of a whole. In this view, one of my chief aims has been the widest diversity of subject, thought, & especially tone & manner of handling. Were all my tales now before me in a large volume and as the composition of another--the merit which would principally arrest my attention would be the wide diversity and variety. You will be surprised to hear me say that (omitting one or two of my first efforts) I do not consider any one of my stories better than another. There is a vast variety of kinds and, in degree of value, these kinds vary--but each tale is equally good of its kind. The loftiest kind is that of the highest imagination--and, for this reason only "Ligeia" may be called my best tale.[1]

Even though Poe is far from a reliable witness, his statements about the intended variety of his tales and the long range planning for book unity have other supporting evidence in their favor. There is indeed much more variety, especially in "tone and manner of handling" among Poe's fictions than is commonly realized, as a cursory glance at the complete list

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[1] John Ward Ostrom, The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1948), II, 327-330.

will indicate, but critics and publishers alike still would not agree with Poe that no one of his stories was better than another. In selecting the best among Poe, they inevitably prune the humorous and grotesque stories because Poe is remarkably un-funny. Other inferior types such as the hoaxes are likewise neglected.

The particular phrase which makes the above letter pertinent to our analysis, though, is the claim for variety in the "manner of handling." Here is precisely the point at which the fallible narrator should figure. If Poe worked from a preconceived single effect for presentation of a thesis, his narrators should be an important consideration in his total scheme. Choosing among as wide a variety of good, bad, and indifferent as necessary, let us then investigate Poe's narrators and discover what care he has used in conceiving them.

After we have completed this classification and sampling, which will comprise the next section on Poe, our purpose will be to give detailed attention to those of Poe's narrators who deal with the exploration of horror and terror, the narrators of his tales of imagination, climaxing our study with the narrators of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson." Poe's novel, Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, of Nantucket, which both Quinn and Davidson consider as central to the entire canon, is included in the next

chapter on "The Narrator as Youth" and for that reason is omitted here.

Before we take up the classification and the examples, however, it is worth noting that Poe gave particular attention to the advantages of the reader's identifying himself with the narrator of a tale. He noticed also that this proceeds first from an identification of the author with the narrator. Among Poe's Marginalia is this comment about Robinson Crusoe:

> Not one person in ten--nay, not one person in five hundred, has, during the perusal of Robinson Crusoe, the most remote conception that any particle of genius, or even of common talent, has been employed in its creation! Men do not look upon it in the light of a literary performance. Defoe has none of their thoughts--Robinson all. The powers which have wrought the wonder have been thrown into obscurity by the very stupendousness of the wonder they have wrought. We read, and become perfect abstractions in the intensity of our interest--we close the book, and are quite satisfied that we could have written as well ourselves. All this is effected by the potent magic of verisimilitude. Indeed the author of Crusoe must have possessed, above all other faculties, what has been termed the faculty of identification--that dominion exercised by volition over imagination which enables the mind to lose its own, in a fictitious individuality. This includes, in a very great degree, the power of abstraction; and with these keys we may partially unlock the mystery of that spell which has so long invested the volume before us.[1]

Such a spell, needless to say, produces a complete illusion of reality and, as Poe somewhat unhappily admits, a disappearance of the author in favor of the fictional narrator. Quinn

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe, The Centenary Poe, ed. Montagu Slater (New York: Medill McBride Company, 1950), pp. 541-542.

states positively that Poe's successful stories are dependent upon such identification:

> From this personal involvement of Poe in the lives of his imagined characters proceeds the peculiar intensity and anguish which his best stories convey. When he writes without this identification the results are merely tiresome and banal.[1]

Any attempt to classify Poe's prose tales might in itself turn out to be an extended topic. Some editions simply list them; the Viking Portable classifies them under subject headings--fantasy, terror, death, revenge and murder, and mystery and ratiocination. Poe's own earliest classification is indicated in the title of the collected tales "Tales of the Arabesque and Grotesque," but since we are using classification only to indicate somewhat the variety which Poe claimed for his tales, we have chosen three divisions which Poe sometimes refers to for a rough but workable grouping. These divisions--tales of ratiocination, grotesques, and tales of imagination--have the further advantage, for our purpose, of classifying according to manner of handling or mood. They can be subdivided then according to subject matter; ratiocination into puzzles, detective stories, and science fiction; grotesques into burlesques, hoaxes, and satire; imagination into horror, terror, and fantasy. These groups will be sufficient to furnish us with examples which illustrate the range of Poe's narrators.

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[1]Quinn, p. 187.

From the tales of ratiocination of the first group, the most famous one and Poe's most popular tale "The Gold Bug" would furnish a good example. Poe had mystification as his object, the thrilling adventure of a treasure hunt for his subject, and a display of ability at cryptography for the additional delight of his reading audience woven into this story. His narrator then could not be the one who solves the problems--at least not in the first part of the story where the baffling aspects of the mystery are to be presented. What Poe needed was a stooge--a generous, considerate, and well-meaning friend, one who could be depended upon in case of emergency not to do anything rash. After the finding of the treasure, the narrator's purpose is to ask the leading questions and eagerly absorb the answers of Legrand in as far as there are any answers. This type of narrator, who led straight to Dr. Watson, is so common today that it is hard to realize Poe first tailored him to take his subordinate position and give his impression of mystification by and reverence for a "great" ratiocinative intelligence.

The same general type of narrator served Poe in the "I" of the three detective stories "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and "The Purloined Letter." Properly speaking, "The Mystery of Marie Roget" is a piece of detective reasoning based on newspaper accounts of the murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers of New York. This fictional parallel, placed in Paris, really has no conclusions, and the

interest centers on Dupin's elimination of the impossibilities in the evidence and the probable solution. Aside from this exception, we notice a parallel structure in each story. After the crisis has passed, the function of the narrator changes from bemused spectator to questioner, and by means of dialogue, the chief character, the one gifted in rational analysis, presents his story.

In the third group of the tales of ratiocination we have stories like "Mellonta Tauta" which today are labeled science fiction. The narrator of this story on board the balloon "Skylark," which, she complains, is moving at only a hundred miles an hour, has become bored to the point that she is going to write letters to her "dear friend" every day during this long trip. The story could also be included under satire as the comments of this very supercilious narrator satirize the antiquities which Pundit is absorbed in. She signs off as "Pundita." Pundita makes a fairly consistent narrator and certainly a different one. The whole story is simply her impressions. Those impressions should not be supposed to be Poe's, however, since Pundit with Poe carries the connotation of an ignorant know-it-all.

For the middle group of our classification, the grotesques, we shall spare just enough attention to show what qualities these narrators display to serve their author's purposes. We have subdivided the grotesques into burlesque, hoax, and satire. Pundita of "Mellonta Tauta" is a sample of

the type of narrator used for satire. "X-ing a Paragrab" is a satire on editorial battles; the point of view here is a mixture of omniscience with an editorial "I"--not a bad device for the subject. "Some Words With a Mummy" is likewise satirical in the Poe manner. The narrator of this one is represented as dreaming he is one of a party who with Dr. Pennonner unswathe and bring to life the mummy of Allamistakeo. The narrator is too obviously a patriotic ignoramus. In fact, Poe is heavy-handed in his attempts at satire, and his narrators are merely mechanisms.

Perhaps Poe's own sense of the nature of such humor as existed in magazine fiction of his time, may give a clue to his failure in this field. In the same letter to White in which he discusses "Berenice" he sets forth the popular taste as a demand for "the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque" and "the witty exaggerated into the burlesque."[1] Not having a sense of humor, Poe was working blind in the heightening and exaggerating process. He could invent fools enough for his narrators when he used them, but, unfortunately, he had no fellow feeling with them, only a feeling of scornful superiority or cruel delight in pitiless exposure of them.

"The Devil in the Belfry" with its echoes of Irving's History is told from an omniscient point of view. But "The Spectacles" is dependent upon the blindness, both physical

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[1]Ostrom, Letters, I, 57-58.

and mental, of a young man who narrates how the vanity which kept him from wearing spectacles and thus spoiling his good looks also led him into a marriage with his great-great-grandmother. The action is farcical; the plot is elaborately contrived, and all is explained logically at the end. For this narrator Poe constructed a foppish and impressionable young man who rashly trusted his myopia rather than his discretion. The young man is allowed to escape his deservedly horrible fate, however, because the whole action had been a hoax to persuade him to wear spectacles.

"The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" is an example of burlesque with a possibility of some significance. The scene is laid in the south of France where the narrator had secured an introduction which would enable him to visit a private mad-house whose superintendent, Mr. Maillard, had introduced a new "system of soothing" in the treatment of insane persons. He is told that this system had been discarded a few weeks ago and a new system instituted by Professor Tarr and the celebrated Fether. The narrator of the story, a credulous, but polite young man, endures a banquet featured by antics which render him very uneasy. This is climaxed by a scene of violence during which the guards, the only sane persons on the grounds, escape from their forced imprisonment where they had endured tar and feathers among other indignities. Mr. Maillard, the superintendent, had also succumbed to insanity as a result of his "system of soothing" and was

in the plot for the insane to run the institution. As in Swift's famous discourse on the uses of madness, the ambiguities of insanity possess a certain political and social relevance.

The hoax is a type of story which Poe delighted in because it tested his ingenuity and displayed his ability to exercise such verisimilitude in realistic and scientific details that the preposterous whole was swallowed by the readers with little difficulty. In these tales and his detective fiction, as Poe himself pointed out, it was not their method, but their "air of method"[1] which convinced.

One of Poe's famous hoaxes characterized by this convincing "air of method" was "The Marvelous Journey of Hans Pfaall." Its narrator, an Amsterdam bellows mender and a true picaro, claimed to be the first man to ascend to the moon. He had the account of his journey dropped before the famous scholars of Amsterdam out of a balloon basket by an earless dwarf. The narrator of this account is a conscienceless rascal who secures the aid of the three creditors who were dunning him to get his balloon off the ground, blowing them to bits with dynamite in the process and leaving him hanging outside the balloon wicker basket by one leg from the force of the explosion. For a mere bellows mender and a reader of one book he had an astonishing knowledge and

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[1] Ibid.

unbelievable inventive powers. But Hans so interests the reader with his account that the reader prefers to believe the story than to accept the unconfirmed rumor that Hans and three companions had just returned from a long sea voyage and had been seen carousing in a tippling house in the suburbs of Amsterdam.

The last group, the tales of the imagination, presents us with many of Poe's commonly anthologized stories. Among tales of horror we have included "The Black Cat," "The Tell-tale Heart," and "The Cask of Amontillado." Each of these is told by a first person narrator who is abnormal, but there is variety among them.

The least cruel, if intention can provide a yardstick, is the inflamed alcoholic of "The Black Cat" who kills his wife in a rage and accidentally walls up the mutilated cat with the body. He has the usual excuses of the self-deceived for his moral deterioration; his horror is not only at the monstrous deed he has committed but also at the impulses which led him to its commitment. He is suffering from what Poe elsewhere calls "The Imp of the Perverse."

The more fiendish cruelty of the monomaniac--who assured the reader that he is not mad because of his ability to give a lucid account of each step of his crime of killing the old man on account of his obsessive revulsion for one of his eyes--would rank him as a worse villain. The description this narrator gives of his midnight intrusion into the old

man's room on the eighth night, of how he let the old man lie there in terror one whole hour before he murdered him, all the while chuckling at his suffering, takes more than a third of the story. Quinn sees in this story an example of the Doppelganger motif with the murdered old man as the repulsive object of his younger self.

The last story, "The Cask of Amontillado," displays the most heartless and the most despicable narrator and murderer. For in each of these horror stories we have a confession of murder, but this last named narrator is murdering to avenge his pride. The method of presentation of "The Cask of Amontillado," save for the brief introductory paragraphs explaining the motive, is scenic. The manner in which the narrator leads Fortunato to his tomb playing upon his weaknesses is as horrible as the actual act of walling him up alive. Presumably, the murderer does escape punitive consequences of his revenge, for he tells us it had been fifty years since his act. However, the reader wonders at the vivid recall of the scene, the remark "My heart grew sick," and especially at the pious benediction "In pace requiescat!"[1]

This trio of horror stories shows a careful discrimination in subject and method though the effect designed for them is similar. And those stories that can be classified as tales of terror likewise show a diversity of matter and manner.

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe, Tales of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Hervey Allen (New York: Random House, 1944), p. 518.

Probably terror and horror are almost synonymous, but for the purposes of this discussion the difference lies between horror as an emotion of the narrator induced by his own action and terror as an emotion of the narrator produced by accidents or events happening to him. Through the reader's identification with the narrator, these emotional effects in the story tend to pass over to the reader, but it can be observed that the reader fights identification with narrators as hideous as the three murderers, and his horror arises _at_ them. In the terror stories he feels _with_ the narrator.

"The Pit and the Pendulum" and "A Descent into the Mealstrom" will provide good examples of this latter type. Reference has been made to the impression which Brown's pit scene in _Edgar Huntly_ had on Poe. The pit scene in Poe is preceded by a graphic portrayal of the emotional and spiritual reactions of the narrator as he faces the inquisitorial judges for his death sentence. The handling of light and dark images in this story is a fine example of how Poe projects the states of the narrator's feelings. Hypnotized by seven tall candles which change from "angelic forms" to "meaningless spectres, with heads of flame,"[1] the doomed man recalls being carried down and down in a swoon from which he awakes to consciousness in absolute blackness. Poe has carefully depicted in his suffering narrator the nerves unstrung by the suffering and

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 532.

suspense of the trial, by the nature of the terrors awaiting him, and by the struggle for mental and spiritual command in dealing with them. We never see this narrator from a physical point of view, but we respect and admire his courage and rejoice wholeheartedly over his reprieve. The point of view here achieves all the advantages of the vividness and verisimilitude for which the first person point of view is known.

"A Descent into the Maelstrom" is handled in quite different fashion. The narrating "I" is but a means of introduction, an auditor to the actual account of the descent by a Norwegian fisherman. Since the fisherman narrator is an unschooled man, who feels it necessary to account for his use of such words as cylinder and sphere in his story, the more scientific and geographical facts are provided by the "I" of the introduction. For the remainder of the tale the narrator is the fisherman-protagonist. We see him through the first "I" as a prematurely white-haired but rugged physical speciman, well-fitted to grapple with storm and tide. In this account of terror there is not so much display of emotions, as there is a portrayal of that curious objectivity which the mind assumes in moments of great physical danger, enabling it to think with unusual rapidity, and of that acutely heightened sensory awareness which accompanies this state. That the fisherman owed his life to this fact is presented with entire plausibility. In this account of terror the narrator-reader identification again is strong. The nature of the

consciousness of these two narrators is entirely different; the situations which inspire the terror are likewise in contrast--historical event as opposed to present danger, and terror of men as opposed to terror of natural forces.

In Poe's tales which we have classified as tales of fantasy we come the closest to his approximation in prose of that beauty with some admixture of strangeness in it which he desired for his poems. There are three of these, which seem to be a series, dealing with the death of a beautiful woman, "Berenice," "Morella," and "Ligeia." Poe so considered them and, as a letter to Philip P. Cooke admits, kept "Morella" in mind when writing "Ligeia" in order not to repeat himself.[1] Another tale "The Oval Portrait," not so well known, is interesting among the many which could be classified under fantasy because of its suggestion of a theme similar to Hawthorne's "The Birthmark."

The first three tales mentioned are in all probability among the offending ones which give the impression that all of Poe's tales and narrators are alike. The narrators and the world of these fantasy tales fit into the generalized description of Bliss Perry:

> He [Poe] haunted a borderline between the visible and invisible world, a land of waste places, ruined battlements and shadowy forms, wrapped in a melancholy twilight. He felt the mystery of far-away cities and half-forgotten names. His favorite hero is the descendant of a race of visionaries, brooding over

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[1] Ostrom, I, 118.

> occult books in a vaulted, tapestried chamber of his hereditary halls, in some "dim, decaying city by the Rhine."[1]

In this description the "descendant of visionaries" refers to the narrator of "Berenice"; and the "old decaying city near the Rhine" comes from "Ligeia." "Morella" is less specific in locale.

There are differences among these three stories, but certainly, as far as the narrators are concerned, the differences are minor ones. Each of these men is a delver into occult knowledge, two of them, the "I" of "Ligeia" and the "I" of "Morella," under the influence of beautiful women of great erudition. None of the narrators is quite sane, and the one in "Berenice" is a compulsive monomaniac. There are other minor differences in the attitudes of the men toward these beautiful dying women, but none are important enough to separate these narrators one from the other. This type of narrator is more clearly realized later as Roderick of Usher.

The significant difference in the manner of handling which reveals Poe's skill lies in the way in which the resurrection is achieved in each story. In "Berenice," which is the earliest published of the three, use is made of the same device later so much more effective in "The Fall of the House of Usher"--the cataleptic trance; in "Morella" the dead heroine is reincarnated in the body of her new-born daughter; and

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe, Little Masterpieces, ed. Bliss Perry (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1899), pp. vi-vii.

in "Ligeia" the strong and ardent heroine takes possession of her dead rival's corpse to stand triumphant before her amazed lover. The last-named story is the best one in sustaining an illusion, and "Berenice" contains the strongest "shock." The three of this series almost seem preparatory to the culmination artistically of all their elements in the story of Roderick and Madeline in their ancient mansion.

"The Oval Portrait" likewise takes place in a deserted chateau, one "hung with tapestry and bedecked with manifold armorial trophies, together with an unusually great number of very spirited modern paintings in frames of rich golden arabesque."[1] Among these paintings in the small turret room to which his valet has carried the wounded and feverish narrator is a portrait of the head and shoulders of a young and beautiful girl. When his eyes fall upon this portrait it startles him immediately from his stupor, and for an hour or more he gives it his undivided attention, trying to discover the secret of its attraction. This attraction he finally decided was the absolute "life-likeness" of its expression. Then from a small volume found upon the pillow of the bed he reads the descriptive story behind the picture about a lovely and high-spirited maiden who had fallen in love with and married an artist who was a perfectionist and already wed to Art as Aylmer of "The Birthmark" had been to science. As this

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[1] Poe, Viking Portable, p. 103.

artist painted his young wife during long and tiring sittings he drew from her her life and transferred it to the picture. She was dead when he finally turned from the picture exclaiming, "This is indeed Life itself!"[1]

While less sensational than the other stories with which it is grouped, "The Oval Portrait" is brought closer to a more believable though no less romantic world. The acute sensitiveness of this narrator does not proceed from sick nerves or morbid fixations, but from a wound which has become feverish. His concern for his valet and his attempt to beguile sleepless hours by reading a casually placed guide book to the paintings are also plausible activities. The climaxing idea and its corroboration in the descriptive guide book are equally imaginative with the subjects of the other three stories.

This survey of different types of Poe's tales has indicated several things about Poe's use of the fallible narrator: first, that he was conscious of using the story-teller as part of the "manner of handling" his stories and that he varied these narrators even within the boundaries of the same general type of stories; second, that Poe moved characteristically from the effect he wished to produce to the means and that, consequently, the narrators are sometimes artificial devices; and third, that Poe realized the value of the

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[1] Ibid., p. 106.

narrator-reader identification in an empathy so complete that the author fades away.

Poe has been accused of being a poseur and a charlatan, and with some justice probably, as the difficulties of earning a living in the magazine world of his time required an adaptability to the opinions of others, a subservience to the interests of what would pay that must have galled both his pride and his literary conscience. But one criticism of Poe which seems hardly fair is that all his characters are Poe himself. Philip Stern writes of Poe's stories,

> In most of them there are only two characters--Poe himself and the death-doomed or already dead mother-wife. No matter how protean the characters may appear to be, they are basically always the same. The self may be called William Wilson, Roderick Usher, or even C. Auguste Dupin, but it is inevitably some phase of the author that is being projected.[1]

This particular criticism overlooks the fact that among the highly subjective authors of romanticism--Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley--this concern with projected selves is valid. Moreover, as Booth points out, it is artistically impossible for an artist to put himself, the personal man, into his work.[2] There is always, even where omniscience is the point of view, the "second self," the man as writer, between the reader and the person of the author. Davidson describes the functioning of Poe's Romantic ego in his work.

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[1]Stern, "Introduction" to Viking Portable Poe, p. xxxvi.

[2]Booth, pp. 71-73.

> This method of simultaneous concealment and revelation became, as we shall see, central to Poe's art: he was always "there" and "not there." And as his craft improved and his art matured, he was able to find and use ever more elaborate masquerades for obtaining both distance from and relevance to his poetic subject; the Poe symbol became almost the only subject Poe ever had, but a number of events had to occur and a variety of transformations had to take place before the self-as-symbol became sufficient.[1]

The type of identification which Poe had with his central character was an imaginative one; he enjoyed manipulating this Poe symbol, this arrogant and self-exalting man, possessed of "gloomy and glowing imagination," of extraordinary erudition, and of self-destructive instincts. This was the type of man destined to suffer intensely as a mode toward discovery. The criterion for the success of these Romantic selves is the degree to which art has projected and shaped them as characters possessing the vitality of life.

Poe has two stories which, I believe, have projected with a fine degree of art two nightmares concerning this self-symbol, and these two self-portraits fulfill the requirements which are inherent in his romantic and symbolic definition of art. Art is "the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the soul."[2]

It is no surprise that the veil of Poe's soul was spotted, like the rich cloth of gold draperies in "Ligeia,"

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[1] Davidson, p. 5.

[2] Poe, "Marginalia," Centenary Poe, p. 539.

all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures which were monstrosities. The narrators of these two stories "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson" are conceived in such a fashion as to present the reader with a tale of the terror of dissolution in the first and of the horror of self-murder in the second. This terror and horror, moreover, are not peculiar to Poe, but are the universal fear of what the French call "le neant" and what is in religious terms called "losing the soul" or in psychological critical terms "losing the identity." In the "Fall of the House of Usher" Poe has disguised and dramatized this deep terror in symbols drawn from the well of the subconscious, whose significance is paralleled by the "truths" of the prose poem Eureka; and in "William Wilson" Poe has dramatized the struggle in terms of the allegory of the double self. Symbols were more congenial to Poe's artistic sense because more hidden, more indirect, but Poe's main objection to allegory lay in its tendency to occupy the foreground when it should properly be rather a dim background on which the shadows of the protagonists would fall. He criticized Bunyan and Hawthorne alike severely for this reason.

The narrators of these two stories are right for their subjects in light of the theme. For Roderick Usher to have told his own story would have produced merely another tale of madness like "The Tell-tale Heart." Madness can be explained as perversion of the common experience, but this

theme is everyman's terror displayed by very special characters in a symbolic universe. It needs to be looked at by someone who is sane but sympathetic, someone who could approach it on "a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year" under oppressively low clouds and flee it aghast in a wrathful storm. Only the "I", the friend from the outside, could experience for the reader the deepening impression beginning with the look at the "bleak walls," "the white trunks of decayed trees," and the mirrored images in the "black and lurid tarn."[1] This impressionistic painting, characteristic of the whole which produces the insufferable gloom the narrator complains of, is never lightened throughout the story. The picture of Roderick Usher, the sole survivor of a long and eccentric race, the man whose nervous sensibilities had been stripped bare of defense, acutely aware and suffering excruciatingly from inner as well as outer stimuli, is another impression we gain through the one who came in response to a plea for help.

The bulk of the story is composed of these pictures, for the method is dominantly one of picture, not scene. These pictures, suggestive of Dali or other surrealist painters, even contain their own special music, poetry, "The Haunted Palace," and pictures within the picture, which the narrator describes for us as pure abstractions--the painting

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[1] Poe, Viking Portable, p. 245.

of Roderick Usher's ideas. The pure white buried rectangular tunnel without interrruption of any kind bathed in intense rays, as the narrator sees the picture, is indeed a horrifying representation of utter dissolution--worse than darkness--because there is nothing there but the blankness of living light.

Another special quality in "The Fall of the House of Usher" which adds to the mounting terror is the special quality of the mansion itself--"The House" and its peculiar and sentient identification with Roderick, who is likewise called "The House" as the last in line of a family which has survived only in a single main line of descent. Among the ideas about the universe which Poe sets forth as truths in Eureka is the idea that all created shapes, animate and inanimate, are the results of an electric force emanating from unity and resulting in this individuation and that everything therefore is animated with sentient existence. So the impressions of the narrator regarding what he calls superstitious beliefs--that the mansion and its domain built up its own atmosphere, "a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued";[1] that the physique of the building and the morale of Roderick's family, specifically that Roderick himself as the last of his house, were bound by an influence the one upon the other; that the gray stones of the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 247, 252, 257.

mansion in their collocation and the fungi which overspread them in their long association had produced a vegetable sentience in the mansion; and that this individual life was evidenced by "the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion"[1] during the night of the climactic storm--all these impressions, recorded as fixations of a troubled mind by the narrator, compel the reader who so vividly receives them to feel as if they might be so.

The reader is prepared then for the scene which closes and climaxes the symbolic and impressionistic pictures of character, setting, and action, pictures which are all the time so effectually building up the tension of gloom and terror of approaching and inevitable disaster for this world "which had no affinity with the air of heaven."[2] Madeline escapes from the coffin in the copper-lined vault and, collapsing in her agonizing brother's arms, drags him to death with her. And to complete the story of the dissolution, the narrator fleeing across the old causeway gives the reader the final picture:

> Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued; for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I

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[1] Ibid., p. 252. [2] Ibid., p. 247.

> gazed, this fissure rapidly widened--there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind--the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight--my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder--there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters--and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher."[1]

With this apocalyptic image the narrator pictures for the reader the fulfillment of the terror of Roderick of Usher. The "House" in both senses of the word has sunk into that bottomless tarn in which it once was a mirrored image. The return to the primal Unity of all matter by decay, death, and dissolution which Eureka proclaims has been accomplished in symbolic terms. This story gains in intensity from the character of the witness, the only sane and surviving person of the mad world playing its dance of death before him.

The protagonists of both "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson" have doubles. Roderick Usher has a twin sister in Madeline, whose struggles in the tomb he likewise experiences (because of a particular affinity between them), but lacks the courage to alleviate. William Wilson becomes aware of a perfect stranger, of no kin whatsoever, who bears the same name, who had entered school on the same day, and who easily excels him as boyish leader. Since the double is usually ignored or overlooked by others in a story, only one narrator could tell this story, and that one was William Wilson himself. It is his confession written in the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 267-268.

shadow of an approaching death and showing the origin of "his sudden elevation in turpitude"[1] which made him monstrous in crime.

William Wilson is not the real name of the narrator, but it possesses some of the unsatisfactory qualities of his real name. When Wilson discovers at school a scholar who bears his name he scornfully remarks, "a circumstance, in fact little remarkable; for, notwithstanding a noble descent, mine was one of these everyday appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob."[2] And this fact is capable of allegorical interpretation.

Since this story covers a span of time reaching from boyhood to mature manhood, for economy's sake it is rendered by description and summary narration for the most part. Each scene, however, marks a moral crisis on this wrong way pilgrim's path. The story concludes with the climactic scene which provides the explanation for the moral disintegration of the narrator mentioned in the beginning.

William Wilson's double is a better self or "conscience-symbol" as Stern calls him.[3] Because the self-willed narrator had proved to be ungovernable for weak though talented parents and become his own master at an early age, it

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[1] Ibid., p. 57. [2] Ibid., p. 62.

[3] Stern, "Preface" to "William Wilson", p. 55.

is appropriate for him to be involved in a struggle with this mysterious other self at an early stage in school-boy days. The description by Wilson of the recollections of school-life in a large rambling Elizabethan house in a community in which the church-bell was the only sound regularly breaking "upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay imbedded and asleep,"[1] is undoubtedly in its rambling details a description of Poe's own school in England where he spent five impressionable years.

Significantly, in Wilson's boyish encounters with his double his own feelings toward the double are ambiguous. He is irritated by the double's air of patronage for him, by the double's interference with his will, by the excellence of the double's copy of his spirit and manner, and especially by the advice insinuated without request. He is mystified by a feeling of having been acquainted with this other William Wilson at some epoch long ago and embarrassed by the fact that this boy who so sarcastically imitates him is not impressed by him and yet mingles with his sly insults and contradictions a most "unwelcome <u>affectionateness</u> of manner."[2] The double's sole defect is a vocal difficulty which hinders him from speaking above a low whisper, but even this annoys Wilson because the whisperer can imitate the intonations and accents of his own louder tones. In the late-at-night

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[1] Poe, <u>Viking Portable</u>, p. 59. [2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 63.

attempt of Wilson to perpetrate a practical joke on his imitator in the dormitory, the appearance of the other William Wilson's sleeping face is sufficient to cause the awestricken boy to extinguish his lamp and leave the academy. This scenic encounter is the conclusion of the early boyhood account.

Then the narrator recalls his three years of folly and "soulless dissipation" at Eton and tells the reader of an early morning interruption to these activities by a figure dressed just like him who merely whispers his name to check him. But the next scene, which takes place at Oxford, results in his exposure by his double of a cowardly effort to cheat a newcomer at cards. This exposé results in his disgrace. The succeeding years are more hastily summarized by the narrator with mention of divers occasions and places in which this despised other William Wilson had interfered in the narrator's concerns.

The culmination of this by now frantic flight and pursuit comes at Rome during a masquerade of the Carnival season. This scene and the one at Oxford are the most fully dramatized, and both come close to the conclusion after the panoramic view has unrolled the history of the relationship. The double again confronts Wilson, but this time meets furious resistance. Wilson plunges his sword again and again through his adversary in the struggle. He turns from the double for a moment to secure the door against interference and when he

turns back he sees in what he confusedly thinks must have been an unnoticed mirror his own image tottering to meet him "with pale features and all dabbled in blood."[1] But Wilson is mistaken, for there is no mirror, and the dying figure is that of his double.

> Not a thread in all his raiment--not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face which was not, even in the most absolute identity, mine own!
>
> It was Wilson; but he spoke no longer in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said:
>
> "You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead--dead to the world, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist--and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself."[2]

The conscience-symbol is well portrayed through the gradual evolution of the attitude of this self-willed and irresponsible narrator toward his accusing and protecting double. His failure to understand this other boy who so easily excels him, his fear and awe of this possessor of the "keener moral sense," and his lack of awareness of their relationship until too late display a skilful use of the fallible narrator whose own consciousness develops toward the revelation at the end of the story.

Poe's critical description of the short story found in the review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales can be summarized in four important points. First, the direction of the tale is from the preconceived effect back to the means, and

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[1] Ibid., p. 81. [2] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

this, of course, should include the narrator; second, the whole should be rigidly economized to achieve that effect; three, the sense of its artistry should then give the sensitive reader a full sense of satisfaction; and four, the idea back of the tale, its "thesis" has a spotless, because "undisturbed" presentation.[1]

If we apply these four points of technique to these two stories just examined, we discover: first, that he has selected effective narrators for producing the preconceived effect of each tale. Second, by confining himself to the restricted point of view and scenic representation for only the points of crisis, Poe has economized his means toward the single climactic effect. Third, the sensitive reader, both during the actual reading of the tales and after his immersion in these fictional worlds, retains a sense of satisfaction with their artistry. Fourth, Poe has not only presented a thesis in an "undisturbed" fashion, but has dived deeply enough for a thesis of terrors worthy of the elaborate rhetorical effect. He validated his theory in his art in these tales with unusual success.

Summary

In summarizing Poe's contributions to the development of the fallible narrator in fiction we find that he added to its proportions in significant ways, especially in the short

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 566.

story. Poe was, both as writer and critic, the most self-conscious artist America had had up to his time. He left no stone unturned in his search for the revealing secrets of his profession. Among his marginalia are very modern remarks about the importance of punctuation; of rhetoric as a study, he wrote:

> The rhetorician's rules--if they are rules--teach him not only to name his tools, but to use his tools,--the capacity of his tools--their extent--their limit; and from an examination of the nature of the tools--(an examination forced on him by their constant presence)--force him also into scrutiny and comprehension of the material on which the tools are employed, and thus, finally, suggest and give birth to new material for new tools.[1]

Probably the first fact of importance regarding Poe's use of the fallible narrator is that the delegated story-teller looms so large in his short stories. If we consider Poe's own list, included in a letter to Lowell, of his best stories--"Ligeia," "The Gold Bug," "Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Tell-tale Heart," "The Black Cat," "William Wilson," "The Descent into the Maelstrom," and also "The Purloined Letter"--we find that all of them are stories told by fallible narrators.[2] And, with the exception of "Murders in the Rue Morgue," which has an introductory exposition on the pleasures of ratiocination, he eschewed personal intrusion. Poe very largely dropped the leisurely

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[1] Poe, "Marginalia," Centenary Poe, p. 556.

[2] Ostrom, pp. 94-95.

discursive type of approach of Irving, Simms, and others. In this one instance of "The Murders" when he was introducing a new type of story, "new material for new tools," he probably felt a need for authorial comment. The generalization would be safe, however, that Poe felt the great advantage which a fallible narrator provided for his single effect theory in the unity and verisimilitude of impressions from one source.

The second fact is that Poe deliberately varied these narrators and constructed them for their tales. There were monomaniacs in "Berenice" and "The Tell-tale Heart," neurotic visionaries in "Morella" and "Ligeia," supercilious fools in "Mellonta Tauta" and "Some Words With a Mummy," an appreciative stooge in "The Murders in Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," sympathetic friends in "The Gold Bug" and "The Fall of the House of Usher," a martyr and a fisherman in "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "A Descent into the Maelstrom," a picaresque rogue in "Hans Pfaall," and a fop in "The Spectacles." The list could be greatly extended; there is ample support for Poe's claim of variety in these examples. The criticism could be advanced that some of this "construction" is too mechanical, but it does evidence the consciousness that the "I" had a character of his own to maintain within the story.

A third fact, and one more significant to the full artistic development of the fallible narrator, is that Poe in his best fiction demonstrated the power of the imagined

discursive type of approach of Irving, Simms, and others. In this one instance of "The Murders" when he was introducing a new type of story, "new material for new tools," he probably felt a need for authorial comment. The generalization would be safe, however, that Poe felt the great advantage which a fallible narrator provided for his single effect theory in the unity and verisimilitude of impressions from one source.

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narrator to project a fictional world of a certain tone or mood by means of his impressions of that world. In this manner, Dupin presents us with the world of detective fiction and Roderick Usher's friend describes a symbolic drama of terror in a world combining dream-like vagueness with vivid horror. This constitutes an influence from the narrator upon the story and increases the reality of the illusion.

Some things are yet lacking and among these is the third person point of view fallible narrator, a step still farther away from the ubiquitous author and toward dramatization. Poe had gone far with first person narrators, in which, in Percy Lubbock's words, "the characerized 'I' is substituted for the loose and general 'I' of the author,"[1] but the further step had to wait for a writer who was even more conscious of fiction as art than Poe and possessed of a surer taste--Henry James.

Herman Melville

For Melville the greatest terror in the world was the power, the ubiquity, the ambiguity, and the devilish subtlety of evil, the inscrutable malice in the universe. In the first chapter of Moby Dick Ishmael remarks, "Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror . . ."[2] On the

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[1] Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), p. 127.

[2] Herman Melville, Moby Dick, ed. Leon Howard ("Modern Library Edition"; New York, 1950), p. 6.

perversity and strength of this attraction for what destroys man, Melville and Poe could agree.

Melville was drawn toward the problem of evil first of all by his restless habit of independent philosophical and theological speculation. The best description of this habit comes from Hawthorne's account of Melville's visit to him in which Hawthorne speaks of their talk by the seashore at Southport and of Melville's ceaseless wandering over "these deserts as dismal and monotonous as the sandhills amid which we were sitting."[1] Second, Melville was deeply concerned with the moral aspects of man's struggle--the difference between the conventional appearance of right and wrong and the reality, as bitter denunciations of "The Confidence Man" indicate. And finally, he was passionately moved by man's plight, his frail humanity whirled about in the vortex of so titanic a conflict. Bartleby might be selected for a single example of this pity for humanity.

Whatever these causes of his investigation of the terrors and horrors of this world, Melville's presentation of it became a steady obsession after Mardi. In Benito Cereno Melville included among his varied means of presentation a story told by one Amasa Delano, A New England captain of Duxbury, Massachusetts. Captain Delano was an example of the

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[1] Newton Arvin, The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), pp. 230-231.

unreliable narrator in the third person point of view and so, technically, something of an advance over those tales studied up to this point.

As is thoroughly demonstrated by Barbara Moorehead in her study of Melville's narrators in Typee, Redburn, and Moby Dick, Melville permitted himself great freedom in this matter of point of view. In fact, he moves in and out of various points of view in Moby Dick and has a kind of omniscient stage manager for all of them, who is the true narrator. Moorehead finds that the advantages of this freedom for the presentation of the meaning is the most important contribution it makes to Moby Dick. She asserts:

> The narrator is clearly distinguished in his beliefs from Ishmael, just as the narrator in Typee and Redburn were distinguished from their earlier youthful selves.[1]

and among her conclusions Moorehead includes this one:

> The chief significance of the way the narrator is employed in Moby Dick, then, is that he is the means of including many different points of view, and, most important, of expressing unpopular views indirectly.[2]

We are not unprepared, therefore, for a point of view which, while it is restricted, will not be rigidly adhered to in Benito Cereno.

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[1] Barbara Moorehead, "Melville's Use of the Narrator in Moby Dick" (microfilmed Ph. D. dissertation, Dept. of English, University of Chicago, 1950), p. 218.

[2] Ibid., p. 224.

Captain Amasa Delano As Narrator

Benito Cereno, which has been classified both as short novel and long short story, was first published in book form in Piazza Tales in 1856. As is true of Israel Potter, this fiction has a factual account behind it--Amasa Delano's Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres--but the use made of these facts is strictly Melville's own. Melville possessed a very distinctive gift for taking factual adventures and breathing life into them. As early as Typee and White Jacket his ability to "yarn" from facts stood him in good stead.

From the second paragraph of Benito Cereno until the decision of the captain to let his mate lead the attack upon the San Dominick the narration is maintained in Captain Delano's point of view, though the author uses perfect freedom in adding a comment here and there. Very early Melville gives the reader cues as to the character of his narrator, though when he "goes behind" as James calls this process, he limits his freedom only to Captain Delano. Others can be seen as they impress the captain, but the writer comments on the narrator's first puzzled observations of the strange ship's even stranger behavior:

> Considering the lawlessness and loneliness of the spot, and the sort of stories, at that day, associated with those seas, Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge

> in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man.[1]

And then Melville adds a warning signal to the reader which helps at the same time to characterize the narrator.

> Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine.[2]

However, somewhat in the manner of Captain Delano himself, Melville tends to muffle his warning bell with the statement that the ship's obvious awkwardness in her navigation would have dissipated any sailor's misgivings.

Melville makes us aware from the beginning that there is considerable distance between the author and the man to whom he is entrusting the story, but in order that the reader may be caught off guard in his sympathetic identification with Captain Delano, this awareness is carefully kept in the background. (Having once read the tale, the reader can go back and pick up warnings in the metaphors "every hearse-like roll of the hull," "gray-headed bagpipers playing a funeral march," "a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave," "a dreary graveyard toll," etc.)

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[1] Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," The Literature of the United States, ed. Walter Blair, Theodore Hornberger, and Randall Stewart, I (New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1946), p. 1076.

[2] Ibid.

The first actions of the captain-narrator demonstrate his warm humanity and capacity for decisive action. He brings fresh fish and sends his boat back to the sealer for water, soft bread, pumpkins and a dozen bottles of cider from his private store. He plans within a few hours, as the winds permit, to bring this drifting Spanish ship into safe harbor alongside his own and later see her safely to a Chilean anchorage.

The full advantage of restricting our view to the befuddled but good man becomes apparent later after we have finished our first reading. It is a tribute to Melville's well-wrought workmanship that there is seldom a reader of Benito Cereno who does not re-trace his steps to pick up all which he, as well as Captain Delano, or rather, with Captain Delano, has missed of the ever-present irony and hidden horror.

The captain, being a good seaman as well as a benevolent American, cannot but criticize his host captain and praise the shepherd-dog-like fidelity of the negro, an image Melville repeats in The Confidence Man with something of the same effect. Delano notes Don Benito's surly reserve, his contempt for his task as commander, his irresolution, his determined hypochondria, and unfriendly indifference. With a kinder eye he regards Babo's "steady good conduct," his friendly, if almost familiar, service upon his master and faithful assistance in times of physical distress. Captain

Delano reflects that to have watched Don Benito "this undemonstrative invalid gliding about, apathetic and mute, no landsman could have dreamed that in him was lodged a dictatorship beyond which, while at sea, there was no earthly appeal."[1] Such thoughts as these, because the reader trusts this obviously well-intentioned man, are accepted at face value; indeed they are hardly noticed.

Another example, and many could be offered, of this same following of Delano's interpretation by the reader occurs during Don Benito's recital of how his ship had come to her present state. Delano in praise of Babo exclaims to Don Benito:

> ". . . I envy you much a friend; slave I cannot call him."
>
> As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other. The scene was heightened by the contrast in dress, denoting their relative positions.[2]

But the generous, blunt captain, whose sympathies were constantly being called on to drown his criticism of this strange brother captain, has practical as well as sentimental aid to offer. Having heard out Don Benito's story, he offers sails and rigging, a permanent water supply, and three excellent seamen as temporary deck officers to get the <u>San Dominick</u> to port where she could be refitted. For the first

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 1080. [2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 1082.

time the Spanish Captain seems to seize upon some eagerness of hope, only to lose it after a short withdrawal with his negro servant.

Amasa Delano had hoped that in exchange for his generous offer of supplies, for which he must account to his ship owners, Don Benito would offer reimbursement, but again there was a period of withdrawal for private conference with Babo. This time the American was thoroughly bewildered, for he did not like the tenor of the embarrassed questions which the Spanish captain asked about the number and movements of his men and their armament. Despite his fears Captain Delano reveals in this conversation his lack of any subtlety or tendency to lie. He belongs to those who possess both courage and nothing to hide.

Captain Delano is democratic in his sympathies as well as generous, humane, practical, and truthful. His position as captain requires an autocratic leadership, but his attitude toward his men and their response to it illustrate the best kind of discipline, one in which there is mutual respect and consideration. In this side of his character, he reminds us somwhat of Captain Vere. The captain is dissuaded from leading the attack against the San Dominick, and his sailors are cheered on by offers of reward. When Don Benito refuses to reserve the best of the food offered for himself but insists on its general distribution among blacks and whites alike, the American is gratified. He admires the

pastoral simplicity of the negress suckling her child and the statuesque manly dignity of Atufal. When the water casks are hoisted on deck, Captain Delano doled the water out "with republican impartiality as to this republican element, which always seeks one level, serving the oldest white no better than the youngest black."[1]

The American captain is ashamed of what fears come to his mind as being blasphemous and atheistical. He links his safety to his own good conscience and an overruling Providence.

> Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is some one above. Fie, Fie, Jack of the Beach! you are a child indeed; a child of the second childhood, old boy; you are beginning to dote and drule, I'm afraid.[2]

Melville kept his narrator from seeming credulous to the point of caricature or obtuse to the point of stupidity, however, by a skilful balancing of two forces at work within him. The one force is his almost blind trust in man, in nature, and in God and the other his instinctive fears or sense of hidden terrors. The one force with the habitual reactions of a benign, good-natured, healthy, and fortunate man in the prime of life is dominant at the beginning. Captain Delano is startled by and contemptuous of any of his suspicions or fears which arise in an increasing number and tempo as the hours wear on from early morning through the gray noon to the

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[1] Ibid., p. 1095. [2] Ibid., p. 1094.

time of the freshening evening breeze and his departure for his own boat.

His first reactions to the unruliness of the negroes, including several incidents of violence, he put down by attributing these acts to the lack of discipline probably due to the hardships undergone and to the Spanish captain's lack of vigor. The apprehensive twitch in the calves of his legs when he had to pass between the Ashantee hatchet polishers he smiled at in retrospect; his instinctive recoil from the sight of Atufal stationed like a guard outside Don Benito's cabin and an equally instinctive association of Atufal with Babo would have been harder to dispel but for the confidence the rising breeze inspired in Captain Delano.

For slowly but surely the accumulation of unexplained appearances--the bizarre scene of Babo's shaving his master, the moments of half-threatening danger like the one in which the American captain had started to push back the unruly crowd in order to portion out the water, the mysterious attempt of the white sailors to communicate with him, and the alternate sensitiveness of a man "flayed alive" and capricious rudeness of his host--all the ambiguities he had thawed by his good nature and charitableness begin to crowd in upon Delano. A balustrade gives way when he is eagerly looking out for the return of his boat; a few moments later he has the sailor's knot taken from him by a negro and tossed overboard.

> "all this is very queer now," thought Captain Delano, with a qualmish sort of emotion; but, as one feeling incipient sea-sickness, he strove, by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady.[1]

This time again he laughs off his misgivings because of the approach of something suggestive of home, his good boat Rover. Later comes the shaving scene with Delano's bland thoughts about negroes, so devastatingly ironic later. "God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune." The breeze springs up, and Delano gets rid of his fears in the action of issuing orders and heading the ship into the harbor. He still has the climaxing ordeal of his stay on board to face. Having taken leave of Don Benito he has the narrow corridor to pass to get to the stairs when he hears the echo of the ship's "flawed bell."

> Instantly, by a fatality not to be withstood, his mind, responsive to the portent, swarmed with superstitious suspicions. He paused. In images far swifter than these sentences, the minutest details of all his former distrusts swept through him.[2]

As these thoughts crowd his mind he becomes aware that Atufal stands without. "He seemed a sentry, and more . . . . The Spaniard behind--his creature before; to rush from darkness into light was the involuntary choice."[3] But Captain Delano "with clenched jaw and hand" passes Atufal and stands unharmed on deck. Here the sight of his familiar boat, the benign aspect of the evening, and the appearance of industry on board the ship cause Captain Delano's fears to relax.

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[1] Ibid., p. 1093. [2] Ibid., p. 1104. [3] Ibid.

> Once again he smiled at the phantoms which had mocked him, and felt something like a tinge of remorse, that, by harbouring them even for a moment, he should, by implication, have betrayed an atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above.[1]

This is the last of the captain's false recoveries, for the next discovery is the "flash of revelation" which illuminates all of the events of the day and the conduct of the mysterious Benito Cereno. The scales drop from Captain Delano's eyes as he realizes that he has spent an entire day among a throng of murderous mutineers, tragically misjudging the helpless and terror-stricken captive captain.

The rest of the action, the resolution of the mutiny and the trial, is portrayed as summary narration. The narrative of the taking of the San Dominick and the defeat of the negroes is told simply as a story of good rousing action in Melville's best manner. The unbelievable horrors of the voyage of the San Dominick are lifted from legal documents, principally from the deposition of Benito Cereno, whose account was later attested to by the surviving Spanish sailors. A final interview between Don Benito and his rescuer Captain Amasa Delano, which takes place during the voyage to Lima and is reported retrospectively by the omniscient author, furnishes the concluding picture of both men.

Benito Cereno, though only twenty-nine years of age, is a shattered man, whose act of heroism in leaping into

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[1] Ibid.

Captain Delano's boat was apparently the last act of will he could force himself to make. He can no longer respond to comfort nor the kindness of good fortune. Captain Delano urges him to forget the past.

> "See yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves."
> "Because they have no memory," he dejectedly replies; "because they are not human."
> "But these mild trades that now fan your cheek, Don Benito, do they not come with a human-like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the trades."[1]

Benito Cereno had had too long and too steady an immersion in the realities of a world where every waking or sleeping image was one of terror and bitterest irony to shed so lightly as Amasa Delano does the horrors of the mutiny of a ship under his command. Benito Cereno's answer to the remark on the friendliness of the trades was that their steadfastness but wafted him to his tomb. The prophecy is fulfilled when Benito Cereno does indeed follow his murdered friend and leader to the vaults of St. Bartholomew's church.

Whether Melville's narrator had learned how deceptive appearances can be, how "far even the best men err, in judging of the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted"[2] is dubious. Apparently, for Captain Delano "the past is passed," and one can continue to trust in a charmed life with impunity. According to Fogle, Delano

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[1] Ibid., p. 1114. [2] Ibid.

lacks "a sense of evil" and so "cannot penetrate the meaning until Cereno forces it upon him, and its deeper implications are permanently closed to him."[1]

Delano with his bluff heartiness and healthy good nature is not an unattractive character; in fact, he is intended as an American type, a rather flattering portrait. But he is not the hero of the story, for he does not display sufficient awareness of the true situation. Benito Cereno, the young man blasted so early by initiation into the secrets of human malignity, is the one whose courageous action in leaping into Captain Delano's boat prevents a second catastrophe and enables human justice to hold its trial of the culprits. Captain Delano generously acknowledges Don Benito's heroism displayed during the long ordeal of the day on the San Dominick as well as in his final act. "You saved my life, Don Benito, more than I yours; saved it, too, against my knowledge and will."[2]

To the Spaniard's courteous rejoinder that Captain Delano must have had safe conduct from Heaven to escape in spite of his rash talk and action, Delano adds his own interpretations.

> Yes, all is owing to Providence, I know; but the temper of my mind that morning was more than commonly

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[1] Richard Harter Fogle, "The Monk and the Bachelor: Melville's Benito Cereno," Tulane Studies in English (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1952), III, 159.

[2] Melville, "Benito Cereno," p. 1114.

> pleasant, while the sight of so much suffering, more apparent than real, added to my good nature, compassion, and charity, happily interweaving the three. Had it been otherwise, doubtless, as you hint, some of my interferences might have ended unhappily enough. Besides, those feelings I spoke of enabled me to get the better of momentary distrust, at times when acuteness might have cost me my life, without saving another's.[1]

And yet he cannot understand why a happy outcome for the situation for Don Benito, an outcome due to fortuitous circumstances, to the intervention of an inscrutable Providence, and to a single act of desperate courage is not sufficiant to restore Benito Cereno's confidence in life. Delano's lack of sensitiveness is not drawn in bitter caricature and is the more effective for that reason. He is a reasonable and forthright man with just enough imagination to make him a risk to both friend and foe.

The World of Melville's Terrors

Melville's imagination always seems to reach its greatest heights when it can work within the setting of the sea. The mystery of its moods, its depths, the creatures hidden in it, and the cunning of its analogies furnishes him with his most challenging material. Benito Cereno is no exception then among Melville's work as to the environment in which its terrors hold sway. Within this setting in Benito Cereno, as Fogle demonstrates, are poised three orders, each one represented in one of the three main figures of the story.

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[1] Ibid.

"The primary order of Benito Cereno is the order of Spain, an hierarchical system in which Church and State are one. The San Dominick is a symbol of this order, and its fate."[1] Babo represents "the destructive vigor of the primitive"[2] order of savagery, though in his mystery he goes beyond this, becoming a leader who outranks Atufal, a king in the savage tribal order. And then there is the practical, democratic, humane order of Captain Delano with its "rights of man" doctrine. The terrors spring from the oldest order, symbolizing probably at the same time both the demonism associated with savagery and the destructive inequities which exist at the bottom in every order.

Lewis Mumford has ranked this tale high: "That story marked the culmination of Melville's power as a short-story writer, as Moby-Dick marked his triumph as an epic poet."[3] However, critical opinion of Benito Cereno is not unanimous. F. O. Matthiessen has criticized the "black" and "white" symbolism because it raises "unanswered questions" about the negroes, who are victims of social injustice. He judges Benito Cereno as tragedy and describes it as "comparatively

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[1] Fogle, p. 166. [2] Ibid.

[3] Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville ("The Literary Guild of America"; New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, Inc., 1929), p. 244.

superficial."[1] Newton Arvin is even more severe in his strictures, calling attention to the tedious and wasteful build up which would "overwhelm the dullest-witted and most resistant reader,"[2] the melodramatic almost comic quality of the hatchet polishers and the shaving scene, and the abundance of cliches.

The defense against the first criticism lies in the fact that "black" and "white" are both intentionally ambiguous to indicate the primary theme, which is, according to Fogle, "realization of mystery"[3] Arvin has failed to take into account the transforming work of the fallible narrator Captain Delano. If Melville had written this story "swifty, boldly, hypnotically," as Arvin states that Melville working as "his highest pitch"[4] would do, the story would not be Benito Cereno, but something quite other. Captain Delano thinks in cliches, of course; the slow tedious build up is the painful effort of a mind wandering in a maze, seeking clues for understanding. This is what the story is about, and the "rhythms of the prose" in the first pages which Arvin

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[1] F. O. Matthiessen, The American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), quoted in Richard Harter Fogle, "The Monk and the Bachelor: Melville's Benito Cereno," Tulane Studies in English (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1952), III, p. 162.

[2] Newton Arvin, Herman Melville ("American Men of Letters Series"; New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), p. 239.

[3] Fogle, p. 176. [4] Arvin, p. 239.

characterizes as "slow, torpid, and stiff-limbed"[1] are the reflection in style of the leaden calm, the gray day, and the heavy helplessness of the San Dominick. The melodramatic and comic elements are a part of Babo's play-acting, in which the ridiculous and the terrible have been combined with sadistic relish; however, this is not realized while we identify ourselves with the narrator's point of view but in retrospect.

The style of Benito Cereno is in some ways even an improvement over the rhetorical bombast that Moby Dick is at times guilty of. It is a more restrained style in which the theme of unbearable and ironic terror lurking beneath ambiguous appearances is interwoven with vivid details which are frequently symbolic. Two pictures which are presented early in the narrative, the one of nature on the morning of the adventure and the other of the appearance of the San Dominick when Captain Delano first boarded it, will serve as illustrations of this mature style and at the same time as backdrops for the action of this drama.

The first description is often reproduced:

> The morning was one peculiar to that coast. Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mould. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over

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[1] Ibid.

> meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come.[1]

It is to be noted that this is not a description through the eyes of the American captain, who, good seaman that he is, is looking through the glass at the strange sail coming into view. This is Melville's description which sets a mood in color before us. Even the imaged leaden fixation of the waves warns that this world is far from the safe world we are accustomed to; it is a world in which birds and vapors are kin in confusion and monotonous color. Aside from these flitting shadows, this seems a plastic world and not a living one.

The second description is a portion of a series of pictures of the San Dominick as Captain Delano looked at her. The first part is in the author's point of view, but then it changes to that of the captain.

> Always upon first boarding a large and populous ship at sea, especially a foreign one, with a nondescript crew such as Lascars or Manilla men, the impression varies in a peculiar way from that produced by first entering a strange house with strange inmates in a strange land. Both house and ship--the one by its walls and blinds, the other by its high bulwarks like ramparts--hoard from view their interiors till the last moment; but in the case of the ship there is this addition: that the living spectacle it contains, upon its sudden and complete disclosure, has, in contrast with the blank ocean which zones it, something of the effect of enchantment. The ship seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave.

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[1] Melville, "Benito Cereno," p. 1076.

> Perhaps it was some such influence, as above is attempted to be described, which, in Captain Delano's mind, heightened whatever, upon a staid scrutiny, might have seemed unusual; especially the conspicuous figures of four elderly grizzled Negroes, their heads like black, doddered willow tops, who, in venerable contrast to the tumult below them, were couched sphynx-like, one on the starboard cat-head, another on the larboard, and the remaining pair face to face on the opposite bulwarks above the main-chains.[1]

Other details are noted in succession by Captain Delano's alert eye, including the six hatchet-polishers, but the whole presents the unreal effect of a staged setting. As the captain later learns, that is just what it is--a stage improvisation acted out for one spectator, the deluded captain. This garish reality covers an even more incredible truth equally compounded of danger and terror of such intensity that re-reading heightens rather than mitigates the effect.

In such a world anything seems possible to the puzzled narrator. But there is a contrasting world, the world of the practical common sense of his everyday life, which always restores to Captain Delano his confidence and his good humor. Each return of his whaleboat or the rising breeze making navigation possible dispels the confusion of appearance and sets everything right. Then with the change from the restricted point of view comes the world of dashing and romantic action--the sea fight for the possession of the San Dominick--and finally the story ends in the land world--the world of solidities such as trials, judgment, and restoration.

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[1] Ibid., p. 1078.

Fittingly, the most fantastic of these worlds, in which the terror of malignity in man and universe is portrayed, is seen through the eyes of the unimaginative but generous-hearted Amasa Delano. He adds to its credibility by his pragmatic quality and intensifies its threat by his obtuseness.

Though preachment is nowhere implied in Benito Cereno, neither by Don Benito nor Captain Delano nor by the author, the giant shadow cast by the association of the physically insignificant Babo and the magnificently statuesque Atufal symbolizes the institution of slavery and its inevitable destructiveness. Don Benito does give it a name when he answers to the captain's question: " . . . you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?" simply "The Negro."[1] The subterranean terror, ironically present in all of Captain Delano's pleasant thoughts about the attractiveness of the negro character as slave, is rooted in the wrong which, like a smoldering fire, eats out the supports of the civilization that rests upon it. And, in the final analysis, punishment is impotent to right the wrong or destroy the terror.

The Whole As Restricted by the Narrator

Richard Chase, writing of Melville's dependence upon written accounts for material, states: "Benito Cereno and Israel Potter were rewritten from subliterary biographies,

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[1] Ibid., p. 1114.

though Melville wrote so well in these stories that the difference between his versions and the originals is absolute."[1]

Part of the excellence of this writing in Benito Cereno lies in the varying of the proportion of the separate parts of what might have been a very long story indeed. The section of the tale which is entrusted to Captain Delano from the moment of his first gazing at the strange ship through his glasses until his return by boat to his sealer takes in the events of one day and is six times as long as the next longest section. This might seem an extravagant emphasis since almost all that Captain Delano does that day on board the San Dominick is recorded, and much of what he observed, concluded, or wondered at is likewise, but the emphasis is skillfully provided for to bring out the theme and provide ample evidence for the conflict between Amasa Delano's trusting nature and his instinctive suspicions of the true status of affairs. The entire voyage of the San Dominick, the journey back to Lima, the trial, and the death of Babo and later of Benito Cereno, events which actually filled many months in the action, are economically narrated because, while necessary, they are void of the suspense of the main action. The voyage and the trial are reported in the impersonal legal language of Benito Cereno's deposition, a style which helps to minimize its intensity at the same time that it does provide a

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[1] Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 285.

detailed account of the facts behind the ambiguous appearance which were noted by Captain Delano during his stay on board. The briefly dramatized scene between Captain Delano and Benito Cereno, occurring during the latter's period of temporary recovery, is necessary to clarify the theme. This is followed then by a few concluding paragraphs which wind up the completed action and highlight the significance of the events.

At no point in the story is the physical appearance of Captain Amasa Delano described. Because he is so typically the American gentleman perhaps no description is needed. We are aware that he is resolute and vigorous in action, pleasant in temperament, comparatively a young man though experienced as a leader, and we can generally conclude that, if not as handsome as Billy Budd, he is attractive as a picture of manly good health.

What is portrayed very definitely about Captain Delano is the play of the alternating moods of trust and suspicion--what Fogle calls "the rhythm of distrust and trust"[1]--within his buoyant spirit as these moods are derived from the ambiguous appearances on shipboard. Because Captain Delano is portrayed in the third person point of view, we receive his impressions just as he received them with no sense of prognostication as far as the appearances and his responses

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[1]Fogle, p. 169.

to them are concerned. We wander with him through the maze of uncertainties, but are never quite as easily reassured as he is.

This latter effect is produced by Melville's planted question mark at the first of the narrative as to the wisdom of a man who cannot consider human malignity as a possibility. He indicates a distance between himself, the author, and his narrator; thus, in effect, he enters into collusion with the reader as to his narrator's reliability. The result here is that the reader is a bit more apprehensive than Captain Delano, although essentially sympathetic toward him. As the tension mounts toward the climax with a series of stairstep events which are characterized by evidence confusing to the practical American, the reader's irritation with the narrator likewise mounts. His stupidity in the face of an obviously dangerous situation arouses our concern for him. But we are as bewildered as Captain Dealno by Don Benito because until the climactic leap into the captain's boat we never see him except through the vision and interpretation of the narrator. Thus Melville has procured an intensity and an illusion of reality which is of unusual power. Although narrated in vigorous, straightforward, lucid prose, the story presents a flickering image, one slightly out of focus with shapes of terror moving throughout. One strange advantage deriving from Melville's method is that the reader feels compelled to

re-read the story once it is completed--this time with the image clear and truthful.

The appropriateness of the color, light, and atmospheric images to the interpretation of the story should also be noted as one evidence of the skill with which Melville wrought in Benito Cereno. As Chase indicates, there is sometimes "an over-all deficiency in symbolization" with Melville even when the symbols are "beautiful and sufficient in their context."[1] Among the symbols which Chase lists--"Movement and Stasis, Light and Dark, Flight and Fall, Space and Time, Mountain and Valley"--only the first three pair are prominent in Benito Cereno, but in this story they constitute a beautiful part of the whole.

The opening description with its leaden overtones of gray rigidity sets the color key and incidentally the mood as well. Even in the realm of nature this is a gray world. Distinctions are difficult; realities are insubstantial; movement looks like solidity, and what appears is inevitably deceptive and often ominous.

Into this gray world Captain Delano orders his whaleboat dropped despite the wary opposition of his mate. What follows is a series of images in black and white. The ship of medieval design finally emerging from the shreds of fog appears like a white-washed monastery thronged with dark cowls.

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[1]Chase, p. 285.

She seems launched from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones. A white noddy is observed in the tops perches on a ratlin. A persistent emphasis contrasts the white and the blacks on board the ship with the spotlight of attention playing on the two figures of Spanish captain and his black servant Babo. Both black and white are confusing to Captain Delano who "was operated upon by certain general notions which, while disconnecting pain and abashment from virtue, invariably link them with vice."[1] With Captain Delano black was black and white was white, and it was painful to find himself questioning his own conclusion.

Not only are black and white confusing; both at times contain elements of terror. The Ashantee hatchet polishers and the very pressure of the number of blacks "with the white faces, here and there sparsely mixed in with the blacks, like stray white pawns venturously involved in the ranks of the chessmen opposed,"[2] are a challenge to the American captain's courage and determined good will. The white, too, takes on treacherous connotations in Captain Delano's eyes during the adventure. At times he suspects the Spanish captain and his evasive sailors. In nature, white is ambiguous too, as in Moby Dick. The relief he felt in a critical moment at seeing Rover, his whaleboat which he likens to a friendly dog, approaching with a white bone in mouth, is set back when the

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[1] Melville, Benito Cereno, p. 1091. [2] Ibid., p. 1090.

white bone turns out to be a "bubbling Tide-rip." The whiteness of the ship turned out to be due to neglect and decay, a charnel-house white.

In a universe of gray, the weather even at noon bears a similar aspect. Captain Delano marks that "from the grayness of everything, it seemed to be getting toward dusk."[1] With the grayness came also the opposite of movement--the stasis of the calm.

"The calm was confirmed. In the far distance, away from the influence of land, the leaden ocean seemed laid out and leaded up, its course finished, soul gone, defunct."[2] The dead weight of this calm and the uncertainty of the boundaries between virtue and vice, white and black, increase their pressure on the good captain until that moment when a breeze flutters the curtain of Don Benito's cabin and Captain Delano seizes a trumpet and gives the orders which bring the San Dominick to anchor beside the Bachelor's Delight.

At the moment of climax the symbols act in a group in startling effectiveness. The breeze brings on movement. Flight and fall are one in Don Benito's leap into the boat of the surprised captain, followed closely by Babo. Then, as the scales drop from the captain's eyes, in quick succession there is the descent of a mass of the blacks in "sooty avalanche," the cutting of the cable which whips away the covering canvas

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[1] Ibid., p. 1094. [2] Ibid.

and reveals the white terror of Aranda's skeleton, and the ship's escape,

> the blacks thickly clustering around the bowsprit, one moment with taunting cries toward the whites, the next with upthrown gestures hailing the now dusky moors of ocean--cawing crows escaped from the hand of the fowler.[1]

Under the light of the moon, a symbol of romantic clarity, the boarding of the San Dominick is achieved and the whites overpower the wolf-like blacks. Again order is restored, and the ambiguities are stowed away. This particular section is an interesting device, showing how Melville as a mature writer handled the problem of the block of exposition, a problem which is always present when an action is presented from the restricted point of view. It is a solid block, to be sure, but it comes after the suspense is over to answer all the questions which the befuddled narrator had asked himself. Its economy is a tribute to Melville's narrative skill, for it is about a sixth as long in the telling as the single day which we experience with Captain Amasa Delano. This section in its matter-of-fact style, and its sense of solid, landsman reality has the effect of resolving the action. The conclusion in the author's point of view serves a purpose of interpretation and establishes Don Benito as the martyr of an incurable evil.

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[1] Ibid., p. 1106.

For Captain Delano the end of his adventure has restored the right boundaries in life with virtue rewarded and vice punished; he is content with this restoration of the forms. Not so with Don Benito. He rejects the appearance of beneficent nature symbolized in this closing section by the blue sea and sky, a bright sun, and the healing trade winds because their bright beauty and gentle motion seem like mockery to his memory of human terror and woe. He further realizes the impotence of man's punishment and rightly predicts his own approaching death.

For the portrayal of the deceitfulness of appearances for men of simplicity and good will Melville chose an excellent unreliable narrator in Captain Amasa Delano. Because he wanted none of the perspective of the backward glance to ruin the sense of immediacy or intensity of his narrator's, the thus the reader's, impressions he placed his narrator in the third person and produced a master piece of fiction. Fogle summarizes about Benito Cereno:

> Its deepest effects are muted. It has not the life nor the luminescence of Moby Dick. . . . It is in the sober vein of the later work, well represented by its colors. But after Moby Dick the tale of Benito Cereno is Melville's most achieved piece of writing.[1]

Brown, Poe, Melville--all felt the fascination of the darker side of human nature and were drawn to explore the terrors of the emotional depths for the possibilities of

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[1]Fogle, p. 178.

discovery. They sought to penetrate the "more smiling aspects" of American life, which they suspected were superficial. Brown in Wieland portrayed a family guided by the ideals of humane rationalism and leading an idyllic existence in the flush times, suddenly crushed by the destructive irrationality lurking within man himself. An explosion of submerged violence resulted in intrigue, insanity, murder, and fire. Poe in his tales of imagination explored the dark underside of human consciousness, and, reaching "farther than any interpretive speculation"[1] can go, he projected these discovered terrors of the soul into symbolic dramas which act out the nightmare of existence in a universe where death and decay and the conqueror worm reign. Melville in Benito Cereno exposed a world in which appearances were not to be trusted; evil masqueraded brazenly and good was powerless to expose the truth. Paradoxically, in such a world acuteness of intelligence did but increase the hazard without decreasing the danger.

All three writers were prophets of the nineteenth century whose foreboding sense that all was not well with our vaunted American progress caused them to dive for deeper truth among the hidden terrors which haunt men's souls.

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[1]Davidson, p. 260.

CHAPTER V

THE NARRATOR AS YOUTH

Among the uses writers have discovered for the fallible narrator, none has given more pleasure to more readers than the fallible narrator as youth. Wayne Booth has analyzed this enjoyment which the reader receives when there is a conspiratorial relationship between the author and him behind the narrator's back, a relationship always present to some degree when the narrator is a youth. He mentions forms of active collaboration between the author and the reader such as deciphering allusions and subtleties; appreciating humor or an ironic joke at the narrator's expense; and providing mature moral judgment as opposed to that which the narrator represents. As an example of this last-mentioned effect, Booth quotes Jason Compson's opinion of "damn eastern Jews!"[1] Huck's Pap in his tirade against the "govment" would be an equally good example. This type of activity on the part of the reader can demand of him his "best, most perceptive level" in reading.[2] Though such delights are not confined to stories told by youths, or even by fallible

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[1] Booth, pp. 300-309. [2] Ibid., p. 308.

narrators, they can be richly present there as they are in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn--the second of the books used as examples of the narrator as youth in this chapter.

The two books--Narrative of A. Gordon Pym by Poe and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain are quite different in subject and method of treatment.[1] It would indeed be difficult to find two writers more directly opposite in their attitude toward youth. Poe seems never to have been young during his precocious and insecure childhood; whereas Twain, despite an ever-deepening pessimism, seems to have retained some of the clarity and irrepressible exuberance of a boy until old age. Although the first book, except for recent work by two scholars,[2] has been a neglected, uneven work and the other has been recognized as outstanding among American novels, both provide a study of the advantages and restrictions of this type of narrator.

Poe published the Narrative of A. Gordon Pym in 1838, after having earlier included two installments of it in The Southern Literary Messenger for January and February of 1837. He wrote it during the period of his removal from the South

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[1] I did not include Redburn in this study because Barbara Moorehead's dissertation included the narrator in Redburn. Although Moorehead uses a different approach I would have to go over too much of the same ground to add anything of significance. Huck is, of course, a good subject, and Pym makes a representative contrast.

[2] I refer to the sections on A. Gordon Pym in Edward H. Davidson's Poe: A Critical Study and Patrick Quinn's The French Face of Edgar Poe.

to New York, possibly in response to Harper's rejection of his tales because there was no vogue for a collection of short tales. Whatever his true reasons for writing it, the book was a disappointment to its author who labeled it "a silly book." F. O. Matthiessen would seem to agree with Poe when he states that,

> On one level these adventures of young Arthur and his friend Augustus, who survive mutiny and delirium and the sight of sea gulls gorging themselves on human flesh, are merely the last word in adolescent fantasy.[1]

On the realistic and logical level A. Gordon Pym could hardly escape such a judgment, but Matthiessen, and most surely Poe, were aware of another level, the imaginative one, which, as Matthiessen states, looks backward to Coleridge's Ancient Mariner and white albatross and forward to Melville's whaling voyage after a white whale.

Poe, as we have elaborated elsewhere, was quite conscious of the place of the narrator in relation to both style and point of view, and he bestowed considerable care on Pym's self-analysis and language in the first section of his tale of adventure to establish the picture of the sixteen-year-old youth who is the angle of vision in the account. A provision which must be allowed for, especially in any reflective portions, though, is that it is the older Pym looking back on

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[1] F. O. Matthiessen, "Edgar Allan Poe," Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby (rev. ed. in one vol.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 329.

his adventures who first recounted them for some gentlemen in Richmond and then consented to write or allow Poe to write the account.

The first trait of Pym's which is emphasized in the story is a reckless taste for excitement along with a fascination for the sea. The first adventure (which takes place on board Pym's sailboat, the Ariel, with Augustus Barnard, an older school friend, when both are intoxicated) begins with "a thrill of the greatest excitement and pleasure"[1] in which Pym regards the mad suggestion of a sail at night in October with a gale blowing as "one of the most delightful and most reasonable things in the world."[2]

A second trait of Pym seems to be an imperviousness to learning anything from experience. Although the two boys are resurrected from watery graves in this first adventure at a great risk of life on the part of the crew of the Penguin, their chief concern the following morning is to deceive everyone about their escapade.

Another characteristic, which seems closely allied to the foregoing, is a complete lack of any emotion which could be called truly unselfish. Of love or concern for any member of his family (for Pym possesses a father and mother and a

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe, Narrative of A. Gordon Pym, Tales--Marvelous Adventure, Vol. II of The Works of Edgar Allan Poe ("The Cameo Edition"; New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1904), p. 7.

[2] Ibid.

doting grandfather) there is apparently more than the usual adolescent indifference. Under the stress of dire circumstances Pym thinks in terms of sensory experiences.

Pym mentions prayer and God in passages like these:

> Having thus arranged everything as well as I could in my chilled and agitated condition, I recommended myself to God, and made up my mind to bear whatever might happen with all the fortitude in my power.[1]

A later example, which occurs during the ordeals of starvation on shipboard when they discover a Gallipagos tortoise in the storeroom, reads: "This was indeed a treasure; and falling on our knees with one accord, we returned fervent thanks to God for so seasonal relief."[2] But such passages seem more like an echo of the narrator of Robinson Crusoe than a consistent attitude with Pym. This conclusion is strengthened by Pym's statement concerning the rescue of the two friends by the Penguin that "our deliverance seemed to have been brought about by two of those almost inconceivable pieces of good fortune which are attributed by the wise and pious to the special interference of Providence."[3] Quite plainly he could not classify himself with "the wise and pious."

Perhaps the outstanding trait of this strange youth "of gloomy although glowing imagination" was the compulsion under which he lived. Among the tales of seafaring life which Augustus told him he found himself possessed by "visions of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian

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[1] Ibid., p. 11. [2] Ibid., p. 149. [3] Ibid., p. 13.

hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown."[1] He considered that such was going to be his destiny and that he was duty-bound to fulfill it. The older Pym, who, we remember, is the real narrator, at this point assures the reader that such feelings are common "to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men."[2] Psychologists would probably say of Pym that he was possessed of the "death-wish."

This combination of traits in our narrator is not such as would endear him to his reader nor even make a bid for his sympathy. Pym, however, possesses a few capabilities of a more affirmative kind; he has a vitality which rises as difficulties mount, as shown by his unsuspected powers of physical recuperation amid the horrors of the Grampus adventure. He has a keenly observant mind. (The imaginative qualities of the narrative will have to be added up on Poe's side of the ledger since the older Pym swears that everything narrated is gospel truth.) Furthermore, Pym, with his companions--Augustus and Peters--shows considerable ingenuity and some courage in overcoming difficulties. Their victory over the mutineers, their struggles for food and water, and their efforts to retain some degree of sanity, though not uniformly successful, would evidence that truth. Pym has a remarkable

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[1] Ibid., p. 19. [2] Ibid., p. 20.

(maybe too remarkable for credence) mental and moral resilience to almost impossible horrors. Perhaps this is the obverse side of the trait mentioned above as the resistance to learning anything from experience. After the ultimate horror of cannibalism on the shipwrecked Grampus, the despair of seeing the two ships of false hope--one of which is literally manned by the dead, and the excruciatingly painful physical ordeal, he recovers rapidly. He says:

> In about a fortnight . . . both Peters and myself recovered entirely from the effects of our late privation and dreadful sufferings, and we began to remember what had passed rather as a frightful dream from which we had been happily awakened, than as events which had taken place in sober and naked reality. I have since found that this species of partial oblivion is usually brought about by sudden transition, whether from joy to sorrow or from sorrow to joy--the degree of forgetfulness being proportioned to the degree of difference in the exchange.[1]

Before drawing conclusions about the success of Pym as narrator, it is necessary to note his consistency as a witness and actor in his own story. Pym combines qualities found in some of Poe's narrators of his short stories. He has some of the arrogance and rebellion which characterize the young William Wilson; he notes details in time of physical danger with the coolness of the Norwegian fisherman of "The Descent into the Maelstrom"; and he displays much of the passive nature of such witness narrators as the one in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and the detective stories. But

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[1] Ibid., p. 167.

he is not consistently a youth of sixteen. Though he starts out as a person with adolescent tendencies of deceit and rebellion, rashly immature, during the period after he has boarded The Jane Guy, he is influencing the British Captain in pushing on to the Pole.

By this time Pym is spouting forth encyclopedic knowledge on flora and fauna of the Antarctic regions, speculating on the possibilities of a continent at the South Pole, and keeping a journal with details of navigation and scientific experience far beyond his ken. His journal entries give the impression of a commander of an expedition for their author rather than of a shipwrecked youth taken on as part of a crew. Poe has drawn largely on voyages into the Arctic and Antarctic regions and probably failed in putting these into his narrator's style.

In one respect Pym retains a position as youth. Others are continually planning for and looking out for his welfare and safety. Both Augustus and Peters serve as elder protectors, and Peters figures as Pym's rescuer from the attack of the great white bear, and again in the descent of the gigantic cliff on the Island of Tsalal when he is overcome by the attraction of falling, and in the dash for the canoe. Pym's participation in any action is usually a minor role. But he is the one who is chosen to hold the splinters which determine by lot the one to be eaten during the episode of cannibalism--probably because the older men consider the

youth more innocent of guile. Aside from this consciousness on Pym's part of being under guardianship and the already mentioned lack of reflection upon experience there are no recognizably young traits in the narrator. There is nothing like the transforming power of Huck's consciousness in his adventures.

This lack of consistency between the concept of Pym as an adolescent and his performance as a narrator would not be too serious if more were made of the distance between the Pym of the adventures and the older Pym who, presumably, is the narrator--if the knowledge presented or the point of view expressed were more clearly those of the implied narrator. He is separated not only temporally from his earlier self but his moral, intellectual, and aesthetic judgment has understandably undergone appreciable change. Though there are comparatively few places where the older Pym becomes a self-conscious narrator, in those few places he passes judgment upon, but nevertheless justifies all Pym's behavior--for example, in the following comment on Pym's schemes for going to sea.

> I have since frequently examined my conduct on this occasion with sentiments of displeasure as well as of surprise. The intense hypocrisy I made use of for the furtherance of my project--an hypocrisy pervading every word and action of my life for so long a period of time--could only have been rendered tolerable to myself by the wild and burning expectation with which I looked forward to the fulfilment of my long-cherished visions of travel.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 21.

Unfortunately, the reader who is unable to accept the irresponsible yet driving desires of Pym is antipathetic to the character--that is, from the opening episodes he conceives a dislike for Pym which moves even toward indifference to his fate. The distance between the reader and Pym then is too wide. If this distance remained a fixed one throughout the book, it would be disastrous. It moves, however, on an emotional axis nearer to the reader whenever Pym is enduring any of the crises in which "the terror of the soul," as described in the preceding chapter, seizes him. These comprise by far the most interesting episodes in the book: the agonizing days in his coffin-like, iron-bound hideout in the hold; the excruciating tortures of alternating hope and despair on the derelict Grampus; the terrifying disaster of near entombment by the vicious blacks of the island of Tsalal; and the weird journey toward a chasm "which threw itself open to receive us."[1] Wherever Pym is threatened by destruction under the circumstances which call forth the fears that are the lees of emotional life, the reader moves in closer to the narrator in sympathy.

Incidentally, these are the most imaginative sections of A. Gordon Pym also. Our interest in Pym's exposition and his summary narrative is practically non-existent. (This uninteresting writing could be blamed on the implied narrator,

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[1] Ibid., p. 268.

who had in the prefatory small print explained his diffidence about his ability to write. As Booth pointed out, an unskillful narrator could let an author get away with murder. There is, however, as Irving unhappily discovered in The Conquest of Granada, a heavy price of failure for the book to pay for such immunity.)

In description, the reader is often annoyed by an overprecise zeal for seamanlike detail. It smacks of the textbook and suggests that Poe's secondary sources are showing. But imaginative detail is another matter, and at this point it is important to include Pym's dreams in their context.

Patrick Quinn states that Poe possessed "power the extent of which he scarcely knew himself, to bring up to the surface of consciousness the kind of submerged emotional life that the intelligence prefers to ignore."[1] In Pym's dream images Poe gives us an interesting glimpse of this power. We note first the circumstances under which the first dream images occur for Pym: he was suffering from thirst after having eaten freely of Bologna sausage and having drunk most of his water supply, he was suffering from the "confined air of the hold," and he was aware from the steady humming sound that a strong gale was blowing. Under these circumstances Pym was afflicted in his dreams with being smothered between

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[1] Quinn, p. 201.

huge pillows by ferocious demons or held in the embrace of immense serpents whose "fearfully shining eyes" held his gaze. Then he faced expanses of limitless and forlorn deserts.[1] Another and stranger vision was that of an endless succession of tall, gray and leafless trees, whose roots "were concealed in wide-spreading morasses, whose dreary water lay intensely black, still, and altogether terrible beneath."[2] These ghastly trees cried in accents of despair and agony as they moved skeletal arms to "the silent waters for mercy."[3] In the final scene of this stupefied sleep Pym seemed to be naked and alone on the "burning sand-plains of the Sahara" with a fierce lion crouched at his feet that opened a red throat in a ghastly roar. At that point Pym struggled to consciousness and discovered a beast actually did have its paws on his chest, but after a moment of intense terror the beast was revealed as his Newfoundland dog Tiger.[4] That the circumstances of the dream are reflected in the images of the dream is, of course, no unusual occurrence, but the connection between his terrors and the realities is imaginatively conceived.

Another interesting cluster of dream images visited Pym after the worst of the nights when the mastless brig had been wallowing helpless, encircled with towering ridges of

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[1] Poe, A. Gordon Pym, pp. 31-32. [2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid. [4] Ibid., p. 33.

foam which washed over the four men, Peters, Parker, Augustus, and Pym, as they lay lashed to the deck. The sun had come out, the sea had fallen, and the wind abated.

> Shortly after this period I fell into a state of partial insensibility, during which the most pleasing images floated in my imagination; such as green trees, waving meadows of ripe grain, processions of dancing girls, troops of cavalry, and other phantasies. I now remembered that, in all which passed before my mind's eye, motion was a predominant idea. Thus, I never fancied any stationary object, such as house, a mountain, or any thing of that kind; but windmills, ships, large birds, balloons, people on horseback, carriages driving furiously, and similar moving objects.[1]

Again, the circumstances such as the escape from the imminent threat of drowning during the storm, the mild breeze, and the warming sun are reflected indirectly in the buoyancy and motion of the images. In these dreams, the irresistible hope of youth momentarily reprieved from terror is the connection between the images and the realities--a very slender thread as the subsequent events prove.

These and other sections of A. Gordon Pym touched with imaginative detail such as the description of the all-black island of Tsalal (its strange rock strata; its stranger water made of distinct veins which could be separated with a knife; its fowls that laid black eggs; and its unusual people who never showed their teeth when smiling because they too were black) are the better parts of the narrative.

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[1] Ibid., p. 113.

They recall to the reader that, as Quinn points out, Prince Amerigo in the first chapter of The Golden Bowl pays high tribute to this quality of symbolic imagination.

> He remembered to have read, as a boy, a wonderful tale by Allan Poe, his prospective wife's countryman--which was a thing to show, by the way, what imagination Americans could have; the story of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym, who, drifting in a small boat further toward the North Pole--or was it the South?--than anyone had ever done, found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow.[1]

This mention of the dramatic finale of the book is typical of all the admirers of A. Gordon Pym as is also the vagueness concerning actual details of the narrative which would require a careful reading, for the book narrowly escapes being unreadable. When we consider such important matters as the effect of Pym as narrator upon the whole--its structure and theme--we are brought face to face with the fact that the narrative of A. Gordon Pym is not a good novel--in spite of the effort to establish it as one.

In the first place, there is a split between the implied narrator and the youth Pym which is not clearly developed. At some indeterminate point, possibly where we begin to be fed much information entirely out of the scope of Pym's knowledge or experience, the older Pym, who is the implied narrator mentioned in the preface at the beginning of

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[1] Henry James, The Golden Bowl, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: The Grove Press, 1952), pp. 22-23.

the book and in the note at the end, takes over completely. The narrator is simply no longer young. This could, of course, be accounted for in part by stating that such experiences as the boy had endured would age and mature him. Beyond a doubt that much is true. But this would hardly supply the youth or the implied narrator with the information and the power of influence he seems to enjoy on the voyage to the South Pole.

Secondly, the two levels--the realistic and the imaginative--never quite coalesce. In the dream sequences they come close, and in the final sequence of the canoe's journey on milky waters they enforce one another wonderfully well, but there are all those desert stretches in between the imaginative high spots. It is as if Poe were struggling to balance two voyages which were undoubtedly among his sources, that of Robinson Crusoe and that of the Ancient Mariner, and coming out with a result which is only alternately one or the other.

As evidence of the unsatisfactory resolution of the book on any realistic level, there is the fact that the apparent destruction of Pym as he is rushed into the opening chasm is not a fact because he survived to recount the story to Poe and other gentlemen in Richmond, Virginia. As Poe presents it with his concluding rationalization about the death of Pym and the loss of two or three final chapters, the book <u>is</u> incomplete.

Davidson, who wishes to discard everything of the book except its imaginative level, simply ignores the fine print at the beginning and end of the book as something which Poe added which did not clarify and states: "however ill-organized it may be, Pym is a study of the emergence and growth of the knowing and thinking self."[1] If the words "imagining and perceiving" self were substituted for "knowing and thinking" in this quotation, it would seem to be more consistent with Pym as he is revealed in the book.

The split between the two levels, however, is evident. Davidson when remarking on this tendency in Poe to split feeling and mind, emotion and intellect asserts:

> Much of what Poe wrote stemmed from a feeling self, a Romantic consciousness deeply moved to make some adjustment between itself and insensate reality; but Poe was literally ashamed to let that self-awareness go too far; he was continually putting a brake on imaginative exuberance . . .[2]

It would seem then that Poe could only achieve the unity he obviously sought in the short stretch--the short poem and the short story. Without a larger concept of structure than he apparently was able to visualize his own divisive tendencies defeated him. He attempted this larger structure by trying the voyage and the single narrator, but he realized little of the advantage for unity which a consistently developing point of view might have given him and presented a voyage which was alternately fantastic and realistic. Another

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[1] Davidson, p. 161. [2] Ibid., p. 260.

unsatisfactory suspicion regarding the implied narrator intrudes when we note some evidences that this story might have been originally planned as a hoax. To mention an example, there is the statement in the preface that Pym, "could only hope for belief among my family, and those of my friends who have had reason, through life, to put faith in my veracity . . . ."[1] When we recall that Pym begins his adventures with a series of lies and impostures, we wonder. In the concluding note Poe is represented as declining the task of furnishing materials for the few remaining chapters because of "his disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portions of the narration."[2] What is Poe trying to suggest about his narrator?

Within the story itself there is no means either for support or correction of the narrator. Except that a youth or boy is classified among the fallible or "unreliable" narrators because of what James calls their inconscience, Pym could be regarded as a straight, almost an authoritative story-teller. He _is_ one in the last portion of the novel. One can only surmise that Poe himself had not quite made up his mind or that he left his angle of vision an unsolved conundrum.

However, since theme is more an effect produced by the ferment of the imaginative qualities in a work, _A. Gordon_

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[1] Poe, _A. Gordon Pym_, p. 2. [2] _Ibid._, p. 268.

Pym is more fortunate in this respect than in that of structure.

Pym functions throughout the narrative, in spite of his other shortcomings as a narrator, as an intensely perceptive being. We see him first as an adolescent moved by morbid desires for experience in horror, destined to such experiences and obligated to fulfill his destiny. His wild desires, which are pictorialized by a "gloomy and glowing imagination," then materialize for him in equally wild experiences, culminating in a symbolic adventure. The final adventures, which Poe as editor disclaims as unbelievable, are drawn in the opposing colors of black and white with an occasional relieving bit of red in the red berries found in a floating bush and the red teeth and claws of the white sea animal. Everything on the island of Tsalal is black, even the nature of the treacherous, primitive people--no romantic glorification of primitivism here. And the mysterious taboo of this people is against anything white; even a white handkerchief terrifies them. Everything to the south of Tsalal in the direction of the white curtain is white. There is not, however, any terror associated with the whiteness in Pym's account, which contains among its details milky waters of increasing temperature; a dreamy somnolence on the part of the three in the canoe; a white precipitation resembling ashes which melts in the ocean; giant white birds fluttering in and out of the curtain, uttering the cry "Tekeli-li"; the great soundless curtain

itself "a limitless cataract, rolling silently into the sea from some immense and far-distant rampart in heaven";[1] and a glare from the water reflected from the white curtain. The final detail of this moving picture is the sudden appearance of "a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow."[2]

This is all so good that it must have significance. The suggestiveness of the great mystery lies behind that curtain of light and in that shrouded figure; the details all of whiteness and milky waters and tepid somnolence and the opening of the chasm seem like a return to the womb. For the purpose of a rebirth? Is Nicodemus's question being dramatized? Each reader will on his own imaginative level respond to these symbols. They are as revealing as Rorschach ink blots.

Two interesting interpretations of A. Gordon Pym, which come from Patrick Quinn and E. H. Davidson, are relevant here. Quinn summarizes:

> To some extent, Arthur Gordon Pym belongs with the classic detective tales of Poe; it is a narrative of exploration; things are to be found out and clarified; a cryptogram awaits solution. In this variety of Poe's fiction the movement is characteristically from darkness to light upward, from mystery to clarity . . . . Behind the straightforward and at times gruesomely realistic prose, and in spite of the recurrence of chapters containing the most arid factual data, there is a potent dream symbolism at work and a power

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[1] Ibid., p. 267. [2] Ibid., p. 268.

> of morbid fantasy that relate this story to those sombre tales of Poe in which the movement is the reverse of the other, going downward this time, from twilight into mystery and darkness . . . . In the writing of Arthur Gordon Pym Poe effected a remarkable balance between his two major kinds of fiction.[1]

This "remarkable balance" is especially evident in the final dream picture where deepening darkness falls around the occupants of the canoe as they shoot toward an opening in the gigantic curtain of light. Quinn feels that Poe's themes and symbols are but "pretexts" (a term Quinn borrowed from Mauclair) through which

> Poe found it possible to embark on an imaginative exploration beyond the frontiers of conscious knowledge . . . . Poe well knew that the every-day world could call his visions fantastic, and so for most of his readers they seem to be. But so deep was Poe's apprehension of them that they took on for him the character of profound truths, grasped by the intuition rather than the intelligence, "upon the verge of the great secret."[2]

Both Quinn and Davidson regard this story as one of ontological discovery. Davidson explains Pym's obsession with horror as a search for the avenue to the "ultimate rationale of existence of which our own mortal existence is but a crude fragment."[3] This view of the theme is reinforced by the form used in the novel since voyages usually imply broadening experience and self-discovery whether the journeys are realistic as in Robinson Crusoe; satirical as in Gulliver's

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[1] Quinn, p. 274. [2] Ibid., p. 274.

[3] Davidson, p. 134.

Travels and Don Quixote; or romantic and symbolic as in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Moby Dick. But Davidson interprets the finale as destruction for Pym. Of the themes developed in the book (which he has divided into four narrative episodes)--deception, self-loss, death, and rebirth--Davidson claims that the final one is missing.[1]

He elaborates his view thus:

> Poe steadily defines and sharpens the point of perception until all else fades before the intensity with which a Pym-self regards the world and itself. This self-as-imagination begins with the real, substantial world, follows the poetic direction of penetrating and destroying that world, and then goes even farther in order to set up on "the other side" certain symbols and keys to the mind's perception of reality.[2]

This final act of penetration to the other side with only the "self-as-imagination" aware of what is happening is effectively symbolized in the final adventure. Nu-Nu, the primitive self, lies lifeless at the bottom of the canoe; Peters, the grotesque self of brute action, sits apathetic and silent; but Pym is steadily taking note of every detail of the adventure. Davidson concludes:

> Poe, however, puts nothing on the other side or in the condition of being reborn: the search for the self's true center ends in the death of the self. The idea is, of course, an anomaly which is implicit in much of Poe's writing: The romantic drive toward self-assertion ends in total self-destruction: the hero finds himself only at the moment he loses himself; he dies the instant he is about to be born

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[1] Ibid., p. 164. [2] Ibid., pp. 160-161.

again; the blankness of eternal mystery engulfs him the moment he faces the white light of revelation.[1]

While this is all interesting and much of it consistent with the imaginative level of the narrative of A. Gordon Pym, it cannot be reconciled with the point of view Poe selected and dramatized for his story. That he was aware of a difficulty and unable or unwilling to resolve it is plainly indicated by the preface and by the concluding note. Perhaps he planned the book after he had written that grand and awesome finale and his imagination failed him. Suppositions, however, are fruitless without objective evidence to help. As it stands, Poe not only failed to realize, for the greater part of the book, any advantage from using a youth as narrator, he compounded confusion by trying to account for his narrator in materials extraneous to the narrative. The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym remains a tantalizing failure--tantalizing because it just misses being very good, and a failure because it falls short of the mark.

As has been mentioned, the juxtaposition of the Narrative of A. Gordon Pym and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is largely productive of contrasts. Although Pym as a character becomes less a person independently realized as the story progresses and narrows to a perceiving consciousness in a symbolic universe, Huck comes alive as one of the immortal individuals of the fictional world. Pym's attitude of

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[1] Ibid., p. 177.

arrogant adolescent rebellion against restraining authority survives the gruesome horrors of a universe of necessity and survival and becomes an attitude of wondering discovery. Huck's desire for freedom from the routine responsibilities of civilization apparently survives all well-meaning attempts to change it, but his humanity has involved him again and again during the progress of his adventures in the lives of others and probably will civilize him in spite of himself. Another contrast lies between the representation of the physical realities. In spite of display of his nautical knowledge, Pym does not make the reader feel the ocean as Huck gives him the feel of the great river. The river is present in almost every scene in Huckleberry Finn; where it is not actually mentioned, it is reflected in the detailed life of the society that perches upon its bank. It requires no separate blocks of facts to bring it to life. Probably the most vital contrast, however, is between the lack of any element of humor in A. Gordon Pym and its pervasive quality in Huckleberry Finn. Both books have their nightmares, but only Twain has been able to balance his with laughter.

With Huck Finn we have a more striking demonstration of the function of the fallible narrator as a youth. Huck as narrator has been praised by such varied critics as Brander Matthews, Andrew Lang, Bernard De Voto, Lionel Trilling, and T. S. Eliot. In fact, whatever else critics have had to say to Huckleberry Finn, on one point the agreement is unanimous--

that Huck was exactly the one right person to tell the story. John C. Gerber writes of the choice and its advantages to Twain thus:

> More particularly I should like to argue that Twain's style is so intimately dependent upon his point of view that it flourishes only to the extent that the point of view is detached and sharply restricted. A detached point of view, by providing him with psychological distance, results in a better controlled and more consistent style. A sharply restricted point of view, by forcing him to focus upon a specific and concrete situation, results in a more sensitive and pictorial style. A combination of the two results in the finest efforts of his imagination.[1]

However, a statement of the value of the restricted point of view to Mark Twain in this novel does not demonstrate conclusively enough why Huck is so excellent an example of our fallible narrator. First, let us consider the autobiographical form which the story takes, its more obvious structure. Writing to W. D. Howells on the subject of autobiography, "Twain insisted that an autobiography is the truest of all books, 'for while it inevitably consists mainly of . . . shirking the truth, partial revealments of the truth . . . the remorseless truth <u>is</u> there, between the lines, where the author is raking dust upon it.'"[2] Authenticity and veracity were with Twain high virtues, as they are with all serious

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[1] Gerber, "The Relation Between Point of View and Style in the Works of Mark Twain," <u>Style in Prose Fiction</u>, ed. Harold C. Martin ("English Institute Essays"; New York, 1959), p. 143.

[2] Gladys Bellamy, <u>Mark Twain as Literary Artist</u> (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. 280.

authors, but evidently he valued the fluidity of self-revelation at the core of autobiography, that process of give-away which ensues in spite of all the "raking dust" when the subject talks long enough. And if the subject doing the talking were a boy, a serious, literal-minded, and unpretentious innocent, the self-revelation could be one of the attractions of the story--as it is.

The looseness of the autobiographical form bothered Twain not at all, for it fitted both the picaresque type of subject in the big middle of the book and the style of Twain's conscious art of humor. Revealing the secret of humorous story telling, Twain wrote:

> The humorous story depends for its effect upon the manner of the telling; the comic story and the witty story upon the matter. . . . The humorous story is strictly a work of art--high and delicate art--and only an artist can tell it. . . . To string incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes purposeless way, and seem innocently unaware that they are absurdities is the basis of the American art.[1]

The looseness inherent in the first person narrator instead of being a disadvantage was a part of the organic style of the humor and the proper narrative form for an unrelated sequence of adventures. The correcting impulse for the apparently disconnected form is, of course, always the single, central consciousness of Huck.

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[1]Samuel L. Clemens, "How to Tell a Story," quoted in Gladys Bellamy, Mark Twain as Literary Artist (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. 148.

The autobiographical form for Twain's novel, then was a happy one--given his art form, his subject, and his preference for autobiography as authentic and true. It also, as Gerber, Bellamy, and Stone all point out, solved Twain's biggest personal drawback in writing satire. Bellamy says that

> two years after he shelved Huckleberry Finn he wrote the 1878 letter to Howells, explaining that he felt himself unable to write successful satire because to do so calls for "a calm, judicial good humor." His trip down the river in 1882 to get material for Life on the Mississippi naturally recalled the river story to his mind. He must then have arrived at the design which made the book a masterpiece. All the meannesses of Mark Twain's "damned human race" are seen through the eyes and presented through the lips of Huck Finn. And thus Mark Twain was enabled, at last, to attain the calm detachment with which satire should be presented.[1]

This detachment, or objectivity, is analyzed in James's "Preface" to What Maisie Knew where he too was confining himself to the point of view of a child's consciousness. Though we have no comparable statement by Twain, the book Huckleberry Finn demonstrates Twain's knowledge of each statement James here makes:

> The one presented register of the whole complexity would be the play of the child's confused and obscure notation of it, and yet the whole, as I say, should be unmistakeably, should be honourably there, seen through the faint intelligence, or at the least attested by the imponderable presence, and still advertising its sense.
>
> I recall that my first view of this neat possibility was as the attaching problem of the picture restricted . . . to what the child might be conceived to have understood--to have been able to interpret and appreciate. Further reflexion and experiment

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[1] Bellamy, Twain as Literary Artist, p. 344.

> showed me my subject strangled in that extreme of rigour.[1]

Twain doubtless never went through such an early experiment with restrictive "rigour" because he would have at once hugely enjoyed the humor of the innocent naming and describing many things he never understood nor appreciated such as Huck's return to the Widow's at the beginning of the story in order to achieve enough respectability to belong to Tom's gang of robbers.

James continues:

> The infant mind would at the best leave great gaps and voids; so that with a systematic surface possibly beyond reproach we should nevertheless fail of clearness of sense. I should have to stretch the matter to what my wondering witness materially and inevitably saw; a great deal of which quantity she either wouldn't understand at all or would quite misunderstand--and on those, my task would be prettily cut out. . . .[2]

The secret of much of the beauty of Huck as a point of view is this limiting of the spectacle, though not the vision, to what one wide-eyed, unprotected, but alert and kind-hearted little boy saw. That he saw clearly without social or bookish distortion was probably due to his almost absolute lack of status and his experiences in fending for himself. His frequent misunderstandings are clear to the reader because Huck presents what he sees and misinterprets so vividly that the reader can make the corrections, for his

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[1] James, The Art of the Novel, pp. 144-145.

[2] Ibid., p. 145.

own enjoyment, at Huck's expense as in the circus scene. In other cases the reader can see the horrible shadows form in the background while Huck is reveling in the good food and fun as in the Shepherdson-Grangerford episode. In Huck's terrible struggles with conscience over Jim, the reader sees the grim parody of reflected slave owner morality where the youngster trembles at the image of his own degeneracy.

The eyes of Huck Finn are the source too of the poetic descriptions in the vernacular which provide so rich a source of beauty in the book--the thunderstorm on Jackson's Island when "the rain would thrash along by so thick that the trees off a little ways looked dim and spider-webby,"[1] or the sunlight through the trees when Huck was "lazying" on the same island, "There was freckled places on the ground where the light sifted down through the leaves, and the freckled places swapped about a little, showing there was a little breeze up there,"[2] or the fearsome sights of the canoe lost in the fog.

> The whooping went on and in about a minute I come a-booming down on a cut bank with smoky ghosts of big trees on it, and the current throwed me off to the left and shot by amongst a lot of snags that fairly roared, the current was tearing by them so swift.[3]

The freshness of these images in showing just what Huck saw in his terms is an improvement over Twain's more literary descriptions.

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[1]Samuel L. Clemens, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, ed. Bernard De Voto ("The Portable Mark Twain"; New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 248.

[2]Ibid., p. 232. [3]Ibid., p. 285.

Likewise Huck is the styptic for the sentimentality of the book. His undercutting of his own emotional reaction provides a humorous correction on occasion. After his last sight of the Sir Walter Scott and her entombed criminals he remarks, "I felt a little bit heavy-hearted about the gang but not much, for I reckoned if they could stand it I could."[1] When the mob disappeared at the threat of Colonel Sherburn's shotgun Huck admits, "I could'a' stayed if I wanted to but I didn't want to."[2] His complete reaction to the artistic creations of Emmeline Grangerford provides several examples and so too his scorn of the adult activities in the chapter called "All Full of Tears and Flapdoodle." His honest surprise that negroes could feel like white folks after Jim's story about his poor deaf child serves as a similar corrective at the same time that it heightens the real tragedy of the situation. A small boy is seldom a victim of the sentimental illusions in the community, and Huck is no exception to the rule.

Huck's adventures dramatize the theme of a boy's search for absolute freedom and, by implication, the ultimate futility of the search. Huck is planning to "light out for the territory ahead of the rest"[3] to escape civilization once more at the conclusion of the book, and, though it is

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[1] Ibid., p. 278. [2] Ibid., p. 375.

[3] Ibid., p. 539.

referring to a fact not in the book to recall it, we remember Twain's comment that Tom Blankenship, Huck's progenitor in real life, ultimately became a respectable citizen of the West. The theme could not be Huck's initiation because he is the outsider still at the conclusion--a not unusual state for a Twain hero. Nor has Huck's attitude toward slavery actually been revised--except toward Jim personally--as his relief in finding that Tom was not actually attempting to set a "nigger" free exemplifies. Huck's adventures, though, had enlarged his sensibilities, developed his confidence, and at least cracked some of his prejudices so that we see him ready to take off again with something like complacency on our part as to the result. But that is another story.

These advantages of the point of view in Huckleberry Finn have often been pointed out as they are obvious to some extent even to the casual reader. What is not so evident are the technical excellences which have to a large measure overcome some of the disadvantages inherent in the use of the first person point of view for the novel.

The first disadvantage of the first person is the revised focus of the retrospective look; the narrator who writes is no longer the "I" who actually experiences the narrative. The writer constantly passes judgment upon or comments interpretatively upon the earlier scenes and the earlier "I". There is a lapse in consciousness between the "I" who is being presented to the reader and the older, and

perhaps wiser, "I" who writes the narrative. The writer also tends to wrap himself in some of the omniscience of the intrusive author. This is the double focus of Dickens in David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Great Expectations, of Thackeray in Henry Esmond, of Melville in Redburn and Typee. By just so much as this focus either becomes too intrusive or fails to be distinct it fails of keeping the illusion of reality.

Twain has so unobtrusively avoided this dilemma that we are scarcely aware of its absence until it is looked for. First of all, Huck launches into the middle of the stream and floats us off without any awareness of our having stepped into his narrative or having left the shore.

> You don't know about me with you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain and he told the truth mainly.[1]

So the introduction continues but without excuse for or mention of Huck's writing. The introduction ends with the first statement "So I went back." In fact, the first mention of writing a book comes in the final paragraph of the book.

> Tom's most well now, and got his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch, and is always seeing what time it is, and so there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd 'a' knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't 'a' tackled it, and ain't a-going to no more.[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 193-194. [2] Ibid., p. 539.

In truth, Huck didn't write the book; he told it. The oral rhythms of Huckleberry Finn have often been noted, but no provision within the story is made for Huck's writing a book. Compared, for instance, with Richardson's constant effort to account for Pamela's possession of leisure and the materials for writing, the omission is glaring. We are told in detail about the difficulties, partly real and partly manufactured by Tom's fertile imagination, of writing and delivering the "Nonnamous" letters, but nothing of the provisions for the safety of the manuscript for the book during Huck's adventures. The only extent of time for writing the book would have to be the extent of time covered from the first to the last paragraph. But the lack of this illusion is never missed, and there is scarcely a retrospective allusion in the story.

Occasionally Huck grows a bit philosophical as in his observations on scratching:

> Seemed like I'd die if I couldn't scratch. Well, I've noticed that thing plenty times since. If you are with the quality, or at a funeral, or trying to go to sleep when you ain't sleepy--if you are anywheres where it won't do for you to scratch, why you will itch all over in upwards of thousand places.[1]

He directly addresses the reader in a general fashion at times. "If you think it ain't dismal and lonesome out in a fog that way by yourself in the night, you try it once--you'll see."[2] But the reader could just as easily be the listener.

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[1] Ibid., p. 198. [2] Ibid., p. 286.

When strongly moved Huck refers to the remainder of life, as he does when he knows he'll never see Mary Jane again or when he apologizes to Jim. "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 afterward, neither."[1] But these examples do not constitute retrospective allusions except as these and similar phrases are common to talk.

We seem to experience with Huck the direct impact of his adventures. The lack of provision for the double focus of a retrospective point of view just discussed is one aid to this sense of immediacy. The preponderance of scenic representation in the book over description and summary narration also assists. The description is furthermore tightly woven into the narrative, and the narrative is full of the dramatic particularities needed for economy of treatment. The following scene from the Peter Wilks episode is an illustration of these traits:

> Well, we swarmed along down the river road, just carrying on like wildcats; and to make it more scary the sky was darking up, and the lightning beginning to wink and flitter, and the wind to shiver amongst the leaves. This was the most awful trouble and most dangersome I ever was in, and I was kinder stunned; everything was going so different from what I had allowed for; 'stead of being fixed so I could take my own time if I wanted to and see all the fun and have Mary Jane at my back to save and set me free when the close-fit come, here was nothing in

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[1] Ibid., p. 290.

> the world betwixt me and sudden death but just them tattoo-marks. If they didn't find them--
>
> I couldn't bear to think about it, and yet somehow I couldn't think about nothing else. It got darker and darker, and it was a beautiful time to give the crowd the slip, but that big husky had me by the wrist--Hines--and a body might as well try to give Goliar the slip. He dragged me right along, he was so excited, and I had to run to keep up.
>
> When they go there they swarmed into the graveyard and washed over it like an overflow. And when they got to the grave they found they had about a hundred times as many shovels as they wanted, but nobody hadn't thought to fetch a lantern. But they sailed into digging anyway by the flicker of the lightning and sent a man to the nearest house, a half a mile off, to borrow one.
>
> So they dug and dug like everything; and it got awful dark and the rain started and the wind swished and swushed along, and the lightning come brisker and brisker and the thunder boomed. but them people never took no notice of it, they was so full of this business; and one minute you could see everything and every face in that big crowd, and the shovelfuls of dirt sailing up out of the grave, and the next second the dark wiped it all out, and you couldn't see nothing at all.[1]

One verb Huck uses in his narrative, consistent with his vernacular usage, is "come", the present tense, and for his tag verbs in dialogue he also uses the present tense--"somebody sings out," "I says," "The duke says," "the king drawls out," etc. This too is consistent with the folk way of telling a story and thus in harmony with the vernacular of the narrator. But it is also, as historical present, a more dramatic way of presenting scene and further lends emphasis to the effect of immediacy and tends to wipe out the

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[1] Ibid., p. 438.

distinction of time between the "I" who experienced the story and the one who wrote it down.

The handling of dialogue can be a destroyer of illusion with a first person fallible narrator. Huck's report of dialogue in the main is carefully rendered as though filtered through his consciousness, but there is at least one flagrant exception--the speech of Colonel Sherburn on the cowardliness of the mob. Several doubtful ones are partially accounted for, among them Huck's record of the king's Shakespearean speech, which he claims to have learned as the duke was teaching it to the king. The speeches of the "Roarer" and "The Son of Calamity" strain credulity but since that episode has an independent existence as far as Huckleberry Finn is concerned, it can be excluded.

Beside these destroyers of the illusion of reality which are, as we have demonstrated, adjusted for in Twain's novel very successfully, there is a necessity for some economy of form in the autobiographical narrative. The advantages of looseness for Twain's art of humor and his type of subject have already been mentioned, but reference should also be made to some of the means of economizing. Huck as the narrator has provided Twain with his devices for economy. For example, thought, comment, and emotion as Huck expresses them are simple, vivid, and brief. He does not try to analyze or go behind them. Huck comments, " . . . if ever I was down a little they always give me the fantods," or "It made me so

sick I most fell out of the tree," or "'Jim, this is nice,' I says. 'I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here.'"[1] Mention has already been made of the tendency to understatement, but here is another example. "I dived--and I aimed to find the bottom, too, for a thirty-foot wheel had got to go over me, and I wanted it to have plenty of room."[2] When Huck approaches the Grangerford cabin under poised guns he confesses, "I didn't hurry; I couldn't if I'd a-wanted to. I took one slow step at a time and there warn't a sound, only I thought I could hear my heart."[3] Though such simplicity might seem easy it is in truth the result of much high art.

Another economy in the book provided by the boy's point of view is the amount of space given to the description of appearances. Huck's details on the appearance of most of the characters are sketchy. Miss Watson was "a tolerable slim old maid with goggles on."[4] The Grangerford family, possibly because they impressed Huck as "quality" folks, received the most attention.

> Col. Grangerford was very tall and very slim, and had a darkish-paly complexion, not a sign of red in it anywheres; he was clean-shaved every morning all over his thin face, and he had the thinnest kind of lips and the thinnest kind of nostrils, and a high nose and heavy eyebrows, and the blackest kind of eyes, sunk so deep back that they seemed like they was looking out of caverns at you, as you may say.[5]

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[1] Ibid., p. 248. [2] Ibid., p. 315. [3] Ibid., p. 317.
[4] Ibid., p. 195. [5] Ibid., p. 327.

Of course, Twain was working his ironies into this picture as Huck sketches it in clear lines. Mary Jane brings out the most enthusiastic description from Huck. "Mary Jane was red-headed but that don't make no difference, she was most awful beautiful and her face and her eyes was all lit up like glory."[1]

Perhaps the strangest of missing details in Huckleberry Finn is the lack of any appearance for Huck himself. In fact, we must turn back to The Adventures of Tom Sawyer to find one.

> Huckleberry was always dressed in the cast-off clothes of full-grown men, and they were in perennial bloom and fluttering with rags. His hat was a vast ruin with a wide crescent lopped out of its brim; his coat, when he wore one, hung nearly to his heels and had the rearward buttons far down the back; but one suspender supported his trousers; the seat of the trousers bagged low and contained nothing; the fringed legs dragged low in the dirt when not rolled up.[2]

The change in style is not the only inferiority apparent here. We still do not see Huck, just some ridiculous old clothes. Seeing the fallible narrator is always a problem, but there are several indirect methods which can be used--remarks of other characters, glimpses in mirrors, pools of water, etc. But Twain seems to have felt and heard Huck more distinctly than he saw him. For one thing, Huck's age seems indeterminate.

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[1] Ibid., p. 393.

[2] Samuel L. Clemens, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York: Modern Library, n. d.), p. 50.

At times he seems no more than nine or ten, and this is especially true in the sections dominated by Tom in such scenes as the raid on the Sunday School picnic and the incidents in the freeing of Jim; at other times, he gives evidence of the thirteen or fourteen years he claims in the Grangerford episode. This more mature attitude Huck displays in his decisions to place his money with Judge Thatcher, to help Mary Jane, and to risk damnation on Jim's behalf is so mixed up with other attitudes of immaturity that either the lack of sophistication of these intelligent boys operated toward a regression, or their creator was satisfied with any age short of sexual change.

The treatment of all these matters of exposition and analysis--dramatic in form, concrete of image, characterized by brevity and understatement--makes for an economy which balances the inherent looseness of the autobiographical form, and this economy springs all naturally from the boy who tells the story. Twain stands at the peak of his personal achievement in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and Huck Finn ranks as the prince of story-tellers, the apex of the development of the juvenile fallible narrator.

In summary then, we discover nineteenth century American authors using a youth as narrator with only partial realization of the advantages and limitations as in Poe's narrative or with a happy exploitation of the possibilities as in Twain's story.

There is an active collaboration between the author and the reader throughout The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Much of the reader's humorous enjoyment comes from his superiority to Huck. Sometimes those agonies which throw Huck into a sweat call instead for the reader's sympathetic pity or fear rather than his laughter. But the reader is never far from Huck; in fact, part of the condemnation of the final chapters may stem from an unconscious resentment at Tom's hogging of the center of the action when he reappears. If Twain planned it that way to contrast Tom's pseudo-heroism with Huck's genuine experience he could not have more expertly caused his readers to champion their favorite. The trouble lies in the extreme to which he pushes the burlesque elements of Tom's efforts; they become so painful to the reader that he not only wishes to reject Tom but the book as well.

The possibility which Huck provides for the reader's exercise of his most strenuous level of appreciation, in providing aesthetic and moral judgment either lacking or in opposition to that of the narrator is likewise a form of collaboration between author and reader. Twain warns at the beginning that "persons attempting to find a moral" in the book will be banished, but Huck's view of slavery and civilization is so truthfully presented that no reader can refrain from correction of the warped interpretation and thus arriving at meaning.

There is no mystery in the fact that modern writers have learned from this book, for, as Booth points out, when it comes to matters of point of view "the novelist should find the practice of his peers more helpful than the abstract rules of the textbooks."[1] The practices which Mark Twain demonstrated in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn provide a good lesson in just what can be achieved with the narrator as youth.

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[1]Booth, p. 165.

CHAPTER VI

THE NARRATOR AS DRAMATIZATION OF THEME: THE AMERICAN IDEALIST IN DANGER

Among all the types of the fallible narrator in our literature of the nineteenth century none has furnished a more numerous progeny in twentieth century literature than the narrator, who, regardless of the story he tells, is himself the thematic center of interest. Further, among the themes thus dramatized, as R. W. B. Lewis in The American Adam has pointed out, the dominant one has probably been the pitting of inexperienced or so-called "innocent" idealists against the inevitable hard facts of the core of reality in this imperfect world. At the moment when America herself was coming of age, emerging from the romanticism of her successful struggle for independence and prestige and fronting a hostile and cynical war-weary older world, what theme could be more indigenous?

During this period, two ways of making the unreliable narrator function as a thematic center demonstrate a difference in distance between the author and his narrator. First, the author can create an authoritative voice to replace his, and thus comment and judge in a fashion similar to that of

the authoritative character in drama. The older Pip who relates the story of Great Expectations is such a character; at the same time he passes retrospective judgment on young Pip he proves by reciting his adventures how the moral is demonstrably true. Melville in Redburn uses this type of narrator.[1] Or second, the author can create a character toward whom he is sympathetic, perhaps even one who resembles him, but who is in important respects an embodiment of the dangers or weaknesses the author sees in the total situation. Then in this character's changing point of view the author can dramatize the significance of all the action. This type differs from the authoritative voice in the bewilderment of the fallible narrator as he faces complexities which are never neatly resolved. The total irony is the disparity between the high expectation and confidence of the narrator at the beginning and the ambiguous outcome reflected in his thinking and attitudes at the conclusion.

This latter type is the one to be considered in the following exploration--first, of Miles Coverdale from The Blithedale Romance and, second, of Lambert Strether from The Ambassadors. Our discussion of each of these narrators will include (1) an analysis of the character of the narrator himself; (2) the progress of the action under his observation;

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[1] Barbara Moorehead, "Melville's Use of the Narrator in Moby Dick" (microfilmed Ph. D. dissertation; (T838) Dept. of English, University of Chicago), Chapter I.

(3) the total effect--dramatically and thematically considered; and (4) a summary.

Miles Coverdale

Recent revaluations[1] of The Blithedale Romance give it a high rank among Hawthorne's longer works, but our choice of this novel is based primarily on the fact that it is his most ambitious attempt to rely upon the fallible narrator for his point of view. Hawthorne has numerous shorter fictions, tales, and sketches which are written with a first person narrator, such as "The Seven Vagabonds," "The Celestial Railroad," "Earth's Holocaust," and "The Haunted Mind," but the "I" in these fictions has such a shadowy existence that he tends to fade into the author himself.

In The Blithedale Romance the fallible narrator Miles Coverdale is the witness-narrator type telling his story in the first person. His point of view vacillates from the periphery of the action where he is witness to the center of the action in his futile desire to be also a protagonist. The futility of his effort is evident from the earliest scenes in which the characters of Blithedale are introduced in the light of blazing hearth fires. Coverdale seems to stand aside from and just miss the dramatic and the heroic

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[1] Among others, two very fine ones are: Frederick C. Crews, "A New Reading of the Blithedale Romance," American Literature, XXIX (May, 1957), 147 and Roy R. Male, Jr., "Toward the Wasteland," College English, XXI (1955), 277.

in the action. At the first summons of Silas Foster's horn Coverdale pleads a bad cold and remains in bed where he is fed a watery gruel. He constantly makes reference to his being an outsider--a position emphasized in the scene in the city when Zenobia draws a curtain to shut out his too percipient observation. In the same episode when Coverdale calls formally at her apartment she even more pointedly rebuffs his interest by leaving with Westervelt and Priscilla for an unknown destination. In spite of actual participation in the socialist community (as Brook Farm is characterized by Hawthorne in Blithedale) Coverdale remains an outsider to his story, rejected by the women of the triangular group which interests him most--Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth.

His relationship to Hollingsworth, the tough and single-minded reformer, is one of both attraction and repulsion. Coverdale is attracted by the man's apparent capacity for tenderness and love, by the magnetism of his intensity and strength, but he is repelled by Hollingsworth's tendency to short-circuit his conscience, by his use of his power for exploitation of others for his own purposes, and by his narrow sphere of human interest. The repelling forces cause Coverdale to refuse Hollingsworth's plea: "Will you devote yourself, and sacrifice all, to this great end, and be my friend of friends forever?"[1]

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[1]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Blithedale Romance", The Novels and Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne ("The Modern Library; New York: Random House, Inc., 1937), p. 519.

Coverdale's reply locates him definitely out of the center of the mystery and the action which attracts him and places him at the periphery as an observer:

> "In Heaven's name, Hollingsworth," cried I, getting angry, and glad to be angry, because so only was it possible to oppose his tremendous concentrativeness and indomitable will, "cannot you conceive that a man may wish well to the world, and struggle for its good, on some other plan than precisely that which you have laid down? And will you cast off a friend for no unworthiness, but merely because he stands upon his right as an individual being, and looks at matters through his own optics, instead of yours?"[1]

Coverdale pays a price for his decision not to be involved and soon indicates his, at least temporary, withdrawal from the community. He speaks of "an intolerable discontent and irksomeness"[2] which had come over him and reflects that this break with Hollingsworth, though not generally known "had really an effect upon the moral atmosphere of the Community."[3] The failure of the narrator to become more than a witness to the tragedy limits the point of view to the outside of the action. He speaks of his partial view of the personages in Zenobia's lavish city apartment from his hotel window as an acquaintance with "that little portion of the backside of the universe."[4] This offstage view of the monstrous surrender of Priscilla to Westervelt by Zenobia, apparently with Hollingsworth's consent or indifference, the act which brings on the descending action with a rush, hinders

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 520. [3] Ibid., p. 521.
[4] Ibid., p. 526.

the reader from one of the most dramatic events of the action and limits his reactions to Coverdale's rainy day forebodings.

Friedman has pointed out that in the category of the witness-narrator, the suspense is heightened, but there is a removal to a distance when the retrospective "I" recounts the story. As we have noted, Coverdale as narrator struggles between the positions of protagonist-narrator and witness-narrator. In the protagonist-narrator point of view there is a certain transparency of the narrator himself, and yet in his thoughts, action, and reaction this character displays a development of his personality and possesses a role of his own to play.

This lack of a definitive role is the source of Coverdale's affliction when the view from his hotel window in the city reveals Zenobia and Westervelt to him in the apartment opposite.

> Nevertheless, there seemed something fatal in the coincidence that had borne me to this one spot, of all others in a great city, and transfixed me there, and compelled me again to waste my already wearied sympathies on affairs which were none of mine, and persons who cared little for me. It irritated my nerves; it affected me with a kind of heart-sickness. After the effort which it cost me to fling them off,--after consummating my escape, as I thought, from these goblins of flesh and blood, and pausing to revive myself with a breath or two of an atmosphere in which they should have no share,--it was a positive despair to find the same figures arraying themselves before me, and presenting their old problem in a shape that made it more insoluble than ever.
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> I began to long for a catastrophe. If the noble temper of Hollingsworth's soul were doomed to be utterly corrupted by the too powerful purpose which had grown out of what was noblest in him; if the rich and

> generous qualities of Zenobia's womanhood might not save her; if Priscilla must perish by her tenderness and faith, so simple and so devout,--then be it so! Let it all come! As for me, I would look on, as it seemed my part to do, understandingly, if my intellect could fathom the meaning and the moral, and, at all events, reverently and sadly. The curtain fallen, I would pass onward with my poor individual life, which was now attenuated of much of its proper substance, and diffused among many alien interests.[1]

Hawthorne had in mind an intense emotional involvement for his narrator as this scene, among others, and the confession of the final chapter indicates, but how anticlimactic is this statement of Miles Coverdale's love for Priscilla! Had he confessed that he had been in love with Zenobia it would have been just as convincing, for the detachment with which he viewed both women from the first displays more zeal for making analyses than a share in the tender passion.

Coverdale and the Unfolding Action

Hawthorne's apparent inconsistency in presenting his narrator is actually a portrayal of the narrator's uncertainty. He sometimes portrays Coverdale as one who holds aloof, who is intellectually detached, keenly observant, and able humorously to scoff at his own idealism. On leavetaking Coverdale could facetiously say "I had serious thoughts of kissing them the Blithedale women all round, but forbore to do so, because, in all such general salutations, the penance is fully equal to the pleasure."[2] Speaking of the "nervous sympathy"

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 531. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 522.

among the members of the Blithedale community Coverdale reports.

> If one of us happened to give his neighbor a box on the ear, the tingle was immediately felt on the same side of everybody's head. Thus, even on the supposition that we were far less quarrelsome than the rest of the world, a great deal of time was necessarily wasted in rubbing our ears.[1]

At other times, chiefly in the early portion of the novel, Hawthorne presents Coverdale as a man zealous to find purpose and action in life. While journeying to the community in the late spring storm Coverdale thinks of his journey as a "quest of a better life."

> The better life! Possibly it would hardly look so now; it is enough if it looked so then. The greatest obstacle to being heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove one's self a fool; the truest heroism is, to resist the doubt; and the profoundest wisdom, to know when it ought to be resisted, and when to be obeyed.[2]

Not that a young man of idealistic tendencies might not display both attitudes alternately or almost at one and the same time. It is the persistent avoidance or shunning of both action and commitment on the part of his narrator that leaves the author on one side of the narrator and the reader on the other side almost <u>outside</u> of the story.

The limitations of this vacillating point of view become likewise limitations in the revelation of the mysteries of the story. There is, in addition, a strain placed on character delineation of the narrator. Coverdale is almost

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 521. [2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 444.

reduced to the condition of eavesdropper with the meanness and curiosity characteristic of such a person. The first time he sees Westervelt and Zenobia together is from his owl-like perch in the pine which had been embowered with grape-vines--a peculiar type of hermitage for a grown man (though it had the excuse of being a good place to smoke a cigar). At the time of his observations he questions even the validity of what he does overhear from his perch as they walk past. Later he builds assumptions on these observations as if he had verified them.

> . . . Zenobia's utterance was so hasty and broken, and Westervelt's so cool and low, that I hardly could make out an intelligible sentence on either side. What I seem to remember, I yet suspect, may have been patched together by my fancy, in brooding over the matter, afterwards.[1]

Yet the dialogue which follows proceeds quite in line with the revelation the reader is supposed to gain. The attempt seems to justify mystification as the right of privacy of the fictional characters. ". . . I resolved that to no mortal would I disclose what I had heard."[2] Coverdale appears to be a provokingly unwilling witness for his author.

Frederick Crews has neatly explicated these discrepancies by characterizing them as Coverdale's "imaginative reconstruction" of the "surface plot." In his judgment "the real achievement of Blithedale lies in the complexity and consistency of its structure. Hawthorne is attempting what

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[1] Ibid., p. 500. [2] Ibid., p. 501.

few writers have dared: a surface plot, an imaginative reconstruction of that plot by a narrator, and a symbolic commentary on both."[1] Subsequent events prove, however, that the imaginative reconstruction is a reliable one, thus giving an impression of unnecessary mystification.

One reason that the confession of Coverdale's secret love for Priscilla in the final chapter seems unconvincing is his inaction after his discovery of Priscilla's danger. In the same scene just referred to above in which Coverdale's premonitions receive support, he trusts a very important warning to Priscilla to a strange agent--that is, if his concern were genuine and not merely speculative.

> A bird flew past my tree; and, as it clove its way onward into the sunny atmosphere, I flung it a message for Priscilla. "Tell her," said I, "that her fragile thread of life has inextricably knotted itself with other and tougher threads, and most likely it will be broken. Tell her that Zenobia will not be long her friend. Say that Hollingsworth's heart is on fire with his own purpose, but icy for all human affection; and that, if she has given him her love, it is like casting a flower into a sepulchre. And say that if any mortal really cares for her, it is myself; and not even I, for her realities;--poor little seamstress, so Zenobia rightly called her!--but for the fancy-work with which I have idly decked her out!"

A more thoroughly ineffective gesture of warning can hardly be imagined. And Coverdale criticizes Hollingsworth because Hollingsworth's heart is "icy for all human affection."

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[1] Crews, "A New Reading of the Blithedale Romance," p. 169.

[2] Hawthorne, Blithedale Romance, p. 498.

His own seems scarcely a shade warmer. At this point in the story, however, Hawthorne provides an explanation for his narrator's lack of humanity. Coverdale hears Westervelt's laugh in the woods beneath him and with sudden insight he realizes that just meeting this repulsive man of the world had colored all his recent thoughts.

> I recognized as chiefly due to this man's influence the sceptical and sneering view which, just now, had filled my mental vision, in regard to all life's better purposes. And it was through his eyes, more than my own, that I was looking at Hollingsworth, with his glorious if impracticable dream, and at the noble earthliness of Zenobia's character, and even at Priscilla, whose impalpable grace lay so singularly between disease and beauty. . . . I detested this kind of man; and all the more because a part of my own nature showed itself responsive to him.[1]

After the stormy scene in Zenobia's apartment in which Coverdale is definitely warned off from interference with her plans, he sets out to procure further revelations, and these (including the disclosure of the Moodie-Fauntleroy double identity with its attendant revelation of the half-sister relationship of Zenobia and Priscilla and the fact that Zenobia's wealth is not legally hers except at her forgotten father's sufferance) lead him to the scene in the lecture hall where Hollingsworth rescues Priscilla as "The Veiled Lady" from Westervelt. The fiend's power over Priscilla collapses before "the true heart-throb of a woman's affection."[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 499. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 559.

Priscilla safe, Coverdale sets out on foot for Blithedale on a breezy September forenoon "to learn the upshot of all my story." Even here he is unsure of himself and of his motives.

> . . . I laughed with the bitterness of self-scorn, remembering how unreservedly I had given up my heart and soul to interests that were not mine. What had I ever had to do with them? And why, being now free, should I take this thraldom on me once again? It was both sad and dangerous, I whispered to myself, to be in too close affinity with the passions, the errors, and the misfortunes of individuals who stood within a circle of their own, into which, if I stept at all, it must be as an intruder, and at a peril that I could not estimate.[1]

His half-hearted pursuit of the "upshot" or the complete revelation leads him to skirt the farm through the woods like an Indian spy. He reflects as he does so on his only worthwhile effort in life, "In the sweat of my brow I had there earned my bread and eaten it, and so established my claim to be on earth, and my fellowship with all the sons of labour."[2]

This walk in the September afternoon is invigorating; Coverdale's senses are alive to the September grass, the mysterious clumps of toadstools, the tufted barberry bushes, the tiny fish and the hermit frog. The succeeding contrast to nature when he arrives at the Blithedale masquerade is devastatingly ironic.

This masquerade scene follows, then Coverdale's escape from the masqueraders, and finally his unexpected appearance

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[1] Ibid., p. 560. [2] Ibid.

at Eliot's pulpit. Abashed by his intrusion into a scene which had left the air charged with passion's heat, Coverdale offers unsuccessfully to withdraw. Hollingsworth insists that the place is free to him, and Zenobia reveals Coverdale's role as she bitterly jests about the truth of the grim climax.

> This long while past, you have been following up your game groping for human emotions in the dark corners of the heart. Had you been here a little sooner, you might have seen them dragged into the daylight. I could even wish to have my trial over again, with you standing by to see fair play! Do you know, Mr. Coverdale, I have been on trial for my life?[1]

Coverdale has arrived just too late; he characterizes the scene as "a battle-field before the smoke was as yet cleared away."[2] It has been the resolution of all the mysteries he is seeking the answers to. He sums them up, "On these points, as before, I was left to my own conjectures. One thing only was certain: Zenobia and Hollingsworth were friends no longer."[3] The battle was not completely over, however, for Coverdale witnesses Zenobia's counter-attack, a defense worthy of her intelligent and rich womanhood. As she states in asking for a fair trial, "There might, at least, be two criminals, instead of one."[4] Her pitiless exposure of Hollingsworth's motives in her own defense in which she tells him, "You are a better masquerader than the witches and gipsies yonder; for your disguise is a self-deception,"[5] actually

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[1] Ibid., p. 565. [2] Ibid., p. 566. [3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 565. [5] Ibid., p. 568.

shakes the egotist Hollingsworth and corroborates Coverdale's own earlier suspicions and discoveries about him.

At this point in the action when all the mysteries seem to have been revealed, Coverdale moves into the center of the story as protagonist-narrator, almost as if the catastrophe he had earlier wished for were the signal for him to become an involved member in the tragic action. His own explanation of his silent witness of Zenobia's "tearless agony," however, is apparently pointed toward the secret of the final confession of his love for Priscilla. He says,

> But, so it happend, I never once dreamed of questioning my right to be there now, as I had questioned it just before, when I came so suddenly upon Hollingsworth and herself, in the passion of their recent debate. It suits me not to explain what was the analogy that I saw, or imagined, between Zenobia's situation and mine. . . . In simple truth, however, as Zenobia leaned her forehead against the rock . . . it seemed to me that the self-same pang, with hardly mitigated torment, leaped thrilling from her heart-strings to my own.[1]

Coverdale is the last person to see Zenobia alive. Only his troubled dream at the foot of Eliot's pulpit where he sinks down after her departure and the extreme cold of her hand when he bids her farewell give him the premonition which causes him to go back to the deep pool of the river which had drawn his attention earlier in the afternoon.

Returning to the Blithedale farmhouse at about midnight he wakes Hollingsworth and Silas Foster to aid him in the gruesome search for the drowned Zenobia. And at the

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[1] Ibid., p. 570.

funeral in the Blithedale pasture, Coverdale defends Zenobia's character to Westervelt, her unfeeling "evil fate." After an impious wish that Heaven will deal with Westervelt according to his nature and deserts, which, he reflects, would be to annihilate him, Coverdale concludes:

> Whatever stain Zenobia had was caught from him; nor does it seldom happen that a character of admirable qualities loses its better life because the atmosphere that should sustain it is rendered poisonous by such breath as this man mingled with Zenobia's.[1]

Coverdale, now the sole actor of the scene, seeks just one more answer, one further revelation, for his search among the human emotions--what would happen to Hollingsworth after all the evil he had done? He gets his last glimpse and discovers that a broken-spirited Hollingsworth dependent on his loving wife Priscilla had never even begun his grandiose scheme for reforming criminals. In answer to Coverdale's relentless probing "Up to this moment . . . how many criminals have you reformed?"

Hollingsworth responds, "Not one. . . . Ever since we parted, I have been busy with a single murderer."[2]

With so pitiable and true a confession in his ears Coverdale discovers he can forgive Hollingsworth. Speaking of Hollingsworth's life and its wasted wealth of possibilities Coverdale draws this tragic truth. "I see in Hollingsworth an exemplification of the most awful truth in Bunyan's

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[1] Ibid., p. 581. [2] Ibid., p. 582.

book of such;--from the very gate of heaven there is a by-way to the pit!"[1]

So far, we have been considering Miles Coverdale on the basis of the type of narrator he is, and we discover by examination of the novel that he begins his story as a reflective protagonist-narrator, then retires to an outside position--that of witness-narrator--in the action, especially after his rejection of Hollingsworth's appeal. This position on the periphery is maintained until the grand climax in which Zenobia is judged and rejected by Hollingsworth and Priscilla chooses to follow Hollingsworth.

We could substitute for the figure of the outside of the circle for Coverdale's position, Coverdale's own figure which portrays him as the spectator of a drama he must helplessly sit and watch. This metaphor brings more meaning to his desperate statement, "I began to long for a catastrophe," an expression of his nervous desire for the play to hasten to its climax. This metaphor would also tend to explain an otherwise almost incongruous listlessness which overcomes Coverdale with sleep after the climaxing scene at Eliot's pulpit. The catastrophe is over, and he can relax into tragic dreams.

The effect of Coverdale's changing position as a center of focus is to bring the story of Hollingsworth, Zenobia,

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[1] Ibid., p. 583.

and Priscilla alternately close and then remote. The first wintry April evening at the farmhouse the story seems warm, human, real: even the cold which confines Coverdale to his bed for the first exciting morning of his new adventure, where he is fed with Zenobia's poorly-cooked gruel and tended by Hollingsworth, belongs to a real world of unseasonable spring snowstorms. Vividly real too is the scene in which the three men, Coverdale, Foster, and Hollingsworth, are probing the deep pool with rake and hook for Zenobia's body and, likewise, the preceding scene in the forest when Zenobia was judged. These are the spots where Coverdale is an active participant, not merely a spectator. The other parts of the action, the staged sections with their mysteries attached for the sake of suspense,--the mystery of the Veiled Lady, of Moodie-Fauntleroy, of the Satanic Westervelt with his gold-banded teeth, and of the relation between Zenobia and Priscilla--are fantastic devices of romance and are properly set in a dim light at a staged distance. The perverse passions which cause Coverdale to characterize these actors as "goblins of flesh and blood" are somehow in excess and remain theatrical motivation except in those scenes where Coverdale brings them nearer to us again.

The Total Effect

Hawthorne seems unsure of what he wants of his narrator, though, in truth, the uncertainty is a part of the

illusion. Did he have in mind the ideal aesthetic point of view he once described in "Sights From a Steeple?"

> The most desirable mode of existence might be that of a spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible around man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself.[1]

There are definite elements of such a character in Coverdale--the hovering in the tree, the spying from his apartment window, the complaint that his poor individual life was "attenuated of much of its proper substance, and diffused among many alien interests."[2] Unfortunately for such an artistic point of view a flesh and blood narrator is hardly an effective means. For Coverdale can scarcely be "spiritualized" sufficiently to escape at least the implications of a male gossip indicated by the name Paul Pry or at the most the tarring with the same brush he blackens Hollingsworth with. The peculiar agony of Coverdale's interest Hawthorne hid from the reader under the coy excuse of its being Coverdale's "secret."

Or did Hawthorne attempt in Coverdale to provide a character with no admixture of the "marvelous," a realistic one who might have come from the pages of the admired Trollope? There is some evidence to support this view. In the first place, the materials in The Blithedale Romance are lifted

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[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Sights From a Steeple," Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections, ed. Austin Warren (New York: American Book Company, 1934), p. 51.

[2] Hawthorne, Blithedale Romance, p. 531.

from Hawthorne's own experiences both at Brook Farm and elsewhere.[1] The search for the drowned body of Zenobia very closely parallels a similar search for the body of the nineteen-year-old school teacher Martha Hunt. His own personal reaction toward the sight of the young girl's marred and rigid corpse is repeated in Coverdale's reaction:

> Being the women that she was, could Zenobia have foreseen all these ugly circumstances of death,--how ill it would become her, the altogether unseemly aspect which she must put on, and especially old Silas Foster's efforts to improve the matter,--she would no more have committed the dreadful act than have exhibited herself to a public assembly in a badly fitting garment![2]

Other experiences from his journal records creep in throughout; there is the description of the bar in which Coverdale meets Mr. Moodie, even to the detail of the bartender who so artistically mixed the drink by "tossing it in a large parabola from one tumbler to another, until fit for drinking."[3] The arrival at Blithedale in an unseasonable April snowstorm parallels his entry to Sophia on his arrival at Brook Farm.

> Here is thy poor husband in a polar Paradise! I know not how to interpret this aspect of Nature--whether it be of good or evil omen to our enterprise. But I reflect that the Plymouth pilgrims arrived in the midst of storm and stepped ashore upon mountain snowdrifts; and, nevertheless, they

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[1] Robert Cantwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years (Toronto: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1948), pp. 391-393.

[2] Hawthorne, Blithedale Romance, p. 579.

[3] Newton Arvin, The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), p. 138.

> prospered, and became great people--and doubtless it will be the same with us.[1]

The picnic party in the woods of Brook Farm on the occasion of six-year-old Frank Dana's birthday becomes the masquerade Coverdale encounters on his return to Blithedale with Hawthorne's reaction to the original scene again very nearly transcribed in Coverdale's reaction and observations.

The following description taken from Hawthorne's journal, during his short stay in Boston, of a back-window view when compared with the description of the back-window view of Zenobia's apartment in the city is another illustration of how closely Hawthorne was attempting to include the fixities of real life in The Blithedale Romance:

> In the intervals betwixt these ranges of outhouses or walks, are grass-plots, already green, because so sheltered; and fruit-trees, now beginning to put forth their leaves, and one of them, a cherry-tree, almost in full blossom. Birds flutter and sing among these trees. I should judge it a good site for the growth of delicate fruit; for, quite enclosed on all sides by houses, the blighting winds cannot molest the trees; they have sunshine on them a good part of the day, though the shadow must come early; and I suppose there is a rich soil about the roots. I see grapevines clambering aginst one wall . . . . In another place, a frame is erected for a grapevine, and probably it will produce as rich clusters as the vines of Madeira, here in the heart of the city, in this little spot of fructifying earth, while the thunder of wheels rolls about it on every side. The trees are not all fruit trees; one pretty well-grown buttonwood-tree aspires upward above the roofs of the houses.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 68. [2] Ibid., p. 141.

Here is the concentrated and more specific scene as it appears in The Blithedale Romance:

> The interval between was apportioned into grass-plots, and here and there an apology for a garden, pertaining severally to these dwellings. There were apple trees, and pear and peach trees, too, the fruit on which looked singularly large, luxuriant, and abundant; as well it might, in a situation so warm and sheltered, and where the soil had doubtless been enriched to a more than natural fertility. In two or three places grape vines clambered upon trellises, and bore clusters already purple, and promising the richness of Matta or Madeira in their ripened juice. The blighting winds of our rigid climate could not molest these trees and vines; the sunshine, though descending late into this area, and too early intercepted by the height of the surrounding houses, yet lay tropically there, even when less than temperate in every other region . . . . Most of these winged people seemed to have their domicile in a robust and healthy buttonwood tree. It aspired upward, high above the roof of the houses, and spread a dense head of foliage half across the area.[1]

Aside from the fact that the time has been moved from spring to fall--from promise to fruition--and that the rewritten description reveals the skill of the writer, the specific details are true to the earlier entry and the subjective response woven around these details is the same. It is not at all strange that William Dean Howells, who is included among the later admirers of The Blithedale Romance, preferred it because of its greater "realism."[2]

In drawing so directly upon his own experiences Hawthorne came close to a self-identification with Coverdale.

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[1] Hawthorne, Blithedale Romance, pp. 526-527.

[2] Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 123.

Coverdale often feels and thinks in complete affinity with his author. He even catches cold as Hawthorne did upon his arrival at Brook Farm and is fed on similar watery gruel. Both Hawthorne and Coverdale were proud of calloused hands and muscular strength after experience at farm community labor. Coverdale's analytical sensitivity to motives, his own and others, and his aloof objectivity bear resemblance to those of his creator. Such identity is not unusual when the fallible narrator is an "I". Autobiographical reference may be read into any story where the author's experience and that of the narrator coincide or run parallel.

But this heavy reliance upon real life material, upon the solidities, is an effort to build up his narrator's weakest side, to keep Coverdale from evaporating into the "Paul Pry," a purely etherealized point of view. His narrator needed all this weight he could give him. Hawthorne distrusted characters who were too ingrown even as he distrusted those tendencies in himself which dissociated the artist from humanity in general. One of a number of expressions of this distrust is in "The Artist of the Beautiful."

> To persons whose pursuits are insulated from the common business of life--who are either in advance of mankind or apart from it--there often comes a sensation of moral cold that makes the spirit shiver as if it had reached the frozen solitudes around the pole.[1]

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[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful," The Novels and Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne ("The Modern Library"; New York: Random House, Inc., 1937), p. 1146.

Trying to construct a rock foundation under his air castles, in line with Thoreau's advice, was exactly what Coverdale's "strenuous aspirations" were to amount to. The air castles were already a part of his character as a young minor poet of the transcendental era. Hawthorne did not need to stress this side of Coverdale. It was strongly and richly there for both of them. Out of this unresolved conflict between the actual and the ideal is to come the tragedy for three of the main characters--Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Coverdale.

In line with Hawthorne's objective for weighting the physical side of Coverdale's dilemma, note the picture of Coverdale given indirectly by the rough and practical Silas Foster when Coverdale announces his plan to depart for the city:

> "Now, here's a pretty fellow! His shoulders have broadened a matter of six inches since he came among us; he can do his day's work, if he likes, with any man or ox on the farm; and yet he talks about going to the sea-shore for his health." . . .
>
> "Well, but, Mr. Foster," said I, "you must allow me to take a little breath."
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> "Breath!" retorted the old yeoman. "Your lungs have the play of a pair of black-smith's bellows already."[1]

This description of Coverdale as a stalwart young laborer, capable of lifting heavy rocks for the stone fence or harvesting field crops seems to jar with the reader's impression of Coverdale. We picture him as the sensitive young

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[1]Hawthorne, Blithedale Romance, p. 520.

man, but sensitive without motivation or fruition. Hawthorne dowered Coverdale with some of his own sensitivity, his genius for analysis, his awareness of suffering and evil but withheld from him the strong seriousness, the virile qualities of courage, independence, and devotion to duty. The potential for the manly qualities is imaged in the physical prowess developed during the summer of sweat on the brow and shared labor which established his claim on earth, but Coverdale as a young man turned back. By his middle years we see that his aspirations cannot rise above his comfort.

> If Kossuth, for example, would pitch the battlefield of Hungarian rights within an easy ride of my abode, and choose a mild, sunny morning, after breakfast, for the conflict, Miles Coverdale would gladly be his man, for one brave rush upon the levelled bayonets. Further than that, I should be loath to pledge myself.[1]

Miles Coverdale is Hawthorne's idealist who failed to open up an intercourse with the world. Coverdale is not Hawthorne, but he was part of himself that Hawthorne feared.

Chase, who feels that Hawthorne is experimenting with point of view in The Blithedale Romance, diagnoses the author's difficulty as a growing interest in the literary and moral problem of Coverdale as an observer.[2] The evidence from the very first of the book, however, indicates that this is the

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[1] Ibid., p. 584.

[2] Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition ("Doubleday Anchor Books"; Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 85.

dominant interest all along. Coverdale is too skeptical to grant Moodie a "a very great favour," although, as he admits, "I was ready to do the old man any amount of kindness involving no special trouble to myself."[1] Thus he misses being the one to convey Priscilla to Blithedale and loses his first opportunity for generous action.

The core of the difficulty of Coverdale as narrator seems to me to lie not in the consistency of his development but in the kind of character he is for the kind of a story The Blithedale Romance is. The title plainly indicates that this is romance, and, as Frye indicates, "The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes."[2] This description fits Hawthorne's characters perfectly, and it conveniently covers the characters of Blithedale too--except for Coverdale. Zenobia comes close to being a "real person" also, but here Coverdale's reactions to Zenobia help us. He sees her romantically. She suggests Eve and is adorned first by symbolic "hothouse" flowers and later by symbolic jewelled flowers. But Coverdale, as the presiding consciousness, cannot himself be a "stylized figure." From its earliest use as point of view the fallible narrator has been prized for his air of authenticity, his realism. Where Hawthorne attempts

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[1] Hawthorne, Blithedale Romance, p. 7.

[2] Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 304.

to have his narrator present himself in symbolic terms as in the scene in the woods when he imagines himself coming to the farm laden with ripe grapes or pictures himself as prophetic voice warning Priscilla, the manner and the means are not suited. This is not to say that romance and realism cannot mingle because James would provide instant refutation for such a statement. Coverdale can modulate romantic distance for the other characters, but he is too close to the reader to do the same for himself. As the characters of the book form their tableaux, much like figures of a nineteenth century morality play, one character is missing from the set. Coverdale, who represents the paralysis of intellectual pride, is there at our elbow, meditating and commenting. This seems to me a flaw in the handling, though certainly not a major one in a work of such complexity as The Blithedale Romance.

Coverdale is a character worthy of attention quite in his own right, aside from any interest in the dramatic characters of the little play he feels so strong a compulsion to watch. Perhaps he resembles his creator a little too closely, but who could better know this strange combination of diffidence with intense suffering, of modesty with manly independence, and of uncertainty as to whether he was hero or fool, and yet add to these contrarieties a belief that the objective did not need to be reached at all! The idealistic struggle for a better world held the same ethereal promise for Coverdale that the creation of the butterfly had for Owen Warland. The

striving against obstacles need not have the market value of success; it was itself the touchstone which made or broke those participating in it as they strove nobly or ignobly. Out of his own thought comes Coverdale's judgment on himself. In one of his earliest meditations on the way to Blithedale he muses:

> The greatest obstacle to being heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove one's self a fool; the truest heroism is, to resist the doubt; and the profoundest wisdom, to know when it ought to be resisted, and when to be obeyed.
>
> Yet, after all, let us acknowledge it wiser; if not more sagacious, to follow out one's daydream to its natural consummation, although, if the vision have been worth the having, it is certain never to be consummated otherwise than by failure. And what of that? Its airiest fragments, impalpable as they may be, will possess a value that lurks not in the most ponderous realities of any practicable scheme. They are not the rubbish of the mind. Whatever else I may repent of, therefore, let it be reckoned neither among my sins or follies that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny,--yes!--and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment; even to the extent of quitting a warm fireside, flinging away a freshly-lighted cigar, and traveling far beyond the strike of city clocks, through a drifting snow-storm.[1]

But this was only the youthful Coverdale; in retrospect the older man can only confess that he once had "faith and force."

In this idealistic strand of the theme of The Blithedale Romance can probably be found the answer to Browning's unexpected admiration of the book. Hawthorne recorded in his Journal of July 13, 1856:

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[1]Hawthorne, Blithedale Romance, pp. 444-445.

> After we left the table, and went into the library, Mr. Browning introduced himself to me--a younger man than I expected to see, handsome, with brown hair a very little frosted. He is very simple and agreeable in manner, gently impulsive, talking as if his heart were uppermost. He spoke of his pleasure in meeting me, and his appreciation of my books; and--which has not often happened to me--mentioned that The Blithedale Romance was the one he admired most. I wonder why.[1]

Those who characterize The Blithedale Romance as a satire on Hawthorne's Brook Farm experiences, I believe, have misinterpreted the narrator. To be sure, Coverdale has a few satirical comments about the endeavor of the brothers and sisters of the community (his farewell address on the subject of the slaughtering of the pigs to Foster), and on his own inconsistencies as a member of a socialistic community. But these remarks are such as any young man with a sense of humor would inevitably make on the contrasts which spring up between illusion and reality of any idealistic endeavor.

On the whole, Coverdale's attitude is serious, hopeful, and gentle, even in retrospective condemnation. He states his personal objective in the experiment rather early when a committee was considering a name for their farm:

> We did not greatly care--at least, I never did--for the written constitution under which our millenium had commenced. My hope was that, between theory and practice, a true and available mode of life might be struck out; and that, even should be ultimately fail, the months or years spent in the trial would not have

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[1] Arvin, Heart of Hawthorne's Journal, p. 227.

> been wasted, either as regarded passing enjoyment, or the experience which makes men wise.[1]

This statement of his goal, plus his own explicit concept of his place in the drama enacted by Hollingsworth, Priscilla, and Zenobia is not appropriate for a satirical point of view. Coverdale is not primarily a satirist.

Summary

Coverdale is Hawthorne's most ambitious attempt at a fallible narrator. The only other examples of his willingness to relinquish the rights of authorial omniscience and intrusion are found in such sketches and short stories as "Monsieur du Miroir," "Sights From a Steeple," "The Custom House," and "The Celestial Railroad." His concept of the limiting point of view seemed to be confined to the use of the "I", the confessional narrator. Coverdale is one step further away from Hawthorne's introductory essays, sketches, and "I" stories--a successfully projected fictional character.

Our next concern is the wisdom of Hawthorne's choice of Coverdale as a focus for the unfolding of the experience in this story. For The Blithedale Romance is a story of developing experience. Its action is a progression from hope to increasing disillusionment and to the paralysis of

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[1]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, ed. Ernest Rhys ("Everyman's Library"; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1912), p. 63.

self-knowledge. In this progression the weak Priscilla becomes the strong one; the most self-righteous, Hollingsworth, becomes his own object of reform, a murderer; the epitome of pride and womanly wealth, Zenobia, is fished up from the depths, a loathsome corpse; and the poet-contemplator, Coverdale, loses his zeal for reform, his love, and what purpose he had in life. Coverdale's self-condemnation is implicit in his echo of the New Testament picture of Dives, "I live very much at my ease, and fare sumptuously every day."[1] Blithedale is a most ironic title.

Though Coverdale as point of view does not always escape the dangers which James noted for the longer fiction in the "I" (He is by turns too clever, too clear in his observations and analyses and then too obtuse; and sometimes his fancy and playfulness suggest an unpleasant effeminacy), he is on the whole a strong artistic focus.

Male sees the technique of the restricted point of view as excellent for objectifying the plight of Coverdale who complains of the lack of vigorous reality his life possesses and what a "dim figure" he casts.[2] We have noted previously how easily the fallible narrator is seen through rather than looked at and what a tenuous hold he has on our attention.

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[1] Ibid., p. 249.

[2] Male, "Toward the Wasteland," p. 282.

Though, unfortunately, we have no prefaces which reveal just how Hawthorne worked out his technical achievement in The Blithedale Romance, we note with interest how many reflectors he has set up to throw enough light back on Coverdale to cause him to emerge from his shadow position. Zenobia twits him with looking for materials for a ballad in his friends' experiences, accuses him of "groping for human emotions in the dark corners of the human heart" and wonders why she didn't try winning him because he is the handsomest. Hollingsworth proclaims: "Miles Coverdale is not in earnest, either as a poet or a labourer." And when Coverdale speaks to Priscilla in "petty malice" she dismisses him with true "feminine imperiousness": "Go on before, . . . It pleases me best to loiter along by myself." The judgment of Silas Foster we have quoted above, and practically every character of the romance remarks on Coverdale to his face. Somehow, with our attention concentrated on the more colorfully decked-out trio who absorb Coverdale's attention, we miss the point of these reflections until we look back for them. They are ample to prove that Coverdale is our subject, though in identifying our view with his we tend to overlook his own moral deterioration which is taking place within our ken.

We note that the pendulum-like physical movement of Coverdale between the city and Blithedale symbolizes his indecisions. When he is approaching Blithedale his poetic sense is heightened and his emotions are quickened; whether it

be in snowy April or breezy September, he dreams dreams. But each time he endures more bitter experience and retreats. The aesthetic position of the narrator, alternately near and then far, vivifies and then blurs the outlines of picture and scene. One reason the dramatic analogy cannot be considered the structure is this alternation of the position of the narrator. Coverdale is a spectator only part of the time; the rest of the time he is moving either toward or away from the center of the action.

The progress of the seasons and the alternation of day and night under Coverdale's observation modulate the lighting, one of Hawthorne's most effective devices. Hawthorne relied heavily on his narrator to provide that sense of an atmosphere between reality and fantasy which he conceived of as the proper one for his particular art form, the romance. And the fatal emotional fascination which attracts and then repels him from his three friends with mothlike flights toward the flame helps to provide a density of restless foreboding. It is this density rather than the machinations of Westervelt or the pitiful vengeance of Moodie which gives the sense of evil to the story. Hawthorne's almost instinctive respect for the limitations of Coverdale's impression of the story has resulted in a tragic effect like that which James might have used, and we have James's tribute to

this romance of Hawthorne's as "the lightest, the brightest, and liveliest"[1] of them all.

The thematic richness of The Blithedale Romance and the provision for this richness in the symbolic images have been commented upon by Male and Chase. Chase mentions "the veils and masquerades to suggest the falseness of motive and belief; mesmerism to suggest falseness of spirit and emotional confidence tricks; hearth-fire to suggest the genial emotional life which ironically eludes tne cold ideology of the Blithedalers,"[2] and states that The Blithedale Romance is "one of the few anti-pastorals" of our literature. Male comments on the images of flower, fruit, animal, landscape, and weather--images which display the "dynamic wholeness of nature"; the images of frustrated regeneration like those of Coverdale's recovery from illness, of the drinkers in the saloon, of Westervelt's hypnotism, and of the "false spring" storm of the Blithedale experiment--itself the dominant image of abortive hopes; and the abundant images of withdrawal and concealment, the veils and masks which are characteristic of every one, except possibly the narrator. The wholesomeness of the natural images is more than counterbalanced by the

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[1]Carl Van Doren, The American Novel, 1789-1939 (rev. and enl. ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 76.

[2]Chase, The American Novel, pp. 84-85.

cumulative effect of the others so that the total effect is a pessimistic one.[1]

As the evidence in the book itself indicates, Coverdale is not intended as a hero but as an ineffectual idealist. Male characterizes him as one of the "hollow men." Coverdale is a prophetic presentation of the dilemma of modern man, blessed (or cursed) with clear insight but paralyzed by the Medusa of evil. He is the embodiment of what Hawthorne feared would happen to the high-minded transcendentalist youth confronted with initiation--that he would immerse himself in physical comfort and substitute movement in space for life.

Coverdale as a fallible narrator is a genuinely projected and realized complex character. He is an intelligently aware observer of his story with its thematic and ironic implications. He is not a completely authoritative character because in reacting to the opposing pulls of unselfish group action and individual integrity, he can only withdraw and deny, thus becoming the saddest failure of them all.

Henry James

Henry James did not arrive at his use of a fine central intelligence for his fiction by a sudden heaven-born inspiration. His stories and the record in his notebooks and prefaces show a series of experiments, which, moreover, were not

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[1] Male, "Toward the Wasteland," pp. 277-283.

a straight line of progress from his earliest to his major phase. In Roderick Hudson, his first long piece, he used Rowland Mallet as a fallible narrator; but when he wrote six years later (1881) a book more representative of his modest popularity The Portrait of a Lady, though he set Isabel up for his dominant point of view, he also stressed that of others to provide a series of reflecting lights on his heroine and at times filled in these angles of narration with an authorial freedom.

The three short novels of his dramatic middle period likewise show a variety of treatment in handling point of view: The Awkward Age is James's tour de force in novelette form, a novel moving close to drama in its emphasis with an imaginary spectator as its point of view. What Maisie Knew is restricted to the child as fallible narrator; and The Spoils of Poynton, after a few pages from Mrs. Gereth's point of view, only enough to introduce the reader to the young woman Fleda Vetch, is completely experienced from that heroine's angle of vision. This novel, according to Beach, was the first absolutely pure example of the James method.[1]

And in the three great novels of what F. O. Matthiessen has called the major phase--The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl--James displayed all the technical skill years of patient endeavor had taught him in a

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[1]Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), pp. 60-61.

variety of ways for handling point of view. The Ambassadors has Lambert Strether for its single central consciousness; The Wings of the Dove has a different pattern for each piece, the pieces being roughly equivalent to the books, and James wrote of balancing these structural blocks of different "reflectors"; The Golden Bowl is divided almost in perfect halves between the Prince and the Princess, with the exception of those small areas in which Mrs. Assingham functions. To put this in James's own words:

> It is the Prince who opens the door to half our light upon Maggie, just as it is she who opens it to half our light upon himself; the rest of our impression, in either case, coming straight from the very motion with which that act is performed.[1]

Among his experiments, two novels which were entrusted to a single fallible narrator for their "direct impression of life" and which particularly pleased him as felicitous were The Spoils of Poynton, a short story which somehow grew into a short novel because of James's preoccupation with the picture of the moral developments reflected in the understanding of Fleda Vetch, and The Ambassadors.

Concerning Fleda's understanding James wrote:

> Absolutely, with this, I committed myself to making the affirmation and the penetration of it my action and my "story"; once more, too with the re-entertained perception that a subject so lighted, a subject residing in somebody's excited and concentrated feeling about something--both the something and the somebody being of course as important as possible--has more

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[1] James, The Art of the Novel, p. 330.

> beauty to give out than under any other style of pressure.[1]

This style of pressure of the restricted point of view of an excited and intensely feeling somebody is also and more richly present in The Ambassadors, which was James's preferred novel among his work and the subject for our examination.

The fact that James used a third person narrator rather than the more common first person narrator for his single point of view has been marked by Lubbock as a distinct step forward in the technical maturity of the novel. Lubbock characterizes the first person narration as

> the first step in the dramatization of picture. . . . This, then, is the readiest means of dramatically heightening a reported impression, this device of telling the story in the first person, in the person of somebody in the book; and large in our fiction the first person accordingly bulks. The characterized "I" is substituted for the loose and general "I" of the author; the loss of freedom is more than repaid by the more salient effect of the picture. Precision, individuality is given to it by this pair of eyes, known and named, through which the reader sees it; instead of drifting in space above the spectacle he keeps his allotted station and contemplates a delimited field of vision.[2]

Lubbock proceeds, after discussing the limitations of the "I" as narrator,

> And the next step is to lay aside the autobiographic device which the novelist was seen to adopt . . . in the interest of drama . . . .
>
> The novelist, therefore, returns to the third person again, but he returns with a marked

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[1] Ibid., p. 128.

[2] Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), pp. 126-127.

> difference . . . . It is still the man in the book who sees and judges and reflects; all the picture of life is still rendered in the hero's terms. But the difference is that instead of receiving his report we now see him in the act of judging and reflecting; his consciousness, no longer a matter of hearsay, a matter for which we must take his word, is now before us in its original agitation. . . . This man's interior life is cast into the world of independent, rounded objects; it is given room to show itself, it appears, it acts. A distinction is made between the scene which the man surveys, and the energy within him which converts it all into the stuff of his own being. The scene, as much as ever, is watched through his eyes; but now there is this other fact, in front of the scene, actually under the hand of the reader. To this fact the value of drama has accrued.[1]

The values which Lubbock describes here are the values of James, and to gain these values and avoid the weaknesses of the first person form in the "long stretch" James turned to this form for his restricted point of view. As he describes his practice, however, he does not hold to it with rigidity, always reserving the right for himself as artist to "go behind" his figures when the necessity arises, and some examples of this process will be pointed out in our discussion of The Ambassadors.

Just as Twain's work developed from an oral tradition and art and bears an organic relationship in its every part to its origins, so James's work bears its relationship in all its ramifications to his twin interests in picture and drama. The reader notes his constant references to seeing and showing and his consistent use of images which compare his work

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[1] Ibid., pp. 142-143.

to painting in his prefaces--such words as canvas, brush, light and shadow, tints, wet sponge, and varnish bottle. These images in much of his criticism help reveal the extent to which James, like Hawthorne, depends on picture and scene in his novels. In fact, in his major phase he first wrote out for his longer novels a pre-plan which closely resembled a scenario. Furthermore, Joseph Warren Beach maintains that in James's ideas and his search for inner truth of the human spirit he was considering the picture.

> All three novelists--James, Meredith, Eliot--are given to the development of an idea or motive; the difference lies in the way in which the motive is conceived. The others conceive their motive more as a thesis or moral; James conceives his as the subject of a picture.[1]

Of the dominance of the moral tone in James's fiction Beach says:

> His concern is with the appearance made by right and wrong. . . . Hence the artist's delight in "ironies," which are patterns of circumstances so revolting to the practical, the moral sense, while often so pleasing in their appeal to the imagination.[2]

Lambert Strether

This concern with picture and scene explains much of what is excellent in James's fiction, but how does this all bear upon the point of view? In attempting to bring out a "direct impression of life" in terms of showing how it looked

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[1] Beach, The Method of Henry James, p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 28.

the importance of an observer of the right kind became to James a primary consideration. The fallible narrator provided him with a chance for making experience immediate and bringing out theme from observed relationships of the dramatic situation.

It is worth noting in this connection how intimately the following factors in the novels of James as set forth by Beach--idea, picture, revelation, suspense, point of view, dialogue, drama, eliminations, tone, romance, and ethics[1]--are all dependent upon one another and how the choice of point of view determines the handling of the rest. As James's analyses of his fiction and the notebooks disclose, his second concern after the "germ" began to reveal to him its possibilities was to place a fine intelligence in front of the situation.

To take one of these factors and illustrate how in its Jamesian quality it is dependent upon the point of view let us consider suspense. Though James lacked the motion and methods of suspense usually considered indispensable in a novel--the sense of the progress of the story and of the cause and effect sequence of incident--his scenes are moving, speaking dramas with many emotional tones and overtones out of which action springs, firmly grounded in character and energized by motive. The handling of this problem of suspense

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[1] Ibid., p. iv.

in the development of the novel is particularly interesting. Within the limits of the point of view certain information can, of course, be withheld. Strether, for example, sets out as ambassador from Woollett armed with certain facts, possessed of certain guesses (or divinations as James would say), and ready to "see" and act. Almost immediately he begins to sense complexities in his simple errand. Chad does not actually appear on the scene before Paris and new friends make the bewildering impression upon Strether that there may be more here than meets a Woollett eye. He alternately advances toward and retreats from his line of duty, trying to comprehend in a most complete and honest fashion. He draws false conclusions, many of which he himself has to correct, but he is thrown off the track in his quest by the ambiguous word virtuous which is uttered by little Bilham with a Paris connotation and translated by Strether in the Woollett idiom. Bit by bit information comes to Strether and then occurs that scene of painful revelation in the country. This is followed by equally clear and equally painful further revelations (such as the likelihood of Chad's defection) by decisions, and by renunciations. The suspense effect is much like that of bringing up the lights of the theater gradually from dim to the full glare of the bright. James calls his revelations "a process of vision," and they are placed in the consciousness of the point of view. The suspense of this method when

it "comes off" is as breathless as that of the more obvious narrative suspense of a Cooper novel.

The record of the germ of The Ambassadors is clear, and the germ itself is planted as a statement by Strether (as James so explicitly tells us in the preface), to little Bilham on the Sunday afternoon in Gloriani's garden. "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to."[1]

Since The Ambassadors is the story of Strether's sensitive and expanding consciousness on this subject just as The Spoils of Poynton is the story of "the penetration and affirmation" of Fleda's understanding of the spoils, the important factor of the whole is the kind of narrator Strether is.

Here James has been explicit also. He speaks of projecting his New Englander into a false position in which his excellent imagination and the narrower localism of the philosophy of Woollett would be in constant hour by hour conflict and change under the magic of vivid facts. James embodies this picture of Strether as he conceived him in a chemical metaphor:

> He had come with a view that might have been figured by a clear green liquid, say, in a neat glass phial; and the liquid, once poured into the open cup of application, once exposed to the action of another air, had begun to turn from green to red, or whatever,

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[1] Henry James, The Ambassadors, ed. Martin W. Sampson and John E. Gerber (Harper's Modern Classics"; New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948), p. 149.

> and might, for all he knew, be on its way to purple, to black, to yellow.[1]

Strether, then, is to be a witness-protagonist type of narrator with a definite mission assigned him as the first of Mrs. Newsome's ambassadors. As ambassador he attempts to penetrate to the center of the mystery, the outline of which only reluctantly reveals itself to him. And the culminating irony of the book is that his mission successfully accomplished becomes for him the irony of his failure.

The story is, as already mentioned, the story of how Strether changes his point of view, and, as a consequence, the reversal takes place within Strether's consciousness, indicated by his promise made to Mme. de Vionnet to "save her."

The resemblance of Strether to James himself has been noted, but it would be as ridiculous to insist on an identification as to insist that Coverdale is Hawthorne. The greatest similarity between James and Strether comes in the endowment of imagination and mature charm which James gives his narrator. Strether's renunciation is strictly in the James pattern too, but this tendency Strether shares with others of James's heroes and heroines--Christopher Newman, Isabel Archer, Fleda Vetch, and Milly Theale.

The differences between Strether and James need not be labored to prove the point, but they are significant.

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[1]James, The Art of the Novel, p. 314.

Strether is represented as an editor of a New England critical magazine of small fame, for which the principal financial support is the widow he is to marry. He is not an artist and therefore not as close to James in that sense as numerous narrators of the shorter pieces, for example, Dencombe in "The Middle Years" or Paul Overt in "The Lesson of the Master." Strether is represented as New England in pattern, a product of a narrow localism. In fact, this provincialism is the source of the "false position." But more important than some of these differences is the one related to the theme which caused James to label Strether "our belated man of the world."[1] James would not figure here as prototype as neatly as his friend who was the author of the remark James seized as the germ of the story--William Dean Howells.

Because of these and other differences woven closely into the texture of the story Strether can perform as a fully projected fictional narrator with a clear distance between him and his author. Early in the novel, we are given a description of Strether's physical appearance, which is an example of James's violation of his own point of view. The author goes behind his narrator.

> When, in a quarter of an hour, he came down, what his hostess saw, what she might have taken in with a vision kindly adjusted, was the lean, slightly loose figure of a man of the middle height and something more, perhaps, than the middle age--a man of five-and-fifty, whose most immediate signs were a marked

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[1] Ibid., p. 315.

> bloodless brownness of face, a thick, dark mustache, of characteristically American cut, growing strong and falling low, a head of hair still abundant, but abundantly streaked with gray, and a nose of bold, free prominence, the even line, the high finish, as it might have been called, of which, had a certain effect of mitigation. A perpetual pair of glasses astride of this fine ridge, and a line, unusually deep and drawn, the prolonged pen stroke of time, accompanying the curve of the mustache from nostril to chin, did something to complete the facial furniture which an attentive observer would have seen to be catalogued, on the spot, in the vision of the other party to Strether's appointment.[1]

This description is a bit self-conscious and marks one of the difficulties of the witness-protagonist as the point of view. If he is the one to see everybody, who is to see him? We noted that Coverdale's physical appearance as reported by others did not seem like a suitable outside for the reflective and sensitive mind which was presenting the story to us. There is a happier blending of Strether's objective and subjective self as well as better reflectors for the contradictory or conflicting elements within his own nature.

With Strether, James has placed in the first chapters two flanking figures, which he calls ficelles, who serve several purposes quite necessary for dramatizing the restricted point of view story. First of all, these two Waymarsh and Maria Gostrey, portray in objective form the opposite pulls in Strether's nature--a relationship which Strether is aware of. Waymarsh, dyspeptic, harsh, but nevertheless generous and loyal, is his New England conscience and prudence; Maria

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[1]James, The Ambassadors, p. 6.

Gostrey, though a compatriot too, represents the more subtly civilizing forces that are to appeal so to his starved imagination. In the second place, they serve as reflectors of his "downfall" or "progress," depending on which one is reflecting. And in the third place they function as confidants, especially Maria, both giving and receiving information and impressions. James says of Maria that she is positively for the benefit of the reader, and indeed she does provide light to clear up some of Strether's bewilderments, which, as a matter of point of view, have become the reader's bewilderments too. Strether changes, grows, and expands beneath our scrutiny in the novel, and his original condition plus the changes are adequately provided for in these two and other reflectors.

Strether becomes clear for the reader in the first few paragraphs of the book as a man arriving in Europe, wanting to take a "draught" of it and enjoying such a consciousness of personal freedom that he is relieved when his friend Waymarsh neither meets him nor shows up immediately at the hotel. In the sense of this new freedom Strether becomes acquainted with Maria Gostrey, and the light of her astute but kindly questions reveals one side of his double consciousness.

When Strether keeps checking his watch on a sightseeing stroll in Chester, Maria comments:

> "You're doing something that you think not right." It so touched the place that he quite changed color, and his laugh was almost awkward. "Am I enjoying it as much as <u>that</u>?"

> "You're not enjoying it, I think, so much as you ought."
> "I see"--he appeared thoughtfully to agree. "Great is my privilege."
> "Oh, it's not your privilege! It has nothing to do with me. It has to do with yourself. Your failure's general."
> "Ah, there you are!" he laughed. "It's the failure of Woollett. That's general."
> "The failure to enjoy," Miss Gostrey explained, "is what I mean."
> "Precisely. Woollett isn't sure it ought to enjoy. If it were it would. But it hasn't, poor thing," Strether continued, "any one to show it how. It's not like me. I have somebody."[1]

Strether has given away the pressure of the sense of duty, the suspicion of any leisure, the obsession of "something else than the thing of the moment"[2] which is the imprint of his New England way. He admits his failure, and, Miss Gostrey responds to his appeal to make this attitude impossible to him with:

> "Is it really an 'order' from you?--that I shall take the job? Will you give yourself up?"
> Poor Strether heaved his sigh. "If I only could! But, that's the deuce of it--that I never can. No--I can't."
> She was not, however, discouraged. "But you desire to, at least!"
> "Oh, unspeakably!"[3]

Strether and the Unfolding Action

Thus Strether is launched upon dangerous water, leaving behind, he hopes, some of his Woollett baggage. The strong side of his double consciousness, however, has the

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[1] Ibid., p. 12. [2] Ibid., p. 14.

[3] Ibid., p. 14.

support of Mrs. Newsome's letters, Mr. Waymarsh's jogging reminders, and his own habit of conscientiousness. The conflict has sharpened to such a point of discomfort for Strether by the evening when the changed Chad enters their box that he delivers the family message with a consciousness that he may be acting like a fool. And at the same time that Strether feels his ineptness he observes the new quality in Chad, which made the first scene between them easy for Chad and so disconcerting to Strether.

> Chad was brown and thick and strong, and, of old, Chad had been rough. Was all the difference therefore that he was actually smooth? Possibly; for that he <u>was</u> smooth was as marked as in the taste of a sauce or in the rub of a hand. The effect of it was general--it had retouched his features, drawn them with a cleaner line. It had cleared his eyes and settled his color and polished his fine square teeth--the main ornament of his face; and at the same time that it had given him a form and a surface, almost a design, it had toned his voice, established his accent, encouraged his smile to more play and his other motions to less. He had formerly, with a great deal of action, expressed very little; and he now expressed whatever was necessary with almost none at all. It was as if, in short, he had really, copious perhaps, but shapeless, been put into a firm mould and turned successfully out.[1]

With this new Chad, this "irreducible young pagan"[2] as Strether mentally describes him, Strether can scarecely deal without putting himself in awkward positions. When he admits that Woollett had thought Chad could only be kept from coming home by some woman Chad responds.

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 104. [2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 107.

> "I must say then you show a low mind!"
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> It so fell in, unhappily for Strether, with that reflection of his own prompted in him by the pleasant air of the Boulevard Malesherbes, that its disconcerting force was rather unfairly great. . . . Chad had at any rate pulled his visitor up; he had even pulled up his admirable mother; he had absolutely, by a turn of the wrist and a jerk of the far-flung noose, pulled up, in a bunch, Woollett browsing in its pride.[1]

Strether's honesty which impelled him to straight, direct dealing was somehow too blunt a weapon for the contest that now begins to develop. He is thrown off guard by Chad's liking him and treating him very much like a distinguished visitor. He can only learn so much from Miss Barrace with her ironic, "Ah, ah, ah!" when he questions too closely; and little Bilham also, likeable as Strether finds him, has his evasions. Maria Gostrey enlightens the scene until after the Sunday afternoon in Gloriani's garden when she discovers that the women in Chad's life are Mme. de Vionnet and her daughter. Then Maria leaves Paris, and Strether can only wonder about her real reason for doing so.

The society that has caught up Strether and Waymarsh with Chad's generous supervision is meantime producing its impression and making its appeal to the repressed aesthetic and imaginative nature that was just as genuine a part of Strether as his New England heritage. He shows the reader an appreciative sense of what was good in Chad's apartment "a charming place; full of beautiful and valuable things"[2] and a

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 110. [2] *Ibid.*

discriminating awareness that Miss Gostrey's compact quarters were "the innermost nook of the shrine"[1] for beautiful things. He forces his reluctant conscience along with him into many enjoyable scenes--even to a luncheon in public with Mme. de Vionnet. He relaxes his vigil under the seduction of old beauty, old gardens, objects of art, and charming manners, trying always to translate the ripe "goodness" which he finds in Chad and his "virtuous" attachment into letters to Mrs. Newsome.

All these adjustments to impression are given direct to the reader because he receives them "fresh" just as Strether does. And they interest the reader precisely because the sensitive mind of the narrator has perceived the very feel of his new experiences, always legitimately assisted by the style of the author. The two examples below display this quality of the <u>feel</u> of his experience. The first one refers to the days of Chad's entertainment for Strether and Waymarsh. The image carries its own humor which helps both in giving the reader an impression of the experience and an impression of the mind that thinks in these terms:

> Waymarsh himself, for the occasion, was drawn into the eddy; it absolutely, though but temporarily, swallowed him down, and there were days when Strether seemed to bump against him as a sinking swimmer might brush a submarine object. The fathomless medium held them--Chad's manner was the fathomless medium and our friends felt as if they passed each other, in their

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 82.

> deep immersion, with the round, impersonal eye of silent fish.[1]

This second example is Strether's impression of Mme. de Vionnet's Paris residence.

> The general result of this was something for which he had no name, on the spot, quite ready, but something he would have come nearest to naming in speaking of it as the air of supreme respectability, the consciousness, small, still, reserved, but none the less distinct and diffused, of private honor. The air of supreme respectability--that was a strange blank wall for his adventure to have brought him to break his nose against. It had in fact, as he was now aware, filled all the approaches, hovered in the court as he passed, hung on the staircase as he mounted, sounded in the grave rumble of the old bell, as little electric as possible, of which Chad, at the door, had pulled the ancient but neatly-kept tassel; it formed, in short, the clearest medium of its particular kind that he had ever breathed.[2]

The irony of finding so pervasive an air of respectability in the drawing-room of Chad's "influence" was not lost upon Strether, whose inward comment on his own presence in this place was to think of himself as <u>brazen</u>.

The tide to whose centripetal action Strether has, with recurrent misgivings, surrendered himself reaches its full in the scene in Gloriani's garden where Strether, introduced to the world of the great and finding it <u>good</u>, utters to little Bilham his trust in the personal freedom vividly portrayed on every side in his Parisian experiences:

> Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that, what have you had? This place and these impressions--

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 119. [2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 171.

> mild as you may find them to wind a man up so; all my impressions of Chad and of people I've seen at his place--well, have had their abundant message for me, have just dropped that into my mind. . . . one lives, in fine, as one can. Still, one has the illusion of freedom; therefore, don't be, like me, without the memory of that illusion.[1]

The next morning, however, when Chad puts in an early appearance to breakfast with Strether and reports on the flattering impression ces dames had received of him Strether reasserts to Chad his desire to know where he is and again attempts the direct route to the central fact. In a scene of struggle between Strether's desire to know and Chad's easy urbanity, Strether, trying to avoid the vulgar and yet pin Chad down, asks,

> "Is she bad?"
> "Bad?"--Chad echoed it, but without a shock. "Is that what's implied--?"
> "When relations are good?" Strether felt a little silly, and was even conscious of a foolish laugh, at having it imposed on him to have appeared to speak so. What indeed was he talking about? His stare had relaxed; he looked now all round him. But something in him brought him back, though he still didn't know how quite to turn it. . . . He none the less at last found something. "Is her life without reproach?"
> It struck him, directly he had found it, as pompous and priggish; so much so that he was thankful to Chad for taking it only in the right spirit. . . . "Absolutely without reproach. A beautiful life. Allez donc voir?"[2]

Strether's generosity and growing affection for these people is thus largely appealed to and his suspicions lulled by the admonitions to "make out" for himself, "to trust" them, to "see." There are only occasional notes like that of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 149-150. [2] Ibid., p. 165.

Maria's doubt as to whether Chad is as good as he seems in the scene in which she urges Strether not to be in a hurry to make up his mind, that he will see in time. The fact that he can never put an exact finger on the relation of Chad and Marie keeps a submerged warning bell sounding.

Then comes the day of the shock of the telegram from Mrs. Newsome, presenting its clues to the treachery of Waymarsh and leading directly to Strether's failure as ambassador. He advises Chad to stay, to make the family come over and see for themselves and Chad's mother how rich and right Chad's present course is. This constitutes Strether's first costly step of faith, and the second is taken when in Sarah's presence he allows himself to be pulled into Mme. de Vionnet's slowly sinking boat. Though on the periphery of Chad's splendid activities in showing to the family what Strether had learned to value, Strether too soon senses that Sarah Pocock retains within an impermeable shell her own tight world of impressions. After Waymarsh's futile warning before the interview with Sarah, Strether is not surprised to learn that to her the "wonderful" Chad seemed "hideous." Strether has failed as ambassador.

The full catastrophe only awaits the predestined encounter on the perfect day when he seems to himself to be realizing the scenery of <u>the</u> Lambinet, the work of art he had almost purchased so long ago at a Boston art dealer's. In the midst of his feast for his imagination, he penetrates to

the central mystery. This knowledge--which he recognizes he may actually have veiled from himself--ends the centripetal flow of the action and flings the characters out from center with centrifugal force.

Strether's failure becomes general frustration as the twelfth book discloses. Mme. de Vionnet must fact that which she feared--the desertion of Chad; Chad hollowly promises Strether that he is not tired of her, but his excitement at the tremendous prospects in advertising betrays him; and Strether determines that personally he will reap no benefit from his crash nor cherish anything so vulgar as vindictiveness for wrongs suffered.

The Total Effect

The Ambassadors is an outstanding example of what can best be accomplished by a fallible narrator in a novel. This success is not just the success of a particular technique in point of view but rather of a success in determining a technique exactly suited to a particular subject. The Ambassadors did not, in the process of its evolution from germ to finished product, become other than its original subject because of the transforming power of the central consciousness, as Wayne Booth asserts happened in The Spoils of Poynton.

In Booth's section "The Development from Flawed Reflector into Subject" he says:

> Because we have his prefaces and notebooks, it is possible to trace in many of James's stories a

> process undoubtedly frequent in other modern authors but usually more deeply hidden: the transformation of a "subject," through the development of a "reflector" not important in the original conception, into something quite different.[1]

Booth then proceeds to illustrate with a number of James's fictions, including The Spoils.

> His account in the Notebooks of the transformation of The Spoils of Poynton resulting from the use of Fleda Vetch as reflector is the most complete we have of this process. The original idea for this fine novel centered in a squabble between a mother and son over the inheritance "of a large place filled with valuable things." But in his search for a "centre" James discovers Fleda Vetch, who, just because she is a person of character, becomes a "main agent"; it is, as he says in the Preface, her "concentrated feeling" about everything which is his final "subject"; "the affirmation and the penetration" of her "understanding" is what makes his final "action," his "story."[2]

But in The Ambassadors the germ itself suggests the story of a flawed consciousness, and Strether from the beginning was the possessor of this hidden hurt. He was the best center from which to experience the process of vision since this was distinctly an inside story. To realize to what an extent both subject and theme are tied to his inner change we note that the most devastating irony of the whole book is the fact that as far as the little drama which Strether observes and participates in is concerned, the march of events would probably have proceeded to a more or less inevitable outcome without Strether. Early in the novel Maria guesses that Chad may be attempting to "sink" his companion; Chad himself

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[1] Booth, p. 340. [2] Ibid., p. 345.

pleads only for some time to break away; and Mme. de Vionnet admits in her last interview with Strether that she had feared it all along. The only thing which really happens then, happens to Strether with his two friends, Waymarsh and Maria, standing by.

Unlike Coverdale, who under the stress of the tragic events of his summer at Blithedale sinks his idealism in disillusionment, Strether who has endured great personal loss after his summer of Paris, nevertheless, sustains a Job-like integrity. Perhaps because of this, The Ambassadors balances between comic and tragic tones. How carefully James walks a tight rope to avoid the vulgar connotations that Strether has had merely a middle-aged fling! He lets Waymarsh carry off that comic burden, with Strether this time standing by in tenderly amused approval. Tragedy too is avoided, but here we must rely on Strether's verbal testimony. James does not choose to expose Strether's passion for the admirable lady of Woollett in terms other than what Strether confesses to Chad and Maria Gostrey. The suffering is muted by substituting dialogue for thought and by revealing clarity of vision in place of self-pity in the dialogue.

This ability to sublimate the purely personal, as Strether finds it coming home to him what the cost of "living all you can" means for him, is best illustrated in the final pages when Maria inquires,

> "Is there anything he [Chad] can do that would make you patch it up?"
>
> "With Mrs. Newsome?"
>
> Her assent, as if she had had a delicacy about sounding the name, was only in her fact; but she added with it: "Or is there anything he can do that would make her try it?"
>
> "To patch it up with me?" His answer came at last in a conclusive headshake. "There's nothing anyone can do. It's over. Over for both of us."
>
> Maria wondered, seemed a little to doubt. "Are you so sure for her?"
>
> "Oh yes--sure now. Too much has happened. I'm different for her."
>
> She took it in then, drawing a deeper breath. "I see. So that as she's different for you--"
>
> "Ah, but," he interrupted, "she's not." And as Miss Gostrey wondered again: "She's the same. She's more than ever the same. But I do what I didn't before--I see her."
>
> He spoke gravely and as if responsibly--since he had to pronounce; and the effect of it was slightly solemn, so that she simply exclaimed "Oh!"[1]

Such understatement does not, of course, relieve the sympathy we feel for Strether. It probably heightens it more than extravagant emotion would, leaving us to estimate the depth of feeling below the modest account of it. But the ironies of the outcome, which have so keen a receptor in Strether, keep pulling both Strether and the reader back from the tragic abyss. The little image of his progress which occurs to him during this last visit with Maria expresses clearly his feeling of the unimportance of his adventure.

They were recalling humorously the events of the past summer and he remembered that in prospect the two of them had wondered where he would "come out."

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[1] James, The Ambassadors, p. 429.

> They had so assumed it was to be in some wonderful place--they had thought of it as so very much out. Well that was doubtless what it had been--since he had come out just there. He was out, in truth, as far as it was possible to be, and must now rather bethink himself of getting in again. He found on the spot the image of his recent history; he was like one of the figures of the old clock at Berne. They came out, on one side, at their hour, jigged along their little course in the public eye, and went in on the other side. He too had jigged his little course--him too a modest retreat awaited.[1]

The reader, however, in collusion, I believe, with the author sees more in Strether's adventure than the little jigging movement into a strange atmosphere and back again of Strether's image. The something more lies in the sympathetic advance the reader has made with Strether as he moved step by step receiving his rich impressions until with great courage and entirely to his own hurt he reversed his ambassador's message of "Come home!" to "Stay here." At the moment of this reversal of the message entrusted to Strether by Mrs. Newsome, Chad asked him, "But what, my dear man, . . . does it all lead to for you?" To which Strether gave laughing answer,

> "Well, to my having a certitude that has been tested--that has passed through the fire. But oh," he couldn't help breaking out, "if within my first month here you had been willing to move with me--!"
> "Well?" said Chad, while he paused as if for weight of thought.
> "Well, we should have been over there by now."
> "Ah, but you wouldn't have had your fun!"
> "I should have had a month of it; and I'm having it now, if you want to know," Strether continued, "enough to last me for the rest of my days."[2]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., pp. 224-225.

The reader is aware that Strether had--for a very brief period, to be sure--realized a rich experience in living; that he had indeed "let go" and allowed his imagination to direct him. Though "a belated man of the world" he is one for a single unforgettable summer. The metaphors for the process suggest his being immersed and swimming in a strange new world, and the centripetal action of the incidents suggest the moving of a swimmer being drawn down into a whirlpool--with the difference from Poe's maelstrom that this whirlpool seems warm, pleasant, slow-moving, and only at secret moments terrifying. After the reversal, when the centrifugal action sets in, he is indeed cast up and out, his "everything" which he had risked completely wrecked. But (and this is the touch with the Jamesian difference) Strether is not the same man; the capacities in him, which a lifelong habit had almost atrophied, have been stretched and exercised. Strether had gained despite any renunciation he feels is necessary to keep him "right." His "rich impressions" and his new way of seeing are a part of him now.

Not the least of the ironies of the situation is the way at the conclusion the old Woollett grain shows through. The most Paris could do for this man was to bring out a latent sympathy and a new insight; it couldn't trifle with the essence. When Strether exhorts Chad never to leave Maria it is in terms of duty.

"You owe her everything--very much more than she can ever owe you. You've in other words duties to her, of the most positive sort; and I don't see what other duties--as the others are presented to you--can be held to go before them"[1]

When Strether has his parting interview with Maria he is setting out for himself a similar path of self-denial and duty. To her question concerning his future:

> "Shall you make anything so good--?" . . .
> He had sufficiently understood. "So good as this place at this moment? So good as what you make of everything you touch?" He took a minute to say, for, really and truly, what stood about him there in her offer--which was as the offer of exquisite service, of lightened care, for the rest of his days--might well have tempted. It built him softly round, it roofed him warmly over, it rested, all so firm, on selection. And what ruled selection was beauty and knowledge. It was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things; yet, none the less, so far as they made his opportunity, they made it only for a moment. She would moreover understand--she always understood. . . .
> "I know. I know. But all the same I must go." He had got it at last. "To be right."
> "To be right?"
> She had echoed it in vague deprecation, but he felt it already clear for her. "That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself."
> She thought. "But, with your wonderful impressions, you'll have got a great deal."
> "A great deal"--he agreed. "But nothing like you. It's you who would make me wrong!"
> Honest and fine, she couldn't pretend she didn't see it. Still, she could pretend a little. "But why should you be so dreadfully right?"
> "That's the way that--if I must go--you yourself would be the first to want me. And I can't do anything else."
> So then she had to take it, though still with her defeated protest. "It isn't so much your <u>being</u> 'right'--it's your horrible sharp eye for what makes you so."

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 423.

> "Oh, but you're just as bad yourself. You can't resist me when I point that out."
> She sighed it at last all comically, all tragically, away. "I can't indeed resist you."
> "Then, there we are!" said Strether.[1]

Maria, we remember, is the special aid for the reader of The Ambassadors, and we, like her, understand that Strether had to be right and the right course would take him back to Woollett to see what he could make of the rest of life. Strether's reminding Maria that she too has a sharp eye for what is right recalls for us James's description of the likeness between the two of them at the occasion of their second meeting. The view of Maria which begins easily with an observation of Strether's slips then just as easily into an observation by an imagined spectator.

> She affected him as almost insolently young; but an easily carried five-and-thirty could still do that. She was, however, like himself, marked and wan; only it naturally couldn't have been known to him how much a spectator looking from one to the other might have discerned that they had in common. It would not for such a spectator have been altogether insupposable that, each so finely brown and so sharply spare, each confessing so to dents of surface and aids to sight, to a disproportionate nose and a head delicately or grossly grizzled, they might have been brother and sister.[2]

This likeness is an additional hint to the reader that Maria's understanding of Strether from beginning to end can be largely trusted to supplement Strether's understanding of the situation and himself for our interpretation and sense of the theme.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 431-432. [2] Ibid., p. 8.

Wayne Booth in his excellent chapters on the unreliable narrator has rightly estimated that there is a price to be paid in using such a point of view. Whether it is too high or not, probably should be decided on the evidence of the individual novel in which it is used. He lists as one element in this price the confusion of distance. Booth brings out the importance of understanding the relationship between the author and the one whom he deputizes and correctly demonstrates that the confusion as to the distance between them is no new problem. Analyzing the source of the difficulty, he suggests (1) that there is lack of warning that irony is at work; (2) that there is an excessive complexity, subtlety, or privacy of the norms to be inferred; (3) and that the vivid psychological realism with "a prolonged intimate view of a character works against our judgment."[1]

Each of these three sources of difficulty has become apparent in novels and stories by James; and Booth has presented a fair case for his examples, "The Turn of the Screw," "The Liar," and "The Aspern Papers," and mentioned an increasing number of critics who argue for diametrically opposed views of the narrators.

If we omit the irresponsible critics who insist on their readings despite the evidence both of work and the author, we still must answer for any unnecessary confusion

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[1]Booth, p. 322.

due to the sources of such ambiguity as summarized by Booth above. Examining The Ambassadors first on the basis of the warning that irony is at work, we center our attention on the constant play of Strether's mind on this aspect of the situation. He is accused of being possessed of too much imagination, but never of a lack of sensitiveness. Strether is neither young nor proudly egotistical, and his smiles are often wry ones. I believe that careful readers are brought face to face not only with the larger irony of the total situation but also with the play of subtle ironies throughout the novel because of the character of Strether's consciousness.

As for the second source of ambiguity the one due to the complexity, subtlety, or privacy of the norms to be inferred, James can surely be cleared of this charge in The Ambassadors. First of all, James has played fair with both sets of norms, for there are two of them set up against each other as there are in most of his novels which deal with his international theme. The norms or standards of Woollett are not stressed as much as the norms of the Parisian world, but isn't that solely because Strether has had fifty-five years of solid living according to these standards behind him? He is their best product. Incidentally, the audience of readers can, for the most part, be trusted to know these norms. And the characters who dramatize this set of standards are treated fairly with little of satire or caricature--the absent Mrs. Newsome, the blundering but loyal Waymarsh, Sarah and Jim

Pocock, and indeed most sympathetically Mamie Pocock. Maria too both knows and understands Woollett; but she quite naturally fails of any enthusiasm for Mrs. Newsome or Sarah, who is her mother's deputy. Woollett standards have their final inning with Strether, and even when they tend to pale out before Chad's and Marie's charm and magnificence, they are always clearly there.

The norms of the world in which beauty and knowledge are prized above everything are presented with an acceleration of seductive charm until the climax. This rising perception of beauty begins in Strether's consciousness first with the sense of a personal freedom new to him; then it grows in interests of dress and amusement; next it revels in scenes of beauty in England and France, mixed in with nostalgic regrets about the yellow paper-covered books of his memory; and finally Strether's awareness takes in the beauty of mannered social relationships and occasions staged just for enjoyment. This world, too, is clearly dramatized through characters--little Bilham, Chad, Miss Barrace, Marie de Vionnet and her _jeune fille_, and, representative of the great within it, Gloriani. And it is presented without judgment except for that of Sarah Pocock who asserts to Strether that she finds his "wonderful" Chad "hideous." Uncertainty as to what norms are to be inferred in _The Ambassadors_ is not a source of difficulty.

The third source of ambiguity in a fiction told by a fallible narrator is so involved in this particular point of view that Strether, along with the others, may be at fault. Booth maintains that the vivid psychological realism which is, as we have seen, one of the strong advantages of the technique is also a trap for the judgment of the reader. Since the reader sees only the one point of view, can he supply the corrective balance? For those who are sold on art for art's sake, this might seen irrelevant. For those who wish to see not only life but also art steadily and whole, it can be an important consideration.

Booth has demonstrated, using Jane Austen's Emma, how beautifully the corrective is supplied in that novel by the author's brief comments, Knightley's concerned criticisms to Emma, and the character contrast in Jane Fairfax. Austen has by very economical comment and effective dramatic means managed to center her action from the point of view of a heroine whose serious flaws we see at the same time that we sympathize with her and rejoice to see her humiliated for her moment of truth.

Summary

The question of the other side of Strether's consciousness is an interesting one. It does make a difference as to whether he saw truly or whether he was seduced, as Chad had possibly been before him to accept an enchantress as a

woman whose "life was beyond reproach." What flaw is there in Strether and did James provide for a corrective within the story?

Seeing that Strether came out with just exactly nothing to show for his adventure except a greater knowledge of both good and evil (and he seemed to discover both in both worlds), and realizing that this draws us thematically toward the myth of the garden, we wonder if we arrived here without warning or cues. The reader is very much with Strether from almost the first moment; James has realized in him one of his most sympathetic characters, and it is only after reading the book that the reader can hope to look back and possibly see behind Strether.

There seem to be some quite definite clues for Strether's "fall" to be discovered by a backward glance. We don't have to consider his Quixotic errand, the ease of his innocent friendship with Maria, his loyalty to Waymarsh, and his cautious acceptance of this bright "Old World" long to realise that in Strether we have an example of the American idealist, one who has always played the game more to his own hurt than to anyone else's.

His flaw is an excess of imagination, an imagination which had always had to be repressed, which had always had very meager materials to work upon. Exposed to the yeasty excitement of beauty unmeasured and provocative knowledge, his imagination expands and overflows, enabling him to add

glamor to what was already excitingly glamorous. It blinds him to some of the truth even as he has the joy of seeing many things more clearly than ever before. In Gloriani's garden his fullest sense of freedom causes him to utter his "Live all you can" to Bilham, and this same episode introduces him to Maria, the woman in Chad's life. He imagines all sorts of "virtuous" attachments--Chad must be wanting to marry the daughter or (when that idea is no longer tenable) perhaps the beautiful friendship is a platonic family relationship.

It is a wilful blindness as he later sees. Then after the quiet beauty of his day in the country, Strether is treated to the "lie" which cannot cover the knowledge he was avoiding. Significantly, this one time he fears to go to Maria. He recognizes the inevitability of her question, "What on earth--that's what I want to know now--had you then supposed?"[1] He realized with sickness that all along he had "dressed the possibility of intimacy between Marie and Chad in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll."[2] His longing to transfer the benefit of the doubt to so comely an association as that of Marie and Chad, aided, no doubt, by Marie's appeal to all his chivalrous instincts to "save her," had precipitated Strether into the fray with a blind faith. Only later does he speculate that in dealing with women one is walking on water. Then, to demonstrate the rightness of

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[1]James, The Ambassadors, p. 389. [2]Ibid.

having acted in good faith Strether finds his final renunciation his only course.

Are there other possible interpretations of Strether's action than his own in the novel? There are, of course, but they are presented clearly enough and meditated upon so thoroughly in Strether's fine intelligence that they are refuted and rendered invalid as the story progresses. However, it is important to notice in this connection that actually Strether's interpretation, his point of view, changes from first to last until his final assessing of where he had "come out." And in these changes he has run a gamut of almost all of those represented by other characters so that, in as far as it is possible, the reader is willing to accept Strether's final judgment. Like Don Quixote, Strether burns his books. In his final interview with Maria Gostrey, when she asks concerning Chad's absence in London:

> "And is your idea . . . that there was some other woman in London?"
>
> "Yes. No. That is I have no ideas. I'm afraid of them. I've done with them."[1]

The entire action of The Ambassadors like that of The Blithedale Romance has taken place in a summer season passing from springtime with its illusory promises to the fall with its disappointing and even tragic harvest. The unreliable narrators of both novels, one a young man and one an older man, have had lessons to learn about the nature of reality

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[1] Ibid., p. 431.

and were endowed by their creators with the sensitive intelligence necessary for recording their progress. There is a wholeness in Strether which makes him more satisfying as a protagonist and a generous maturity which enable him to turn his face away from recrimination or vindictiveness. As fallible narrators they are both examples, regardless of the dangers of ambiguity (greater in James because of the greater emphasis on dramatizing as opposed to summarizing statement such as Coverdale makes in the final chapter of Blithedale), of the possibilities of the narrator's being the dramatization of the theme. The drama in both novels is an inner one despite the interest both narrators arouse in their readers for the play which they are watching, and the most important outcome is what happens to the American idealist who bravely, but not without a sense of his own ridiculousness, charges into battle against the Protean Giant Wrong. He may lose the fight; he may lose the fair lady; nevertheless, the victory or defeat lies in those impalpable changes in the human spirit, and who could portray those more convincingly than our unreliable narrators?

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

At the very beginning of this concluding chapter we need to state that the emphasis on the fallible or unreliable narrator provided by this dissertation is in no way to be interpreted as an attempt to elevate one point of view as the right one for all fictions. As our study has indicated, for example, with Clara in Wieland, this point of view can result in very awkward handling of structure and is always possessed of certain disadvantages. Our consideration has omitted much that is good in nineteenth century American fiction--such books as The Leatherstocking Tales, The Yemassee, and Nick of the Woods--precisely because they were not told by fallible narrators. The preference of authors for materials bordering on the historical leads them to choose sweeping and panoramic points of view rather than restricted ones, and probably rightly so.

As Booth reminds us, the older novelistic techniques are by no means dead; they are constantly reappearing in new guises. "The novel comes into existence as something

communicable, and the means of communication are not shameful intrusions unless they are made with shameful ineptitude."[1]

With this caveat in mind, we proceed then to our conclusions. First, we shall summarize the characteristics of each division of narrators studied. Then we shall advance the more general conclusions drawn from our study concerning the effect of choosing the fallible narrator upon the story as a whole.

With Irving, we discover only the rudimentary beginnings of fallible narrators, created personages--Jonathon Oldstyle, Diedrich Knickerbocker, Geoffrey Crayon, and Fray Agapida--who served him for the purposes of satire, hoax, or desirable anonymity. Somehow once the story is under way the style is indubitably Irving's, and the "heard voice" is that of the genial author himself, or rather, his "second self." The dramatic quality of his best work is due to his skill with the dramatic particularities in presenting picture.

Separated from their authors by recognizable physical, emotional, social, and moral differences and having an existence as fictional characters within their own fictions, the group of narrator-observers represents a further step toward the dramatized narrator. They are usually portrayed as visitors or travellers from one social group to another, thus

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[1]Booth, p. 397.

accounting for their interest in the customs and mores of the group.

Kennedy invented a sympathetic observer of manners for Swallow Barn in Mark Littleton. His invention, however, advances very little beyond the character of the Addisonian essays, serving the same function of running commentary within the framework of a loose narrative. But the emphasis is more upon narrative and scene than in the essays, and his narrator's impressions of the Old Dominion display the fallible narrator's advantage of freshness and an air of authenticity.

With Cooper we have fully dramatized narrators in the three young men of the Littlepage manuscripts: Corny Littlepage, his son Mordaunt Littlepage, and Mordaunt's grandson, Hugh Littlepage. Cooper's narrators serve him well as observers of manners, giving the reader excellent vignettes of life in city, country, and frontier in New York state. The exuberance of the youth of these narrators, especially the first two, lends a charm to their adventures. These narrators are participants as well as observers of the stories they relate; Corny and his friend Dirck are the heroes of Satanstoe. As participants, Cooper's narrators display some of the disadvantages of the restricted point of view. They are so handsome, so proud of the family which dotes on them, and so full of good works that to the modern reader they seem smug. Cooper is not unaware of his danger here, and in

Satanstoe in particular he avoids it by the use of reflectors. As his propaganda purposes sway him more strongly in the last of his trilogy, Redskins, the author's use of his narrator degenerates. Hugh Littlepage is less a character than a mouthpiece. The distance between author and narrator is never completely closed, however; Hugh behaves with more tolerance and good humor when confronted with landlord problems than his author did under similar provocation.

One of the most interesting observations to be drawn from Cooper's use of these fallible narrators is that the fine social and economic criticism which the books convey (quite distinct from the preachment in them) grows out of the consistency and truthfulness of the point of view. It exists as one example of what Schorer calls "discovery." Cooper's own integrity and respect both for his art and for the truth resulted in a prophetic portrayal of meaning which overshadows the anti-Rent struggle. The rhetoric of both sides, faithfully observed and reported by his young men, outlines an important conflict inherent in American democracy.

The next group of narrators, the explorers of emotional depths, dramatizes the problem of man in relation to the universe he finds himself in--the search for significant relationship between the terrors of the world within him and those of the world without. The portrayal is subjectively vivid, whether expository and descriptive as in Wieland, pictorial as in "Cask of Amontillado," allegorical as in

"William Wilson," or pictorial and symbolical as in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Benito Cereno. The narrators are commonly portrayed as sinking physically into swooning faints, as succumbing mentally and/or morally to great stress, or as inflicting demoniac terrors upon others. Since the forces represented as hostile to man are great, the outcome is most frequently defeat in the form of madness, crime, or dissolution. The exceptions, though, are interesting too because they portray resources of character in man, reserves of mental and emotional power which enable the protagonists to endure as in Clara of Wieland, in the fisherman of "The Descent into the Maelstrom," or in the character of "The Pit and the Pendulum," or, even more strangely, in Ligeia of the story by that name. Fortuitous circumstances, as inexplicable as the "terrors," also enable men to overcome the unknown hostility; the most important example here is found in Benito Cereno, in which a combination of circumstances plus the painful innocence of Captain Delano, leads Benito Cereno to a single heroic action that produces ambiguous victory. Mystery and tragedy are implicit in the world of the investigators of the "terror of the soul."

The narrators as youth have lessons to learn about life, and they are usually impatient of any restraint which keeps them in check or holds them in the social world of routine, cleanliness, and order--the mother's world. So they venture forth upon a pilgrimage, the archetypal journey with

the goal of discovery. What they learn is usually a surprise and not at all what they are seeking. The necessary condition for their venture, which is their freedom, is frequently confused by the youth with the idea of absolute freedom as a goal. Nevertheless, they either survive and mature or give in to self destruction.

The restricted narrator is a natural choice for such subject matter as the special advantages inherent in the point of view--vividness, sympathetic identification, play of ironies, and the privilege of gradual discovery--operate in support of the material to be represented. When these special advantages are fully realized aesthetically as they are in Huck, they can be the means for the creation of a whole that is, in gestalt terms, more than the sum of its parts. As Albert E. Stone, Jr. states:

> Huckleberry Finn derives much of its unique power as pastoral poem from "the immediacy of the heard voice" of a boy. The same is true of the novel's achievement as social history. As Twain makes Huck the alembic through which is filtered a series of impressions of the natural world, so in similar fashion Huck's innocent eye and his unspoken audible voice are made delicate instruments for registering social truth.[1]

But when the means inherent in this point of view fail of complete aesthetic realization as they do in Pym where the "heard voice" becomes a mixture of Pym, the adolescent, the older Pym, and Poe, the surrogate author, the

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[1] Albert E. Stone, Jr., The Innocent Eye: Childhood in Mark Twain's Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 144.

materials fall into separate unassimilated blocks, and the whole suffers in spite of the brilliance and suggested possibilities of the parts. The choice of a good fallible narrator then will not of itself make a good novel, though it can make the difference between good and excellent when consistently realized with all its advantages.

The narrators as youths show little tendency toward long-range objectives though they do act with vigor when faced with obstacles. Usually in their drifting progress they are accompanied by an older male who serves as a combination of brother and father. With Huck, Jim is the comrade and father, in spite of his inferior social status, which Huck quite took for granted at the beginning. Pym has two friends, Augustus and Dirk Peters. Combined, they provide an active and protective force during his ordeals until that point at the climax when only the "Pym-self" alertly regards the gigantic white curtain they are drifting toward in deepening darkness. These older figures, besides being guides and reflectors, also represent the closeness of youth to the more elemental and primitive side of society.

The most challenging and complex function of the fallible narrator is the use of the narrator himself as the thematic subject. In The Blithedale Romance and The Ambassadors, Coverdale and Strether have the stories of others to tell to the reader, but the real story consists of their own relationship to the dramas they watch and present to us and

what happens to them during the action and their presentation of this action. Both narrators belong to what Booth classifies as un-self-conscious narrators (although he uses only the opposite term "self-conscious"), those "who seem unaware that they are writing, thinking, speaking, or 'reflecting' a literary work."[1] In the strictest sense of the word, Strether would be called the "center of consciousness" for The Ambassadors, but he is an example of the restricted point of view for the fallible narrator in the third person as defined in our introduction.

Though narrators of this type may seem unaware of their writing chores, they are characterized by a high degree of sensitive awareness of all other relations. To have these narrators as unaware as the youths or the obtuse Captain Delano would defeat their value as thematic center, for, in addition to being witnesses and protagonists, Coverdale and Strether provide a great deal of commentary. It may not be omniscient in the sense that an author's comment would be, but it is thoughtful and intelligent and contains what the reader needs to know at that time. Coverdale has less help and correction from other characters in his story, not possessing Strether's confidants and reflectors, and so must rely more on authoritative statement like that of his last chapter in The Blithedale Romance. This method might seem

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[1] Booth, p. 155.

less ambiguous, but for the possibility of a measure of unreliability in what a man reveals concerning himself.

Because Coverdale and Strether are both American idealists they demonstrate convincingly how mettle is tested in the eternal conflict between what is and what should be. The end is usually ironic tragedy or ironic comedy, for with the certain disillusionment comes self revaluation, which reveals that vaunted strength is often weakness and that a despised weakness is salvaging strength. The peculiar advantage of the fallible narrator for this type of discovery lies in the continuous record of developing experience from within the character himself. Since the story possesses an "inside" theme, an "inside" view is most appropriate.

Advancing now to conclusions which can be supported among our fallible narrators, we consider the transforming power of the narrator upon the whole of the fiction in which he occurs. Second only to the author himself, this figure interposed between us and the story definitely affects its style, pattern or form, and the evaluation of the work.

Assuming that our authors are not going to deliberately throw the dust of confusion and ambiguities into the eyes of the reader because <u>life</u> is like that (a fairly safe assumption in our nineteenth century fiction), we can state as axiomatic that the narrator is at his most effective when he is a fully dramatized character in his own right, when he can be realized "in the round." Such characters as Clara

Wieland, The Littlepage sons, Captain Delano, Huckleberry Finn, Miles Coverdale, and Strether are included among dramatically realized narrators. Although short story narrators are necessarily more sketchy in their outlines, Poe's narrators, Wilson, Montresor, Hans Pfaall, and the unnamed "I" of such tales as "The Black Cat," "The Gold Bug," "Morella," and "The Fall of the House of Usher" are likewise among our fallible narrators as our examination in Chapter IV indicated.

Following the same assumption, we state as another axiom that the fallible narrator functions best when there are proper clues for the careful reader as to the reliability of this narrator, especially with regard to his distance from the author, within the fiction itself. These corrections can be provided in several ways--by authoritative characters such as Clara Wieland's doctor uncle, Strether's confidante Maria Gostrey, and the older Pym; by obvious ironic distance as with some of Poe's narrators, Montresor, the "I" of "Berenice" and "The Black Cat," Huckleberry Finn, or Captain Delano; or by authorial comment which both Melville and James skilfully avail themselves of. It is, of course, no secret that the practice of James and the principles of James's theory as abstracted by some Jamesians are at variance. Booth points out that James has been accused of violating standards which he probably never sought to follow:

> One recent critic contrasts James's practice in <u>The Ambassadors</u> with Lubbock's description of that practice, and he naturally finds a great many "lapses

> and shifts." Even those "intrusions" which James himself talks about in his Preface can then be quoted against him as evidence of "inconsistency" in pursuing "his struggle, in what he believed to be his finest work, to master the art of his craft." Where James had cited his shifting point of view as evidence that intensity of effect was more important than any rule about being dramatic, the Jamesian can only conclude that James "presumably does not recognize his frequent lapses not only from Strether's point of view but from objective narration as well," and suggest that we can excuse "James the Old Intruder" because he "was still so close to the conventions of nineteenth-century fiction that he could never quite eschew their besetting manners and methods.[1]

The poorest type of corrections for the reliability of the narrator are those made outside of the story itself in the form of footnotes of the editor, as Cooper makes them with his Littlepage manuscripts or in the form of fine print addenda--either preface or appendix--as Poe makes them for A. Gordon Pym.

When we note the effect which the fallible narrator has on style we are brought face to face with one of the disadvantages of the use of this point of view. The story is the impression of an imagined narrator, but whose is the style? One primary fact is inescapable. The author cannot afford to abdicate his control over the style of his work. To do so would be aesthetic suicide. Those poetic descriptions of Huckleberry Finn are not as Huck, an illiterate youngster, would have written them; they contain impressions

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[1] Booth, quoting from John E. Tilford, Jr., "James the Old Intruder," Modern Fiction Studies, IV (Summer, 1958), 157-164.

true to the boy's way of looking, but the ordering, the emphasis, the unity of the details are those of the artist Mark Twain. In spite of the use of the vernacular and the authenticity of the "innocent look" the creative work of Twain is everywhere apparent. Nevertheless, the illusion is intact when the observed details, like those of Huck or of Captain Delano, fit the bias and interest of the observer. Incidentally, as was pointed out concerning Arvin's criticism of Benito Cereno, a style can be criticized unfairly when the point of view narrator is not taken into account. Those authors whose narrators possessed traits of mind similar to their own, Kennedy, Cooper, Hawthorne, James and in some instances, Poe, could most safely walk this plank. But while not making Irving's mistake of being heard only in his own voice, our authors did not succumb to the absurd realism of letting inarticulate narrators completely control the style of their fiction. Between these two extremes lies the transforming effect of the right choice of fallible narrator for the right story. The style must be a happily conceived effort on the part of the author to filter his impressions through the consciousness he had imposed between him and his subject.

Another aspect of the whole which is definitely affected by the fallible narrator is dramatization of the theme. Booth has indicated some of the danger of long identification with the inside view of a single character and how it works

to ensnare reader sympathy. This reader identification with the narrator makes the narrator a powerful exponent of whatever themes the author chooses to present. It is a rare reader who can successfully keep reminding himself that this is only one private impression of this story and that outside of it are all the booming, buzzing contraries. This is especially true when there is a lack of correction within the story or when the narrator occupies a post on the circumference of the story as an observer.

If we list some of the passive-observer narrators who draw no more attention to themselves than a pair of field glasses--the "I" of "The Fall of the House of Usher," of "Morella," of "Murders in the Rue Morgue," or of "The Gold Bug"--we realize that we have not looked <u>at</u> them, only <u>through</u> them. What coloration they may have given the story is the only color we are aware of. How do we know, for example, that Roderick Usher was not attempting the murder of his sister Madeline and that the sinister doctor and perhaps even the narrator were not his accomplices? This is not proposed as serious interpretation of the story, but it suggests an alternate to the impressions of the "I". It demonstrates the fact that in assessing the meaning of any story told by an unreliable narrator, the first task of the critic is to take a careful look at the narrator. The more inconspicuous he seems, the easier it is to overlook the fact that his is only "an impression" of the story. The relation of

protagonist-narrators, who center more of the attention on themselves, to the theme is somewhat more apparent. For the moment a character begins to act, our judgment is wakened to a degree; even here, however, it is easier to slide down the same rhetorical groove with the "inside" character than to retain our evaluative independence. Earlier criticism missed the thematic importance of Coverdale to The Blithedale Romance, perhaps partially because his role is mostly that of passive observer.

The final conclusion to be drawn about the effect of the narrator is that he definitely determines the pattern of the form which the fiction he relates assumes. It is interesting to observe, first, how the fallible narrator restricts the unities of his fiction. Since his consciousness provides the circumference, his experience in space and time provide those unities, and the geometry of his movement gives pattern to the action.

Space at any given moment in the fallible narrator stories is always limited to what one human pair of eyes can sweep over. Pym lashed to the deck in the storm can see only the towering ridges of foam which break regularly over the water-logged brig; Captain Delano's gaze is bewildered by the exotic scene on the deck of the San Dominick; Coverdale strives to surmise the truth behind half-caught glimpses from his vine-hidden perch in the woods or his city apartment window; and the helpless man in the Maelstrom is surrounded by a

whirling wall of water in which the debris rotates downward to destruction. Aside from the range of the imagination of these "seeing eyes," their world in space is a series of small scenes. The panoramic or broad vista is impossible. This space limitation has a narrowing and tightening effect which compensates for its lack of breadth by increasing its sense of immediacy. But we applaud Melville's freedom with his narrator in Moby Dick; those final climactic three days would never reach their grandeur if they had been confined to what Ishmael alone could have seen.

Time too is limited narrowly in the stories we examined. It is interesting to note how often the entire span of time is a single season from spring to approaching winter. This is true in Swallow Barn, The Blithedale Romance, The Ambassadors, and Huckleberry Finn. The actual time of the action presented in terms of the fallible narrator is even shorter in Benito Cereno. In fact, this part of the story takes in only one day, giving it the concentrated unity of a short story, although it seems longer because of the effect of the movement of the narrator, as we shall see. In the short stories, of course, the compression of the time is even more marked with certain exceptions like "William Wilson" and "The Marvellous Journey of Hans Pfaall" which are not characterized by the usual single action of the short story.

It would seem then that, at least among our examples, the closer the novel moves toward dramatic representation of

an action as experienced by one narrator, the closer it comes to the older dramatic unities. This certainly has not been the fashion nor tendency of twentieth century autobiographical novels, however; so we cannot claim that it is inherent in the form.

The story of the fallible narrator inevitably moves as he moves because he carries it shut up in his own consciousness. This gives the narrator the unique privilege of tracing out its pattern in the geometry of his own physical movement. When this physical movement is at the same time symbolical of his mental and spiritual development, as it is in a surprising number of these fictions, we have the most effective organic structure for this type of novel. It actually grows from the teller himself in his act of telling and showing his story.

When the narrator is too close to being a mask to be doffed at pleasure, revealing the author himself, we note an absence of any such pattern as with Irving or Kennedy. When we observe Clara Wieland, our only woman narrator, the erratic pattern of advance upon and flight from danger is, at least partially, obscured by Brown's unfortunate awkwardness with plot. Cooper's young men move from one closed social circle to another and find rest (status, happiness), a temporary resolution of conflict in the fact that these circles of city, country, and frontier have congruent areas within which the manners, mores, and conflicting interests mingle and

compromise. The pattern reveals a young, healthy and developing society.

In Benito Cereno we have a very interesting pattern which helps to account for the general critical complaint about the slowness, almost tiresomeness of the pace of the story. With Captain Delano we have a man of generous impulses whose typical action is the straight undevious line of direct force, but his action is deflected by the impenetrable mystery on board the San Dominick and wanders in a maze, slowly circling in upon itself in confusion in the midst of a dead sea calm. Not until the breeze springs up and he seizes the trumpet of command can he move again with decision. Don Benito acts too. Then comes the sea fight, the sailing to Lima, and the trial; the action is direct, legal, unambiguous. But Captain Delano's straight practical common sense collides with the impenetrability of Don Benito's tragic mystery, and the circling movement suggestive of unknown and sinister currents swirls round the concluding symbolic facts.

In The Blithedale Romance, we have already noted the pendulum-like swings of Coverdale between Blithedale and the city, between the ideal of the simple and better life and the creature comfort of the real but imperfect life, and between involvement and distance. He comes to rest at a sort of dead center, unable to pay the cost of disillusionment. Strether, submerged in the new medium of Chad's wonderful world, is drawn in by centripetal force toward the center of the

mystery of relationships he so much desires to penetrate. Then after the painful revelation, the force becomes centrifugal and beaches him rapidly on his concluding sacrifice.

Both Pym and Huck follow the linear pattern of the journey with the difference that Pym, as the older youth, one obsessed with a desire to experience the ultimate mystery, gives the impression of boring steadily toward a goal, whereas Huck's progress is more like that of a ricocheting ball of considerable elasticity. Both patterns are, interestingly enough, open at the end, implying other journeys, other adventures.

Others might disagree in interpreting form in terms of geometry and lines of force, as we have conceived it, but regardless of the particular way we see structure and form, the narrator in his thought and action sets this pattern in the fiction he relates.

We conclude then our dissertation on the fallible narrator in nineteenth century American fiction with a consciousness that the possibilities of this point of view were becoming evident to the serious artists among American fiction writers throughout this period. Their interest, their successes, and their failures were to prove fruitful in further experiments by twentieth century authors for advancing technique in fiction.

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