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AN EXISTENTIAL PORTRAIT OF THE TEACHER IN
RECENT AMERICAN LITERATURE

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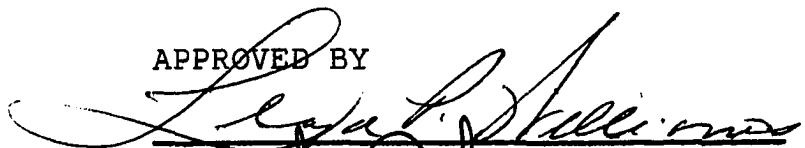
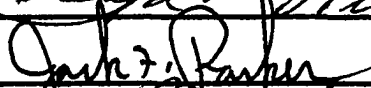
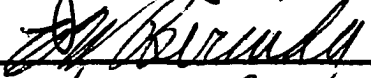
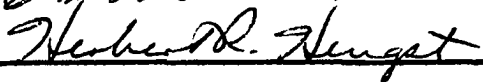
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
The Approach	2
Jean Paul Sartre	9
Martin Buber	14
Limitations	18
Major Sources	20
II. 1919-1929	21
Sherwood Anderson, <u>Winesburg, Ohio</u> , 1919	21
Adolph Myers, alias Wing Biddlebaum	26
Kate Swift	29
Sinclair Lewis, <u>Main Street</u>	34
Vida Sherwin	35
Fern Mullins	39
<u>Arrowsmith</u>	41
Dr. Max Gottlieb	41
"A Letter from the Queen"	48
Dr. Wilbur Selig	48
III. 1929-1940	52
Thomas Wolfe, <u>Look Homeward, Angel</u> , 1929	52
<u>Of Time and the River</u>	61
Professor Hatcher	62
Eugene Gant	63
William Faulkner, <u>The Hamlet</u> , 1940	67
Ernest Hemingway, <u>For Whom the Bell</u> <u>Tolls</u> , 1940	74
IV. 1941-1945	79
Lionel Trilling, "Of This Time, Of That Place", 1943	79
Richard Wright, <u>Black Boy</u>	86
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	93
VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY	111

THE FIGURE OF THE TEACHER IN RECENT AMERICAN FICTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically the figure of the teacher in both literature and reality has been as diverse as human nature itself, ranging from the lofty dignity of Aristotle to the comic pedantry of Ichabod Crane. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the figure of the teacher as he or she appears in recent American fiction. This first chapter outlines and analyzes the assumptions necessary to make such a study.

Perhaps the first great illumination of the teacher, the first profound attempt in western culture to illustrate and examine the efficacy of an "educative principle" as such is to be found in the dialogues of Plato. There, clothed in myth, poetry, and drama emerges the figure of Socrates. His wisdom and his pedagogy, however much it may have been idealized by his student Plato, has perennially symbolized the grandest educative principle for western man.

His reported dictum, " . . . The life which is unexamined is not worth living . . . ,"¹ expresses two of the

¹Plato, "Apology," Literature in Translation (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1942), p. 365.

foundational assumptions of all western education. First, it assumes a faith that human understanding can assist human choice, and second, that it is desirable to share the search for understanding, as a basis for human choice, with all mankind.

This twofold principle of faith in education, purposefully simple, will be accepted in this study as a given hypothesis.

Like most principles of faith though, the implied educative principle has suffered an astounding faceting. This paper in examining fictional teachers must ignore a large number of legitimate views, and proselytizings, such as those advanced or implied in theology, the social sciences, the natural and physical sciences, psychology, and technology. Some of these views are evidenced in the fiction selected, but they will not receive full discussion as specialties. For functional criteria, selective choices must be made.

The Approach

For a number of reasons, which will be discussed as they appear in the study, a modern existential view will be the basis for criteria to examine the fictional figure of the teacher. Existentialism is not one view however, but many, not lending itself to any of the traditional systematic treatments of more rationalistic philosophies. Among the dominating thinkers termed "existential" though, there are two

thinkers whose views are supportive of this study: Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Buber.

Several of the so-called existentialists, including Sartre, have used fiction to illustrate a symbolic vision of man which they deemed difficult to express in more ordinary essays. In fiction they have achieved a dramatic immediacy which at once puts the reader-philosopher beyond all the traditional problems of epistemology and into an encounter with existence more or less per se. Instead of assuming that man first thinks and therefore exists, as in Descartes' " . . . Cogito, ergo sum . . . ,"² they posit existence as primary.

This reversal of "I think, therefore I am" has been one of the major differences between traditional systematic western philosophers and the existential philosophers. Dr. G. Max Wingo states this critical philosophical dilemma in the following quotes:

. . . The question of the nature of existence or being has been a matter of debate ever since the birth of western philosophy, and the development of this question has usually taken the form of the great speculative systems of metaphysics in which the nature of man himself has been reduced to some essence that in itself not only describes the nature of man but also prescribes it. Man, thus, is reduced by the philosophers to an abstraction. But something apparently keeps telling common men, and perhaps also philosophers in their unguarded moments, that the real problem of existence is not one of abstraction and essences, but the problem of my existence, here

² Rene Descartes, "The Principles of Philosophy," Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Dover Publications, 1955), p. 221.

in this world. The existentialist approach to philosophy is in agreement with this common feeling, or intuition, or whatever it is. Thus, in a sense, existentialism proposes to do what Socrates did for the philosophy of his own time, namely to abandon physical nature as the center of interest and the attempt to develop some all-encompassing scheme to explain everything and, instead, to make man the central concern of philosophy. 'Know thyself' was Socrates' admonition. 'The unexamined life is not worth living. . . .' If existentialism is capable of being defined, and there is some question whether it can be, it is possible only to say that as philosophy it is concerned with the actual character of human existence and the calling of men to a realization of their essential freedom.³

As far as educational theory is concerned, whether one regards it as a major influence of how education is practised or only as an indirect attempt to explain hypothetically what has or should happen in educational practice, it has obviously been prescribed by the major western metaphysical systems. It seems clear therefore that educational theory has suffered a reductionism to determinism and objective, essentialistic truths.

Doctor Wingo uses the example of organized Christianity to underscore this thesis:

. . . the net effect of western philosophy . . . [has] . . . been to submerge the individual in the Absolute, to deny the validity of subjective truth, and to obscure the reality of individual experiences. In its own way, organized religion . . . [has] . . . done the same thing. When Greek rationalism, which insisted that the only truth is objective truth, was synthesized with Christianity, religion itself fell victim to a rationalistic reductionism. Theology became a matter of proving propositions through rational argument, and faith, which

³G. Max Wingo, The Philosophy of American Education (New York: D. C. Heath and Co., 1965), pp. 391-392.

emphasizes the commitment of the individual, had to assume a secondary role. Further, the church as an institution was ignoring the individual subjective element that is always paramount in religious experience. It was engulfing the individual and the realities of his own experience.⁴

The historical relationship between Christianity and education in western culture was, and still is, so close a relationship that Christianity's rationalism with such pervasive extremes as legalism and literalisms has indirectly and unconsciously been forced upon educational theory and practice. Descartes' "Cogito, ergo sum," with its presupposition of man's essence is a final, crowning illusion of rationalism.

The reversal of this flattering anthropomorphism of man's essence has put man the questioner, the seeker after truths, in the position that Socrates seemed to envision, i.e., that he knew he knew nothing. More inclusive questions then, instead of grand formulas and ideal forms seem to be man's future hope of enlightenment. For education the results are not totally disheartening, for beyond all possible educational systems and efforts, in the historical past, the present, and future, there is something to be gained by the existential search elsewhere than for new "essences." For whatever the system of education, no matter how future technology and civilization alter the means of our given educative

⁴Ibid., p. 396.

principle, there will be some kind of "teacher" and some kind of "student."

The problems of a rationalistic reductionism seem to have been conceded by the awareness in contemporary philosophy that serious problems of language do exist. Fiction may well be as legitimate a means for symbolizing and communicating ideas as any other. Some of the logical positivists suggest that language clarification is foundational, indeed, to any further speculation. After twenty-five centuries of systematic western thought one often has the unhappy feeling that the huge bag of philosophical speculations has always had a hole in it; but, until recently, no one noticed it. More extreme is another contemporary notion or feeling that the hole in the bag, the human subjectivity of the philosophers, is the starting point for inquiry:

" . . . The For-Itself [Man], in fact, is nothing but the pure nihilation of the In-Itself [Objects or in this context, Essences]; it is like a hole of being at the heart of being."⁵

However distressing these problems may be to philosophers, the central purpose of this paper is peripheral to them. Literary symbolism of the philosophic nature is a contemporary vehicle of the existentialists, and perhaps

⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 617.

fiction itself may well be as fruitful in some cases as traditional rationalistic prose in offering philosophic ideas:

"A whole philosophy of life is often implicit in the metaphors of creative writers, the philosophy of an entire generation, indeed, even of an entire civilization."⁶

The term metaphor, an evocative description of something it is not; for example the modern definition of "matter" as ultimately "energy," is used by Embler, the author quoted above, as an important and even determining factor in societies:

To future generations, an age may be known by the metaphors it chose to express its ideals. Between 1798 and 1859 a good deal happened to change men's minds about the world they lived in. Among other revolutions in thought not the least effective was the change in attitude toward nature. Wordsworth had said that nature was full of consolation, of joy, and of wisdom. Presently, however, as a result of geological and biological investigations, nature ceased to be regarded as Wordsworthian and came to be thought of as Darwinian. The theory of natural selection brought about a new attitude about nature that had perforce to be expressed and communicated in new figures of speech. Tennyson was not simply striving to attain animation and originality in expression when he described nature as 'red in tooth and claw.' The association of abstract nature with tigers was striking, but for the Victorians it was also to become true. In Memoriam anticipated the Origin of Species by nearly a decade, but its representation of nature as a tiger was subsequently to assist in the firm entrenchment of the Darwinian hypothesis; in fact, I suspect it did more to consolidate the philosophy of struggle than did the Origin of Species itself. . . . The analogy of the watch in eighteenth-century Deism was so befitting

⁶Weller Embler, "Metaphor and Social Belief," Language, Meaning, and Maturity, ed. S. I. Hayakawa (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 126.

the ideas of scientists, poets, and philosophers of the age that the analogy became a truth and God a cosmic clockmaker. . . .⁷

To follow up the reasonings; if Socrates came to us garbed in myth and Platonic poetry, for Plato was first a dramatist; and the most modern scientific theories are reduced to metaphorical formulations; i.e., $E=MC^2$, then the aesthetic vision may well be an acceptable source, even method, of examining human experience. Man certainly loved tales before he learned to love logics. Perhaps the fictional teacher is about as open to philosophical inquiry as our subjective conceptions of the flesh and blood teacher. If he is subjective, imaginary, and symbolic, well then so is everything else within human communication.

Such hypotheses may well limit the verifiability so desired by the nineteenth century thinker, or the modern logical positivist, but it may well produce as many meaningful questions about the figure of the teacher and educational theory in general as any other approach.

With these limitations in mind concerning fictional characters as more or less suitable specimens for examination, the effort will be to examine them through an existential glass, darkly.

The examining of fictional teachers will begin with chapter two after the discussion of existentialism as a

⁷Ibid., pp. 127-128.

philosophical point of view and the development of some guiding criteria.

With the bewildering assortment of existential philosophies extant some choices must be made to focus down to a workable set of conceptions. Two particular authors, Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Buber, have formulated philosophical concepts which lend themselves to this purpose. Actually the two thinkers are polar in some conclusions, but this will add a needed flexibility for such a general evaluation of individual characters in the sources selected.

Jean Paul Sartre

Sartre briefly is the most famous and perhaps influential thinker of post-war existentialism. He is catalogued too simply as an atheist, a communist, a literary author, and even an anti-semitic. Aside from his numerous novels, short stories, and plays which he uses to illustrate and diagnose existential ideas, he has written a serious ontological examination of existence complete with a technical vocabulary, Being And Nothingness.⁸

One of his formulations, which has a parallel, later mentioned, in Buber, is the conceptual statements describing man's duality in existence, the "In-Itself" and the "For-Itself."⁹

⁸ Jean Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960).

⁹ Ibid., p. 119.

The "In-Itself" can be understood as an object within the world of things, a Platonic "particular." It is a sensitive method, inherent in the combination of the two expressions, in defining non-conscious objects by constantly being aware of the subjective, all too human desire for a reductionistic, objective reality. Language remains a problem related to consciousness but Sartre has at least made certain in the adaptation of the expression "In-Itself" that it is ourselves who are symbolizing "things," or adversely, "universals," as nouns. We are in our own self-constructed jungle of metaphor, calling objects by our pet names for them. We seem constantly tempted to gain certainty by "nominalizing," unconsciously, our reality and our "objective essence."

. . . Perhaps the most important aspect of Sartre's treatment is his distinction between two forms of being: being in-itself and being for-itself. By being in-itself Sartre means the self-contained being of things. What we in common speech call 'objects,' that is, trees, stones, chairs, tables, etc. are being in-itself. They are what they are in themselves.¹⁰

The "For-Itself" forms a contrast with the "In-Itself" by being conscious and subjective:

. . . On the other hand being for-itself is the realm of human consciousness and the essential fact of consciousness is that it is always outside of and ahead of itself. We project ourselves into the future, or perhaps behind into the past, but we are always outside ourselves. In this sense, we transcend ourselves and the being of man is always for itself. If this were not true, we would simply be being in-itself. . . . Sartre restates and makes an important part of his philosophy the theme . . . existence precedes essence. Sartre completely

¹⁰Wingo, op. cit., p. 70.

disavows the idea that there is some universal concept 'Man' that exists prior to the existence of particular men and determines their nature. . . . There is no universal idea of human nature because there is nothing to conceive it. God does not exist and, therefore, the idea of man does not exist in the mind of God. Man is whatever he conceives himself to be, and whatever he may become is whatever he wills himself to become. Said Sartre, 'Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of Existentialism.'¹¹

So Sartre's vision of existence is introduced by the two conceptions, the "In-Itself" and the "For-Itself." Man is free to become whatever he can imagine and choose to become. The responsibility for his own existence, without the illusion of universal truths, however, is crushing:

The conditions of existence are not only that man is whatever he has chosen to be, but that when we choose we are not choosing only for ourselves, but for all mankind and, therefore, the responsibility we inescapably bear is far greater than merely choosing for ourselves. . . . This being the case, the responsibility that weighs on all men is simply incalculable, and it is this fact that is the source of anguish, anxiety and despair. . . . He is what he chooses to be.¹²

The essence which Descartes and other western philosophers traditionally accepted is simply, in this light, another subjectivity, from Aristotle's flattering definition of man as a rational animal clear through twenty-five centuries of philosophical and theological views that suggest such things as a position within the chain of being of the scholastics. It is hardly any wonder that existential

¹¹Ibid., pp. 403-404.

¹²Ibid., pp. 404-405.

thinking has had such a pronounced effect upon contemporary thought. Its implications for education may well be as significant.

Man lives in freedom but does not exist until he comes fact to face with the existential awareness that he is his own creator, as far as an "essence" is concerned. He cannot find solace in "being like everyone else" for in so doing he is merely pretending to be object-like, an "In-Itself." An object, man could never logically be, and in a serious way he forfeits any claim to a legitimate human existence in trying to become something.

This attitude is familiar to all of us. We are all constantly tempted to be identified with a vocation, much less, a profession, an age, a geographic "home," a series of formal and informal memberships in organizations and groupings, all designed to give us social credibility, objectivity, or reality. This effort Sartre calls "Bad Faith" which is possible:

" . . . because consciousness conceals in its being a permanent risk of bad faith. The origin of this risk is the fact that the nature of consciousness simultaneously is to be what it is not and not to be what it is."¹³

If man is a creator of his own self, and has the freedom and accompanying responsibility to be whatever he chooses,

¹³Sartre, op. cit., p. 70.

"Bad Faith" can be seen as the abdication of this responsibility. It is not so tedious as a moral problem only though, but is part and parcel of life itself. Whatever else "Bad Faith" might be, a psychologically explained effort at defeating death with belief in a magic reality, a quest for certainty, a group agreement of misplaced concreteness; it is not a genuinely human manner of living. The history of teleologies in education, from the fourth "R" to purely vocational educational programs, is basically group agreements in "Bad Faith" to the degree that they fail to accept the responsibility of human freedom. And an existential teleology is impossible:

So we see that man's latest project, the attempt to find existential recognition among his fellows, has come to the same luckless end as his philosophies and religions. Only this time there is a special pathos in his defeat not encountered in earlier trials, something that may help to explain why 'age of anxiety' as an epithet for our time, has become so common as to be a cliché. The pathos is this: In settling for something less, in lowering our price for recognition and looking for it in human relations and organizational affiliations, we have been seduced into a kind of recognition which eventually takes away as much as it offers. For it is precisely in modern, corporate human relations and the impersonal organization complex that we have become convinced, as we never were before, that we are indeed replaceable. Factory hand or college professor, store clerk or school teacher, it is the same; the organization can and will do without you. And since the 'organization' is somehow made to appear of higher rank than the persons in it, modern man knows he has been 'out-psyched' by a counterfeit promise. . . . Now, when it is said that philosophy, religion, and social ethics are all constructed on a faulty ontology of value, we mean that they all have an erroneous notion of where the values by which I intend to live are to be found. These programs all start from the hypothesis that man is a consequence of the world rather than an antecedent to it. Believing this, they

hold quite logically that man, qua consequent, must find his values in that of which he is a consequent, i.e., the world. They all begin looking for human values in the world instead of in men. . . .¹⁴

The preceding discussion is a necessary explanation of the existential views of man the subject, confronting his world, the object. The terms "In-Itself" and "For-Itself," "Bad Faith," and a small host of related expressions like despair, freedom, existential awareness, etc. will be necessary in discussing the fictional teachers in chapter two. Sartre's own view of the individual and the world, as well as the implications for traditional rationalisms, are clear in the paraphrasing of Wingo, Morris, and Sartre. Aside from individual existential emphasis though, the teacher also must attempt to share, somehow, whatever freedom and responsibility he can garner. Martin Buber's views are helpful in rounding out a workable set of criteria for teachers in literature.

Martin Buber

Martin Buber, the late Jewish philosopher and theologian, has also been identified as an existential thinker. Buber, however, was not of course an atheist, and his views and those of Sartre combined in this paper as usable criteria for examining the figure of the teacher will provide, as has been stated before, a certain flexibility and depth which

¹⁴Van Cleve Morris, Existentialism in Education (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 36-37.

neither one nor the other alone could suggest. Buber's major and most influential work is termed I And Thou and suggests conceptual terms for his world view.

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is the combination I-Thou. The other primary word is the combination I-It; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words He and She can replace It.

Hence the I of man is also twofold. For the I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It.¹⁵

The twofold terms I-Thou and I-It are an expression of the existential predicament of human subjectivity. Buber sees it as the basis for our relationship with the world:

. . . The existence of I and the speaking I are one and the same thing. When a primary word is spoken, the speaker enters the word and takes his stand in it.

The life of human beings is not passed in the sphere of transitive verbs alone. It does not exist in virtue of activities alone which have some thing for their object. I perceive something. I am sensible of something. I imagine something. I will something. I feel something. I think something. The life of human beings does not consist of all this and the like alone.

This and the like establish the realm of It. But the realm of Thou has a different basis.

When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing there is another thing. Every It is bounded by others; It exists only through being bounded by others. But when Thou is spoken, there is no thing. Thou has no bounds.

When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation.

It is said that man experiences his world. What does that mean?

Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from

¹⁵ Martin Buber, I And Thou (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 1.

them: he wins an experience from them. He experiences what belongs to the things.

But the world is not presented to man by experiences alone. These present him only with a world composed of It and He and She and It again.

I experience something. If we add 'inner' to 'outer' experiences, nothing in the situation is changed. We are merely following the uneternal division that springs from the lust of the human race to whittle away the secret of death. Inner things or outer things, what are they but things and things! . . .¹⁶

This quote from Buber offers several presuppositions necessary to this study:

First, it offers an unusual awareness and immediacy of the problem of subjectivity in the western tradition of man's search for himself and his world. Second, it points out the language problems of that subjectivity with extraordinary sensitivity. Third, it serves as a foundational ontological conception which can serve as a criterion for evaluating the figure of the fictional teachers of this study without undue prejudice or moralizing, by simply cutting across epistemological problems and directly confronting human existence on an individual level of cognition, without assuming any particular universal essence or view of a generic "Man." And last, the I-Thou relationship, whereby man sees himself in his actual humanity only by becoming more than his I-It relationship, strongly suggests the existential need of human relationship with others, for example as teachers.

The I-Thou relationship which for Buber is primary to any acceptable knowledge of self can be seen as "becoming."

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 2-3.

As one's self-image becomes identified of course it becomes objectified, it becomes something. This dilemma will serve as an open conception of what will be called the "courage to teach," the sharing of cognition existentially whereby we all as individuals, and especially as teachers, are able to become human only through the process of extending existential freedom or awareness to others. The term Buber uses to describe this teacher responsibility, this mutual act of becoming, is simply "Love":

. . . Love does not cling to the I in such a way as to have the Thou only for its 'content', its object; but love is between I and Thou. The man who does not know this, with his very being know this, does not know love; even though he ascribes to it the feelings he lives through, experiences, enjoys, and expresses. Love ranges in its effect through the whole world. In the eyes of him who takes his stand in love, and gazes out of it, men are cut free from their entanglement in bustling activity. Good people and evil, wise and foolish, beautiful and ugly, become successively real to him; that is, set free they step forward in their singleness, and confront him as Thou. In a wonderful way, from time to time, exclusiveness arises--and so he can be effective, helping, healing, educating, raising up, saving. Love is responsibility of an I for a Thou. In this lies the likeness--impossible in any feeling whatsoever--of all who love, from the smallest to the greatest and from the blessedly protected man, whose life is rounded in that of a loved being, to him who is all his life nailed to the cross of the world, and who ventures to bring himself to the dreadful point--to love all men. . . . But this is the exacted melancholy of our fate, that every Thou in our world must become an It. It does not matter how exclusively present the Thou was in the direct relation. As soon as the relation has been worked out or has been permeated with a means, the Thou becomes an object among objects--perhaps the chief, but still one of them, fixed in its size and limits. In the work of art realization in one sense means loss of reality in another. Genuine contemplation is over in a short time; now the life in nature, that first unlocked itself to me in the mystery of mutual action, can again be described,

taken to pieces, and classified--the meeting point of manifold systems of laws. And love itself cannot persist in direct relation. It endures, but in interchange of actual and potential being. The human being who was even now single and unconditioned, not something lying to hand, only present, not able to be experienced, only able to be fulfilled, has not become again a He or a She, a sum of qualities, a given quantity with a certain shape. Now I may take out from him again the colour of his hair or of his speech or of his goodness. But so long as I can do this he is no more my Thou and cannot yet be my Thou again.

Every Thou in the world is by its nature fated to become a thing, or continually to re-enter into the condition of things . . .¹⁷

Limitations

With the two sets of conceptual statements of Sartre and Buber and the expressions "Bad Faith" and "Love," general criteria are introduced. They obviously reflect a choice ultimately in Bad Faith, as the fictional teachers must be discussed and analyzed. The enigmatic tension inherent in the expressions "For-Itself" and "I-Thou," the illogic of using such clearly opposite terms in an analytical, objective study is appreciated. But they are similar to all human efforts; they are absurd.

The two fundamental assumptions inherent in an educative principle based upon Socrates' statement that "The life which is unexamined is not worth living . . . ,"¹⁸ mentioned in the opening remarks of this paper, are transformed into existential questions for the study. The assumptions

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹⁸ Plato, op. cit., p. 365.

that human understanding can assist human choice and that this search for understanding should be shared with all mankind offer the two critical questions for an evaluation of the fictional teachers.

First, do the fictional teachers, in recent American literature, evidence existential awareness and an acceptance of the responsibilities of human freedom, second, do the fictional teachers make existential awareness and the responsibility of human freedom central to their teaching?

The two questions will be phrased for simplicity's sake as problems surrounding "the courage to live" and "the courage to teach."

The philosophical views of Sartre and Buber are recognized as being very difficult of implementation. The teacher in fiction or reality who might measure up well against the existential ideal would be understandably rare, but an evaluation can be made with such an idealization and the figure of the fictional teacher is perhaps more visible against such illuminations.

The limitations of this study are fairly obvious. Only those teachers in important or literary American fiction will be used, and only when they are developed fully enough to warrant evaluation.

Further, the fiction selected will include novels and short stories from 1919 through 1945. Three decades are sufficient to get a figure or profile of teachers in America,

and literary works later than 1945, with some few exceptions, could not so seriously be considered as major or literary fiction.

Major Sources

Anderson, Sherwood; Winesburg, Ohio.

Lewis, Sinclair; Main Street, Arrowsmith, A Letter From the Queen.

Wolfe, Thomas; Look Homeward Angel, Of Time and the River.

Faulkner, William; Hamlet.

Hemingway, Ernest; For Whom the Bell Tolls.

Trilling, Lionel; Of This Time, Of That Place.

Wright, Richard; Black Boy.

CHAPTER II

1919-1929

SHERWOOD ANDERSON, WINESBURG, OHIO, 1919

The first writer this chapter will examine is Sherwood Anderson, 1876-1941, whose most important work, Winesburg, Ohio, includes two fictional teachers developed sufficiently to warrant evaluations. Anderson was born in Camden, Ohio, and lived in several midwestern towns including Clyde, Ohio, which is the setting for the novel Winesburg, Ohio. Published when Anderson was 43, Winesburg, Ohio is an autobiographical, naturalistic novel which is obviously patterned on Anderson's own adolescence:

. . . Outwardly the book consists of a series of slices of life in the naturalistic manner. It offers a cross section of village life and carefully relates the various characters to their environment. Also, these narratives are based on a solid realistic substratum. Winesburg is the Clyde, Ohio, of Sherwood Anderson's boyhood, with hardly any change at all. (Even the name is not entirely imaginary, contrary to what Anderson thought. There is such a town, to which he may have sent 'Roof-Fix' when he dealt in paint in Elyria.) Thanks to this careful use of an actual place, the village is so real that one could draw a map of it.

Not only is the background of the book a faithful and only slightly modified reproduction of reality, but the stories themselves are often told with absolute detachment and perfect objectivity, as though the author were a scientist observing physical or chemical phenomena with total unconcern . . . though he describes the

surface of reality with as much objectivity and frankness as he can, his real purpose was to go beneath the mere surface. He dedicated Winesburg, Ohio to the memory of his mother, because, he said, she awoke in him 'the hunger to see beneath the surface of lives.' And indeed we see this hunger at work in the book.¹

Although Winesburg, Ohio was not a best-seller, it was included as a classic in the first selections of the Modern Library collection in 1922. Winesburg, Ohio did however earn a respectable berth within the so-called literary renaissance of the period:

Sherwood Anderson's work is typical of this renaissance, this expression of America to-day in a literature which is no longer provincial but has its roots in the soil. In fiction this movement of independence has taken the form of realism, a resolute insistence upon the fundamentals of life, upon the facts so strenuously denied, or ignored, by the conventional imitators of British orthodoxy. It is essentially a literature of revolt against the great illusion of American civilization, the illusion of optimism, with all its childish evasion of harsh facts, its puerile cheerfulness, whose inevitable culmination is the school of 'glad' books, which have reduced American literature to the lowest terms of sentimentality.²

Naturalistic literature in America is literature with a social conscience. Anderson began writing seriously after authors like Stephen Crane, William Dean Howells, and Theodore Dreiser had given the romantic "glad" books quite a jolt:

. . . naturalism was by far the dominating factor in Anderson's development as an artist. Dreiser, who had

¹Roger Asselineau, "Sherwood Anderson," American Literary Masters general ed. Charles R. Anderson (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), pp. 756-757.

²Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio, Introduction by Ernest Boyd (New York: The Modern Library, 1922), pp. X-XI.

doubly triumphed in 1911 with the publication of Jenny Gerhardt and the reissue of Sister Carrie, suppressed since 1900, was the most famous product of the Chicago school and a tempting model for a beginner from the Middle West. No wonder that, when Winesburg, Ohio appeared, Francis Hackett, the Chicago critic, described its author as 'a naturalist with a skirl of music'.³

Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio is a naturalistic book, but one filled with poetic symbolisms. In the book he is a psychologist more than a mere reporter, and he is conscious that realistic reporting is a means to an end:

. . . This end is not the description of everyday life, in which . . . the naturalists are engrossed. . . . He [Anderson] is not interested in the standard reactions of commonplace people under ordinary circumstances, but in the secret thoughts of men and women who live in their dreams or who dream aloud at night, when darkness frees them from the tyranny of society--and that is why, incidentally, such a large part of the book is set in twilight or complete darkness. In his Memoirs Anderson announced, 'I would like to write a book of the life of the mind and of the imagination. Facts elude me. I cannot remember dates. When I deal in facts, at once I begin to lie. I can't help it.' To some extent he did write this ideal book. It is Winesburg, Ohio; for the stories which compose it are not meant to describe external reality, but to explore the innermost recesses of a number of souls. . . . In other words, he wanted above all to reveal what his characters keep hidden or unexpressed in their souls for fear of being laughed at or despised or even punished by the community in which they live.⁴

Anderson therefore is not simply a naturalistic reporter, but seems keenly aware of the problems of anxiety in his characters. He correctly alludes to the most significant aspect of 20th century man: his inward doubts of himself.

³Asselineau, op. cit., p. 756.

⁴Ibid., pp. 757-758.

He could not rightly be called an existentialist, but it is entirely fair to say that he approaches the problems of human existence from the inside out, not in the optimistic materialistic manner of his contemporary Americans.

The introduction to Winesburg, Ohio suggests further parallels with the existential approach in this study.

Anderson sees the characters populating Winesburg as "Grotesques," as follows; in describing an old writer:

. . . At his desk the writer worked for an hour. In the end he wrote a book which he called 'The Book of the Grotesque'. It was never published, but I saw it once and it made an indelible impression on my mind. This book had one central thought that is very strange and has always remained with me. By remembering it I have been able to understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before. The thought was involved but a simple statement of it would be something like this:

That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful.

And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them.

It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.⁵

⁵ Anderson, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

Although there are many possible elements suggested by the above, such as the presupposition of a natural innocence reminiscent of Rousseau or Walt Whitman within human beings, the suggestions made by Anderson are quite similar to this study's introduction. The "snatching" of a truth, or of an objective universal essence is the very problem explained in the relationship I-Thou. The appropriation of the "Truths" is identical to the problem of looking outside of ourselves, in the "Objective" world, rather than within ourselves.

With these parallels in mind, the study of the two teachers who appear as characters in Winesburg, Ohio will begin, reinforced with Mr. Boyd's quotation in the introduction of the first Modern Library edition of the novel:

. . . Winesburg, Ohio is like that wheel of many colors, of which Anatole France writes, which had only to revolve to give a harmony to all of the parts, which becomes the truth. These separate fragments of mid-American society combine to make a picture of American life which carries the inescapable conviction of reality. The stories are written out of the depths of imagination and intuition, out of a prolonged brooding over the fascinating spectacle of existence, but they combine that quality with a marvelous faculty of precise observation. Thus, the impression of surface realism is reinforced by that deeper realism which sees beyond and beneath the exterior world to the hidden reality which is the essence of things. Did not Schopenhauer, interpreting Goethe's own confessions, point out that this is precisely the quality of the artist: that it is given to him alone to perceive the metaphysically Real- das Ding au sich?⁶

⁶Boyd, op. cit., p. XV.

Adolph Myers Alias Wing Biddlebaum

The first teacher mentioned in Winesburg, Ohio is the small, shy Wing Biddlebaum, so frightened of the world that he assumes this alias in Winesburg to cover his past as the actual Adolph Myers from Pennsylvania. Myers-Biddlebaum had been a teacher and Anderson goes to some length to describe his character as a sensitive, idealistic, and vulnerable human being:

. . . Adolph Myers was meant by nature to be a teacher of youth. He was one of those rare, little-understood men who rule by a power so gentle that it passes as lovable weakness. In their feeling for the boys under their charge such men are not unlike the finer sort of women in their love of men.

And yet that is but crudely stated. It needs the poet there. With the boys of his school, Adolph Myers had walked in the evening or had sat talking until dusk upon the schoolhouse steps lost in a kind of dream. Here and there went his hands, caressing the shoulders of the boys, playing about the tousled heads. As he talked his voice became soft and musical. There was a caress in that also. In a way the voice and the hands, the stroking of the shoulders and the touching of the hair was a part of the schoolmaster's effort to carry a dream into the young minds. By the caress that was in his fingers he expressed himself. He was one of those men in whom the force that creates life is diffused, not centralized. Under the caress of his hands doubt and disbelief went out of the minds of the boys and they began also to dream.⁷

The character of Adolph Myers-Biddlebaum as a teaching figure would probably be dismissed as a neurotic, introverted, perhaps even perverted figure by our rather blasé society. He is certainly assumed so by a number of persons

⁷Anderson, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

as the story unfolds. Anderson, however, taking perhaps a clue from his Whitmanesque attitudes towards his characters, sees them as suffering the problem of being a "grotesque." In Anderson's own acceptance of his characters as being basically only human beings, and thence labeled or categorized by the "Truths" which they select, it is obvious that he sees Biddlebaum as a tragic figure in a society that does not appreciate or understand him.

The tenderness and love which Adolph Myers-Wing Biddlebaum manifests for his students is misunderstood by the parents and townsfolk of the unnamed Pennsylvania town where he had taught. We can assume that they react with violence partly because of their own fears and guilts, and socially crucify the gentle teacher whose capacity for love is outside the aggressive accepted patterns of their Victorian sexual morality. If not a Christ-like figure, Myers-Biddlebaum at least suggests the angelic with his nickname "Wing."

The hands which characterize Biddlebaum are used by Anderson to suggest his own personal abnormal and grotesque conception of himself, as well as being the major source or label of his identity in Winesburg:

The story of Wing Biddlebaum's hands is worth a book in itself . . . In Winesburg the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity. With them Wing Biddlebaum had picked as high as a hundred and forty quarts of strawberries in a day. They became his distinguishing feature, the source of his fame. Also they made grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality. Winesburg was proud of the hands of Wing Biddlebaum in the same spirit in which it was proud of Banker

White's new stone house and Weslet Moyer's bay stallion, Tony Tip, that had won the two-fifteen trot at the fall races in Cleveland.⁸

And as Biddlebaum is regarded by his neighbors, as the frightened, queer eccentric on the other end of his hands, their focal point in identifying him, so he also sees himself. One afternoon, in conversation with the narrator of the book, the young reporter of the Winesburg Eagle, George Willard, his own acceptance of himself as something loathsome or frightening reveals itself:

. . . For once he forgot his hands. Slowly they stole forth and lay upon George Willard's shoulders. Something new and bold came into the voice that talked. 'You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of voices.'

Pausing in his speech, Wing Biddlebaum looked long and earnestly at George Willard. His eyes glowed. Again he raised his hands to caress the boy and then a look of horror swept over his face.

With a convulsive movement of his body, Wing Biddlebaum sprang to his feet and thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. Tears came to his eyes. 'I must be getting along home. I can talk no more with you,' he said nervously.⁹

Since George Willard is Biddlebaum's only human connection with Winesburg, the failure to establish friendship with him is crucial. He remains cut off and prey to almost paranoid fears of all others:

. . . Wing Biddlebaum, forever frightened and beset by a ghostly band of doubts, did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years.¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 10.

⁹Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 8.

Biddlebaum has been a teacher. One of his students, described as a "slack jawed, half-wit" boy, dreams of homosexual relations with him. He reports the dream as factual. Fathers of several of his students come to his school, beat him, threaten his life, and he flees to anonymity in Winesburg. The Bad Faith is complete.

Biddlebaum assumes himself to be the something the parents of his students also believe, that he is a homosexual. Logically the term is descriptive of behavior patterns between the same sexes, but is objectified into a noun, a thing. In answer to either of the critical questions concerning the awareness and responsibility of an existential understanding of himself, of course he fails. His failure is strongly reinforced by a dramatic show of public opinion which he assumes somehow to be correct, but he does fail in not having the courage to emerge from the cocoon thus jointly constructed by his society and himself. He regards himself as an It, precluding any possibility of establishing an existential I-Thou, i.e., the courage to live and/or to teach.

Kate Swift

The second teacher in Winesburg, Ohio is the spinster Kate Swift. There are parallels between her and Wing Biddlebaum, particularly evident in their relationships with the young narrator, George Willard.

Kate Swift is described as a woman of thirty, with a poor complexion but a trim figure, who lives with her aging

mother. She is more sophisticated than most of the inhabitants of Winesburg having lived in New York City for two years and having traveled in Europe. She is stern, intense, and sharp tongued and something of a puzzle to her townsfolk:

Although no one in Winesburg would have suspected it, her life had been very adventurous. It was still adventurous. Day by day as she worked in the schoolroom or walked in the streets, grief, hope, and desire fought within her. Behind a cold exterior the most extraordinary events transpired in her mind. The people of the town thought of her as a confirmed old maid and because she spoke sharply and went her own way thought her lacking in all the human feeling that did so much to make and mar their own lives. In reality she was the most eagerly passionate soul among them, and more than once, in the five years she had come back from her travels to settle in Winesburg and become a school teacher, had been compelled to go out of the house and walk half through the night fighting out some battle raging within.¹¹

Kate Swift's relationship with young George Willard is innocent and tragic. She feels that he has talent and encourages him to work hard at learning to become a writer:

One day in the summer she had gone to the Eagle office and finding the boy unoccupied had taken him out Main Street to the fair ground, where the two sat on a grassy bank and talked. The school teacher tried to bring home to the mind of the boy some conceptions of the difficulties he would have to face as a writer. 'You will have to know life,' she declared, and her voice trembled with earnestness. She took hold of George Willard's shoulders and turned him about so that she could look into his eyes. A passerby might have thought them about to embrace. 'If you are to become a writer you'll have to stop fooling with words,' she explained. 'It would be better to give up the notion of writing until you are better prepared. Now it's time to be living. I don't want to frighten you, but I would like to make you understand the import of what you think of attempting.'

¹¹Ibid., p. 191.

You must not become a mere peddler of words. The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say.¹²

Both Biddlebaum and Swift exhort their young friend to stop listening to what people say, or to " . . . shut your ears to the roaring of voices . . ."¹³ Both also express themselves through physical contact, as though words were not sufficient expression. And both retreat from the physical contact.

It would seem that Anderson is suggesting that the Victorian sexual morality is oppressive for both his fictional teachers. The guilts and fears which seem to possess these two characters, and most of the others featured in Winesburg, Ohio, are obviously part of Anderson's naturalistic concern in seeing beneath the superficial surface of American social life. Kenneth Patchen, the American contemporary poet suggested something similar in his expression that each time he wished to touch someone, he lit a cigarette. There is this quality of tension in Winesburg, Ohio, and Anderson used it to express the lack of genuine human communication and the surfeit of neurotic compensation in a large number of his characters. The only other encounter between George Willard and Kate Swift is decidedly, psychologically frustrating for both:

¹²Ibid., p. 192.

¹³Ibid., p. 12.

. . . young Willard had gone to visit the teacher and to borrow a book. It was then the thing happened that confused and puzzled the boy. He had the book under his arm and was preparing to depart. Again Kate Swift talked with great earnestness. Night was coming on and the light in the room grew dim. As he turned to go she spoke his name softly and with an impulsive movement took hold of his hand. Because the reporter was rapidly becoming a man, something of his man's appeal, combined with the winsomeness of the boy, stirred the heart of the lonely woman. A passionate desire to have him understand the import of life, to learn to interpret it truly and honestly, swept over her. Leaning forward, her lips brushed his cheek. At the same moment he for the first time became aware of the marked beauty of her features. They were both embarrassed, and to relieve her feeling, she became harsh and domineering. 'What's the use? It will be ten years before you begin to understand what I mean when I talk to you,' she cried passionately.¹⁴

Willard is baffled and hurt after the encounter. Any capacity he might evidence for seeing through the Bad Faith of his own Victorian morality into Kate Swift as a Thou is lost in his own self-pity at being rebuffed.

Kate Swift's greater maturity and insight, evident in her generous impulse of understanding affection, and in her recognition of Willard's relative youth, is not matched by the courage necessary to understand herself, or further, to risk an explanation to him. In existential terms neither character can overcome the initial conclusion about themselves as sexual beings, as I-Its, nor find enough understanding and courage to make any further quality of encounter possible.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 193.

The dichotomy of mind and body reflected in the American culture of Anderson's nineteen-twenties is an essential, objective conclusion of what moral people should or should not be. Neither Kate Swift nor Wing Biddlebaum can quite get beyond this status quo In-Itself of Victorianism.

Both are called for greater existential relationship by young George Willard's need for counsel and advice, and both make some abortive, ineffectual effort to rise to this opportunity to teach, to share existentially in the educative principle's demand for I-Thou understanding, but both finally submit, and shut off the encounter as it threatens their neurotic sense of security as "moral" members of society. They both seem to suffer over the Bad Faith decision, but they both fail to find the courage necessary to live and to teach.

Sinclair Lewis

Sinclair Lewis, 1885-1951, is the second major writer to be selected for study. Lewis, like Sherwood Anderson, very effectively leveled a good deal of criticism at American culture, but he was far more pointed in his attacks. His works are almost all direct literary exposés of various areas within American society, and his characters often are identified with their vocation as being "types" of an assumed middle class conspiracy of obscurantism and conformity:

As a child of the 1920's which he, paradoxically enough, somehow managed to remain, Sinclair Lewis neatly wrapped up American life in its raw, physical, and ineffably smug bourgeois state and placed it in a pigeon-hole, where future historians will undoubtedly find it an invaluable ingredient for their chronicle of twentieth-century American civilization. The package does not contain everything, but it is a singularly rich and valuable gift to prosperity.¹⁵

The three of Lewis's works, containing well developed fictional teachers used in this study, are two novels and one short story. The first novel used, Main Street, published in 1920, was a great success for Lewis and he became famous immediately after its publication. He quickly followed this success with other novels and achieved an international reputation as one of the major American writers of his day. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1930 and was the first American writer ever to be so honored.

MAIN STREET

Main Street characterizes two teachers, both women high school teachers in the small midwestern town of Gopher Prairie. The plot of Main Street revolves around a central character, Carol Kennicott, the young wife of the local doctor. She marries Will Kennicott and moves from an urban, cultured atmosphere to the barren, sterile village of Gopher Prairie. She is industrious, if not impulsively neurotic, and attempts to reform the village, to bring the culture of the

¹⁵This Generation, (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1949), p. 335.

metropolitan America of the 1920's to Gopher Prairie. Most of the townsfolk envy her charm and education but are reluctant to get out of the provincial "ruts" in which they feel most comfortable. She fails to reconstruct Gopher Prairie and finally accepts and half-heartedly joins the community.

The first teacher to appear is Vida Sherwin, who welcomes Carol to Gopher Prairie and evidences the good intentions and lack of any genuine commitment to any ideal beyond the status quo:

She rushed into the room pouring out: 'I'm afraid you'll think the teachers have been shabby in not coming near you, but we wanted to give you a chance to get settled. I am Vida Sherwin, and I try to teach French and English and a few other things in the high school.'

'I've been hoping to know the teachers. You see, I was a librarian---'

'Oh, you needn't tell me. I know all about you! Awful how much I know--this gossip village. We need you so much here. It's a dear loyal town (and isn't loyalty the finest thing in the world!) but it's a rough diamond, and we need you for the polishing, and we're ever so humble---' She stopped for breath and finished her compliment with a smile.¹⁶

As the two women, Carol Kennicott, the reformer, and Vida Sherwin, the high school teacher, talk about needed projects and improvements, Miss Sherwin's statements betray a spirit of conformity. Carol asks:

'. . . What shall I do? I've been wondering if it would be possible to have a good architect come here to lecture.'

'Ye-es, but don't you think it would be better to work with existing agencies? Perhaps it will sound slow

¹⁶ Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920), p. 64.

to you, I was thinking--It would be lovely if we could get you to teach Sunday School.'

Carol had the empty expression of one who finds that she has been affectionately bowing to a complete stranger. 'Oh yes. But I'm afraid I wouldn't be much good at that. My religion is so foggy.'

'I know. So is mine. I don't care a bit for dogma. Though I do stick firmly to the belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and the leadership of Jesus. As you do, of course.'

Carol looked respectable and thought about having tea.¹⁷

Miss Sherwin rightly judges Carol's reaction as being somewhat surprised, but continues her statement by confirming her own attitudes of boosterism:

'I'm afraid you'll think I'm a conservative. I am! So much to conserve. All this treasury of American ideals. Sturdiness and democracy and opportunity. Maybe not so at Palm Beach. But, thank heaven, we're free from such social distinctions in Gopher Prairie. I have only one good quality--overwhelming belief in the brains and hearts of our nation, our state, our town. It's so strong that sometimes I do have a tiny effect on the haughty ten-thousandaires. I shake 'em up and make 'em believe in ideals--yes, in themselves. But I get into a rut teaching. I need young critical things like you to punch me up. Tell me, what are you reading?'

'I've been re-reading 'The Damnation of Theron Ware.' Do you know it?'

'Yes, it was clever. But hard. Man wanted to tear down, not build up. Cynical. Oh, I do hope I'm not a sentimentalist. But I can't see any use in this high-art stuff that doesn't encourage us day-laborers to plod on.'

Ensued a fifteen-minute argument about the oldest topic in the world: It's art, but is it pretty? Carol tried to be eloquent regarding honesty of observation. Miss Sherwin stood out for sweetness and a cautious use of the uncomfortable properties of light.¹⁸

Miss Sherwin does not, through the novel, develop beyond the insights of the creed espoused above. She is

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 64-65.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 65-66.

certainly a likeable, good person, but any responsibility to lead the students and townspeople to think more deeply about their lives, or to formulate more mature attitudes about the nature of the community is lost in her secondary and engrossing self-concern for her own reputation. She is cautiously aware that Gopher Prairie's minds and manners need to come to terms with more meaningful realities but lacks the courage to risk a genuinely human exploration of her own ideas or those of the town. Vida Sherwin actually does believe that she is an effective worker in bringing culture and intelligence to her neighbors and students, but her efforts are always within the framework and limitations of "working with existing agencies."

As the novel develops, the reader discovers that a great deal of Vida Sherwin's motivation and enthusiasm is only a cover for a fantasy of Freudian compensation, according to the diagnosis of Sinclair Lewis. She is secretly in love with Carol's doctor husband, or imagines herself to be. The whole excuse for this fantasy is an almost chance encounter with the doctor, Will Kennicott, who is suggestive with her at a party before he marries Carol. Lewis seems to succumb too easily to the theory of sexual compensation to describe her behavior, but perhaps it would be well to remember that he was writing with a good deal of personal indignation, and that Freudian theory in the 1920's seemed sufficient as an explanation of the Victorian prudery. He at least resembles

Sherwood Anderson at this point in giving credence to the theory that human beings in a repressive society want basically to be loved, and wish to be loved so longingly that they become "grotesques."

Vida Sherwin marries the shoe clerk, Raymie Wutherspoon:

Though she became Vida Wutherspoon technically, and though she certainly had no ideals about the independence of keeping her name, she continued to be known as Vida Sherwin.¹⁹

Lewis here suggests a curious phenomenon surrounding school teachers. They tend to remain fixed by title and tend to remain identified with the position they represent, as the formal title, "Miss Sherwin", demonstrates. One can suppose that the former was her identification with her students and that the latter was with the townspeople. It resembles the appellation "School Marm" with all the connotations of being some kind of species. The distinction of being a "Miss Sherwin" is certainly a part of the figure of the teacher in American culture, an almost scientific placement upon the confused but accepted scientific chart projected en masse as being a cornerstone of realism in the process of identifying a person with his or her vocational status. By way of further explanation, it could be understood as the answer that anyone, in this particular case, someone who taught, would be expected to give to the question,

¹⁹Ibid., p. 260.

"Who are you?" Other criteria, more encompassing of human experience, are necessary. It is hoped that the existential criteria, though certainly not sufficient to the task of understanding so many varied problems of language and relationship, will nevertheless provide something more, in this one enigma as well as in others.

After her marriage, Vida Wutherspoon, nee Sherwin, is depicted as falling immediately into the role of Gopher Prairie wife:

The only remnant of Vida's identification of herself with Carol was a jealousy when she saw Kennicott and Ray [her husband] together, and reflected that some people might suppose that Kennicott was his superior. She was sure that Carol thought so, and she wanted to shriek, 'You needn't try to gloat! I wouldn't have your pokey old husband. He hasn't one single bit of Ray's spiritual nobility.'²⁰

Lewis describes his first teacher, therefore, as one who holds to the ideals of an educational principle only so far as it advances her own personal interests. She adopts the more respected role of wife as soon as it is offered.

Fern Mullins

The second teacher in Main Street is Miss Fern Mullins. She is introduced as a pretty young college graduate from the Twin Cities. She confesses upon meeting Carol Kennicott that she is in doubt about Gopher Prairie and her first job:

'Oh dear, I wish I was back in the cities! This is my first year of teaching, and I'm scared stiff. I did

²⁰ Ibid., p. 261.

have the best time in college: dramatics and basketball and fussing and dancing--I'm simply crazy about dancing. And here, except when I have the kids in gymnasium class, or when I'm chaperoning the basket-ball team on a trip out-of-town, I won't dare to move above a whisper. I guess they don't care much if you put any pep into teaching or not, as long as you look like a good influence out of school-hours--and that means never doing anything you want to. . . . If it wasn't too late to get a job in the Cities, I swear I'd resign here. I bet I won't dare go to a single dance all winter. If I cut loose and dance the way I like to, they'd think I was a perfect hellion--poor harmless me! Oh, I oughtn't to be talking like this. Fern, you never could be cagey!'²¹

Of course Fern Mullins does go to one dance. She is accompanied by one of the older students, Cy Bogart, whose mother is the most vicious professional Christian and gossip in Gopher Prairie. Cy promptly gets drunk, tries to make love to Fern all the way home as she drives the buggy, and tells his mother that Fern is to blame for it. Fern is fired by the school board and leaves Gopher Prairie unable to get another job and is even dropped by her teaching agencies. She writes one letter to Carol Kennicott, the only one who befriended her and confesses that she will probably marry someone ". . . that's in love with me but he's so stupid that he makes me scream. . . ." ²²

Both of the teachers in Main Street, Vida Sherwin and Fern Mullins, stop teaching; one by choice, the other by compulsion. Vida Sherwin tries to be an effective teacher but is hesitant about putting the people of Gopher Prairie into

²¹Ibid., p. 335.

²²Ibid., p. 389.

the necessary, and in her mind, impossible position of having to think. She rationalizes all of their provincial illusions and prejudices as being beyond her responsibility.

Fern Mullins has no opportunity to be anything but a victim in the story. Neither teacher is allowed or able to be convinced of the educative principle's demand for a search for truth beyond prejudice and village hypocrisy.

Lewis has Vida Sherwin sum up her viewpoint in conversation with Carol Kennicott:

'I don't want to rub it in, but you can see for yourself now, this is all a result of your being so discontented and not appreciating the dear good people here. And another thing: People like you and me, who want to reform things, have to be particularly careful about appearances. Think how much better you can criticize conventional customs if you yourself live up to them, scrupulously. Then people can't say you're attacking them to excuse your own infractions.'

To Carol was given a sudden great philosophical understanding, an explanation of half of the cautious reforms in history. 'Yes. I've heard that plea. It's a good one. It sets revolts aside to cool. It keeps strays in the flock. To word it differently; you must live up to the popular code if you believe in it; but if you don't believe in it, then you must live up to it!'²³

Arrowsmith

Dr. Max Gottlieb

The second work of Sinclair Lewis selected for this study is his novel Arrowsmith, generally regarded as his best work. Lewis himself, in a purported conversation in his

²³Ibid., pp. 373-374.

later and more melancholic years, once introduced himself with, ". . . I'm Sinclair Lewis, the fellow who wrote Arrowsmith. . . ."

Fortunately for this study, one of Lewis's strongest characters appears as a teacher in Arrowsmith, Doctor Max Gottlieb. Early in the novel, Gottlieb is described in the following manner:

Professor Gottlieb was the mystery of the university. It was known that he was a Jew, born and educated in Germany, and that this work on immunology had given him fame in the East and in Europe. He rarely left his small brown weedy house except to return to his laboratory, and few students outside of his classes had ever identified him, but every one had heard of his tall, lean, dark aloofness. A thousand fables fluttered about him. It was believed that he was the son of a German prince, that he had immense wealth, that he lived as sparsely as the other professors only because he was doing terrifying and costly experiments which probably had something to do with human sacrifice. It was said that he could create life in the laboratory, that he could talk to the monkeys which he innoculated, that he had been driven out of Germany as a devil-worshipper or an anarchist, and that he secretly drank real champagne every evening at dinner.²⁴

The romantic, gothic description of Gottlieb is later to be proven false, as the title character, Martin Arrowsmith, establishes a student relationship with the immunologist. This relationship dominates the thematic development of the work, as the novel traces the life of Arrowsmith through the university, medical school, and maturity. It is a relationship which splendidly illustrates the educative

²⁴Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1925), p. 9.

principle of this study: a genuine encounter between a teacher and a student which takes place on the highest level of intellectual growth and which demonstrates the humanity of them both. It is the more remarkable as one discerns the author attempting a similar encounter, through his art, with his readers.

Arrowsmith's first meeting with Gottlieb takes place during his first day of enrollment in medical school. The relationship begins with the characteristic candor and challenge of the later involvement:

If in the misty April night Gottlieb had been romantic as a cloaked horseman, he was now testy and middle-aged. Near at hand, Martin could see wrinkles beside the hawk eyes. Gottlieb had turned his back to his desk, which was heaped with shabby note-books, sheets of calculations, and a marvelously precise chart with red and green curves descending to vanish at zero. The calculations were delicate, minute, exquisitely clear; and delicate were the scientist's thin hands among the papers. He looked up, spoke with a hint of German accent. His words were not so much mispronounced as colored with a warm familiar tint.

'Vell? Yes?'

'Oh, Professor Gottlieb, my name is Arrowsmith. I'm a medic freshman, Winnemac B.A. I'd like awfully to take bacteriology this fall instead of next year. I've had a lot of chemistry--'

'No. It is not time for you.'

'Honest, I know I could do it now.'

'There are two kinds of students that the Gods give me. One kind they dump on me like a bushel of potatoes. I do not like potatoes, and the potatoes they do not ever seem to have great affection for me, but I take them and teach them to kill patients. The other kind--they are very few!--they seem for some reason that is not at all clear to me to wish a liddle bit to become scientists, to work with bugs and make mistakes. Those, ah, those, I seize them, I denounce them, I teach them right away the ultimate lesson of science, which is to wait and doubt. Of potatoes, I demand nothing; of the foolish

ones like you, who think I could teach them something, I demand everything. No. You are too young. Come back next year.'

'But honestly, with my chemistry--'

'Have you taken physical chemistry?'

'No, sir, but I did pretty well in organic.'

'Organic chemistry! Puzzle chemistry! Stink chemistry! Drug-store Chemistry! Physical chemistry is power, it is exactness, it is life. But organic chemistry--that is a trade for pot-washers. No. You are too young. Come back in a year.'²⁵

This postponement of the bacteriology by Gottlieb for one year is little enough time for young Arrowsmith to prepare himself for the quantity of work and the quality of discipline which is later demanded of him by the scientist. Arrowsmith still has much to understand and learn about himself before he will be prepared for Gottlieb. His year is spent in coming to terms with a fraternity, with romantic love, with superficial success and ambition, and with all the other young dreams which might plague and tempt our protagonist from the search for truth about himself, prerequisite to an objective search in science. He has difficulty with the perennial, continual choice between short and long range values, between social position and a vision of scientific truth, and only at the end of the novel does he find himself and his choice. This conflict, between the accepted decoys and the intangible ducks, Sinclair Lewis equates with a Faustian temptation as a final judgment of value. Though this conflict which Lewis moralizes is not articulated as a

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

philosophical thesis, the choices correspond to I-Thou or I-It relationships and can therefore have direct relation to this study by asking if Gottlieb's relationship with Arrowsmith achieves this quality of encounter. The ingredients of such an encounter do exist in the relationship between this teacher and his student but must be qualified by examining the author's methods and approach within the novel. First, Lewis seems to be quite capable of empathy with his two characters and shows us through them that he is aware of what now would be termed an existential situation. Lewis does not, however, seem to be able to go beyond a strain of personal moralism which colored his world view. He would seem to suggest that there is some universal ethic beyond or behind the hypocrisy and sham he saw in American life in the 1920's; but he is not able to go beyond it to the more human condition and basic relationship of the I-Thou, as it is so ably expressed by Buber. In short, Gottlieb and Martin Arrowsmith do engage in the dialogue inherent in the educative principle operating as a given in this study, but they manage only within the confines of Sinclair Lewis in 1920.

Martin Arrowsmith, while successfully serving as an intern, and temporarily divorced from Gottlieb and scientific research exhibits this mixture of moralistic confusion and responsibility as follows:

But on night duty, alone, he had to face the self he had been afraid to uncover, and he was homesick for the laboratory, for the thrill of uncharted discoveries, the

quest below the surface and beyond the moment, the search for fundamental laws which the scientist (however blasphemously and colloquially he may describe it) exalts above temporary healing as the religious exalts the nature and terrible glory of God above pleasant daily virtues. With this sadness there was envy that he should be left out of things, that others should go ahead of him, ever surer in technique, more widely aware of the phenomena of biological chemistry, more deeply daring to explain laws at which the pioneers had but fumbled and hinted.²⁶

Martin does eventually return to research and to Gottlieb, after both experience numerous trials at the hands of Lewis's vision of a hateful society, but Gottlieb especially is marked for crucifixion. As the intellectual idealist in the cynical world of Lewis's America, Gottlieb becomes almost a Christ figure. He is discharged from the medical school, humiliated by a bureaucrat in the teacher's agency he stoops to join for help, and finally in desperation joins a large pharmaceutical firm which specializes in snake oils. In the midst of this torture, as he is forced to examine himself in society's terms, Gottlieb temporarily falls into self-pity:

He had never dined with a duchess, never received a prize, never been interviewed, never produced anything which the public could understand, nor experienced anything since his schoolboy amours which nice people could regard as romantic. He was, in fact, an authentic scientist. . . But even this drop of wholesome optimism was lacking in his final doubts. For he doubted all progress of the intellect and the emotions, and he doubted most of all, the superiority of divine mankind to the cheerful dogs, irreligious horses, the superbly adventuring seagulls. . . .

²⁶Ibid., p. 120.

While the medical quacks, manufacturers of patent medicines, chewing gum salesmen, and high priests of advertising lived in large houses, attended by servants, and took their sacred persons abroad in limousines, Max Gottlieb dwelt in a cramped cottage whose paint was peeling, and rode to his laboratory on an ancient and squeaky bicycle. . . . If in his house there was but one comfortable chair, on his desk were letters, long, intimate, and respectful, from the great ones of France and Germany, Italy and Denmark, and from scientists whom Great Britain so much valued that she gave them titles almost as high as those with which she rewarded distillers, cigarette-manufacturers, and the owners of obscene newspapers. . . .

But poverty kept him from fulfillment of his summer longing to sit beneath the poplars by the Rhine or the tranquil Seine, at a table on whose checkered cloth were bread and cheese and wine and dusky cherries, those ancient and holy simplicities of all the world.²⁷

The doubts in the mind of Dr. Gottlieb, of the intellectual progress of mankind and even of the superiority of man over cats and dogs, give us an additional dimension of this fictional character. At the low ebb of his hopes he has temporarily adopted the viewpoint of his inferiors. By sinking to self-pity, Gottlieb limits his vision to the I-It relationship and excludes the intangible, immeasurable I-Thou relationship which offers balance and hope within the existential human situation. Though Gottlieb has been fully aware of the value of the relationship with his student Martin Arrowsmith as surpassing the conspicuous prizes of an unexamining world; his faith in mankind and himself is thus tested. He does recover his humanity as he is able to recover his self-respect through an opportunity to work in a

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 125-126.

research institute. Martin joins him and recovers his faith simultaneously.

Typical of the manner in which Sinclair Lewis has his characters relate themselves to a principle greater than circumstances and expediency is the following "prayer" Arrowsmith is made to mutter:

God give me unclouded eyes and freedom from haste. God give me a quiet and restless anger against all pretense and all pretentious work and all work left slack and unfinished. God give me a restlessness whereby I may neither sleep nor accept praise till my observed results equal my calculated results or in pious glee I discover and assault my error. God give me strength not to trust to God!²⁸

The above symbolizes and briefly states the gift of Gottlieb to Arrowsmith. It is a Greek gift in that it insists upon its recipient's sacrifice of any and all certainties, but it offers him the opportunity to become a human being. The educative principle is thus transmitted from the teacher to the pupil, from Gottlieb to Arrowsmith. It is a transaction requiring both characters to commitment of their respective humanity to each other in the I-Thou relationship.

"A Letter from the Queen"

Dr. Wilbur Selig

The short story, "A Letter from the Queen" published in 1929 by Cosmopolitan magazine, draws a humorous picture of its central figure, Dr. Wilbur Selig, a professor of

²⁸Ibid., pp. 280-281.

economics and history at Erasmus College. This short story is a spoof of a frail young bachelor, veneered in academic research, who fails to obtain a valuable letter which would guarantee his ambitions, by succumbing to flattery.

Dr. Selig, as we discover him, is writing a book, described by Lewis in the following manner:

Of course everyone is writing a book. But Selig's was different. It was profound. How good it was can be seen from the fact that with only three quarters of it done, it already had fifteen hundred footnotes--such lively comments as 'Vid. J.A.S.H.S. VIII, 234 et seq.' A real book, nothing flippant or commercialized.

It was called The Influence of American Diplomacy on the Internal Policies of Paneuropa.

'Paneuropa,' Selig felt, was a nice and scholarly way of saying 'Europe.'

It would really have been an interesting book if Doctor Selig had not believed that all literature is excellent in proportion as it is hard to read. He had touched a world romantic and little known. Hidden in old documents, like discovering in a desert an oasis where girls laugh and fountains chatter and the market place is noisy, he found the story of Franklin, who in his mousy fur cap was the Don Juan of Paris, of Adams fighting the British Government to prevent their recognizing the Confederacy, of Benjamin Thompson, the Massachusetts Yankee who in 1791 was chief counselor of Bavaria, with the title of Count Rumford.²⁹

Though Doctor Selig is comically drawn by Lewis, and tends to be a stereotype in comparison with the other fictional teachers selected, including him as part of the total should add breadth, if not profound depth, to this study. The figure of the teacher in American fiction is sometimes

²⁹ Sinclair Lewis, Selected Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis, (New York: The Literary Guild, 1935), pp. 191-192.

satirized, and in qualifying this character for the study we can include him as one of Lewis's satirical creations.

Besides writing a book, Doctor Selig is also involved in a set of problems. He is ambitious and earnestly wishes for fame and fortune. As he researches his book, he discovers that one Senator Lafe Ryder, who figures largely (and fictionally) in American history, is still alive, though thought dead. This forgotten Senator becomes the key to Doctor Selig's researches and his potential success.

He searches out the home of the retired public figure and arranges to spend his summer vacation nearby. He makes friends with the Senator and is given every possible help by the old man in making his research, and thus his book, successful. The old Senator has a letter from Queen Victoria in his possession which had been addressed to President Benjamin Harrison during a time of crisis.

As the story develops, and as Doctor Selig pumps the old man for valuable details for his book, Selig loses his initial sense of awe and respect for the Senator as his own sense of self-importance increases. His vanity thus opened to temptation, Selig fails to obtain the all important letter from Queen Victoria by spending an evening with a female marriage-seeking school teacher who flatters him, instead of honoring the appointment of the same evening with the old man. The Senator dies the same evening, while waiting for Selig to appear.

The story is one of device, and the importance of its dénouement and moral are without educational significance; the fact that Selig is a teacher is incidental. Nevertheless, he is drawn as a teacher, and as such, cannot be seen beyond his stereotype. Selig has no genuine depth, and certainly is not aware of any of the implications of the educative principle operating as a given in this paper. He fails both as a human being and a teacher. The evidence for this assumption is clear, for a reader cannot feel any sympathy for him beyond that usually felt for an insect; and the justice of his failure is appropriate, confined as it is within his inexcusable infantilism.

CHAPTER III

1929-1940

THOMAS WOLFE, LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL, 1929

Thomas Wolfe, 1900-1938, has enjoyed the reputation of being one of our most gifted novelists. During his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Sinclair Lewis praised the young Thomas Wolfe. Wolfe's novels are described as autobiographical as his range of fictional material does not extend beyond his own experience. Instead, Wolfe writes powerful, sensitive, and lyrical descriptions of the people, including himself, who populate his world. Wolfe's style has been the subject of great numbers of interpreters. It is rich, poetic, and powerful expression, as the novelist attempts the impossible task of describing the infinite psychological, emotional, and social complexities of human life with language, metaphor, and symbolization. As one reads Wolfe, one feels, within the interminable passages, an aching identification with the writer because with characteristic candor and honesty, Wolfe confesses so much, so deeply, so well.

Look Homeward, Angel is the first of four major novels written by Wolfe, and contains a single teacher, well developed

as a character, who strongly influences the major character, Eugene Gant. Eugene is understood to be Wolfe himself as a child and young man in this first novel. Eugene's relationship with the teacher, Margaret Leonard, begins when he wins a prize in an essay contest sponsored by her husband, a public school principal. Her plan is to start a small private school, and after reading the prize winning essay, she seeks to enroll Eugene. She is described in the following manner, when Eugene first meets her:

Margaret Leonard at this time was thirty-four years old. She had borne two children, a son who was now six years old, and a daughter who was two. As she stood there, with her fingers splayed about the broomstick, he noted, with a momentary cold nausea, that the tip of her right index finger was flattened out as if it had been crushed beyond healing by a hammer. But it was years before he knew that tuberculars sometimes have such fingers.

Margaret Leonard was of middling height, five feet six inches perhaps. As the giddiness of his embarrassment wore off, he saw that she could not weigh more than eighty or ninety pounds . . . She had on a dress of crisp gray gingham, not loose or lapping round her wasted figure, but hiding every line in her body, like a draped stick . . . Her thin face was given a sense of shrewdness and decision by the straight line of her nose, the fine long carving of her chin. Beneath the sallow minutely pitted skin in her cheeks, and about her mouth, several frayed nerve-centres twitched from moment to moment, jarring the skin slightly without contorting or destroying the passionate calm beauty that fed her inexhaustibly from within. This face was the constant field of conflict, nearly always calm, but always reflecting the incessant struggle and victory of the enormous energy that inhabited her, over the thousand jangling devils of depletion and weariness that tried to pull her apart. There was always written upon her the epic poetry of beauty and repose out of struggle--he never ceased to feel that she had her hand around the reins of her heart, that gathered into her grasp were all the straining wires and sinews of disunion which would scatter and unjoint her members, once she let go.

Literally, physically, he felt that, if the great tide of valiance once flowed out of her, she would immediately go to pieces.¹

Young Eugene Gant, when he meets his future teacher, Margaret Leonard, is twelve years old. He is described as painfully tall and thin, precocious, and therefore introverted into a world of fantasy so immense that even Wolfe's long passages fail to completely describe it. One element, however, is described in the initial conversation the twelve year old and his teacher hold about the books he has read:

She took him into a big room on the left that had been fitted out as a living room and library. She watched his face light up with eagerness as he saw the fifteen hundred or two thousand books shelved away in various places . . .

'Well, tell me boy,' she said, 'what have you been reading?'

Craftily he picked his way across the waste land of printery naming as his favorites those books which he felt would win her approval. As he had read everything, good and bad, that the town library contained, he was able to make an impressive showing. Sometimes she stopped him to question about a book--he rebuilt the story richly with a blazing tenacity of detail that satisfied her wholly. She was excited and eager--she saw at once how abundantly she could feed this ravenous hunger for knowledge, experience, wisdom. And he knew suddenly the joy of obedience: the wild ignorant groping, the blind hunt, the desperate baffled desire was now to be charted for him. Before he went away she had given him a fat volume of nine hundred pages, shot through with spirited engravings of love and battle, of the period he loved best.

He was drowned deep at midnight in the destiny of the man who killed the bear, the burner of windmills and the scourge of banditry, in all the life of road and tavern in the Middle Ages, in valiant and beautiful Gerard, the seed of genius, the father of Erasmus. Eugene thought The Cloister and the Hearth the best story he had ever read.²

¹Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel (New York: The Modern Library, 1929), pp. 212-213.

²Ibid., pp. 215-216.

Eugene spends four years at the private school of the Leonards. He has other teachers in the story, but none is developed by Wolfe sufficiently to be more than faces or catalogues of mannerisms. Further passages describe some of the qualities Wolfe projects into Margaret Leonard, as she assists Eugene in developing himself and in sharing her views of life:

She did not have knowledge. But she had wisdom. She found immediately a person's quality. Boys were her heroes, her little gods. She believed that the world was to be saved, life redeemed, by one of them. She saw the flame that burns in each of them, and she guarded it. She tried somehow to reach the dark gropings toward light and articulation, of the blunt, the stolid, the shamefast. She spoke a calm low word to the trembling race horse, and he was still.

Thus, he made no confessions. He was still prison-pent. But he always turned to Margaret Leonard as towards the light: she saw the unholy fires that cast their sword-dance on his face, she saw the hunger and the pain, and she fed him--majestic crime!--on poetry.

Whatever of fear or shame locked them in careful silence, whatever decorous pretense of custom guarded their tongues, they found release in the eloquent symbols of verse. And by that sign, Margaret was lost to the good angels. For what care the ambassadors of Satan, for all the small fidelities of the letter and the word, if from the singing choir of earthly methodism we can steal a single heart--lift up, flame-tipped, one great lost soul to the high sinfulness of poetry? The wine of the grape had never stained her mouth, but the wine of poetry was inextinguishably mixed in her blood, entombed in her flesh.³

The range of Wolfe's description of this teacher is as broad as his vision of the individual seen through his Romanticism. Any sentimental view, however, is qualified by

³Ibid., p. 308.

an uncommonly astute psychological insight into Margaret Leonard as she falls back upon the following:

This tin-currency of criticism she had picked up in a few courses at college, and in her reading. They were--are, perhaps, still--part of the glib jargon of pedants. But they did her no real injury. They were simply the things people said. She felt, guiltily, that she must trick out her teaching with these gauds: she was afraid that what she had to offer was not enough. What she had to offer was simply a feeling that was so profoundly right, so unerring, that she could no more utter great verse meanly than mean verse well. She was a voice that God seeks. She was the reed of demonic ecstasy. She was possessed, she knew not how, but she knew the moment of her possession. The singing tongues of all the world were wakened into life again under the incantation of her voice. She was inhabited. She was spent.

She passed through their barred and bolted boy-life with the direct stride of a spirit. She opened their hearts as if they had been lockets. They said: 'Mrs. Leonard is sure a nice lady.'⁴

Later in the novel, as Eugene is leaving for college, Margaret Leonard, with her husband, tells him goodbye.

'Well, then, go your ways boy. Go your ways. God bless you.'

She looked for a moment at his long thin figure and turned to John Dorsey Leonard with wet eyes:

'Do you remember that shaver in knee-pants who came to us four years ago? Can you believe it?'

John Dorsey Leonard laughed quietly, with a weary gentle relaxation.

'What do you know about it?' he said.

When Margaret turned to him again her voice, low and gentle, was charged with the greatest passion he had ever heard in it.

'You are taking a part of our heart with you boy. Do you know that?'

She took his trembling hand gently between her own lean fingers. He lowered his head and closed his eyes tightly.

'Eugene,' she continued, 'we could not love you more if you were our own child. We wanted to keep you with

⁴Ibid., pp. 313-314.

us for another year, but since that cannot be, we are sending you out with our hopes pinned to you. . . .'

Later, after he left her, her light kiss upon his cheek, the first she had ever given him, burned like a ring of fire.⁵

This portrait of Margaret Leonard as a teacher is well drawn. Within the novel she is a teacher who can easily be considered a remarkable example of the idealistic human being who attempts to share her best visions with her student, Eugene Gant. They actually do love each other in the finest tradition of the teacher-pupil relationship through a mutual respect for each other in that relationship. The I-Thou exists so strongly, their communication is so intense, and their identifications with each other are so intimate as to be on the threshold of embarrassment for them both. Excluding the elements of sentimentality, the relationship is extremely empathic and raises serious questions about an educational environment, including our own, in which real inhibitions restricting the I-Thou relationship do exist.

The relationships between teachers and pupils are often taxed by a professional propriety on the part of teachers which must seem at some times to all those who either study or teach to be a mask. In a study done of Thomas Wolfe's fictional characters, which strongly reinforces the claim that his autobiographical works were usually mere reporting of his own experiences, Margaret Leonard is mentioned.

⁵Ibid., p. 392.

Immediately after the publication of his first novel, Look Homeward, Angel, Wolfe's townspeople in Ashville, North Carolina, the thinly disguised characters in his book, protested loudly, much as the people of Sauk Center, Minnesota, did when Sinclair Lewis published Main Street.

In spite of a description of Margaret Leonard that appears complimentary, the actual person, Margaret Roberts, seemed to have been less pleased at her portrait:

There is incontrovertible evidence that Wolfe knew that his first novel was autobiographical and that even before publication he was apprehensive about its reception. . . . He wrote his favorite teacher, Mrs. Margaret Roberts and the prototype of Mrs. Margaret Leonard in the novel, that he feared 'this book will wound and anger people deeply--particularly those at home.' Here he may have been thinking especially of Mrs. Roberts and trying to prepare and warn her, but she became one of those most deeply hurt by the novel.⁶

Further evidence of the close relationship between the teacher and pupil, in reality as well as in fiction, is offered in the following:

He described her as 'one of the three great teachers who have ever taught me,' but she was much more than a mere teacher: as he said, her influence was 'inestimable on almost every particular of my life and thought.' 'I was . . . groping like a blind sea-thing with no eyes and a thousand feelers toward light, toward life, toward beauty and order,' he wrote to her in 1927. 'And then I found you, . . . you mother of my spirit who fed me with light. Do you think that I have forgotten? Do you think I ever will?'

⁶Floyd C. Watkins, Thomas Wolfe's Characters (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 26.

⁷Elizabeth Nowell, Thomas Wolfe (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960), p. 30.

Further discussion of the actual teacher, Mrs. Margaret Roberts, in regard to her being "deeply hurt" by the publication of her portrait by her former pupil, is not offered in the Wolfe biographies searched. One can only wonder why a teacher such as Mrs. Roberts, so flatteringly praised by Wolfe on several occasions, would be reportedly "hurt". Such questions, however unanswered they might remain, do apply to the questions assumed within the "educative principle" of this study: does this fictional teacher have the "courage to be" and the "courage to teach?"

The answer, while thus limited and illuminated by the reality of the relationship's subsequent disappointments, is a qualified "yes". Martin Buber gives us a suggestion and an answer to the peculiarity of the circumstances and the question, in his description of the temporal nature of the I-Thou relationship:

But this is the exalted melancholy of our fate, that every Thou in our world must become an It. It does not matter how exclusively present the Thou was in the direct relation. As soon as the relation has been worked out or has been permeated with a means, the Thou becomes an object among objects--perhaps the chief, but still one of them, fixed in its size and its limits. . . . And love itself cannot persist in direct relation. It endures, but in interchange of actual and potential being. The human being who was even now single and unconditioned, not something lying to hand, only present, not able to be experienced, only able to be fulfilled, has now become a He or a She, a sum of qualities, a given quantity with a certain shape. Now I may take out from him again the colour of his hair or of his speech or of his goodness. But so long as I can do this he is no more my Thou and cannot yet be my Thou again.

Every Thou in the world is by its nature fated to become a thing, or continually to re-enter into the condition of things.⁸

Other teachers are briefly mentioned in Look Homeward, Angel as Eugene Gant takes leave of the Leonards' school and goes to the state university. Most of them are casually described without significance, but one teacher of Latin figures in a telling commentary on cheating in Eugene's class.

The situation supposedly has some basis in fact, within the autobiographical experience of Wolfe. He describes Eugene Gant as working out his own translations for class recitation. The translations mentioned are of Livy and Tacitus and the novel describes Eugene as the only member of his class who does not use a "pony" or printed translation. When he reads them aloud in class without faltering, the professor assumes he is cheating.

The Devil's Disciple was not a bad man; he was only, like most men who pride themselves on their astuteness, a foolish one.

'Nonsense, Mr. Gant,' he said kindly. 'You don't think you can fool me on a translation, do you? It's all right with me, you know,' he continued grinning. 'If you'd rather ride a pony than do your own work, I'll give you a passing grade--so long as you do it well.'

'But--' Eugene began explosively.

'But I think it's a pity, Mr. Gant,' said the professor, gravely, 'that you're willing to slide along this way. See here, my boy, you're capable of doing first-rate work. I can see that. Why don't you make an effort? Why don't you buckle down and really study, after this?'

Eugene stared at the man, with tears of anger in his eyes. He sputtered but could not speak. But suddenly,

⁸Buber, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

as he looked down into the knowing leer, the perfect and preposterous injustice of the thing--like a caricature--overcame him; he burst into an explosive laugh of rage and amusement which the teacher, no doubt, accepted as confession.

'Well, what do you say?' he asked. "Will you try?"⁹
'All right! Yes!' the boy yelled. 'I'll try it.'

In the novel, Eugene joins the conspiracy, buys a printed translation, falters over his class readings, and is commended by the professor:

'... Your translation is not so smooth, but its your own now. You're doing good work, my boy, and you're getting something out of it. It's worth it, isn't it?'¹⁰
'Yes,' said Eugene gratefully, 'it certainly is--'

This commentary, fictionalized by Wolfe, is an indictment of the unnamed professor and needs no further discussion within the assumptions of this study. The figure of this teacher is the antithesis of the "educative principle" within the single illustrative episode in the novel.

Of Time and the River, 1935

Thomas Wolfe published his second book six years after Look Homeward, Angel. His autobiographical method of writing continues even though he makes some small efforts at concealing his characters. The time span of Of Time and the River¹¹ is from 1920 to 1925. Since Wolfe was born in 1900,

⁹Wolfe, op. cit., pp. 400-401.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 401.

¹¹Thomas Wolfe, Of Time and the River (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935).

the novel corresponds to his own experiences during those five years.

In 1920 Wolfe goes to Harvard and completes a graduate degree with hopes of becoming a dramatist. He enrolls in Professor George Pierce Baker's playwriting course, a highly regarded inner circle which had produced some notable successes.

Professor Hatcher

Within Of Time and the River the relationship between Wolfe and Baker is fictionalized, but the business-like procedure of the writer's circle does not offer this study the quality of relationship earlier described between Eugene Gant and Margaret Leonard. In the biography of Wolfe by Nowell, the fictional Wolfe, in a passage cut from the novel prior to publication, describes Baker, named Professor Hatcher in the story, with the following:

'I worshipped him for almost a year. He was the great man, the prophet, the infinitely wise and strong and gentle spirit who knew all, had seen all, could solve all problems with a word, release us of all the anguish, grief, and error of our lives by a wave of his benevolent hand.'¹²

The need for a strong figure, father or mother, is mentioned often in biographies of Wolfe, and his fictional self, Eugene Gant has changed little in this respect from an earlier need expressed for Margaret Leonard in Look Homeward,

¹²Nowell, op. cit., p. 52.

Angel. This time however, no reciprocal need seems evident by his instructor in drama, and Professor Hatcher (Baker) is more an object of worship than a well developed fictional teacher. His very excellence keeps Eugene at a respectful distance, beyond the range of an I-Thou encounter. However, Professor Hatcher is drawn as a remarkable example of the teacher operating within a group of students, and challenges his students to their best efforts.

Eugene Gant

In Of Time and the River Wolfe does offer this study a unique phenomenon: a major American novelist describing himself as a teaching figure. In Wolfe's typically lengthy passages, most of his experience as an Instructor in English at NYU is written generally in narration, summing up his feelings about his job, but one occasion of a relationship with a Jewish student is developed.

The context of the encounter is important. Eugene Gant, again the southern mountaineer Thomas Wolfe in disguise, suffers terrible anguish in teaching freshman composition to his New York students. When he finally resigns from NYU to write his first novel, after finding his teaching to be exhausting, he describes succinctly:

' . . . the deep damnation of Freshman Composition.'¹³
As a special kind of hell, Wolfe's enormous energies are

¹³ Ibid., p. 81.

focused on teaching generally insensitive students sensitive appreciation of literature and creative composition. He writes long criticisms on each theme, gets up out of his bed to change a grade, and faces three large humming classes with agonizing fears of incompetence. Every evidence offered in his biographies by former students and faculty colleagues attest to his being a scrupulously conscientious and able instructor.

The encounter is precipitated by the Jewish student, Abe Jones, following instructor Gant out of class and all the way to Gant's hotel lodgings. Abe Jones is Gant's most skillful student and his most ardent critic. Although he always receives an "A" on his papers, he always argues with Gant about the criticisms. The harried Gant feels that Jones symbolizes the petty ugliness of New York City and the hateful life that prevents him from writing his own novel. Abe Jones is in Gant's night class and Gant confronts him in his hotel entrance:

'You don't like my class, do you, Jones? You don't think much of the way I teach, do you?'

Abe was surprised at the question, because his complaint had always had a kind of sour impersonality: it had never wholly dared a final accusatory directness.

'Well,' he said in a moment, with a surly and unwilling tone, 'I never said that. I don't think we're getting as much out of the class as we should. I think we could get a lot more out of it than we're getting. That's all I said.' . . .

'All right,' Eugene said, 'I know where you stand now. Now I'll tell you where I stand. I've been giving you the best I've got, but you don't think it's good enough. Well, it's all I've got and it's all you're going to get from me. Now I tell you what you're going to do, Jones.

'You're going out of my class. Do you understand?' he shouted. 'You're going now. I never want to see you in my class again. I'll get you transferred, I'll have you put in some other instructor's class, but you'll never come into my room again.'

'You can't do that,' Abe said. 'You've got no right to do that. You've got no right to change a fellow to another class in the middle of the term. I've done my work,' he said resentfully, 'you're not going to change me . . . I'll take it to the faculty committee if you do.'

Eugene could stand no more: in misery and despair he thought of all he had endured because of Abe, and the whole choking wave of resentment and fury which had been gathering in his heart for months burst out upon him.

'Why, damn you!' he said. 'Go to the faculty committee or any other damned place you please, but you'll never come back to any room where I'm teaching again. If they send you back, if they say I've got to have you in my class, I quit. Do you hear me, Jones?' he shouted. 'I'll not have you! If they try to force me, I'm through! To hell with such a life! I'll get down and clean out sewers before I have you in class again . . . Now you damned rascal,' his voice had grown so hoarse and thick he could hardly speak, and the blind notes were swimming drunkenly before him. '. . . I've had all I can stand from you. . . . Why, damn you, Jones, you didn't deserve anyone like me . . . You should get down on your knees and thank God you had a teacher half as good as me. . . . You . . . damned . . . fellow. . . . You! . . . To think I sweat blood over you! . . . Now, get away from here!' . . . he yelled. 'To hell with you! . . . I never want to see your face again!' . . . Before he had gone three steps Abe Jones was at his side, clutching at his sleeve, beseeching, begging, pleading: 'Say! . . . You've got the wrong idea! Honest you have! . . . Say! I never knew you felt like that! Don't send me out of there,' he begged earnestly, and suddenly Eugene saw his shining glasses had grown misty and that his dull weak eyes blinked with tears. 'I don't want to leave your class,' he said. 'Why that's the best class I've got! . . . All the fellows feel the same way about it.' . . .

And from that moment, through every change of fortune, all absence, all return, all wandering, and through the whole progress of his city life, through every event of triumph, ruin, or madness, this Jew, Abe Jones, the first manswarm atom he had come to know in all the desolation of the million-footed city--had been his loyal friend.

It was not the golden city he had visioned as a child, and the gray reptilian face of that beak-nose Jew did not

belong among the company of the handsome, beautiful and fortunate people that he had dreamed about, but Abe was made of better stuff than most dreams are made of. His spirit was as steady as a rock, as enduring as the earth, and like the flash of a light, the sight of his good, gray ugly face could always evoke for Eugene the whole wrought fabric of his life in the city, the whole design of wandering and return, with a thousand memories of youth and hunger, of loneliness, fear, despair, of glory, love, exultancy and joy.¹⁴

In this self-identification of the author as teacher in relationship with a single student who becomes a key in the above situation, we witness the curiosity of the author-teacher within the I-Thou. The illumination is twofold. Gant-Wolfe escapes personally from an I-It conception of himself as an object of scorn, an incompetent, guilt-ridden teacher by the act of Abe Jones' emergence from a critical student to a Thou. Abe Jones' realization of Gant as a Thou, instead of merely a teacher, occurs simultaneously.

Additionally, in the two novels used in this study, we have the student and teacher Eugene Gant, emerging from a world view of the In-Itself, from the ideals, hopes, books, and characters as objective entities, to the greater vision of all men, all hopes, and all dreams as being elements in the For-Itself. The subject-object dichotomy of ordinary men is resolved by the artistic unity in the dialogue of Wolfe's creative attempt to make all the world whole in his novels: He symbolizes his total experience as the I-Thou.

¹⁴Wolfe, op. cit., pp. 445-447.

William Faulkner, The Hamlet, 1940

William Faulkner's The Hamlet,¹⁵ compiled of selected short stories, was published in 1940. The Hamlet is the first of a trilogy of novels, including The Town,¹⁶ 1957, and finally, The Mansion,¹⁷ published in 1959, covering the history of the Snopes family through two generations. Within the genealogical histories chronicled by Faulkner of the rural South of the mythical Yoknapatawpha County, the Snopes are central figures, symbolizing the dynamically vital, though red-necked, common people of the post-Civil War South. These works, in short, are part of an enormous range of characters, families, and generations covered fictionally within William Faulkner's fecund vision.

Within this enormous range of characters and events, appears only one teacher of importance to this study. He is named only "Labove", and his position within the novel, The Hamlet, is one generally of isolation from the major events surrounding Frenchman's Bend, the village in which he is the solitary school teacher.

He is subjected by Faulkner to a detailed psychological treatment as an introverted transient working his way

¹⁵William Faulkner, The Hamlet (New York: Random House, 1940).

¹⁶William Faulkner, The Town (New York: Random House, 1957).

¹⁷William Faulkner, The Mansion (New York: Random House, 1959).

through law school at the State University at Oxford. He would hardly have been included had he not had a dramatic, torturous relationship with one of the major figures of the novel, Eula Varner. She is the daughter of Will Varner, the owner and entrepreneur of the village, and is the title character of book two of the novel.

To establish the setting of the relationship between Labove and his student Eula Varner, which is unlike the more romantic and realistic relationships offered earlier in this study of American fiction, I would offer the following quotation concerning the change in fictional point of view:

Practically all of the critics of modern American fiction of adolescence have noted that the novels of the forties and fifties tend to stress symbolism and depth psychology in contrast to the naturalistic novels of the twenties and thirties, which usually imply a need for social reform. The change is a gradual one, but the year 1940 is indicative of this change. Carson McCuller's The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is more representative of the new trend than any other important novel published that year. Three novels by leading naturalists - James T. Farrell's Father and Son, William Faulkner's The Hamlet, and Richard Wright's Native Son - all reveal deep psychological penetration with a certain amount of symbolism. . . .¹⁸

Further, and in preparation of a study of the relationship between Labove and Eula Varner, and quoted from the same source, an additional dimension of treatment within a psychological and symbolic novel, in this case, The Hamlet, is given:

¹⁸W. Tasker Witham, The Adolescent in the American Novel (New York: Fredrick Ungar Publishing Company, 1964), pp. 275-276.

In some recent works of literature, . . . the child becomes a symbol of evil: for example, the child murderess in William March's The Bad Seed . . . also . . . Eula Varner in Faulkner's The Hamlet . . . Undoubtedly Faulkner intended her to personify sex, even in her infancy . . . the sight of her arouses men's animal instincts. An extreme reversal of the traditional symbols of innocence corrupted by experience is found in Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: 'it is the naive child, the female, the American who corrupts the sophisticated adult, the male, the European.' Without admiring Lolita as literature, one can . . . see in it ' . . . a resolve to reassess the innocence of the child, to reveal it as a kind of moral idiocy, a dangerous freedom from the restraints of culture and custom, a threat to order. In the place of the sentimental dream of childhood, writers like Faulkner and Nabokov have been creating for us a nightmare in which the child is no longer raped, strangled or seduced . . . but is himself (better herself!) rapist, murderer and seducer. . . . Such writers have come to believe that the self can be betrayed by impulse as well as rigor; that an Age of Innocence can be a tyranny no less terrible than an Age of Reason; and that the gods of such an age, if not yet dead, must be killed however snub-nosed, freckle-faced or golden-haired they may be.¹⁹

Though one need not be forced to any extreme of attitude concerning our contemporary worship of physical youth, nor to any attendant cynicisms regarding the educative principle as a given article of faith expressed within this study, the role of the teacher, as well as the portrait of any other fictional characters in serious American fiction, seems to be undergoing some genuine measure of change. The anti-hero and the novels of "Black Humor" can be hopefully regarded only as engaging modes of expression rather than exact harbingers of some future anarchy in our institutions, including our evolving educational programs.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 22.

Certainly the relationship between Eula Varner and Labove the teacher is an unusual one, as it can only be grasped within the psychological characterization of Labove as he is contrasted against the more common people of Frenchman's Bend. The following is a definitive description of both Labove and Eula Varner as detailed in a genealogical source book, Who's Who in Faulkner.²⁰

Labove, a Mississippi-born schoolteacher. He worked his way through the state university at Oxford by playing football, received a Master of Arts degree and a Bachelor of Laws, and was admitted to the bar. He taught school at Frenchman's Bend for six years, departing suddenly from the area after clumsily failing to seduce reluctant pupil Eula Varner.²¹

And,

Snopes, Eula Varner (1889-1927), the last of sixteen children of influential business man Will Varner. 'Incorrigibly lazy' and not incorruptible, by age sixteen she was pregnant by Hoake McCarron. There followed a hastily arranged and paternally financed marriage to Flem Snopes. . . .²²

Labove is pictured as a quietly determined young man whose outward calm is contrasted with his keen intelligence and inward self-awareness. He is subjected for his six years as teacher not only to his forced alienation of continual study, but also to the sensuous presence of the physically attractive and mature schoolgirl, Eula Varner. He controls

²⁰ Margaret P. Ford and Suzanne Kincaid, Who's Who in Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963).

²¹ Ibid., p. 63.

²² Ibid., p. 91.

his lust until it becomes an obsession. In the most delicate and vulnerable manner possible, he finally approaches Eula as she awaits her overly protective brother for a chaperoned ride home after school.

. . . He stayed for the privilege of waiting until the final class was dismissed and the room was empty so that he could rise and walk with his calm damned face to the bench and lay his hand on the wooden plank still warm from the impact of her sitting or even kneel and lay his face against the plank, wallowing his face against it, embracing the hard unsentient wood, until the heat was gone. He was mad. He knew it. There would be times now when he did not even want to make love to her but wanted to hurt her, see blood spring and run, watch that serene face warp to the indelible mark of terror and agony beneath his own; to leave some indelible mark of himself on it and then watch it even cease to be a face. Then he would exorcise that. He would drive it from him, whereupon their positions would reverse. It would now be himself importunate and prostrate before that face which, even though but fourteen years old, postulated a weary knowledge which he would never attain, a surfeit, a glut of all perverse experience. He would be as a child before that knowledge. He would be like a young girl, a maiden, wild distracted and amazed, trapped not by the seducer's maturity and experience but by blind and ruthless forces inside herself which she now realized she had lived with for years without even knowing they were there. He would grovel in the dust before it, panting: 'Show me what to do. Tell me. I will do anything you tell me, anything, to learn and know what you know.' He was mad. He knew it. He knew that sooner or later something was going to happen. And he knew too, that, whatever it would be, he would be the vanquished, even though he did not know yet what the one crack in his armor was and that she would find it unerringly and instinctively and without ever being aware that she had been in deadly danger. Danger? he thought, cried. Danger? Not to her: to me. I am afraid of what I might do, not because of her because there is nothing I or any man could do to her that would hurt her. It's because of what it will do to me.

Then one afternoon he found his axe. He continued to hack in almost an orgasm of joy at the dangling nerves and tendons of the gangrened member long after the first bungling blow. He had heard no sound. The last footfall had ceased and the door had closed for the last time.

He did not hear it open again, yet something caused him to raise his wallowing face from the bench. She was in the room again, looking at him. He knew that she not only recognized the place at which he knelt, but that she knew why. Possibly at that instant he believed she had known all the time, because he knew at once that she was neither frightened nor laughing at him, that she simply did not care. Nor did she know that she was now looking at the face of a potential homicide. She merely released the door and came down the aisle toward the front of the room where the stove sat. 'Jody ain't come yet,' she said. 'It's cold out there. What are you doing down there?'²³

Labove moves towards her and struggles to embrace her. She is only fourteen but is completely mature, and a large girl. After some attempt merely to hold her, she wrenches away and catches him with a blow to his face which knocks him down:

. . . He stumbled backward, struck a bench and went down with it and partly beneath it. She stood over him, breathing deep but not panting and not even dishevelled. 'Stop pawing me,' she said. 'You old headless horseman Ichabod Crane.'²⁴

Labove, still obsessed with his madness and isolation, temporarily wishes for death, some catharsis, some exorcising of his private sexual fantasy, his daemon. Finally he goes to her father, expecting violence from the family for what he has attempted. She has not even cared to mention it. He leaves her father's store and Frenchman's Bend:

The house, the heatless room in which he had lived for six years now with his book and his bright lamp, was between the store and the school. He did not even look

²³Faulkner, op cit., pp. 119-121.

²⁴Ibid., p. 122.

toward it when he passed. He returned to the schoolhouse and closed and locked the door. With a fragment of brick he drove the nail into the wall beside the door and hung the key on the nail. The schoolhouse was on the Jefferson road. He already had the overcoat with him.²⁵

The symbols suggested by the objects of the schoolhouse: the locked door, the key nailed up for the next teacher, its location at the edge of the village on the way to the next town, as well as those suggested by his heatless room, with its bright lamp and books and belongings are surely hints by Faulkner of the grinding melancholy environment of inhumanity and darkness. The objects of one's home and of a teacher's schoolhouse are not cast off without some such suggestion. Faulkner's vision of his own world is almost exclusively a world of the I-It. It is the atmosphere of despair and of nausea most pointedly envisioned by Sartre, in which the subjects, the inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend, and innumerable other such villages of Faulkner's world, are totally unaware of any further human responsibility or existence than a superficial acceptance of the world of appearances, of the world as totally, objectively In-Itself.

Labove literally and figuratively runs for his life, intuitively though unconsciously aware of where or what it might be. He is the existential figure in the relationship because he is at least dimly aware of the horror and insufficiency of The Hamlet. Eula remains but she remains only

²⁵Ibid., p. 127.

as an object of fleshy attention, only as some kind of idolatrous misconception of the I-Thou, of love.

In such utter desolation as Faulkner places his teacher Labove, the educative principle of this study is annihilated by the negation of any student-teacher relationship.

In summation of the view of Labove, both his self view and that of those people in Frenchman's Bend who regard him as a noun, a "teacher", Sartre offers us:

Man 'is' what society requires of him, he plays for society the role which he has been assigned and which he has assumed or had to assume. And he plays this role primarily to himself. Of course man 'is' never exactly what a table or a glass 'is'. . . . He is for others and for himself only a representation and can 'be' only in representation. . . . To be in good faith, to be oneself, means therefore to make the attempt to play a representative role . . . For others and myself I am 'in the mode of being what I am not' . . . In other words, my being as subject in the world would be confused with my being as thing in the world of things common to all men.²⁶

Ernest Hemingway, For Whom the Bell Tolls, 1940

Just as Faulkner's teaching figure, Labove, of the novel, The Hamlet, is symbolically isolated from the relative darkness and grinding ignorance of his environment, so is the self-exiled Robert Jordan of Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls²⁷ isolated literally and symbolically from America and his native academic environment. He chooses to be a

²⁶Sartre, op. cit., p. 60.

²⁷Ernest Hemingway, For Whom the Bell Tolls (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940).

Loyalist partisan in the Spanish Civil War, with all attendant risks and deprivations of that choice instead of remaining a comfortably secure professor. He chooses to live and to fight for an idea, for the principle of freedom inherent in a world of the I-Thou rather than expediently to fail to exist by forfeiture of his life in accepting the lesser vision of "being" a member of a world of the I-It. He does not really believe it to be a choice inasmuch as he is not actually being heroic. He simply feels compelled to act, and is thus consciously existential. As such, this teacher must be explored in this study outside the previous methodology of any student-teacher relationship. By way of rationale, however, the very nature of the criteria of an educative principle set forth in this paper precludes any first level of relationship between any such objective distinctions as "student" and "teacher".

Hemingway seems to express some belief in the credibility of his vision of mankind's need for some acknowledged interdependence in the very title of the novel:

In order to understand Ernest Hemingway's motive in writing For Whom the Bell Tolls, it is necessary to know the essence of the quotation from John Donne, from which Hemingway took his theme: ' . . . any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.' Hemingway wanted his readers to feel what happened to the Loyalists in Spain in 1937 was a part of²⁸ that crisis of the modern world in which we all share.

²⁸Frank N. Magill (ed.), Masterpieces of World Literature (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 282.

Although the plot of the novel, particularly the moving love relationship between Robert Jordan and Maria, is seen as a compelling drama and adventure by itself, the involvement Robert commits himself to is an excellent example of Jean Paul Sartre's commentary on human freedom:

Human freedom is not a part of human existence; it precedes human existence and makes it possible. The freedom of man can not be separated from the being of man. It is the being of man's consciousness. It is not a human attribute but it is the raw material of my being. I owe my being to freedom. . . .²⁹

Or to further illustrate the kind of personal responsibility Robert must, by his nature, assume to be his only alternative to not "becoming," to not being a human being:

I can understand my past and my present only as they relate to my future (which confers meaning on my past and my present actions); in the same way the ensemble of my projects (that is, my future) confers on the cause its structure as a motive. We convert a situation into a cause or motive by fleeing from it toward the possibilities of changing it . . .³⁰

So Robert Jordan here serves as an example of a most lucid appraisal of the possibilities of both members of the I-Thou relationship. The tragedy of his death and of his war go far beyond to the continual, though not insurmountable, tragedy of the human comedy, of the universal enigma of each human being doomed to his own irrevocable freedom.

²⁹Justus Streller, Jean Paul Sartre: To Freedom Condemned (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 282.

³⁰Ibid., p. 31.

Any sentimental evaluation of the novel's literal narration must be observed and understood as Robert Jordan evaluates his own life, as a necessary development toward greater freedom, the essential foundation of human existence itself.

Robert's long speech to Maria, in his effort to make her leave and understand why he must remain and die to destroy the central symbolic bridge, is a further demonstration of this vision. The vehicle used by Hemingway to create realistically the circumstances necessary for Robert's speech are ordinary modes of fictional conflict, but they are compelling antecedents for the book's conclusion.

Robert Jordan lives for three days in the novel. He has worked with the Loyalist guerillas previously, particularly in demolition operations. The bridge which finally dooms him is central in an offensive tactical movement. He joins a crew of guerillas who are to support him in blowing up the bridge, but their barbarism and feuding among themselves result in the destruction of detonators, making the demolition of the charges by hand grenades extremely dangerous. Most of the partisans are killed because of this circumstance, the result of one of the peasant leaders, Pablo, who destroys them in a childish fit of pique. The ignorant, emotional blindness of Pablo, who is forgiven by the others afterwards, indirectly kills Jordan. Maria, who loves Robert, and Pilar, the strong, dedicated, and efficient wife of the drunken childish leader Pablo, symbolically cross the clearing

swept by Fascist gunfire, to safety and the future. Robert's horse is shot out from under him and he is injured. He elects to remain with a machine gun to afford them the further protection of time, the always open future of potential peace.

In his speech to Maria, the instructor or teacher comes forth in his efforts to persuade and explain to her why she must leave him. In some ways it is typically poignant as a reader of novels of love and war might expect, but with a literary device noted by one critic, the speech also supports the suggestion of Robert's commitment:

. . . Along with the Biblical solemnity go the intimacy and familiarity of the second-person singular in those Latin languages, the homeliness and earthiness of forms that suggest not the ceremony of aristocratic life but the friendliness and warmth and familiarity of the plain people. This is a stroke of great subtlety and daring. Hemingway has managed by the use of this idiomatic device to link together in our feeling the secular homeliness of the republican cause with the poetry of religious sentiment. And, moreover, since 'thee' and 'thou' is the language of lovers, it is another means of establishing a connection between the two idealisms which run parallel through the story of Robert Jordan, the idealism of love and the idealism of political sentiment. 'I love thee,' Jordan declares to Maria, 'as I love all that we have fought for. I love thee as I love liberty and dignity and the rights of all men to work and not be hungry. I love thee as I love Madrid that we have defended and as I love all my comrades that have died.'³¹

as well as the general premise of the educative principle of this study.

³¹ Joseph Warren Beach, "Style in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*," Ernest Hemingway, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 119.

CHAPTER IV

1941 -

LIONEL TRILLING, "OF THIS TIME, OF THAT PLACE," 1943

Lionel Trilling, born in 1905, is a man of letters of considerable stature as author and critic, as well as Professor of English at Columbia University. The short story selected for this study first appeared in the Partisan Review, 1943, and is a penetrating study of a student-teacher relationship within both a psychological and existential framework.

One of the most interesting footnotes surrounding the story is its basis, in part, in fact. Trilling had the contemporary "Beat" poet Allen Ginsberg, author of "Howl", as an undergraduate student and was present when Ginsberg was expelled from the university for scribbling an obscenity on the dust of a dormitory window. Just how closely one might identify the actual relationship between the two men with those in the story is questionable, but that fact is necessarily of some interest in speculating upon the responsibilities and roles of the student-teacher relationship which is the center of the educative principle criteria of this paper.

The story itself begins with the central figure, Dr. Joseph Howe, on his way to his first day of class of a fall semester. It is a freshman class of modern literature and composition. He gives the class the information they will need concerning his office hours, the edition of the text, and an initial writing assignment:

. . . Its subject was traditional: 'Who I am and why I came to Dwight College.' By now the class was more at ease and it gave a ritualistic groan of protest. Then there was a stir as fountain-pens were brought out and the writing arms of the chairs were cleared and the paper was passed about. At last all the heads bent to work and the room became still.¹

Dr. Howe is a poet as well as a teacher, and thinks of himself as therefore superior to the more mundane aspects of his teaching duties.. It is a mixed feeling, however, as he actually does enjoy such routine rituals as attending Convocations, wearing his doctoral gown, and filling out the official forms and sheets of college affairs. He is jolted out of this cozy imbalance, however, by the late arrival and intrusion of a brilliant, searching, and demanding student in this first day of class:

. . . He advanced into the room and halted before Howe, almost at attention. In a loud clear voice he announced: 'I am Tertan, Ferdinand R., reporting at the direction of the Head of Department Vincent.'

The heraldic formality of this statement brought forth another cheer. Howe looked at the class with a sternness he could not really feel, for there was indeed something

¹Lionel Trilling, "Of This Time, Of That Place," The Rite of Becoming, ed. Arthur and Hilda K. Waldhorn (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 241-242.

ridiculous about this boy. Under his displeased regard the rows of heads dropped to work again. Then he touched Tertan's elbow, led him up to the desk and stood so as to shield their conversation from the class.

'We are writing an extemporaneous theme,' he said. 'The subject is: 'Who I am and why I came to Dwight College.'

He stripped a few sheets from the pad and offered them to the boy. Tertan hesitated and then took the paper, but he held it only tentatively. As if with the effort of making something clear, he gulped, and a slow smile fixed itself on his face. It was at once knowing and shy.

'Professor,' he said, 'to be perfectly fair to my classmates' - he made a large gesture over the room - 'and to you' - he inclined his head to Howe - 'this would not be for me an extemporaneous subject.'

Howe tried to understand. 'You mean you've already thought about it - you've heard we always give the same subject? That doesn't matter.'

Again the boy ducked his head and gulped. It was the gesture of one who wishes to make a difficult explanation with perfect candor. 'Sir,' he said, and made the distinction with great care, 'the topic I did not expect but I have given much ratiocination to the subject.'²

After class Howe is offered a brief but torrential outburst of adulation from Tertan. When Tertan leaves him, with a theatrical but perfectly sincere bow of respect, Howe attempts to dismiss his strange student as an eccentric. When he reads his first theme though, the enormity of the situation, and of his responsibility to this embarrassingly worshipful and talented student begins to dawn on him. Howe realizes full well that he has placed himself in a respected niche as literary editor, poet, and professor over the years and that the niche was constructed, defensively, for a solitary occupant. He struggles against eviction and fights

²Ibid., p. 242.

mightily to keep Tertan outside. When the choice finally arrives, he chooses territorial integrity over personal involvement, and he becomes aware of what he has done. This moment of awareness, when professor Howe realizes he has failed his student and himself, is made perfectly clear by Trilling at the end of the story.

The events which lead to his turning his back on Tertan, the awkward, almost frighteningly honest and searching young student, are painful acknowledgments of his own failures. Howe's own poetry is severely criticized in an academic literary quarterly, mostly on the grounds of its being "preciously subjective," as being too esoteric and cultish. Howe is threatened, as poet laureate of his own small domain,

. . . to be marked as the poet of a wilfull and selfish obscurity.³

Tertan comes to his office with the joint mission of defending Howe from the critical attack and to ask Howe to read his own writing. The confrontation is peculiarly genuine to Howe, who is more accustomed to student excuses than the baring of souls. Howe listens to himself being defended by Tertan as the better poet by reason of the attack:

. . . 'A critic,' he said, 'who admits prima facie that he doesn't understand.' Then he said grandly: 'It is the inevitable fate.'

It was absurd, yet Howe was not only aware of the absurdity but of a tension suddenly and wonderfully relaxed. Now that the 'attack' was on the table between himself and this strange boy and subject to the boy's

³Ibid., p. 246.

funny and absolutely certain contempt, the hidden force of his feeling was revealed to him in the very moment that it vanished. All unsuspected, there had been a film over the world, a transparent but discoloring haze of danger. But he had no time to stop over the brightened aspect of things. Tertan was going on. 'I also am a man of letters. Putative.'

'You have written a good deal?' Howe meant to be no more than polite and he was surprised at the tenderness he heard in his words.⁴

Tertan goes ahead to list a long encyclopedic body of philosophical, theological, scientific essays, plus three novels. He concludes the interview by asking Howe:

' . . . Is it your duty to read these if I bring them to you?'

Howe answered simply: 'No, it isn't exactly my duty, but I shall be happy to read them. . . . Then he was gone.

But after his departure something was left of him. . . .⁵

A fully growing awareness of his student as a "Thou" begins consciously in class, as Howe listens to Tertan give a splendidly rich confusion of interpretation to a play. He realizes that Tertan is brilliantly deranged. He goes to the Dean's office to look up his student's file, but decides not to:

' . . . give the matter out of his own hands. He must not release Tertan to authority. Not that he anticipated from the Dean anything but the greatest kindness for Tertan. The Dean would have the experience and skill which he himself could not have. One way or another the Dean could answer the question: 'What is Tertan?' Yet this was precisely what he feared. He alone could keep alive - not forever but for a somehow important time - the question: 'What is Tertan?' He alone could keep it still a question. Some sure instinct told him that he

⁴Ibid., p. 248.

⁵Ibid., p. 248.

must not surrender the question to a clean official desk in a clear official light to be dealt with, settled and closed.

He heard himself saying: 'Is the Dean busy at the moment? I'd like to see him.' . . . at the very moment when he was rejecting the official way, he had been, without will or intention, so gladly drawn to it.⁶

Howe sees the Dean and suggests Tertan's bizarre qualities as being disturbing, afraid to call the boy "mad." The Dean gives Howe a letter to read, a letter from Tertan about Howe addressed to the Dean. It is a letter of such deeply felt admiration expressed for Howe that it is a letter not only of gratitude and commendation, but of love. It shakes Howe:

This was love. There was no escape from it. Try as Howe might to remember that Tertan was mad and all his emotions invalidated, he could not destroy the effect upon him of his student's stern, affectionate regard. He had betrayed not only a power of mind but a power of love. And however firmly he held before his attention the fact of Tertan's madness, he could do nothing to banish the physical sensation of gratitude he felt. He had never thought of himself as 'driven and persecuted' and he did not now. But still he could not make meaningless his sensation of gratitude. The pitiable Tertan sternly pitied him, and comfort came from Tertan's never-to-be-comforted mind.⁷

Later, although Tertan is allowed to finish the semester, a psychiatrist is called in who gives an answer to the question: "What is Tertan?"

So Tertan continued to sit in Section 5 of English 1A, to his classmates still a figure of curiously dignified fun, symbol to most of them of the respectable

⁶Ibid., pp. 254-255.

⁷Ibid., p. 259.

but absurd intellectual life. But to his teacher he was now very different. He had not changed - he was still the greyhound casting for the scent of ideas and Howe could see that he was still the same Tertan, but he could not feel it. What he felt as he looked at the boy sitting in his accustomed place was the hard blank of a fact. The fact itself was formidable and depressing. But what Howe was chiefly aware of was that he had permitted the metamorphosis of Tertan from person to fact.⁸

Howe asks himself "What is Tertan?" and initiates the process which answers the question. He is fully aware that he has himself turned Tertan into an "It", a madman. The tragedy of his failure is the central, human and existential failure everywhere. As a teacher within this study, Dr. Howe illustrates the failure of all.

The message offered by Trilling is quite clear. In estimation of the teacher as a character in American literature, the lucid logic of Buber's conception of the I-Thou relationships inevitable living failure and tragedy is appropriate:

But this is the exalted melancholy of our fate, that every Thou in our world must become an It. It does not matter how exclusively present the Thou was in the direct relation. . . . And love itself cannot persist in direct relation. It endures, but in interchange of actual and potential being. The human being who was even now single and unconditioned, not something lying to hand, only present, not able to be experienced, only able to be fulfilled, has now become again a He or a She, a sum of qualities, a given quantity with a certain shape. Now I may take out from him again the colour of his hair or of his speech or of his goodness. But so long as I can do this he is no more my Thou and cannot yet be my Thou again.

⁸Ibid., pp. 262-263.

Every Thou in the world is by its nature fated to become a thing, or continually to re-enter into the condition of things.⁹

Richard Wright, Black Boy, 1945

Richard Wright, born in 1908 on a Mississippi plantation, and accomplishing, by 1960, the year of his death, the status of being both a Negro and a major American author, tells of his childhood and youth in the autobiography, Black Boy.¹⁰ Although the book is non-fiction, and Wright does not relate any formal teaching figures except negatively, Black Boy is a revealing commentary upon the essential aspects of this paper's purpose in examining existentially the relationship of teachers and students. It is an incredible document in several respects.

First, as a Book-of-the-Month Club Selection, it is the initial popular psychological study done by an American Negro author of his South. It reflects the well-qualified objectivity necessary to assay the educational, cultural, religious, economic, and social environment of the southern Negro, as well as a first-hand reporting of that milieu in depth. Second, the book dramatically demonstrates the incredibly improbable path to self-realization on an intellectual plane Wright had to follow, with disadvantages so

⁹ Buber, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

¹⁰ Richard Wright, Black Boy (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945).

awesome (for example, he was 13 years old before he lived in one spot long enough for a full school year) that his survival physically, much less culturally, is astounding in itself. Last, the book offers us a quality and kind of educational reality so chillingly desolate and deterministic that it forms a genuine and continuing challenge to any systematic appraisal of all institutions of education.

In 1935, Richard Wright began work with the Federal Writer's Project in Chicago, and later in New York, making it possible for him physically to have time and opportunity to fulfill his desire to write. His travels from his birth at Natchez through various southern towns in Mississippi and Arkansas, through Memphis, and finally to Chicago, are incredible in their descriptions of naturalistic deprivation. His father deserts his mother, leaving her with Richard and one brother at the mercy of the hostile South at large, maniacal, fanatically religious relatives, orphan homes, and Jackson's slums. The overwhelming atmosphere of a totalitarian hatred by the whites and the expedient soulless acquiescence of the fellows of his childhood and youth produce an introversion of environmental thought control that is paralyzing to read. One cannot help but feel that Wright's candid recounting of the facts of his early years are a major impetus only now being realized and attacked in America to any practicable implementation, largely through the reluctant prodding of the federal government. That Wright survived

at all is amazing when one reads of the innumerable and relatively fortuitous factors involved. That he comes to mature self-actualization and knowledge and writes this book is some kind of sign-post not only in literature, but in American studies in general.

The major teacher offered the reader for evaluation is an Aunt, a Seventh Day Adventist parochial school teacher whose transcendental posture thinly disguises an almost psychotic fantasy which would appear to be the manner of personal adjustment of many southern Negroes. Although Richard is an elementary pupil, he is an agnostic largely by intuition, and appraises through comparison the constant warfare in his Grandmother's "Christian" home which he shares for a year, as being less loving, and more given to hate than the homes of the whores, pimps, gamblers, and saloon owners he has known before by association. He is forced to drop public school in his family's well-intentioned effort to save his "Christian" soul, and is placed in his Aunt's class. The battle enjoins.

But Granny won an ally in her efforts to persuade me to confess her God; Aunt Addie, her youngest child, had just finished the Seventh-Day Adventist religious school in Huntsville, Alabama, and came home to argue that if the family was compassionate enough to feed me, then the least I could do in return was to follow in its guidance. She proposed that, when the fall school term started, I should be enrolled in the religious school rather than a secular one. If I refused, I was placing myself not only in the position of a horrible infidel but of a hard-hearted ingrate. I raised arguments and objections, but my mother sided with Granny and Aunt Addie and I had to accept.

The religious school opened and I put in a sullen attendance. Twenty pupils, ranging in age from five to nineteen and in grades from primary to high school, were crowded into one room. Aunt Addie was the only teacher and from the first day an acute, bitter antagonism sprang up between us. This was the first time she had ever taught school and she was nervous, self-conscious because a blood relative of hers - a relative who would not confess her faith and who was not a member of her church - was in her classroom. She was determined that every student should know that I was a sinner of whom she did not approve, and that I was not to be granted consideration of any kind.

The pupils were a docile lot, lacking in that keen sense of rivalry which made the boys and girls who went to public school a crowd in which a boy was tested and weighed, in which he caught a glimpse of what the world was. These boys and girls were will-less, their speech flat, the gestures vague, their personalities devoid of anger, hope, laughter, enthusiasm, passion, or despair. I was able to see them with an objectivity that was inconceivable to them. They were claimed wholly by their environment and could imagine no other, whereas I had come from another plane of living, from the swinging doors of saloons, the railroad yard, the roundhouses, the street gangs, the river levees, the orphan home; had mingled with grownups more than perhaps was good for me. I had to curb the habit of cursing, but not before I had shocked more than half of them and had embarrassed Aunt Addie to helplessness.¹¹

It is only a matter of time before Richard and his Aunt Addie Wilson are literally at each other's throats. A boy seated in front of Richard eats walnuts in class and allows Richard to take the blame. Richard doesn't tattle on the boy, from a sense of gang loyalty, and hopes the boy will invent some excuse to clear the accusation. The docile, frightened boy does not, and Richard is outraged at this particular attack made by his Aunt on him, as well as the total

¹¹Ibid., pp. 90-91.

treatment he has been afforded by her and the school environment:

'You know better than to eat in the classroom,' she said.

'I haven't been eating,' I said.

'Don't lie! This is not only a school, but God's holy ground,' she said with angry indignation.

'Aunt Addie, my walnuts are here in my pocket . . .'

'I'm Miss Wilson!' she shouted.

I stared at her, speechless, at last comprehending what was really bothering her. She had warned me to call her Miss Wilson in class, and for the most part I had done so. . . .

'I'm sorry,' I said, and turned from her and opened a book.

'Richard, get up!'

I did not move. . . .

'Go to the front of the room,' Aunt Addie said.

I walked slowly to her desk, expecting to be lectured; but my heart quickened when I saw her go to the corner and select a long, green, limber switch and come toward me. I lost control of my temper.

'I haven't done anything!' I yelled.

She struck me and I dodged.

'Stand still, boy!' she blazed, her face livid with fury, her body trembling.

I stood still, feeling more defeated by the righteous boy behind me than by Aunt Addie. . . .¹²

Richard extends his hand and is brutally switched on his palm and legs. In defiance, as though she cannot really touch him, he remains in front of the class, holding out his hand when she tires, silent, looking at her. Later as he arrives home, she confronts him once more with a switch. He resists, and tells her that he is not guilty of the crime and that he is sorry he has called her "Aunt Addie." But she is furiously distraught and attempts to assault him once more.

¹²Ibid., pp. 92-93.

He stumbles into the kitchen and grabs up a kitchen knife. They wrestle wildly on the floor, both now afraid of each other and the knife. After the incident, all of his relations except his own mother regard him as lost to Christ and treat him as someone already dead. . . . He is completely alienated and shut-out of this major educational opportunity.

Much later, while in Memphis, Tennessee, working alongside a Catholic white who allows him to use the public library by taking out another card in his own wife's name, is Richard first allowed to glimpse the world of books outside a genuine southern conspiracy of "Fixed News," pulp fiction, and cultural illiteracy. His first selections, which he sneaks into his private room, while working in Memphis, astound him with the first dawning vision of what he has missed, and what has consciously been kept from him through schools "separate but equal." He begins with H. L. Mencken's Prefaces and Prejudices, Sinclair Lewis's Main Street and Babbitt. He is nineteen years old and completely alone.

Richard Wright begins his education and graduates from the terrors and doubts of his inexact, guilt-ridden self-identification within the world of the South, the Negro's I-It. By reading numerous books, initially suggested by the criticisms of Mencken, he enters into a world he can recognize as home, the world of those universal, existential, and empathic authors who constitute our most familiar and consistently successful projection of the I-Thou. His incredible

journey places him, without qualification, among their ranks.

Wright's example of self-education clearly underscores the routine monotony and universal failure of public education's dismal insistence upon the mechanical reductionistic approach to human learning which persistently ignores the necessary "I-Thou" relationship between teachers and students.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Representational literature of the United States from 1919 to 1945 demonstrates a vitality in American literature and letters. It is a period of great social and economic change, including the successful fortunes of two victories in two World Wars, and the major authors of these years reflect deep and careful speculation of the visions these enormous changes offer us. Of the authors selected for this study, three are Nobel Prize winners: Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner. The period is one of great educational change as well, and in selecting characters who are teachers in the literature, it is assumed that some representational figures of teachers can be studied, and further, that some insights into the role of the American teacher can be evaluated.

The teachers selected from the major authors between 1919 and 1945 are extremely varied in both personality and environment. They range from the selective seclusion of Dr. Joseph Howe, poet and teacher at "Dwight College," through the frightening psychological imaginings of the homosexual Adolph Biddlebaum of "Winesburg, Ohio," to the depersonalized

Labove of "Frenchman's Bend," Mississippi. In attempting to achieve a broad range of characters who appear as teachers in works by major authors, the study has included teachers both male and female, Negro and white, old and young, married and single, brave and cowardly, heterosexual and homosexual, poor and well-to-do, neurotic and wholesome, ignorant and wise, warmly human and superficially petty, religiously orthodox and unorthodox, reforming and reactionary, zealous and indifferent, masked and open, and finally, fired, resigned, and promoted.

In spite of the extreme range of "Types" included in this study, each in his or her turn is juxtaposed against the educative criteria principles of this study in chapters two through four. Though complex in nature, the existential criteria and epistemology inherent in this educative principle have demonstrated a sufficient flexibility to pose the introductory questions of this paper: first, do the fictional teachers, appearing in American literature between 1919 and 1945, evidence existential awareness and acceptance of the responsibilities of human freedom, and second, do these teachers selected make existential awareness and the responsibility of human freedom central to their teaching?

To begin a summation of the initial searches made with each teacher as he or she has appeared in this study,

it would be well to begin first with some needed qualifications of the metaphysical assumptions upon which the questions are grounded and posed.

Serious questions can be raised concerning the selection and use of a fictional reality to discuss the accepted world of philosophical realism. Without the most scrupulous concentration of attention most of us are by habit bound to the relative naivete of regarding our positions as observers as being a solid and universal foundation for common sense explanations of both objects and ideas. Steeped as we tend to be in a neo-platonic dualism of culture and language and unaware of the phenomenological nature of our observations, we ordinarily and easily mistake our private and collective opinions for common sense universals of unquestioned factitude. The very term "fiction" as it is usually understood in this dualistic setting carries with it the assumption of being imaginary and illusion.

It is easily observed that what is called the "real" world is generally subject to the greatest quality and quantity of scepticisms, while simultaneously being agreed upon as real with minimum reservations by all of us in our uncritical moments. I contend that though this conception of the real and fictional worlds is not totally pervasive in our minds, since such a contention would only make it yet another "universal" among all the other dualisms in western culture, any philosophical or sophisticated approach greatly

extends the realms of inquiry past "the view over the back fence", and can easily include a more serious inquiry into the major literary minds of America. Surely, with a representative sampling between 1919 and 1945 of such trained observers as our major writers, we can hope for at least as genuine and clinical a portrait of the teacher as is available in any other assumed "reality." The level of self-criticism inherent in an existential approach insures at least an awareness of both extremes, i.e., it does not lend itself to oversimplified generalizations or universals on the one hand, nor does it simply satisfy itself with a sigh of resignation at the complexities that a dualistic reductionism language and tradition impose. Qualified, insightful questions can be meaningfully posed if the observer can satisfy himself without mistaking his own subjective illusions for cold, hard, objective answers. The educative principle cuts across the essentialistic miasmas of formal logic to honest inquiry, to a position where all the questions of the study are not rhetorical by the nature of some hidden metaphysical, well-meaning assumption unwarranted by the evidence, but where such questions can be asked and related to the initial critical questions, repeated above.

Assuming then a cautious set of guidelines into the so-called "real" world via the fictional visions of our major authors, what is the nature of education in America? Enormously long catalogues of activities of both formal and

informal education could be cited. The effects of economic, social, corporate, communication, and technological change between 1919-1945 are so complex and lengthy that they could not be the subject of our conclusions. Needless to say, no generalizations or categorical imperatives will be deduced, either, but some disturbing questions, most of them already posed in the previous chapters, will be summarized. The differences between the actual world and the fictional world of education are problems of language, problems involving the position of the observer, and have been discussed, with tacit suggestion that the data of one is at least as usable, and as accurate, as the other.

If the educational principle is applied to the world of education as a question of whether genuine levels of human freedom are ordinarily a central concern, the answer must be "no." Neither in the fictional nor the actual world of education, insofar as we can know them, does a significant relationship between teacher and individual students present itself on an existential level.

In the works selected, the best of the teachers on any such scale as is ideally posed by an educative principle demonstrate only a limited success. Individually, assuming the best of them first, Dr. Joseph Howe does finally allow his student Tertan to be classified as an I-It, although he is aware of the tragic failure of his actions. Thomas Wolfe in the revealing conversation with one of his Jewish students,

whereby each discovers the other as temporarily a "Thou," abandons his teaching for writing when it becomes financially possible. Robert Jordan, who trades his teaching job for the dangers of a Spanish civil war for freedom of future "Thous," dies. Margaret Leonard, who opens the world of literature to young Wolfe qualifies her offering with the trappings of a maternal attachment, thus offering him only a part of herself as a human being. Dr. Gottlieb similarly shares an intellectual realm with Arrowsmith, far beyond the world of the "I-It," but constantly falls prey to his own fears and insecurities concerning medical practice contrasted to pure scientific research.

The other teachers selected fail even more obviously. Those who do possess an awareness of human freedom are terrified of exercising it or of sharing knowledge of it with their students. Those who are unaware, and the contrast between these two groups of teachers is questionable, are swept away in the self-reductionistic environments of various status quos, posing all the while as thinly disguised pedants or humbugs.

To choose among these teachers represented as being more or less successful would be quite subjective, but perhaps they can at least be roughly grouped and mentioned. Among those who do seem capable of realizing the actuality of human freedom, generally described as the existential situation by Sartre and Buber, are the two teachers in

Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, Wing Biddlebaum and Kate Swift. Neither character is fully self-conscious however, and the psychological determinisms which operate within their environment make a substantial awareness impossible. Certainly neither is able to translate these intuitive self searchings into any responsible offering as teachers in relationship with students. They are both envisioned by Anderson as hopeless victims of unfulfilled sexual longings and simultaneously fail in any context of the "I-Thou."

The two female teachers in Main Street, Vida Sherwin and Fern Mullins, are portrayed by Sinclair Lewis as failures. Vida Sherwin pays only lip-service to any genuine cultural encounter with the students and townspeople who surround her, and marries as soon as the opportunity arises. Fern Mullins, the young teacher who escorts a drunken student home from a dance, is fired and forced from the community without even the satisfaction of being aware of the injustice of her fate.

The other teacher selected from Sinclair Lewis's short story, "A Letter from the Queen," is a miserable wretch without character or self-knowledge. Dr. Wilber Selig fails as a human being, as a teacher, and finally even as an ambitious humbug when an important document he earnestly desires slips through his fingers because of his childish egoism.

The teacher drawn by William Faulkner in The Hamlet is a curiosity understood only within the context of the southern community life of Frenchman's Bend. He, Labove, has

intelligence, and an appetite for education which might pre-sage future possibilities of genuine encounter of an "I-Thou" variety, but his teaching career is only the means to his true vocational aim, the practice of law. He cannot escape from a personal sexual fantasy vicariously involving one of his students. Faulkner, in portraying him, really does not extend any genuine possibility of Labove's escape from his neurotic inner struggle to any serious success as a teacher.

Richard Wright's Aunt Addie who appears as a teacher in Black Boy fails to see her students as human beings. Instead, she sees them as she views herself, as a puppet sinner in the hands of an angry God, the "great schoolmaster" of her sectarian faith.

Of course, the background questions posed by the educative principle of this study, phrased as "the courage to live," and "the courage to teach," are vulnerable to the same criticisms of an assumed objectivity. Briefly it is to be understood that the questions are assumed only within the limits of symbolic language, and are not to be confused with objective questions of a naive philosophical realism. There are no answers of any qualitative nature possible, and quantitative datum is rendered absurd by the nature of the questions. The educative principle then, again, is to be understood as a symbolically communicable idealization impossible of logical reduction or finality of answer. It is posed only as a quest for insights into the figure of the teacher in

America as he or she appears existentially against the background of various literary visions, also symbolic. In dealing however, with symbolic rather than quantitative material, several problems arise immediately which demand clarification.

The problems of language and their resultant cultural determinisms dictate a peculiar paradox in any discussion of education. A kind of non-scientific subjectivity and emotionalism extend through the whole spectrum of educational enterprise. One of the very first is the assumption of education itself, the educative principle of this study which initially assumes that man can in fact educate himself meaningfully. More complex problems later arise as the language of non-scientific mechanism are used to analyze educational theories and their respective applications. In this paper, in which existential analysis is used in examining educational theory, there are many traditionally known schools of thought which could be used for contrast with existential analysis. One of the most pervasive schools of theory, Essentialism, will be used as being both germane and analogous to the whole spectrum of formal and informal educational theory.

Essentialism, like any other general theoretical field, is difficult to examine because it partakes of the language assumptions of education so immediately that common sense realism's language of uncritical abstraction and dualism does not separate it readily from the empirical world. With these difficulties of a semantic nature in mind,

Essentialism can be honestly contrasted with existential analysis.

As an educational view, Essentialism certainly has an influential history of acceptance and use. Most of those educators who would identify with the basic assumptions of Essentialism do not do so uncritically. We cannot assume that they view Essentialism as an ideology or hold any allegiance to it as an "Ism." We also must recognize that Essentialism is no more subject to unimaginative and uncritical application and continuing implementation than any other educational view.

Further, those deeply committed and aware of the central conceptions of Essentialism must be understood as persons who arrived honestly at such conceptions rather than being born with them. These ideas are after all chosen, as are all other human visions, no matter how traditionally or habitually they are expressed as universals.

Granted these foregoing considerations, apologizing for the lengthy explanations necessary for a comparison with existential analysis, and finally allowing even greater latitude of qualification of Essentialism as a major set of educational theories, there are still questions that existentialism as a philosophy would legitimately raise. A concluding set of illustrations do arise which are relevant to this comparison.

Essentialism assumes a cause and effect modus as all systems do, once illuminated as a system. Any rationale is rational, logical, and communicable. Language ultimately insists upon it and no serious communication exists without cause and effect being central to dialogue, as we now use language. Otherwise we would have to submit that no communication is taking place between persons, and that only an endless comedy of exchanged literalisms, perpetually irrational, takes place in conversation. We must assume, therefore, that communication is possible, however difficult genuine dialogue might become.

Given then that Essentialism is a body of reasonably well discussed and understood educational conceptions and that men through cause and effect language relationships improve such conceptions, let us examine the body of Essentialism in further detail.

Our examination, or rather, our autopsy, reveals, that Essentialism has an illogical cause and effect contradiction as the grounds for its pronouncements. It simply does not remain effectively logical or communicative, as Existentialism does, when application is made from its premises. It breaks down into a variety of emotive expressionism by finally assuming value as an effect without a supporting cause development. It suffers the same two-edged paradox of all philosophical realisms by assuming an "essence," much as the scholastic realists posited universal truths by

dialectic truisms. Historically, Essentialism and all other "Isms" lose sight of their assumptive nature and metamorphose into articles of faith. Any assumption or theory can suffer this reductionistic process of philosophical and semantic misunderstanding. The most common illustration of the process is when a "whole" is abstracted into constituent "parts" by failure to maintain an awareness of the nominal nature of theory. Essentialism in this respect is probably no different in this failure than other systems.

Most of the major ideas of Western history have undergone this process. An idea is abstracted and taken out of its theoretical context, its sustaining womb, held up as having an essential and separate existence, and dealt with as apart from its original speculative parent.

A like example of this process is seen in Sigmund Freud's admission that he was ". . . not a Freudian." John Dewey, Johann Herbart, Plato, and surely many others have had their conceptions separated from the parent body, and would undoubtedly comment upon the problem if they were able to do so.

To trace Essentialism as a general educational theory back to its beginnings would be superfluous and arduous. Though it is not possible here to accomplish that task, one can readily see the pattern and process of reductionism it has undergone. It undoubtedly began as an insight which suggested the value and efficacy of conserving the truths and

skills of western culture and transmitting them as a formal offering through education to the young. It is generally observed, however, that the great truths deemed essential have lost through formalism and the perennial temptation to moralism, the essence of their value to stimulate the young to think. They have all too often lost their existential value for individual minds by being presented as school subjects instead of great visions of living.

Another educational problem which seems all too common to essentialistic philosophies is the effect of projecting separate roles for students and teachers in the traditional school setting. This separation is artificial and illogical because it is based on the common misunderstanding of a subject matter expert set over against the student as the recipient of mechanical skills and unexamined information. This separation is not only illogically formal but often prohibits the existential humanism of the student-teacher relationship which is one of education's primary goals.

Such criticisms of Essentialism are not offered to undermine or attack the basic theoretical assumptions of Essentialism as a philosophy of education. But they are offered as a brief analysis and conclusion of an influential educational belief and are appropriately applicable to any educational theory which fails to retain its reason to exist as theory, insightful assumptions, or speculative conceptualization by falling prey to a misguided empiricism. The

inherent difficulties illustrated by the above examination of Essentialism in education are those of mechanism, reductionism, and literalistic language or semantic problems.

Western civilization from science through the humanities is constructed upon conceptions implemented formally through institutions, and informally through widespread communication. Western man individually today is inseparable from western mankind past and present since we now do exist and learn as embodiments of communicable and determining historical visions and factors. It is easy to see how critically important to our present educational efforts the sophisticated understanding of theory and practice becomes.

If we are unaware of our determinisms, we partake and accept an endless human comedy of illusions and pretensions of an inexcusable quality of ignorance, illogically constructed with sentimental, flattering, and nostalgic certitude. This deceptive certitude we all too often mistake and teach as human history. History can only be understood with our best and most critical intelligence. Then, we could better select the "essential" truths and offer them to the young. Finally, and obviously, when we are capable of forgetting that an unexamined Essentialism, or any other "Ism" becomes abstracted as an end instead of a means to learning, and thus becomes an ever narrowing formalism, traditionalism, and sacrosanct, mindless conformity in our schools, we also

forget that these are educational theories and allow them to become institutional totems.

Existential analyses, evidenced in literature, and increasingly evident in every area of contemporary American life, avoid the most obvious limitations of other educational views. The problems illustrated by the discussion of the one example, Essentialism, as an educational theory are the compounded problems of language and human subjectivity. Unexamined, language and subjectivity are barriers to human communication in general and to education in particular by not being logical enough in their ordinary applications. How can we expect to share whatever truths and genuine skills we can abstract and isolate from human experience if we cannot effectively understand and communicate them? Further, how could we possibly hope to accomplish a significant sharing of the experience of human freedom as illustrated by the existential educative principle of this study when we can so easily observe the major problems confronting the practice of human freedom, dialogue, and encounter between human beings?

One answer is that though historical essentialistic truths are not readily available, communicable, or even extant, that theories, insights, and communicable conceptions are available whenever two human beings enter into existential dialogue. Something inherently educational does exist and occur in the I-Thou relationship.

Another answer is that while essentialistic truths or objective data, as they are termed in our contemporary setting, do depend upon a naive philosophical realism, the I-Thou relationship does not, and avoids the worst failures of educational subject material alienated from the students and teachers of the formal school. In fact, the I-It relationship begins and continues without respite the moment the processes of reduction and abstraction begin. In a curiously human way, the I-Thou relationship transcends or cuts across the traditional cause and effect view. Truth is seen not as something man is "over against" as though it were an object, a thing, a noun, or we might add, a formula, an axiom, or a creed. It is instead the ground of one's very existence as an "I." And any viable educational experience therefore, can only exist with any meaningful content as an occurrence between an "I" and a "Thou."

Human existence is filled with the vicarious and the ideal. What we experience in everyday existence is touched with the vicarious identifications of other people and other ideals. Just as we form personal patterns of understanding from our associates, so we must understand that the reading we do unconsciously patterns and directs our visions. Surely the inspirations we admire and assimilate from literature are as existentially real and rich in dialogue as our actual conversations ordinarily are. From one curious point of view,

especially when contrasted with the phenomenological world around us, nothing seems ultimately "real."

It does seem however that the "I-Thou" is real enough as an individual experience. It is the empathic appreciation of one's self reflected by another "Thou," beyond the world of ordinary measurement. The experience, basically educational, is available in the appreciation of poetry, music, mathematics, philosophy, and is similar, as Buber and Sartre discuss the experience, to an awareness of beauty, of an almost religious awareness of the free and awesome existence of one's self as a human being. If this experience does thus exist, however couched in metaphor and within the problems of syntax, it must be understood somehow as being shared with all other "Thous." The I-Thou does not exist as a formula which dawns mysteriously upon one suddenly as a revelation of some essentialistic "Truth," but obviously is transmitted from some other source; whether it is a person, a book, a symphony, a natural setting, an idea, a gesture, a loving reflex, and so on. It exists then, in co-existence, and cannot, as Buber philosophically demonstrates, exist outside some primary condition of an "I" and some kind of "Thou." It seems legitimate to state then that it certainly is an experience, though hardly a "subject," which is basically educational. If education can be understood and defined as being directly involved with human growth to some future capacity, then the human freedom of an existential experience

between an "I" and a "Thou" seems quite assured as fittingly educational by nature. Buber rightly calls it "Love", that responsibility of an "I" for a "Thou."

Finally, after examining the figure of the teacher in American literature existentially, through the mind's eyes of several of our major authors, it would appear that our educational goals too often are limited by our own failure of vision of ourselves as human beings and as teachers. Surely some of the overt suggestions and the dimly illuminated insights inherent in the visions of our major American writers can be at least indirectly applied as qualifying assumptions to whatever educational goals our institutions embrace as being fitting teleologies for our young people, as well as being appropriate insights for all who teach.

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