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Form and Process in American Literature

by

Carolyn Jane Porter

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Director's signature:

[Signature]

Houston, Texas

July, 1972
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I don't know how humanity stands it
with a painted paradise at the end of it
without a painted paradise at the end of it.

-- Ezra Pound
Introduction

In a letter to Malcolm Cowley, Faulkner avowed that he was "still trying to put all mankind's history in one sentence" despite his "unalterable determination never never never to be quite satisfied with it."¹ Faulkner's artistic purpose reveals the dual urge which defines a central dynamic in American literature. The "rage for order" constitutes one pole of that tension under which Faulkner sees himself laboring,² while his self-imposed imperative to remember always the necessary incompleteness of any achieved work results from his profound sense that time and space are unlimited. Yoknapatawpha County limits and defines his fictional world spatially, but the boundaries of that "postage stamp" of land fade as the works expand to encompass "all the moving things . . . eternal in man's history."³ The spatially limited world of Faulkner's fiction expands temporally as he pursues his announced desire to "say it all in one sentence, between one Cap and one period."⁴ Time itself, seen as an endless procession of moments, both defies and invites

The Maker's rage to order words of the sea,  
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly starred,  
And of ourselves and of our origins  
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.⁵

Faulkner's double and conflicting urge -- his desire to impose a plot on history and a design on time itself, coupled with his enforced conviction that his effort is necessarily
doomed to incompleteness—registers a definitive tension in American literature. The conflict between nature and civilization constitutes one metaphor by which we have come to characterize this conflict. Civilization is seen as the product of an achieved mastery over the world, while nature becomes the wilderness, the unformed and open expanse of time and space which both invites and defies man's designs. In The Machine in the Garden, Leo Marx explores the American attempt to mediate between the conflicting demands of industrial mastery and pastoral pleasure. While Marx's theory suggests the peculiarly American terms in which nature and civilization have been conceived, I think he fails fully to appreciate the radical opposition between them. That opposition cannot be mediated, as Perry Miller's discussion of the conflict in "Nature and the National Ego" makes clear. Rather, it constitutes an abiding tension in American literature, infinitely productive because unresolvable. Again and again we find major American authors struggling with the conflicting demands of form and process, design and change, the known and the unknown. Melville's Ishmael is a man to a large extent defined by his condition of landlessness together with his search for meaning. Mark Twain describes his predicament as a riverboat captain's apprentice on the Mississippi in terms of the shifting bottom of the river through which he must somehow maintain his directed course. 7 Wallace Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar"
presents the "jar in Tennessee" as the source of order which "made the slovenly wilderness/ surround that hill." And in "Beech" Robert Frost calls into doubt the "proof of being not unbounded" which the "iron spine" marking the corner of his property represents:

Thus the truth's established and borne out, 
Though circumstanced with dark and doubt --
Though by a world of doubt surrounded. 9

Even the Puritans were deeply committed to maintaining a Christian polity in the face of religious separatism and social disorder. If such examples help to suggest the breadth of the tension between form and process, a closer examination of its operation in a couple of related instances may help to disclose it in greater depth.

In "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick Adams embodies a palpable tension between the love of the undefiled and unformed wilderness and the need for boundaries. At the start of his journey into the wild he is brother to Thoreau's saunterer: 10

He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. 
It was all back of him. 11

Like Thoreau, Nick abandons the complexities of civilization for the pure world of nature. If Thoreau went to the woods to live "deliberately," 12 Nick exercises a similarly deliberate methodological control over nature. Focusing on one task at a time, skillfully limiting his vision to a series of successive tasks which constitute a strictly linear movement. Nick succeeds in shielding himself from the multiple
threats of stream and forest. His threatened position as lone wanderer in the wild manifests itself in his final refusal to enter the swamp:

He looked down the river. A big cedar slanted all the way across the stream. Beyond that the river went into the swamp.

Nick did not want to go in there now. He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits, to hook big trout in places impossible to land them... in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic.13

Hemingway's prose style itself reinforces Nick's mode of control; he limits his world to a sheer succession of distinct events whose potentially endless resonance issues a constant threat to his self-directed order. Thoreau's need for direction, order, and control issues in another mode of thought, not so easily definable but similarly grounded in a desire for mastery.

Thoreau's deliberately executed experiment at Walden Pond results in Walden itself; his avid search for pattern in nature, which generates his exhaustive observations of natural phenomena, gives rise in Walden to a skillfully executed design within which his experiment in the wild gains human meaning. He takes elaborate trouble to measure the depth of Walden Pond, disproving the belief of some "that Walden reached quite through to the other side of the globe."14 Thoreau's measure of the pond succeeds in limiting and defining its otherwise unknown and potentially infinite dimensions. Like the "glassy lights" in Stevens'
poem, Thoreau's "compass and chain and sounding line"
"mastered the night and portioned out the sea."15 But
Thoreau consciously transforms his calculated experiment
into an incalculable metaphor. Finding the pond to have
"a remarkable depth for so small an area," Thoreau is
"thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a
symbol."16 Although he insists on measuring and thereby
limiting the physical dimensions of the pond, he does so
in order to use his observed measures and proportions as
metaphors for extending vision. Accordingly the unusual
depth of Walden Pond is fortuitous; "not an inch of it
can be spared by the imagination."17 The observed dimen-
sions of the pond serve as vehicle for the expansive tenor
of Thoreau's metaphorical extension of meaning. After
verifying the particular law of nature he has abstracted
from his experiments by applying it to White Pond, Thoreau
is able to speculate on the inexhaustible domain of nature:

The particular laws are as our points of view, as,
to the traveller, a mountain outline varies with
every step, and it has an infinite number of
profiles, though absolutely but one form. Even
when cleft or bored through it is not comprehended
in its entirety.18

Note that Thoreau is expressing a contradiction; the mountain,
while it can never be "comprehended in its entirety," none-
theless is certain to possess "absolutely but one form."
While our search for form is necessarily endless, form is
nevertheless assumed to inhere in nature. If the swamp
defines the limits beyond which Nick Adams cannot go,
Thoreau's belief in the ultimate order of nature is what allows him to speculate to the very limits of his imagination without ever exhausting nature's meaning. In "Spring," the observed "forms which thawing sand and clay assume" issue in the leaf metaphor which extends to include everything from ice crystals to blood vessels. As long as he grounds his speculations in close observation, what his imagination produces is true, even though necessarily partial. The wilderness constitutes a potentially endless field for speculation since it can never be "comprehended in its entirety," but such speculation must grow out of close observation and exact measure if it is to yield truth.

If Nick Adams' venture into the wild reflects his love of open-ended freedom and his refusal to enter the swamp defines the self-imposed limits he enforces in the service of self-preservative order, Thoreau's mode of embracing the woods registers a similar tension between the "infinite number of profiles" in which nature presents herself and an insatiable desire to penetrate and articulate nature's laws. Both abandon civilization out of a profound desire for individual freedom; but each brings to bear his own means of controlling nature. Nick opts for exclusion, for the simplest possible design within which life can proceed. Thoreau opts for inclusion, for the most complete design possible. What opposes Nick is the "tragedy" embodied in the threatening darkness of the swamp. What opposes
Thoreau's efforts at inclusive order is the inexhaustible wild itself, the persistent flow of nature in all its protean forms. But both experience and express a fundamental tension between open-ended process and persistently enforced control. Thoreau's encounter with nature originates in closely controlled observation and issues in the finally circumscribed form of *Walden*. Just as Hemingway's pointedly simple yet highly charged prose style functions to limit and control the potentially explosive meanings of the world he creates, the highly developed structural unity of *Walden* acts to circumscribe and contain the endless possibilities thrown up by Thoreau's experience in the wild. The social institutions he has temporarily abandoned are replaced by an aesthetically determined form.

Several aspects of the terms 'form' and 'process' are functioning in these examples. Most obviously, form operates as boundary and limit, as principle of order in an otherwise boundless and unordered world. Stevens' "jar" transforms "the slovenly wilderness" into a "dominion," ordered and bounded, "no longer wild." Nick Adams, by following a strictly defined pattern of simple responses, a pattern which he knows cannot extend to and assimilate the swamp, both imposes a boundary and clings to an ordering principle. Secondly, form provides meaning. Thoreau's leaf metaphor relates organic to inorganic, macro-cosm to microcosm, world to self. Ishmael discourses at
length on the whale -- its history, anatomy, varieties, uses, and ultimately its whiteness -- always in an effort to explore and reveal the whale's meaning. Indeed, *Moby Dick* itself constitutes an energetic, if foredoomed "raid on the inarticulate," an extended voyage into the unknown born of a compelling desire to know, to articulate the metaphysical silence of the sea itself. But while acting to contain, order, and discover meaning, form also serves to preserve it. The preservative capacities of jars may have something to do with Stevens' choice of symbol. Nick Adams stays within the boundaries he has set and the pattern of methodical procedures he has defined, out of a palpable need for self-preservation. Form, in this sense, acts to shelter and maintain the ordered meaning within which life is contained. In short, form is both boundary and boundary keeper. Frost's beech tree constitutes a formal principle in this sense; as "witness" to the pile of rocks which mark the corner of his property, the tree embodies both the need for and costs of boundary keeping. The beech "by being deeply wounded,/ has been impressed as Witness Tree" so as to preserve as "memory" the "proof of being not unbounded" which the "iron spine" constitutes. The boundary itself is only "imaginary." It must be marked and witnessed if it is to endure. Similarly, in "Mending Wall," the speaker's neighbor enforces his conviction that "Good fences make good neighbors" by insisting that the wall be repaired each spring. The wall...
itself marks the boundary line, but it is the human insistence on the boundary which maintains it.

Form, then, acts to enclose and order experience and to discover and preserve meaning. But if form can function in any or all these ways, it nonetheless manifests itself in different modes. For instance, if Frost's boundary is self-consciously artificial and arbitrary, Thoreau regards the forms he discovers in nature as real, as actually inhering in the mountain's shape and in the pattern of an ice crystal. Thoreau's metaphorical musings may be subjectively orchestrated, but they evolve out of a fundamental theme -- the plentitude of forms actually subsisting in the natural world. For Thoreau, form is a given; for Frost it can only be created.

A part of the evolution of the modern world can be traced in the story of the gradual substitution of Frost's belief for Thoreau's. That story has been told in a number of voices with a variety of perspectives. It is not limited to America, or to the last two centuries. My concern is with one episode in this long and complex tale. To medieval man, for whom both natural and cultural forms were given, the world was woven together in a single fabric and the weaver was God. Without going into the steps by which this fabric disintegrated, I think it fair to say that by the nineteenth century, nature and culture were distinct. Among other compelling grounds, the vision of the new world itself did
much to enforce a division between nature as distinct from culture. As the world expanded, the dimensions of distinct cultures became visible, much as our contemporary sense of the earth as a spaceship is now enforced by the perspective gained from the moon. In any case, Thoreau arrived on a scene in which it was possible to embrace nature and reject culture -- at least in its contemporary version. From his radically individualistic perspective, society constituted a static and repressive system, a form inhibiting vitality and limiting freedom. Such a system was for him wholly distinct from the expanse of nature, in which form and meaning abound. The only kind of form which could mean anything to man for Thoreau was to be found in nature; social forms were artificial and dehumanizing. If for Thoreau, form inheres in nature, for Emerson, form is initially allied with social institutions and consistently conceived as a rigid boundary which limits human freedom. If the given form of nature elicits from Thoreau an exuberant desire for exploration, the given forms of society constitute for Emerson shackles to be broken. In other words, both men saw form as given, but while Thoreau viewed that given as the boon of nature, Emerson saw in it the dead hand of the past as instituted in Church and state. While not as radically devoted to individualistic behavior as Thoreau, Emerson nonetheless focused primarily on the individual self in relation to nature as open-ended process -- a relationship
inhibited by the given form of society. As "Circles" and "Fate" reveal, Emerson was not wholly unaware of the fact that social forms, like intellectual perspectives, develop out of the actions and conceptions of men, and are accordingly created rather than given. But as long as he focused on the individual self in relation to the world -- and he focused on that with a good deal of consistency -- Emerson persisted in regarding the principle of form in a fundamentally ahistorical perspective. Form, then, was for him a static principle, a limitation on and boundary of individual freedom. In "Fate," nature itself is the scene of both power and limitation, expansion and confinement. The course of Emerson's career traces the gradual installation in the natural world of the principle of form derived from a sense of institutions as given and limiting. But concurrently, Emerson was developing another sense of form as created. We have seen that when Thoreau turned from society to nature, he repudiated one kind of form for another, that is, artificial for authentic. When Emerson rejected the static and inhibiting institutions around him, he turned to nature as the scene not of authentic form, but of perpetual flux. Turning Plato upside down, Emerson sought in the world of becoming the spiritual truth which Plato had firmly deposited in the world of Being. Confronted with the Heraclitean flux, but deliberately shunning any predetermined form, Platonic or otherwise, Emerson developed
a pressing need for ordered meaning and a prophetic mode of meeting that need. For while the notion of form as given became the unalterable principle of fate and limitation, a new sense of form as created pattern, as individually appropriated design, began to manifest itself as early as "Nature."

It is by now apparent that Emerson's conception of form as given and limiting stands in opposition to the principle of process. That principle, however, assumes as many versions as its opponent. For Emerson, if form is predetermined, limiting, and repressive, process is undetermined, open-ended, and free. But once form assumes the status of the created rather than the given, process undergoes a similarly complex change. For when form is seen as fiction, process becomes both the condition of and the primary threat to form. This transition makes itself felt with particular force in Whitman. *Leaves of Grass* records the continual act of appropriation by which self and world are created and sustained through time. The extended catalogues to which Whitman seems addicted represent an insatiable desire to include the maximum number of events as well as objects within the poetic vision. Such extended lists testify to Whitman's profound sense that reality is fully dependent upon imagination, that without being named, nothing can be. It is according to this principle that "Walt Whitman" is named and thus created in Section 24 of "Song of Myself."
Process, for Whitman, is a principle of freedom and plenitude -- the "open road" as well as all that looms there to be realized and enjoyed. But if he shares with Emerson a sense of reality as fluid and moving, Whitman also comes to see that reality as unboundable, as eluding his poetic embrace. Such boundlessness is of course for Emerson a boon; constant flux and change fundamentally characterize Spirit. But when form becomes the product of imagination rather than the confining principle of static repression, boundlessness becomes not only the open road inviting man's creative urge, but also the open-ended process of time and space which defies inclusive form and frustrates the "rage for order." *Leaves of Grass* grows by expanding to include and thus to realize, the incessant outpouring of time and space. Further, it grows not only by sheer accretion, but also through a series of attempts at formal integration. Yet Whitman's persistent attempts to include and inform with coherent meaning, a reality fundamentally characterized as changing and moving, cannot ultimately succeed. Time itself eludes him. Accordingly, the principle of form functions in opposition to process, but in a sense significantly altered since Emerson. The world of flux and generation offers Whitman the scene and opportunity for creating the myth he makes of himself and of America; but that same world of becoming cannot finally be molded into even so loose a form as *Leaves of Grass*. Its
last two annexes, "Sands at Seventy," and "Goodbye My Fancy," stand as reminders that Whitman's creative urge could never be stopped nor contained within an inclusive form.

If the nineteenth century produced a vision of form as created, the twentieth century has extended that vision to nature itself. According to Heisenberg, scientists must now accept the fact that the phenomena they observe are necessarily affected by the instruments used to observe them.\textsuperscript{21} Technology is no longer simply a cultural adjunct to nature; it has altered the face of the world so thoroughly that nature itself cannot be definitely distinguished from the cultural impression of man's designs. Thomas Kuhn has shown that even the most advanced scientific theories are essentially fictions, so that even the natural world we regard as 'real' is actually the creation of scientists working under the aegis of paradigms.\textsuperscript{22} We have come to see fictions as not only the worlds we create, but the world we inhabit as well.\textsuperscript{23} One major consequence of this realization is a further refinement on Berkeley's argument that reality resides wholly in the mind since there is no way of getting outside that mind to test its observations. If reality comes to us only within the patterns through which we have been conditioned to view the world, then those patterns constitute the only reality we can know. The thrust of structural anthropology and modern linguistics,
not to mention contemporary historical analysis, derives from a pervasive conception that language, being the fundamental tool by which we articulate the reality we inhabit, defines both man and his world. As W. M. Urban puts it, "Language, which . . . is inseparable from thought and knowledge, is not moulded on reality. It is rather the mould in which reality as significant is first given." Wallace Stevens, whose work is largely devoted to exploring the bases and consequences of the condition Urban describes, says of the singer in "The Idea of Order at Key West,"

She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker.

All of which leads us to consider Pound's pregnant statement, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Once we have realized that we inhabit a fiction, in Kermode's sense of that term, we can no longer regard anything as given. If Heisenberg's thesis holds, even the world picture of science is in some sense "painted." While a world defined by our own "painted paradise" hardly satisfies our need for certainty, a world "without a painted paradise," an ordering fiction, is both inconceivable and unbearable. We are caught in a paradox. Without a "paradigm," as Kuhn shows, science cannot operate at all. Without a fiction, a plot which will order, limit, and inform with meaning, a world which is otherwise unavailable to us, we cannot live. Psychiatrist studies have shown that a schizophrenic inhabits a highly developed --
in the sense of extensively applied -- fiction, although
one which differs radically from that of a more "normal"
mind. So it is not simply that madness will ensue if we
do not find a fiction which will "suffice"; madness itself
is predicated on a fiction. 28

This pervasive sense of fiction as the form of life
James says, and his novels constitute a long effort to
"save" life by making it count. 29 The urge to realize the
world through language which compelled Whitman to catalogue
his world and so to create it becomes in James central and
definitive. But whereas Whitman's vision was expansive and
inclusive, issuing in long lists of discrete particulars,
James's is exclusive and penetrating, issuing in an effort
to exhaust the potentially endless meaning of his subject.
Meaning resides in language, for James, so that the novelist
is not using language but exploring it. Accordingly, the
novel records not only a design but a process -- what James
called the "process of vision," -- carried out in language
itself. 30 In The Golden Bowl, design is constantly threaten-
ing to explode as the novel expands to include the meaning
which language itself offers. A further aspect of process
thus comes into play in what Feidelson terms a "problem-
atical" work, one, that is, whose "characteristic subject
is its own equivocal method." 31 For within the world of
the novel, an autonomous world wholly constituted by
language, James engages in a process of discovery which is as endless as Thoreau's pursuit of meaning in the woods. Language possesses, for James, all the plastic, shifting, infinitely suggestive meanings which nature offered Thoreau. James insists on form, on limitation, control, and boundary; but he is equally committed to the process of exploration which is potentially endless and therefore constantly threatening to overrun its boundaries.

If process as temporal and epistemological endlessness opposes form as fiction, still another dimension of the opposition is evident in terms of the loss, decay, and dissolution which Emerson belatedly noticed in the world of becoming. Art, for James, not only makes life, but "saves" it as well. And what is not thus saved is lost. Lambert Strether's injunction to "live" is more than the plaintive cry of a middle-aged American seeing Paris for the first time; it is the imperative for "felt life" which he articulates -- life penetrated and fully done, in the Jamesian sense. Again there is a curious parallel between James's vision of life made to count, life fully realized by the imagination, and Thoreau's stated motivation for going to Walden Pond:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.
What Thoreau sought in nature, James sought in language, not as a tool for expressing himself or recording the world, but as a realm of meaning in itself. But his urge, like Thoreau's, was both exploratory and preservative. Art was for James a way of saving and "hoarding" life, and what was not thus saved was lost forever, left to blunder into the sand.

The sense of loss as inevitable becomes paramount when process becomes fully allied with time, as it does in Faulkner. The urge to encompass "it all in one sentence" is opposed by the relentless procession of time. But if for James, art saves and preserves meaning and life, in Faulkner's fictional world, it is the act of the imagination and not its product which redeems what is lost. Thomas Sutpen cannot be contained within the legends woven around him by Rosa Coldfield and Mr. Compson. Ultimately, even Quentin and Shreve fail to achieve a stable and enduring interpretation of Sutpen, just as Sutpen himself fails to achieve his grand design. But what does endure is the irrepressible urge to appropriate meaning through imaginative action. What makes possible Sutpen's grandeur even in defeat as well as the relative success of Quentin and Shreve's attempts at understanding, is the "rage for order" shared by all of them. A world where all fictions are subject to the ravages of time is also a world open to the perpetual play of the imagination. Just as James saw the
"splendid waste" as existing "luckily for us," Faulkner sees the world of incessant process as the ground of freedom. If time constantly outruns and overrides the forms we have come to inhabit, it also issues an endless appeal to the imagination. And it is by repeatedly meeting that appeal that we may not only "endure," but perhaps even "prevail."

Process, then, constitutes a principle of open-ended change and expansion as well as endlessness and potential dissolution. Viewed as growth and change, it promises freedom; viewed as the scene of unfathomable meanings it issues an appeal; and viewed as the world of becoming, it compels us to face dissolution. When form is seen as given, process is characteristically a principle of freedom. But when form is seen as created, process constitutes a threat. Both principles are bivalent: form can mean both repression and redemption, and process can constitute either freedom or contingency, depending on the context in which the tension between them manifests itself.

This tension between form and process constitutes a persistent dynamic in American literature, one which changes in accord with the author's primary orientation toward the bivalent meanings of form and process. For example, Thoreau begins with a repudiation of repressive social, political, and religious forms, embraces the "wild" as a condition of infinite freedom, but ends by transforming the wilderness
into a home and the experiment of Walden Pond into the aesthetically contained account which is *Walden*. The only kind of form which is not repressive for Thoreau is that which inheres in nature itself and which the imagination discovers. Emerson, in this respect more radical than Thoreau, begins by repudiating the need for form itself and enthusiastically embraces pure process. Spirit moves, for Emerson, and the degree to which man participates in the spiritual flow is the degree to which he realizes his full humanity. The central dynamic of Emerson's intellectual career grows out of the epistemological problems which follow from his repudiation of the principle of form itself. Walt Whitman begins with a totally unformed self and world, but in the successive versions of self which *Leaves of Grass* create, the need for form manifests itself with increasing insistence. That first major movement in American literature which F. O. Matthiessen announced as the "American Renaissance" traces a course which begins in the repudiation of form and ends in the unwilling discovery that an unformed world is uninhabitable. While Thoreau's position in this movement is significantly prophetic, I have chosen Emerson and Whitman as representative figures because they assume a more radical posture than Thoreau. Consequently the changes they undergo reveal more fully the predicament issuing from a total acceptance of formlessness. In response to the inevitable assertion that it is quite absurd to call
the publically timid Emerson and the good gray poet Whitman more radical than Thoreau, the political and social maverick, I can only reply that Thoreau's individualism does not constitute the kind of radicalism to which I refer. As we have seen, Thoreau consistently searches for pattern and unfailingly informs his observations with the meaning accruing from a highly developed metaphorical design. He embraces a physical wilderness, but not a metaphysical one. Perhaps that is why he emerges somehow as a saner, less elusive, and more artistically successful figure than Emerson or Whitman. Emerson, by facing the full consequences of formlessness, emerges as a more radical mind. And Whitman, by enacting a continuing struggle for selfhood in a world wholly incapable of providing him with a predetermined identity, emerges as a more radical poet. It is important to note that "radical" is a descriptive, not a prescriptive word.

If the first major phase of American literature is grounded in a preference for nature seen as open-ended possibility, over civilization seen as repressive form, the second major phase, which we usually refer to as modern, marks a full translation of the whole issue to the province of the artist, a realm in which form presents itself more insistently as a positive value and the unformed represents more of a threat than a boon. That is, if for Emerson in 1836, form is essentially repressive and deadening, for
Henry James in 1902 it is redemptive principle -- the means by which we make meaning and therefore make life itself. And if for Whitman in 1855, absolute freedom is allied with and enacted through a poetry of process, for Henry James, the unformed constitutes the unsaved, the still moving world that must be stilled, enfolded and transformed by the saving act of artistic execution. Yet just as the tension between form and process persists in Emerson and Whitman, never to be fully resolved, so it persists in James, who makes it the supreme principle of the novel as an art form. In *The Golden Bowl*, James creates a prototype of Krieger's mirror-window, a work which simultaneously controls and expands its meaning. *The Golden Bowl* parallels the heightened intensity of Emerson's "Fate"; both bring to bear the full weight of both form and process in relation to each other. Emerson, viewing form as necessity and limitation, can only face momentarily the unresolvable tension between freedom and fate. But James, who regards form as the redemptive principle by which life is saved, and sees life's infinite relations as constituting an inexhaustible appeal for salvation, translates the opposition between form and process into the basis for intensity in the novel.

To a great extent, James visualizes form and process in terms of Europe and America. The ambiguous relationship between the two worked out in James's fiction discloses the moral and aesthetic complexity of James's vision.
is both refined design and artificial trapping; America is both innocent openness and vacuous space. But while James occasionally focuses exclusively on one or the other scene, his attention is preponderantly toward, and his major works grow out of, the conflict which Europe and America in their mutual antagonism represent. If America lacks the profusion of forms necessary to the novelist's art, it nonetheless provides the large majority of James's visionary wanderers. And if Europe yields infinite depths for speculation, it also manifests a moral and aesthetic threat to "felt life." By transmuting the dilemma posed by the opposition between nature and civilization into the realm of fiction, James shifts the tension between form and process into the artistically conceived terms of foreshortened effects and organic form. Of course such a shift is already implicit in Emerson's "Nature," and already apparent in Thoreau and Whitman. But with James, the substitution of aesthetic for social form is total. The artist has become the sole originator of those "painted" pictures which Pound describes as both necessary and necessarily inadequate in the Pisan Cantos.

If Whitman began with the wholly unformed self which Emerson bequeathed to him, Faulkner begins with the vision of artistic imagination as sole source of saving design which James's works sanction and document. This is not to say that James acted as direct influence on Faulkner.
Indeed, Emerson's influence on Whitman is more problematical than the latter's enthusiastic adulation of the Concord sage would suggest. Whitman accepted the final injunction of "Nature," but ignored the more ominous implications of "Fate." Accordingly, Whitman enacted poetically the discovery of necessary form which Emerson's career traces. Yet *Leaves of Grass*, seen as a succession of self-integrating definitions, a series of attempts at formal unity, extends and amplifies the implicit predicament of Emerson's career. And in a similar fashion, Faulkner's novels extend and amplify the explicit tension between the highly wrought design of art and the inexhaustible appeal of life which James's works develop. Further, the move from Emerson to Whitman, like that from James to Faulkner, marks a shift from a basically spatial concept of the formless to a temporal vision of process. Emerson conceptualized spirit in terms of motion, but he visualized spirit in largely spatial terms, whereas Whitman consciously struggled with the sheer procession of time itself. Similarly, James, even more than Emerson, worked in spatial metaphors, so that the infinite possibilities of life came to him as "holes" in a tapestry, as a field circumscribed by a window in the "house of fiction." But Faulkner, even more than Whitman, was obsessed with time as the ceaseless procession of moments, days, years. Could this temporally defined vision have something to do with the fact that Faulkner found himself
in a world fully endowed with those features of civilization of which James found America devoid? Is the multiple perspective of Absalom, Absalom! imaginable only in a world where the house of civilization has already been built and begun to collapse, so that the windows, no matter how badly chipped and cracked, already exist? Perhaps "words strain,/ crack and sometimes break, under the burden,/ under the tension" only after Eliot has recognized myth and language itself as the "fragments I have shored against my ruins," as the pieces in a mosaic within which life is possibly redeemed, but whose achieved design will "slip, slide, perish,/ decay with imprecision, will not stay in place." 39

A recognition of time as constant change, as the still moving current which inevitably outruns the still form of our "painted" pictures, may be possible only after we have painfully faced the fact that our lives are ordered by fictions. Whitman strove to make America the "greatest poem" and himself its poet, but had to revise both poem and poet continually in the face of the "tension" Eliot refers to, the tension between the still and still moving. So Leaves of Grass grows by a series of expansions and cohesions as Whitman submits to the flow of time and struggles to enfold process within coherent form.

Frank Kermode's The Sense of an Ending focuses on fiction as our means of ordering and containing the endless procession of time around a central event, a "kairos"
which acts to circumscribe "chronos," transforming pure succession into a redemptive design, much as the Puritan's theological structure transformed the vagabond into the pilgrim. But what happens to such a design when it loses its capacity to order time, when, as Kermode puts it, fiction degenerates into myth? The millenialists whom Kermode uses as prototypes of this "rage for order," simply changed their calendars, extended their design despite the increasingly elaborate explanations needed to do so, and so retained their chosen fiction, thus illustrating the point of Pound's second lament that "without a painted paradise at the end of it," life is insufferable. What Faulkner's vision presents is the liabilities of living within degenerate fictions, the inadequacies of the "painted" pictures by which we define our world and secure our necessary "sense of an ending" at the price of life itself. He is fully aware of design as the product of the imagination, as necessarily incomplete, but is also aware of the endlessness of time itself, and of the human need for order in the face of a world "without a painted paradise at the end of it." Accordingly, he focuses on the act of the imagination rather than the product, the fictive event rather than the fictional result. The ongoing procession of time cannot be permanently halted, the "rage for order" cannot ever be fully satisfied. But if form is repressive and inadequate, it is also redemptive; if process is threatening, it
is also liberating. James found a way of exploiting this paradox by making the novel a form constantly threatening to explode. Faulkner found a way of joining these bivalent aspects of form and process in the endless succession of imaginative acts which call attention to their own status as fictive events by simultaneously imposing a plot on time and confessing to the inadequacy of that plot in the face of time's endless procession. *Absalom, Absalom!* presents the successive acts of the imagination in the process of finding "what will suffice."\(^{42}\) I have chosen *Light in August* for treatment not because it is a greater novel, but because, by beginning *in medias res* and moving forward in time while it moves backward into history, it focuses on the complex fusion of the still and the still moving which Murray Krieger posits as the major achievement of a great work and which I am suggesting is the conscious purpose of Faulkner's art.\(^{43}\) If *Absalom, Absalom!* succeeds in creating continuity between past and present through the communal act of imagination which transpires in Quentin's room at Harvard, *Light in August* succeeds in creating a vision of past, present, and future as a continuous procession which finally outruns all efforts at closed and final form. The tension between ordered meaning and elusive mystery in *Absalom, Absalom!* resembles, oddly enough, James's epistemological version of the conflict between art and life, form and the unformed, the known and the unknown. The past
in *Absalom, Absalom!* issues very much the same kind of appeal to Shreve which live itself presents to James. What makes *Light in August* a more interesting work for my purposes is that the novel itself enacts a struggle for form in the midst of an ongoing procession of time. Accordingly, the patterns which emerge out of the juxtaposed stories of Lena Grove, Joe Christmas, and Gail Hightower, are achieved in the face of a constantly moving present. The tension between form and process in *Light in August* operates on much the same principle as that by which *Leaves of Grass* proceeds -- by assimilating a growing past while faring forward ceaselessly into the future.

What emerges, then, from the approach to American literature I am suggesting is a dialectical process whose fundamental opposing terms are form and process. In its most grandiose terms, such a process could be seen as moving from the rigidly defined form of Puritan theocracy to the total defiance of form evinced in "Nature." This embrace of open-ended freedom results in the discovery of form as a fundamental human need in Whitman, but a need which can be fulfilled only in the realm of art. With James, the limits of aesthetic form are tested to the breaking point as James struggles to include the maximum "felt life" within the saving circle drawn by art. At this point, the opposition between form and process reaches something like the unrelieved intensity of power and limitation to be found at
the center of "Fate." What has changed is the fact that form for James is not so much necessary limitation as it is redemptive principle, and what is unassimilated is not so much potentially endless freedom as it is assuredly endless waste. Form becomes, then, a positive value in the hands of the artist, whose hands now hold the world. But this adherence to form differs importantly from the Puritans' in that the defining picture has become a consciously "painted" picture. Thus Faulkner carries on the dialectic by focusing on form as potentially repressive even if it is the sole source of meaning, and process as both the inescapable fact of uncertainty and the force which, by disrupting form, liberates us from the confining myths we inhabit. In its roughest outline, this dialectic moves, then, back and forth from form to process to form to process. But each move rings a new change on the bivalent aspects of each term, so that the dialectic moves from form as repressive to form as redemptive, and from process as liberating to process as threat. For instance, if form for Emerson is a necessary limitation, for James it is the very principle of salvation. And if process means open-ended freedom for Whitman, for Faulkner it acts to defy all our efforts to "put it all between one Cap and one period."

Such a dialectical pattern is of course itself something of a "raid on the inarticulate." But it may serve to order our understanding of American literature in a new
and illuminating way. For if we can view a major current in that literature as enacting a dialectical movement between form and process, other issues may be clarified. For example, Donald Kartiganer's thesis that "the central characteristic of modern literary form has been the particular urgency and complexity with which the writer has confronted the conflict of movement and design," will gain a perspective from which the conflict he examines can be viewed as the latest episode in a tradition already at work in nineteenth-century America. \(^4^4\) Joseph Frank's thesis that "modern literature . . . is moving in the direction of spatial form" might gain both verification and amplification from the point of view I am suggesting. For the spatial form which Frank examines as a central feature of modern literature can be seen as grounded in a painful consciousness of time as ceaseless and uncontrollable procession. Frank draws this conclusion himself when he says that "both contemporary art and literature have, each in its own way, attempted to overcome the time elements involved in their structures."\(^4^5\) What I am suggesting is that time seen as endlessness -- and thus as threat to form -- is the latest version of the open-ended possibilities which nature initially represented in America. As we have seen, the spatial metaphor of the wilderness constituted both an invitation to freedom and a threat of annihilation. But the temporal metaphor of endless succession maintains a similar bivalence;
time both appeals to and defies the "rage for order," just as the wild both invited and eluded Thoreau's designs.

In a sense, the dynamic I see as central to American literature derives from and hopefully extends the insights for which every student of American literature is indebted to Charles Feidelson. But since Symbolism and American Literature constitutes something of a watershed for all subsequent criticism of the symbolistic mode which Feidelson treats, some derivativeness is unavoidable. To some extent, then, the following chapters constitute an exploration of one of the many implicit suggestions Feidelson left for future critics to follow up. There are obvious points of congruity between the tension I have discerned in American literature and the problems confronted by modern literature in general, as my discussion of Frank and Kartiganer above suggests. But if the major critical attempts to characterize modern literature issue from the very sense of discontinuity with the past which Monroe Spears justly posits as a central feature of modernism, my approach, by limiting its range spatially, may help to suggest a continuity between past and present which illuminates both. I steel myself against the possible pitfalls of such a method by recalling that Faulkner's spatial boundaries were even more arbitrary than mine and yet facilitated temporal continuity. If such an approach proves convincing, then Spears's title, Dionysus and the City, may metaphorize even more than he expected.
Notes to the Introduction


6 See *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York, 1956), pp. 204-216.


23 There is a curious parallel between our world and the Medieval, in that nature and culture are once again becoming indistinguishable.


27 Of course, one response to the world as wholly defined by form in this sense is the Emersonian repudiation of form in the service of individual liberation. Emerson's hypostatization of social forms into given patterns finds an interesting parallel in contemporary American fiction, as Tony Tanner's recent book, City of Words (New York, 1971), reveals.


31 Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953), p. 73.


34 Blackmur, Op. cit., p. 120.


36 For James's famous enumeration of all that America lacks see Hawthorne (London, 1887), pp. 43-44.

38 Ibid., pp. 5, 46.


41 Ibid., p. 39.


45 Joseph Frank, The Widening Gyre (Bloomington, 1963), pp. 8, 57.
Chapter I

Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Candidate for Truth

"It is very easy to live by the opinion of the world. It is very easy in solitude to be self-centred. But the finished man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson
I

In his essay, "From Edwards to Emerson," Perry Miller calls attention to the "dual heritage" of Puritanism -- the "piety" on the one hand, which endows the Puritan mind with "a religious passion, the sense of an inward communication of the divine symbolism of nature," and the often conflicting "ideal," on the other hand, "of social conformity, of law and order, of regulation and control . . ." As Miller shows, despite all their obvious differences, Emerson shares with Edwards an overriding "religious passion," an irresistible urge toward reunion with God. But if Emerson inherited a version of Puritan piety, he came to acknowledge the need for order and control as well, so that his desire to find outlets for religious energy existed in tension with his need to contain and express that energy. This tension manifests itself through a persistent conflict between the urge to reject social, intellectual, and religious forms in the service of private growth and personal freedom, and the recognition that such growth and freedom presuppose a formlessness inimical to human needs. Emerson's "piety" gives rise to an extravagant faith in the power of the individual to live originally, in direct contact with spirit, without the mediation of social and religious institutions. But having dispensed with public forms, with shared interpretations of reality, Emerson faces the need for private forms, individual shapings of experience. If the Puritans struggled to modify
their religious institutions to accommodate the pressures of a changing world, Emerson sought a definition of form sufficiently coherent to articulate human meaning and sufficiently plastic to avoid ossification.

It may be useful to break up Emerson's life into chronological periods and then plot his intellectual development, to say, for example, that he begins rebelliously by repudiating social, religious, and political institutions, moves to a celebration of freedom and individuality, and finally acquiesces with the acceptance of fact, fate, and experience; but such a formulation, while superficially valid, distorts the motions of a mind whose fundamental value and problematicality derive from its refusal to define or be defined in any final sense. The inner drama of Emerson's mind centers on the conflict between the desire to forge an "original relation" with the world, and the need to find an adequate form through which that relation can be expressed. It is grounded in a tension between the urge to explode the shackles which imprison the mind and prevent that state of being toward which Emerson consistently strives -- a state of absolute freedom, power, and integration -- and the recognition that forms, intellectual patterns through which experience can be received and expressed, are indispensable stepping stones toward the end of wholeness. This conflict assumes a variety of shapes and textures in Emerson's thought, but while the terms change, the basic tension persists. It
is the burden of this chapter to focus on this tension as it manifests itself in three representative essays, "Nature," "Circles," and "Fate," in an effort to define the rhythm of Emerson's mind. I have chosen these particular essays for two reasons. First, they span the years from 1836 to 1852, a period during which Emerson's mind was most active, and they reflect the continuity of his concern with the opposition between form and energy. Second, "Nature" and "Fate" especially present problems which, if not soluble, are at least understandable in the light of Emerson's persistent effort to meet the demands of a dual and contradictory imperative. One of my purposes will be to trace Emerson's repeated attempts to fulfill this imperative and to show that the apparent contradictions in his intellectual posture, and some of the stylistic failings in his expression of it, can be explained as essential features of the struggle to which he is committed. But I also hope to show that the fundamental tension between form and process, between the need for mediating structure and the divine urge for liberation, persists for Emerson, whether he is exploding public forms in the service of private growth, celebrating energy and fluidity at the cost of coherence and formal integrity, or reconciling power and limitation.
II

Emerson's era was infused with iconoclastic energies. R. W. B. Lewis has documented the rising self-consciousness with which Emerson's contemporaries considered their state as Americans, as new men, unrelated to the outworn traditions of Europe, uninjected by original sin, and unconstrained by any inherited cultural forms. The distinction between the old world and the new was very present to Emerson as he visited Europe in 1848: "In England every man you meet is some man's son; in America he may be some man's father." Europe evokes a picture of man as inheritor of tradition while in America each man is self-generated and potentially creative. In England, Carlyle was repudiating the dehumanizing influence of machines and exalting the force of the unconscious. But while the renunciation of materialism and rationalism gave impetus to the Transcendental movement, its emphasis lay on a destruction of the old. While Carlyle and Coleridge rejected eighteenth-century forms of thinking, Emerson set out to reject the past itself, insofar as it was formalized into traditions and inhibiting intellectual structures. If he rejected Locke and Hume as "Reasoning Machines," he also found "pleasure in the thought that... my mind at this moment may be new in the universe" (J,I,361; II,195). It may seem perverse to characterize a movement whose rhetoric was borrowed from Kant as fundamentally obsessed with rejecting inherited structures, but the most cursory
perusal of Emerson's transformation of the Kantian distinction between reason and understanding into an operative distinction between intuition and intelligence illustrates not only the haphazard fashion in which such ideas were assimilated, but also the motivation generating the ostensible adoption of those ideas. The distinction between reason and understanding becomes for Emerson a tool for distinguishing between spirit and matter, revelation and habit, freedom and enslavement. It is reason which puts us in touch with spirit through revelation, and it is through revelation that we are reunited with reality. Further, and most important, this reunion between soul and spirit explodes old forms of perception, habitual ways of interpreting experience, and facilitates the generation of that "original relation" to the world for which Emerson longs.

Emerson participates in the mood of iconoclasm, reform, and radical originality with a goal at once more personal and more universal than some of his contemporaries. His refusal to ally himself with the Brook Farm enterprise illustrates the extent of his opposition to any and all institutions. It is not a desire for solitude or a lack of human sympathy which leads Emerson to remain aloof from his "friends" project, but rather a firm refusal to allow himself to be contained within or expressed by any social form. "I do not wish to remove from my present prison to a prison a little larger. I wish to break all prisons" (J,V,473). He is too
busy struggling to disengage himself from the hold of his own private intellectual patterns to consider being entrapped again in public institutions, no matter how freshly organized. But on both personal and public levels, Emerson is issuing a radical repudiation of form itself. "God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose," he says, going on to define two modes whose opposition is fundamental:

Take which you please, -- you can never have both. Between these, as a pendulum, man oscillates. He in whom the love of repose predominates will accept the first creed, the first philosophy, the first political party he meets, -- most likely his father's. He gets rest, commodity, reputation; but he shuts the door of truth. He in whom the love of truth predominates will keep himself aloof from all the moorings, and afloat. He will abstain from dogmatism, and recognize all the opposite negations between which, as walls, his being is swung. He submits to the inconvenience of suspense and imperfect opinion, but he is a candidate for truth, as the other is not, and respects the highest law of his being. (C,II,341)

It is as a "candidate for truth" that Emerson rejects the need for form and celebrates radically open-ended freedom. The mind is at liberty to wander, to drift, to entertain theory and interpretation without becoming imprisoned within it. Some of Emerson's contemporaries shared his instinct for liberation, but arrived at a different view of its sources and consequences.

Thoreau, like Emerson, rejected institutions and embraced open-ended freedom, but did not finally repudiate form. His "saunterer" is defined generically both by his holy mission and by his rootlessness. He is the man going "a la
Sainte Terre," as well as the man "sans terre" (p. 597). Thoreau describes the latter uncompromisingly as a man divested of all conventional relations:

If you are ready to leave father and mother and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again, -- if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk. (p. 598)

The "secret of successful sauntering," Thoreau claims, is the condition of being "without land or home" (p. 597). But Thoreau prefers the religious derivation of his word, for to him "every walk is a sort of crusade . . . to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels" (p. 598). The saunterer is primarily a "candidate for truth," a man who seeks the highest law of his being and accordingly rejects partial answers and distortions of reality. Thoreau's two definitions of the saunterer are fundamentally contradictory; the saunterer as homeless man wandering the earth is of necessity directionless and adrift, while the saunterer as crusader is pursuing a definite and overriding goal. This conflict manifests itself in Walden as well, where a radical move beyond the confines of social forms, the act of the man "sans terre," ends in a highly ordered imaginative appropriation of the wilderness. What begins as an adventure, a deliberately anti-formal experiment in radical originality, ends as a highly crafted work of art. The man going "a la Sainte Terre" finally overrides and controls the man "sans terre."
Melville too shared in the pervasive sense of the individual self as essentially distinct from social institutions, but saw the freedom promised by this original relation as a terrifying freedom. Sitting atop the mast, staring out hypnotically at the ocean, Ishmael is a man for whom the patterns of rigging and mast, the defining goals of profit and the pursuit of the white whale, are unavailable. He faces a scene unlimited and undefined, except, significantly, by its perpetual motion: "There is no life in thee, now," Ishmael intones, "except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God." Ishmael goes to sea on a sort of crusade, actively seeking the mysterious, moved by his "itch for things remote" (p. 30). But he also represents the man "sans terre," who shuns the "life of landsmen ... tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks" (p. 24). And it is this active rejection of a home, this whole-hearted embrace of landlessness, that finally characterizes Ishmael's journey. For as the possessor of "negative capability" -- the ability to entertain multiple meanings without any irritable demand for the "real facts" or the ultimate truth -- Ishmael can range among ambiguities without yielding to the urge to force them into comprehensive wholes. He obviously has the urge to inform his world with pattern and meaning. He classifies, describes, interprets, imagines, and meditates on "the ungraspable
phantom of life" which he sees in the elusive depths of the sea and in the "whiteness of the whale" itself. But his efforts are admittedly partial, "for small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything" (pp. 195-96). All efforts to create a final, comprehensive ordering of reality are futile, and it is Ishmael's reiterated understanding of this fact that endows him with his capacity for survival. What Emerson calls the "tyrannical instinct" for ordered meaning is tragically dramatized in Ahab, whose desire to "strike through the mask," to impose a final and resounding end to the suspenseful condition of landlessness, destroys him (J,IV,116). What Ishmael acknowledges as his inability to complete his task of imaginative appropriation is his recognition of a world whose final meaning is inaccessible. He opts for the landless state as the only passage to a truth which he knows he will never find. And yet he continues to sail, because the other alternative constitutes for him a prison. To leave one's home is to invite only danger, but to stay at home is a form of death.

Melville, unlike Emerson, recognizes that the condition of the "candidate for truth" is problematical. Having left the safety of land, man confronts a formlessness inimical to his need for ordered meaning. If he maintains an obsessive desire for ultimate truth, a final ordering of reality, he
is doomed. But if he rejects all partial forms of truth, he risks the self-annihilation of the stander of mast-heads, hypnotized by perpetual motion, adrift in pure process. Ishmael's posture constitutes an unstable intermediary between these two lethal options. By admitting his inability to reach a final, comprehensive truth, he avoids the fate of an Ahab, but by constantly struggling to appropriate the ceaseless flow of his world into significant, though partial, form, he resists the fate of a Bulkington, the fatal symbol of obsessive landlessness.

Emerson, like Melville, posits a condition of intellectual drifting as essential to the pursuit of truth. But unlike Melville, he assumes that once we have dispensed with outworm forms and immersed ourselves in the spiritual flux, the ultimate meaning of the universe will automatically reveal itself in a final and inclusive form. The distinction between the man "sans terre" and the man moving "a la Sainte Terre" is absent. For Emerson, truth is a natural product of that "original relation" to the world from which we alienate ourselves by establishing intellectual "homes" in which to "repose." The fundamental "home" for Emerson was the Church, and his resignation from the vocation of his father and grandfather implies a good deal about his relation to the contemporary temper of iconoclasm. "A sect or a party is an elegant incognito devised to save a man from the vexation of thinking," he says in an effort to depict institutions as
obstructions to creative thought. For if "religion is the relation of the soul to God," then "the progress of Sectarianism marks the decline of religion" (J,II,386). The minor premise omitted from that syllogism is the assertion that religious forms are not simply inadequate, but positively destructive to the relation between man and God. It is this belief that leads Emerson to resign from his position as pastor of Second Church, saying, "I have sometimes thought that, in order to be a good minister, it were necessary to leave the ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age, we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers" (J,II,491-92). On a personal level he is rejecting his inheritance, but on a metaphysical level he is repudiating what is for him the most significant form bequeathed to him by the past -- the religious tradition in which he was reared. Emerson's iconoclasm is more radical than Thoreau's, for Emerson is not simply refusing this or that institution as corrupt; he is refusing to accept the very interdependence of individual and institution. "Religion in the mind is not credulity, and in the practice is not form. It is a life" (J,II,492).

Rejection of inherited form is also the crux of the issue over miracles. The orthodox doctrine of miracles was essential to Unitarians in their effort to hold on to Christianity as the historical revelation of God. Emerson and Ripley, in attacking miracles, were attacking the last
cord binding the individual to the received form of religious truth. For, as Emerson quickly perceived, if revelation is the potential resource of all men, then the miracles of orthodox Christian doctrine are unnecessary and spurious. What the Unitarians found intolerable was the corollary to this conclusion which implied a change in the status of Christ, who no longer constitutes the only channel to God, but is simply one member of "the true race of prophets" of which we are all potentially members (C,I,128). The fervor of the debate over miracles testifies to the deeper implications called forth by what may now seem a peripheral issue. What was at stake was the whole question of whether man could reach God without a special divine dispensation. And according to Emerson and Ripley, he could. "The evidence of miracles depends on a previous belief in Christianity rather than the evidence of Christianity on a previous belief in miracles," Ripley said. Christianity provides truth not because it accords with reason, not because it issues from an autonomous personal deity, but because it accords with "the divine testimony of our spiritual nature" (p. 161). For Emerson, miracles are not aberrations through which God dispenses truth to selected men; miracles are "one with the blowing clover and the falling rain" (C,I,129). They are the potential experience of all men. Similarly, God is not revealed through doctrines held by religious sects, and thus, "it is not wise, not being natural, to belong to any religious
party. . . . As fast as any man becomes great, that is, thinks, he becomes a new party . . . which is to say, as fast as we use our own eyes, we quit these parties or Unthinking Corporations, and join ourselves to God in an unpartaken relation" (J,II,386). The "Divinity School Address" and "The American Scholar" both derive from this seminal urge to destroy existing public forms in order to forge an "original relation" to spirit. For most of the 1830's Emerson is loudly proclaiming a conviction more fundamental than individual freedom; he is claiming not only the primacy of man, but also the separability of the human spirit from the cultural forms through which it has been expressed. "The difficulty," he claims, "is that we do not make a world of our own, but fall into institutions already made, and have to accomodate ourselves to them to be useful at all, and this accommodation is, I say, a loss of so much integrity and, of course, of so much power" (J,II,448-49). In "Nature," Emerson sets out to celebrate that "power" and to "make a world" which will re-order man's relation to nature and invest that relation with final and inclusive form.
"Nature" is a particularly problematical essay because it is the scene of two intellectual operations. The effort to define, explain, and argue for a certain view of reality exists in tension with the urge to celebrate and share with the reader the visionary experience which engenders the author's changed perspective. That is, Emerson sets out to liberate us from our prisons, to explode the cultural forms in which we "repose." But he also wants to define a new world, the world which his own liberation has made possible. Accordingly, the essay registers a tension between the desire for re-integration with the fluid whole, and the urge to inform the universe with ordered meaning. This tension makes the essay structurally confusing as well as thematically complex.

"Nature" begins with a statement of vision and labors to produce in the mind of its readers the conditions necessary to their regeneration through the same visionary experience. Simultaneously, Emerson struggles to ground the experience in a doctrinal form sufficiently compelling to command the status of a comprehensive structuring of the world. Thus the essay operates on two levels: on the one hand, it holds out the elusive boon of a total integration of self and world in a fluid whole, while on the other, it attempts to provide an inclusively structured world. But at the very core of the vision is a total immersion of self in
nature, an ultimate annihilation of self, with its "tyrannical instincts" for order, so that the vision of the whole undermines the effort to inform that whole with ordered meaning (J,IV,116). Accordingly, the essay is organized into a rigid structure which defines nature in terms of its use in hierarchical order from "Commodity" through "Discipline" to "Spirit." But concurrently the essay moves in climactic order, from the description of the visionary experience through which we can be re-integrated with spirit by immersing ourselves in nature, through the revelation of spirit as the animating force within us, to the final injunction to enact the visionary experience for ourselves. But since the mystical reunion with the spiritual flux defines a state of radical formlessness, the effort to articulate an inclusive form within which all experience is contained and expressed is frustrated.

The opening section of the essay illustrates Emerson's two-fold purpose. The introduction begins with the repudiation of a "retrospective age" imprisoned in the dead and deadening forms inherited from the past, an age enslaved by "the sepulchres of the fathers" (C,I,3). A call for "new lands, new men, new thoughts" is issued in hortatory tones (C,I,3). The reader is invited to leave aside received tradition and attune himself to nature, whose "forms and tendencies" are "already . . . describing its own design" (C,I,4). Paragraphs two and three reflect the dual function
of this initial section and suggest the course to be followed in the remainder of the essay. In paragraph two, Emerson begins, "Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable," and goes on to restate the benevolent and sure meaning residing in nature (C,I,3). The aim here is to establish the reader's faith in an ultimate correspondence between his need for meaning and its final existence. Emerson is simultaneously announcing his conviction that a final form is forthcoming and attempting to seduce his reader into the posture of open expectation essential to his reunion with spirit. We are confronted with a "hieroglyphic" which can be solved only if we assume an ultimate relation between appearance and reality (C,I,4). "We must trust," Emerson insists, "the perfection of creation so far as to believe," and this belief constitutes the necessary first step toward realization of man's relation to reality (C,I,3-4). Ultimate meaning resides in man's relation to nature, but that meaning becomes available only if we assume its existence. The circular reasoning of this paragraph derives from its dual function. Emerson is at once engendering a mood and making a claim. When he ends by enjoining us to "inquire" with him, "To what end is nature," his tone of confidence reflects his conviction that nature's "design" will readily manifest itself to the mind open to the influx of her "forms and tendencies" (C,I,4). In paragraph three, Emerson reinforces his claim that a "theory of nature," an
inclusive explanation of "all phenomena" is forthcoming (C,I,4). But the closing sentence of this paragraph leaves us hanging. Having claimed that a "true theory" will, quite simply, explain everything, Emerson concludes, "Now many \[\text{phenomena}\] are thought not only unexplained but inexplicable; as language, sleep, madness, dreams, beasts, sex" (C,I,4). Logically, we would expect that he intends to explain, or at least disprove the inexplicability of, each of these problematical "phenomena." In fact, the only one he returns to at all is language. But at this point, the reader is unaware that he will not re-encounter these problems, and reads on in good faith, expecting a comprehensive explanation, in discursive terms of at least these test cases, if not all phenomena.

What follows in the concluding fourth paragraph of the Introduction is a complex fusion of the two modes exemplified in the preceding paragraphs. The last paragraph begins, "Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and Soul" (C,I,4). Here is what seems a definition of terms, the usual first step in a philosophical treatise. Emerson proceeds to recognize two definitions of nature: (1) nature as the "not me," as all which is not included in the soul, and (2) nature as distinguished from culture. Effectively rejecting the second definition for the time being, Emerson seems simply to be defending his definition before launching into his inclusive theory of nature. However, while
offering the promise of comprehensive form, Emerson is also establishing the dynamic of a movement. He is not so much telling us how he is going to use words as he is defining the distance to be crossed between me and "not me." He wants to accomplish two goals simultaneously: (1) he wants us to assume the posture of Thoreau's saunterer, the man "sans terre," so that we can be immersed in the flow of nature and be reunited with "Universal Being," but (2) he also wants to take us "a la Sainte Terre," to reclaim the Holy Land from the Infidels by articulating an inclusive "theory of nature" which will redeem man by re-ordering his world. Accordingly, in the final paragraph of his Introduction, Emerson operates on both levels at once -- to open a discursive treatise, and to set out on a voyage from the limited, unrealized, unintegrated self to a vision in which that self merges with nature and reunifies itself with God. But his conviction that "the problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul," that a final design will follow upon the re-integration of mind and matter through a reunion with spirit, fails to be validated because the vision and the theory end in the eradication, respectively, of the self and the world to be unified and redeemed (C,I,73). The structural conflict between the hierarchically ordered statement of doctrine and the climactically ordered revelation of spirit reflects a thematic tension between the iconoclastic effort to explode
and transcend mediating structures and the formal urge to create a new intellectual pattern through which experience is ordered and meaning assured. But the revelatory vision dissolves the individual into an undifferentiated spiritual flux, and the theory of nature threatens the functional disappearance of natural phenomena, so that self and world fade into the pure flow of spirit which defies formal appropriation. To see the problem Emerson accordingly confronts, we need to examine the features and consequences of the revelatory vision, before turning to the theory constructed to give it a context.

Emerson devotes Section I of the essay, entitled "Nature," to a description of mystical immersion in nature, but his description raises immediate conflicts with his previous claims for an inclusive "theory of nature." He leads into his description of the visionary state by focusing on solitude as the necessary setting for the reunion of self and spirit. But Emerson's solitude is not a state of isolation: "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society" (C,I,7). The man in solitude is a stargazer, and stars act as emblems of all natural phenomena by virtue of their constancy and elusiveness. The stars, "though always present, . . . are always inaccessible" (C,I,7). Significantly, the visionary experience is preceded by a recognition that ultimate answers are unavailable, a conviction in direct contradiction to the previous claim that
no questions are unanswerable. The first feature of man's reunion with spirit is that he abandons the quest for truth in order to achieve that reunion. It is only when we suspend our yearning for ultimate knowledge that we can enjoy that lassitude which opens our minds to the influx of spirit. Before the reunion with spirit is even described it is apparent that the state of mind necessary for the influx of spirit precludes the achievement of the inclusive whole already promised.

A second feature of the perceptual mode leading to this reunion with spirit is the assumption of the poet's stance in relation to nature:

The charming landscape which I saw this morning is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape, There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eyes can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. (C,1,8)

Emerson distinguishes between two modes of perception: one which classifies and limits meaning, and another which unifies it. The poet rejects the given property divisions branding the land with the names of its owners. Like the candidate for truth, he refuses to accept the given pattern and chooses to ignore the form man has imposed on the land he perceptually integrates into a scene. By rejecting the pattern imposed on his world by other men, the poet seems, in this passage, instantly to possess an integrated vision of the Whole. The visionary, then, by abandoning his desire for
ultimate truth, and by sloughing off the cultural skin of the world, is putatively ready to achieve that integrity of impression which will reveal the final and fundamental design of his world. By losing the world, Emerson claims, we shall regain it in its pure and final form.

But when he finally describes this state of mystical reunion, it registers our loss and not our gain. In a passage which bears quoting in full, Emerson re-creates his own visionary experience:

In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. (C,I,10).

The reunion with spirit defines a condition of total immersion in the flow of "Universal Being." The boundaries between me and "not me" vanish so that all sense of the self as a discreet entity disappears. Here is the saunterer "sans terre," the man for whom "to be brothers, to be acquaintances, master or servant, is . . . a trifle and a disturbance" (C,I,10). Dissolved into the spiritual flux, man loses all sight of traditional relationships as well as cultural patterns, as "streets and villages" fade into oblivion (C,I,10). Totally liberated from his cultural setting, the visionary enters a state largely undefinable except in terms of what is lost. For when Emerson tries to provide a positive
definition he comes up against a problem, because the state he is describing resists any such definition. "An occult relation between man and the vegetable" is presented as a replacement for the lost cultural relations and structures (C,I,10). This relationship's only appeal resides in its esoteric and "occult" quality, and not in its vegetable object. Promised a newly integrated world, instead we are instilled with a loosely flowing sense of empathy with "waving . . . boughs" (C,I,10). The world has become so thoroughly fluid that nothing retains its separate stability. All flows together, save the eye which passively observes, and even that eye is "transparent" -- open to the influx of spirit but incapable of informing those "currents of Universal Being" with any universal pattern. The poet's fully integrated whole is nowhere to be found; instead, we have the seer who re-forms nothing, but simply acts as a channel through which the spirit flows. The new "occult" relation with the vegetable constitutes a futile and pathetic attempt to replace the lost world of partial and inadequately formed meaning with a new and comprehensively unified world of integrated meaning. We are effectively left adrift, "sans terre," but still a long way from the promised Holy Land.

But, it may be argued, this is only Section I. The rest of the essay provides the inclusive vision you demand. Yet an examination of the theory postulated in the ensuing sections reveals that theory lands us in the same dilemma as
vision. The first half of the essay is devoted to a doctrine of use. Nature is related to man by virtue of its provision for him. "Commodity" is the physical use of nature for man's physical benefit. "Beauty" is the use of nature for aesthetic pleasure. "Discipline" is the use of nature for moral instruction. The "Doctrines of Use," however, only serve to illustrate the fundamental relatedness of man and nature which Emerson insistently reiterates. As commodity, "all the parts of nature incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man" (C,I,13). The "high and divine beauty" of nature "is that which is found in combination with the human will" (C,I,19). "This relation between mind and matter... stands in the will of God" (C,I,33-34). "All things with which we deal, preach to us" (C,I,42). From "Commodity" through "Discipline" Emerson presents a view of nature as man's home. Each "use" of nature serves to prepare us for the next, higher use. Opening the section on Discipline, Emerson avows, "This use of the world includes the preceding uses as parts of itself" (C,I,36). Each use leads to a "nobler" one, until in "Idealism" we find that the highest use of nature and its final cause is suggested by its symbolic status. Already in the section on language Emerson has asserted the "radical correspondence between visible things and human thoughts" (C,I,29). The basis of man's fundamental relatedness to nature lies in the fact that "the world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because
the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind" (C,I,32). But in "Idealism" this emblematic function of nature operates not to reiterate the basic interrelatedness of mind and matter as it did in "Language." Instead, by focusing on nature's final "use" as its capacity "to conspire with spirit to emancipate us," Emerson is transcending nature as symbol, and in the process is downgrading nature as secondary to spirit (C,I,50). That is, once we have penetrated nature's meaning, we discover that its final use is to symbolize spirit; and once nature has performed this function, its use is exhausted and its status subverted. "It is the uniform effect of culture on the human mind," Emerson says, "to lead us to regard nature as an accident and an effect" (C,I,49). True to his conviction that the moral law is the one stable feature of the spiritual world, Emerson has built, up through Section V, an explanation of nature's final cause as a revelation of that moral law: "To this one end of Discipline, all parts of nature conspire" (C,I,47). But with Section VI, he returns to the symbolic function by which this revelation is made, and consequently explodes this neat conclusion by asserting a still more inclusive statement of nature's final cause. The theory is turned around in mid-course by this last statement, and it is important to understand why this happens.

... Once nature is explicitly viewed as functioning to symbolize spirit, we are faced with the same dilemma
presented by the mystical vision in which man becomes a "transparent eyeball." Once we see through nature to spirit, nature becomes transparent and loses its thickness as symbol. Emerson has so exhaustively shown how all natural phenomena speak to us of spirit, that he has reduced nature from symbol to sign and now faces the possibility of reducing sign to a transparency approaching non-existence. This problem begins to complicate matters even before Emerson confronts it in Section VI. In the preceding section he is defining the ways in which nature teaches us "scale and proportion." He abstracts a little and reiterates the ultimate order and meaning to be found in nature: "the first steps in Agriculture, Astronomy, Zoology . . . teach that Nature's dice are always loaded; that in her heaps and rubbish are concealed sure and useful results" (C,I,38-39). Excited by his subject, he goes on to celebrate man's ability to discover the "laws of physics":

What noble emotions dilate the mortal as he enters into the councils of the creation, and feels by knowledge the privilege to Be! His insight refines him. The beauty of nature shines in his own breast. Man is greater that he can see this, and the universe less, because Time and Space relations vanish as laws are known. (C,I,39)

The diction here resembles that used earlier to describe the visionary state, and the similarity is not accidental. For the man who has transcended the appearance of nature by discovering her laws experiences the same loss of a mediate term between mind and spirit as the "transparent eyeball," so
that the symbolized overpowers and explodes the symbol. But whereas, for the visionary, the disappearing forms were cultural constructs, for the physicist what vanishes is nature itself as symbol. Once we have read the "hieroglyphics" they become transparent. Just as earlier he hastened to assert man's "occult" relationship to vegetables, here Emerson rushes to save nature from this fate in the next paragraph by re-asserting her inexhaustibility: "Here again we are impressed and even daunted by the immense Universe to be explored" (C,I,39). We are safe since we shall never fully penetrate the manifold symbol -- hardly a satisfactory solution in view of the ideal of comprehensive meaning promised.

The same dilemma becomes dominant in the last half of the essay where "Reason," having been "stimulated to more earnest vision," watches as "outlines and surfaces become transparent and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them" (C,I,50). Section VI marks the point in the essay where the theory constructed to provide ordered meaning manifests the paradox implicit in the visionary revelation already posited as origin and end of that theory. Once nature's final use is defined as its symbolic representation of spirit, nature assumes the status previously accorded cultural forms; it becomes a "block of matter" to be "per-vaded and dissolved by a thought" (C,I,55). Nature stands "as the apparition of God," and as such exists to be
penetrated and transcended (C,I,62).

Emerson's response to the problem of how to retain the open channel to God without losing nature in the process takes a complex form. Having subordinated all the uses of nature to its ultimate use as symbol of spirit, and having recognized that its final use reduces nature to transparency, Emerson turns the first half of the essay upside down. Meaning resides in nature as symbol, but man is no longer the passive recipient of that meaning; he creates it. Pure Idealism is inadequate because it fails to take into account man's need for the ordered meaning which his symbols provide. What Emerson acknowledges at the end of Section VI is man's need for form, for a meaningful pattern through which the world is coherently ordered and humanized; "The advantage of the ideal theory over the popular faith is this, that it presents the world in precisely that view which is most desireable to the mind" (C,I,59). Emerson is not only acknowledging the need for a pattern; he is suggesting that such a pattern must accord with and generate from man's need for meaning. If we recall that the essay begins with the emphatic assurance that meaning inheres in nature and will be discovered there if we approach it with the proper reverence, Emerson's reversal is apparent. For now he is arguing for the existence of meaning on the grounds that man requires it. We cannot tolerate the loss of nature as symbol, because without it we are lost "in the splendid labyrinth of . . .
perceptions" (C,I,63). Emerson's disagreement with Berkleyan idealism rests squarely on his assertion that if Idealism "only deny the existence of matter, it does not satisfy the demands of the spirit. It leaves God out of me" (C,I,63). Nature exists finally to symbolize spirit, and while it is crucial to see nature as the phenomenal reflection of a noumenal reality, it is equally crucial to save the status of the phenomenal. That is, Emerson cannot accept a theory which "makes nature foreign" to man by lifting him out of it (C,I,63). It is not only his love of nature which forces Emerson to apologize for his subordination of nature to spirit. It is his need for ordered meaning that leads Emerson to say that we must accept "from God the phenomenon as the pure and awful form of religion in the world" (C,I,60).

The final sections of the essay reflect Emerson's struggle to reconcile his urge to retain the symbolic function of nature with his desire to transcend the symbol and merge with the symbolized. His strategy is not fully rigorous. After discounting the significance of any theory as a complete interpretation of the world, Emerson focuses on the more important problem of man's rage for order. "It is not so pertinent to man to know," he says, "all the individuals of the animal kingdom, as it is to know whence and whereto is this tyrannizing unity in his constitution, which evermore separates and classifies things, endeavoring to reduce the most diverse to one form" (C,I,66). In contrast to the
search for a "tyrannizing unity," Emerson counterposes an intellectual mode which reminds us of Ishmael's stance in Moby Dick. Instead of immersing ourselves in the undifferentiated flow of pure spirit, we are invited to reach out toward the world "by untaught sallies of the spirit, by a continual self-recovery, and by entire humility" (C,I,67). The man "sans terre" may enjoy that "tranquil sense of unity" afforded by the visionary experience, but he cannot articulate that unity into a lasting and comprehensive form; and the urge to give coherent form to that unity, the urge which gives impetus to the Holylander, remains unfulfilled. Emerson acknowledges the conflicting purposes of his essay when he distinguishes between "innocent men" and "naturalists" (C,I,74). "Innocent men" worship God, but do so in outworn forms which vitiate their efforts. "Naturalists" pursue radical truth, but "they freeze their subject under the wintry light of the understanding." The innocent worshippers lack a viable structure through which spirit can work, but the naturalists lack the "instantaneous in-streaming causing power" by which to animate their world. Emerson is trying to provide what both groups need -- a new structure for the innocent worshippers, a revelation of spirit for the naturalists. But "the marriage is not celebrated," except as prophecy.

The orphic poet is introduced as a fictive and omniscient voice who speaks out of eternity. Because he can see
all of history from his omniscient perspective, he can
depict the human condition in a universal context. He can
perform the marriage of mind and matter by articulating a
myth. He simply posits a golden age in which man "was
permeated and dissolved by spirit . . . and filled
nature with his overflowing currents" (C,I,71). Man's
plastic spirit gave form to a world large enough to satisfy
the demands of his imagination. "But, having made for him-
self this huge shell, his waters retired" (C,I,71). The
orphic poet creates a version of the fall of man to explain
the diminished world he sees. The structure man created,
though "once it fitted him, now it corresponds to him from
far and on high" (C,I,71). The orphic poet reconciles the
urge for a comprehensive form within which experience is
meaningfully ordered and humanized, and the need for freedom,
the desire to remain aloof and afloat, by creating a myth.
After building a comprehensive structure, man's energy has
receded, so that the whole appears faintly in the distance.

But the myth does not conclude the essay, because by now
Emerson cannot opt for any ultimate formulation of truth.
Instead the essay ends in a state of radical tension. When
Emerson enjoins his reader to "build therefore your own
world," he is acknowledging both the inadequacy of his own
structure and the need for a structure through which spirit
flows (C,I,76). His effort to articulate the manifold re-
latedness of man to nature has ended with the attribution of
the source of that relatedness to spirit, both within and without. The consequent subordination of nature as symbol to man as symbolizer results in the assertion that it is neither symbol nor the symbolized, but the act of symbolization itself that provides meaning. It is the act of building a world and not the final form of that world which both assures "the redemption of the soul" and solves the "problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty" (C, I, 73). But "Nature" can only prophesy this redemption; it cannot enact it. "Prospects" points to the future and ends in the future tense, for the inability to reconcile vision and theory necessitates an open-ended conclusion. Recognizing his failure to construct a form sufficiently comprehensive to contain ultimate meaning and still remain afloat and in touch with the "currents of Universal Being," Emerson simply shifts the burden onto his reader's shoulders. Having unfixed our world, and having acknowledged his inability to re-form it into a newly ordered whole, Emerson leaves us with an injunction and a promise. We must resist the tempting stability enjoyed by the man of repose and opt instead for the mixed blessings associated with the man of truth. Emerson promises us paradise if we follow his injunction, but his failed attempt to give that paradise palpable form suggests the perils attendant on following his injunction. Emerson tries to inform the visionary's integration into spirit with meaning
by asserting a new "occult" relation with the vegetable which can replace the lost relations with men and the cultural forms annihilated by the vision, but the new relation is inadequate. He tries to save nature as symbol by defining man as symbolizer, but cannot reconcile this solution with the vision of total reunion with spirit he has worked to build. And he tries to reconcile the world's fluidity with man's need for ordered meaning, but he ends his own partial effort at reconciliation by advising us to do for ourselves what he has been unable to do for us.

The benevolent tone of his final paragraph is, in short, not justified by the theory developed in the essay. For Emerson finally evades the dilemma which both theory and vision present. When the "Doctrine of Use" ends by exhausting nature's symbolic function, Emerson fails adequately to reinstate the symbol between symbolizer and symbolized. Because he wants to identify symbolizer with symbolized, the spirit within with the spirit without, the symbol through which "Deep calls unto Deep" constantly threatens to disappear, leaving the man who symbolizes in a solipsistic vacuum, and the spirit which properly issues into symbolic forms unrealized and unattainable (C, I, 74). What Emerson everywhere acknowledges but fails to meet in "Nature" is the need for articulated forms through which the marriage of mind and matter can be celebrated.

"Nature," published in 1836, reflects the excitement and
implicit problems of Emerson's celebratory phase. The essay belongs to that transitional moment after outworn forms have been shed and before a new world is created. Emerson's structural and thematic oscillation between the repudiation of the old and the prophecy of the new evidences the instability of this moment. The theory he expounds constitutes an attempt to complete the movement from iconoclasm to a new and inclusive pattern through which meaning is appropriated, but the acknowledged failure of this attempt reveals the perils of formlessness and the staggering problem of recreating a comprehensive form once the old myths are repudiated. In 1836, Emerson still believes that such an inclusive form is theoretically possible. Laying the "foundation" of his current lecture series in a journal entry, he posits "the constant tendency of the mind to unify all it beholds" as a fact which corresponds to "a parallel tendency ... in nature which makes this just" (J, IV, 119). Although he is unable to achieve a unified theory, he has no scruples about prophesying its achievement, as "Nature" makes clear. But by 1839, Emerson's confidence in that prophecy has eroded. The prophetic vision of man's full appropriation of nature which concludes "Nature" has given way to a profound sense of perpetual incompleteness. "I see that he who thinks he does something for the last time ought not to do it at all," Emerson says, going on to point out that his "objection is not to the thing," the effort to appropriate meaning, but
"with the form," whose alleged finality is spurious (J, V, 288). A month later Emerson reiterates his inability to construct a conclusive "system." Reminded of his youthful desire to compile a "Cabinet Encyclopedia" which would include the "net value of all the definitions at which the world had yet arrived," he acknowledges the futility of his efforts. After two years the compendium "was no nearer to completeness than on its first day. Nay, somehow the whole plan of it needed alteration, nor did the following months promise any speedier term to it than the foregoing. At last I discovered that my curve was a parabola whose arcs would never meet ..." (C, V, 326). In "Nature," Emerson sees "universal truth" as a "great circle on a sphere comprising all possible circles" and within man's reach, qualifying the metaphor only with the observation that "every such truth is the absolute Ens seen from one side. But it has innumerable sides" (C, I, 44). Truth is manifold, but having reached the point of encircling the globe once, we are in a position to know all truth, since "every universal truth which we express in words, implies or supposes every other truth" (C, I, 44). By the time he writes "Circles" in 1841, the figure has changed appreciably. We can never draw that ultimate circle which will enclose all experience within a coherent form.

"Circles" is a short and deceptively simple essay whose thesis appears straightforward. The figure of an infinite series of circles is used to illustrate the fact that "every
action admits of being outdone" (C,II,301). But the essay
gains significance when viewed as an effort to clarify and
resolve the problem created in "Nature." Emerson focuses on
the tension between "the inert effort of each thought, having
formed itself into a circular wave of circumstance . . . to
heap itself on that ridge and to solidify and hem in life," and
the force of the "soul," which "bursts over that bound-
dary on all sides and expands another orbit on the great deep"
(C,II,304). Inertia and expansive power alternate rhythmical-
ly, so that no circle, no form, is permanent, except rela-
tively. "Permanence is a word of degrees" (C,II,303). Ac-
cordingly, there is no final form and the pursuit of truth
is endless: "we can never go so far back as to preclude a
still higher vision" (C,II,308). The world in which we live
is "at any one time directly dependent on the intellectual
classification then existing in the minds of men," and this
world, this "present order of things" is always subject to a
"new degree of culture," which "would instantly revolutionize
the entire system of human pursuits" (C,II,310). Since all
forms are temporary, they can all be exploded by "a new in-
flux of divinity into the mind" (C,II,309). The rhythmical
pattern traced by the supercession of one form by another
larger one has no end. Not only is nature inexhaustible, but
so is man, for whom "there is always a residuum unknown, un-
analyzable" (C,II,306). Since man's power is infinite and
his destiny is the endless creation of new forms, the "only
sin is limitation," and true "valor" consists in the "power of self-recovery," the ability to accept the fact that all forms are temporary (C,II,308,309). The valorous man is he who possesses "the intrepid conviction that his laws, his relations to society, his Christianity, his world, may at any time be superseded and decease" (C,II,309). The sinner, on the other hand, is the man of repose who resides within his given circle of meaning, held there by that inert force which tends to rigidify into circumstance (C,II,308). A subtle shift has occurred, however, between the definition of the "candidate for truth" and the man of valor. The former remains "aloof" from forms altogether, awaiting the vision of total meaning to come, while the latter is constantly drawing another circle, actively crossing the gap between old and new forms. The difference between them is instructive, because it illustrates Emerson's increased awareness of the need for form as well as his reduced ambitions toward final form. If we cannot contain the world within a comprehensive pattern, we can appropriate larger and fuller meaning through an infinite series of partial forms. "Circles" revises and qualifies "Nature" by viewing man's reunion with spirit not as the product of a single leap, but as a gradual process of moving from one generalization to another, higher one. Redemptive meaning resides not in the achievement of a final and inclusive form through which the marriage of mind and matter is celebrated, but rather in the act of "drawing" a
new "circle" (C,II,321). "Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit," and "the coming only is sacred" (C,II,319-20). It is the act of creating a broader world and not the world thus created, which is sacred, for "that which builds is better than that which is built" (C, II,303).

This focus on man as builder reveals another shift in Emerson's assumptions since the writing of "Nature." In "Circles" man is more the creator and less the discoverer of form and meaning. Thus the poet becomes a representative drawer of circles rather than a passive recipient of integrated impressions. The forms he creates are temporary, but gain status in view of the fact that all forms -- philosophical, political, religious -- are temporary. Further, as the man who "breaks up my whole chain of habits" by unsettling the world and redispersing it in new forms, he is the type of the "eternal generator" which "abides" by virtue of its endless effort "to create a life and thought as large and excellent as itself" (C,II,318). The effort is "in vain for that which is made instructs how to make a better" (C,II,318). But it is the effort itself, the act of creation, which endows life with meaning and the poet with his privileged status as a generator of forms.

In "Circles," Emerson addresses himself to the consequences of the repudiation of dead forms articulated in "Nature." He accounts for the disproportion between spirit
and the forms in which it issues by accepting the partiality of all forms. Further, his metaphor suggests again that forms are static, and so resist the energizing spirit which explodes them. Facing the impossibility of a totally formless state, he imposes a rhythmical pattern which accommodates both the need for form and the imperative to transcend it. Forms become not opaque obstructions to be obliterated in favor of total freedom, but stages in the process of realizing spirit. Man resides in forms, without which his world would lack coherence, but he must treat the form he inhabits as temporary, and be ready to replace it with a "higher vision" (C,II,308). Emerson's failure to produce an inclusive vision in "Nature" is redeemed by the realization articulated in "Circles" which posits the inadequacy of all forms while acknowledging the necessity of the principle of form. If "Nature" vacillates between the obliteration of form before the influx of spirit, and the failed attempt to establish a comprehensive system, "Circles" constitutes a new perspective from which the repudiation of old forms and the celebration of spiritual flux are reconciled through a vision of perpetual regeneration. "Nature" celebrates the moment of transition from old to new form, but because Emerson still holds out for a comprehensive structure which he cannot provide, the transition is never completed, except prophetically. In "Circles," however, Emerson completes this transition, not by reinforcing the theory formulated
earlier, but by asserting the necessary incompleteness of all systems. We are still enjoined to become builders, but we are not to invest the world we build with ultimate meaning. It is the act of building, and not the world built, which is sacred.

For the time being, Emerson resolves the conflict between form and process by establishing a coherent pattern in which the creative process issues in an endless series of forms. Implicit in this view is the assumption that the world is the scene of perpetual progress, as man appropriates his experience in increasingly comprehensive forms. Emerson's faith in man's inexhaustible resources remains secure, even though his prophecy of wholeness has been abandoned in favor of a vision of gradual and endless appropriation. By the time he writes "Fate" in 1852, however, Emerson's faith in that expansive power which insures constant growth and progress has diminished considerably. In 1844, Emerson despairs over the world's resistance to man's "vital force" (C,III,69). It takes all our energy to survive, so that "we have no superfluity of spirit for new creation" (C,III,45). We find that somehow "nature ... was so sparing of her fire and so liberal of her earth ... that we lack the affirmative principle ... we have enough \[\text{power}\] to live and bring the year about, but not an ounce to impart or invest" (C,III,45-46). This revision of his previous overestimation of man's power endlessly to enlarge his world is accompanied by
a more realistic appreciation for the inert force which resists our expansive efforts. The "lords of life" enumerated in "Experience" are "threads on the loom of time" which constitute our condition and determine our course. A tired voice speaks of "how easily, if fate would suffer it, we might keep forever these beautiful limits, and adjust ourselves, once for all, to the perfect calculation of the kingdom of known cause and effect" (C,III,67). Impressed with the obstructive force of physical circumstance and the lack of sufficient spiritual power, Emerson no longer asserts the ultimate dominance of spirit, but juxtaposes power and form in a state of constant tension. "Human life is made up of the two elements, power and form, and the proportion must invariably be kept if we would have it sweet and sound" (C,III,65). The tension between form and energy which "Circles" had redisposed into a rhythmical pattern providing for perpetual regeneration is now re-evaluated. Although this revision begins as early as 1844, it finds its most complete expression in "Fate," written ten years after "Circles." If "Circles" is Emerson's clearest articulation of the endless interplay between form and creative process, "Fate is his most committed effort to reconcile the now equally forceful facts of power and limitation.

"Once we thought positive power was all. Now we learn that negative power, or circumstance, is half" (C,VI,15).

As Emerson announces at the beginning of the essay, "fate"
and "liberty" are both facts, but contradictory ones: "this is true, and that other is true. But our geometry cannot span these extreme points and reconcile them" (C,VI,4). Yet it is just this reconciliation which the essay sets out to effect. Emerson warns his reader in the opening paragraph that no complete philosophical system is in the offing: "We are incompetent to solve the times," he admits, and the only question at hand is "How shall I live?" (C,VI,3). Emerson's alleged purpose has been radically reduced since "Nature" where a new world was promised. All he claims to provide is a pragmatic approach to the dilemma we face in the form of radical limitation. But the polarity between form and power remains constant. In "Nature," power is celebrated to such an exalted extent that form disappears. In "Circles," form and power are seen as interdependent forces working incessantly toward a whole never reached but always more closely approximated. At the climactic center of "Fate," the two terms stand in "perpetual tilt and balance," in a kind of double bind which assures victory to neither (C,VI,36).

"Fate" is organized around a series of three definitions, each of which sets fate in opposition to power. Fate is first defined as "an expense of ends to means, . . . organization [means] tyrannizing over character [end]" (C,VI,8). In this sense fate is allied with the forms we inhabit and possess insufficient power to transcend. "Every spirit makes its house; but afterwards the house confines the spirit"
(C,VI,9). Emerson goes on to chronicle the features of circumstance which keep us confined in that house. Both heredity and environment pre-structure and condition us so that what "vital force" we do possess is drained by the simple effort to survive or is wasted in "digestion and sex" (C,VI,11). Nature herself appears as "necessitated activity," and so determines our course that the "force with which we resist these torrents of tendency looks . . . ridiculously inadequate" (C,VI,19). At this point, fate seems to have total command, "organization tyrannizing over character" at every point.

But now a second definition is offered: "Fate is . . . limitation" (C,VI,20). As such, fate offers resistance to power at every stage in its evolution from "brute" to "spiritual culture" (C,VI,20). Fate is the principle of constant resistance, so that although the "limitations refine as the soul purifies," the "ring of necessity is always perched at the top" (C,VI,20). If "Circles" had posited endless circles upon circles, always yielding to man's expansive power to draw a new circle, Emerson is now recognizing a final limitation, an ultimate "ring of necessity," which resists the force of spiritual energy. Further, limitation is no longer a "sin" but a condition, and a principle equal in force to the principle of power. The two exist in a state of constant resistance to each other. "Fate is immense," but "so is Power," and "if Fate follows and limits Power,
Power attends and antagonizes Fate" (C,VI,22). At this point, Emerson reaches his most naked formulation of power and limitation, process and form, spirit and matter. "Man is . . . a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe" (C,VI,22). For one paragraph, Emerson sustains a vision of the fundamental and unresolvable tension between "elemental order, sandstone and granite, rock ledges, peat-bog . . ." and "on the other part thought, the spirit which composes and decomposes nature. Here they are side by side, god and devil, mind and matter, kind and conspirator, belt and spasm, riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man" (C,VI,22-23). The tension is unresolvable but not necessarily unfortunate, for this constant resistance between power and limitation constitutes the dramatic core of life. "The right use of Fate" is neither to ignore it nor to blame it for all misfortune, but "to bring up our conduct to the loftiness of nature" (C,VI,24). Recognizing our power and the limitation which offers constant resistance to it, we are enjoined to use our power to sustain our own constant resistance to fate. "A man ought to compare advantageously with a river, an oak, or a mountain. He shall have not less the flow, the expansion, and the resistance of these" (C,VI,24). This statement traces the stages in Emerson's response to the dual need for form and power. In "Nature," Emerson focuses on man's spirit as flowing in an open-ended process, largely unconstrained by any form, any
principle of limitation. In "Circles," the emphasis lies on growth as a process of gradual expansion through what Emerson once called the "spires of form" (C,I,1). And finally, in "Fate," he adds the principle of "resistance" to define the final form in which power and limitation are related. "If the Universe have these savage accidents, our atoms are as savage in resistance" (C,VI,24). Emerson's cumulative metaphor of man as river, oak, and mountain, retroactively traces the continuity of his concern with the conflicting forces of form and process. As flowing river, man is first liberated and finds himself "afloat" on the "currents of Universal Being" (C,I,10). But this metaphor is inadequate because it does not take into account the need for form, the tendency of spirit to issue in form, so the second figure is added to accommodate the imperative that "we must be expressed" (J,VI,90). The the open-ended growth represented by the oak proves inadequate by failing to account fully for the resistance offered by circumstance. Finally, the figure of the mountain is added to include this principle of resistance. The infinite power celebrated in "Nature" has been gradually modified in the face of the solidity of form, so that the two stand in eternal tension in "the eye and brain of every man."

Emerson spends the rest of the essay hedging away from this vision of unresolved tension. His third and final definition of fate as "unpenetrated causes" reverts to the
vision of endless regeneration defined in "Circles." Circum-
stance may make it more difficult than we thought to draw a
new circle, to find a higher vision, but despite the obstruc-
tions, "thought" still "dissolves" the material universe by
carrying the mind up into a sphere where all is plastic. The
last part of the essay is unconvincing. Like Othello in his
dying speech, Emerson seems to be "cheering himself up."11
Forgetting the resistant form of limitation, he posits a
benevolent telos and reasserts man's power to penetrate cause
after cause, to inform his world with order, to turn tea-
pots into steamboats and fully control his destiny. "If Fate
is ore and quarry, if evil is good in the making, if limita-
tion is power that shall be, if calamities, oppositions, and
weights are wings and means, -- we are reconciled" (C,VI,31).
The final section of "Fate" differs from "Circles" only by
Emerson's more explicit assertion of man's assured progress.
What in "Circles" had been an ethereal principle of spiritual
growth is brought down to earth and made to justify man's
ultimate dominion over the physical world. All diseases are
curable, floods are controllable, disasters preventable -- an
assertion which hardly comforts or instructs the individual
victims of fate to whom Emerson initially addresses himself.
Unlike "Nature," which closes with an open-ended prophecy,
"Fate" ends with a spurious finality. We may, at the end of
"Nature" look forward to a new world, but at the end of "Fate"
we are in no mood to "build altars to the Beautiful Necessity"
(C,VI,42).

The central section of "Fate," however, constitutes Emerson's last and most rigorous treatment of the conflict he had struggled with ever since "Nature." The tension between man's "tyrannical instinct" for ordered meaning and his divine urge to transcend form operates throughout Emerson's most vital years (J,IV,115). In "Nature," symbolized and symbolizer fade with the disappearance of symbol and the newly discovered spirit calls out for a form to animate. The instability of "Nature" derives from Emerson's recognition of the need for, but inability to provide, a form sufficiently comprehensive to meet the demands of the spirit within and without. The tension becomes explicit in "Circles," where energy and form are reconciled into the rhythmical pattern traced by man's endless creation of new, but always temporary forms. Finally, "Fate" juxtaposes power and limitation as the ultimate and contradictory principles of nature.

Emerson's intellectual life was to a great extent a long struggle with form. Having rejected all structures both public and private as potential or actual prisons, he was able to recognize and articulate the principle of power, energy, and process. But as he came to recognize that forms are not merely given, that they are products of creative spirit, he gained new respect for their necessity. "Conservatism stands on this," he says, "that a man cannot jump out of his
skin; and well for him that he cannot, for his skin is the world" (J,VI,317). Just as total fluidity lands us in a vacuum, so does rigid form destroy our spirit and prohibit growth. If "Circles" accommodates both form and energy within a vision of constant and progressive interaction, "Fate" arrives at a perspective at once more realistic and more rigorous. Limitation and power, form and energy, exist in constant tension, and despite his efforts to reconcile them by reasserting the predominance of power, they remain so.

In 1847 Emerson asked himself, "What is the oldest thing?" and answered, "A dimple or whirlpool in water. That is Genesis, Exodus, and all" (J,VII,224). His metaphor articulates a vision of the final unity of form and process, of motion and stasis, of eternal resistance. If Emerson's career took the form of the rhythmical pattern described in "Circles," his vision of this fundamental tension constituted the largest circle he was to draw. But, by discovering that form is created, not given, Emerson effectively shifted the burden of this tension onto the shoulders of the poet, who soon arose in the person of Walt Whitman.
Notes to Chapter I

1 See Errand into the Wilderness, pp. 184-203.

2 See Stephen E. Whicher, Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Philadelphia, 1953). While I have relied on Whicher's pioneering effort to trace Emerson's intellectual career, I hope to have penetrated somewhat deeper into the "inner life" he outlines by focusing on a problem which persists throughout Emerson's thought.

3 Edward W. Emerson, ed., The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston, 1903-1904), vol. I, p. 3. All references to Emerson's works will appear in the text in the following abbreviated form: (C,I,1).


5 Edward W. Emerson and Waldo E. Forbes, eds., The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston, 1909-1914), vol. VII, p. 478. All references to Emerson's journals will appear in the text in the following abbreviated form: (J,I,1).

6 Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," Walden and Other Writings (New York, 1937), p. 597. All page references in the text to Thoreau are to this edition.

7 Herman Melville, Moby-Dick or The Whale (New York, 1964), p. 214. All page references in the text to Melville are to this edition, edited by Charles Feidelson.


9 For an extrapolation of the problem Emerson faced, see Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances (New York, 1964).

10 Faulkner makes use of a similar loom metaphor in Absalom, Absalom! when he depicts Judith Sutpen's conception of the human condition as resembling "five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it can't matter, you know that, or the One that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep trying . . ." (New York, 1936), p. 127.
Chapter II

Walt Whitman : The Struggle toward Identity

"I ventured from the beginning, my own way, taking chances -- and would keep on venturing."

-- Walt Whitman
On April 1, 1856, an unsigned review of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared in the *London Critic*, blasting Whitman and his publication in terms which distinguish the reviewer not so much by his denunciation as by his singularly vociferous outrage. While avowing that he and his British colleagues "had ceased . . . to be surprised at anything that America could produce," having "become stoically indifferent to her Woolly Horses, her Mermaids, her Sea Serpents, her Barnums, and her Fanny Ferns," he admits that this "last monstrous importation from Brooklyn" has indeed shattered his cultivated "indifference."¹ Behind all the chauvinistic scorn lurk the two fundamental charges of obscenity and formlessness. The reviewer tantalizingly claims that "the very nature of this man's compositions excludes us from proving by extracts the truth of our remarks; but we, who are not prudish, emphatically declare that the man who wrote page 79 of the *Leaves of Grass* deserves nothing so richly as the public executioner's whip."² Although he claims that his sense of decency is so violently offended as to render further critical attention unwarranted, the reviewer does find room to denounce Whitman for his utter lack of artistry:

His poems -- we must call them so for convenience -- twelve in number, are innocent of rhythm, and resemble nothing so much as the war-cry of the Red Indians, whose incoherent and barbaric yelps, the reviewer casually
reminds his readers, "Walt Whitman has had near and ample opportunities for studying." ³

While we may be amused at his prudery and shortsightedness, the British reviewer's response is not unrepresentative of critical approaches to Whitman over a hundred years after the first curious edition of Leaves of Grass appeared in 1855. Whitman's candor about sexuality and his apparent disregard for the demands of formal coherence continue to constitute the nodes from which flow most of the critical attention directed his way. The charge of obscenity has more than lost its force since the first appearance of Leaves of Grass, but Whitman's treatment of sexuality has become an asset as well as a sign of his modernity. Somewhat similar changes have been wrought on the charge of formlessness. A great deal of energy has gone into the endeavor to discover formal patterns in Whitman's work, with some positive but more negative results. ⁴ This critical itch remains unsoothed despite the appearance in 1953 of Charles Feidelson's analysis, which cut through the mounting layers of superimposed formal patterns by unpretentiously announcing that Whitman's "ego appears in the poems as a traveler and explorer, not as a static observer," and further, that this "shift of image from the contemplative eye of 'established poems' to the voyaging ego of Whitman's poetry records a large scale theoretical shift from the categories of 'substance' to those of 'process'." ⁵ Feidelson's illuminating redefinition of Whitman's poetic
as "a transmutation of all supposed entities into events"
reorients the whole issue of formlessness:
The method of "Starting from Paumanok" does not
palliate Whitman's diffuseness and arbitrary choice
of material; rather, by depriving him of a static
point of view, it is the immediate cause of these
defects. Yet the principle behind this poem, the
exploitation of Speech as the literary aspect of
eternal process, is the source of whatever value
resides in Leaves of Grass.6

Subsequent criticism has assimilated Feidelson's view of
Whitman as a poet of process without, I think, fully pene-
trating the implications of that view.7 We may have gotten
around the problem of formlessness which so disturbed that
irate London reviewer, but the problem returns to us in
inverted form. We cannot escape it by redefining formless-
ness as process unless we know what we mean by the latter
term as it applies to Whitman. While Feidelson knew what he
meant and laid the groundwork for any further approaches to
Whitman's poetic, subsequent treatment has not always shown
the same perspicuity. For the consequences of viewing
Whitman as committed to the principle of process cut deeper
than excusing him for his linguistic abandon and reach
beyond the boundaries of particular poetic devices.

Paradoxically, when we explore the full extent of Whitman's
commitment to process as a poetic principle, we must come
finally to observe a contrary principle of form at work. We
must view Leaves of Grass as successive versions of an iden-
tity, forged out of an ongoing encounter with its world. In
each of its successive editions, the poem records and enacts
a self in a particular world at a particular time. Which is
to say that it approximates the ideal of pure process as closely as it is possible for a work of art to do. But to claim that Whitman's continual revisions represent an on-going poetic enactment of his identity, indeed a repeated struggle to create his identity anew, is to say that we much account for the nature of those revisions. In fact, those revisions increasingly reflect a tension between his desire to put the self in process on record, to bring it again and again into being, and an opposing desire to impose a static, final form on that changing self, to revise in the service of a coherent whole. If in "Song of Myself," the central document in the first edition, Whitman brings himself into being first as a person, then as a poet, and finally as a prophet with a vision which ultimately crumbles, the successive editions of *Leaves of Grass* re-enact similar struggles toward identity. But as the process continues, the struggle intensifies because of an increasingly persistent attempt on Whitman's part to bend past selves into the present self. Unsatisfied with simply recording his present identity in a purely present context, Whitman insisted on redefining his previous avatars in accord with his current self-concept. It is the burden of this chapter to show that the process which "Song of Myself" enacts and records forms the basis and pattern for Whitman's poetic enterprise as a whole, and that the repeated revisions of *Leaves of Grass* represent an increasingly problematical struggle toward a cohesive self.
"Song of Myself" has been labelled and analyzed as comedy, epic, mystic transfiguration, and monodrama. While all these attempts at definition shed light on the poem's structure and meaning, none exhausts its mystery. In its original version, undivided into sections and flanked by the steel engraving of Whitman whose name remains unrevealed until the middle of the poem itself, "Song of Myself" begins and ends in mystery. It is to the mystery of identity that the opening voice addresses itself, enjoining the reader to do the same with his or her identity:

I celebrate myself,
And what I assume you shall assume.
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.  

If the poem constitutes the scene of Whitman's self-enactment, his reiterated design on us as readers is to lure us into enacting our own identity:

These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me,
If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing or next to nothing.

The act of self-realization to be carried out in "Song of Myself" constitutes a drama in which the reader is to be a participant rather than an observer. Clearly, Whitman intends us not to contemplate a finished form, but to participate in a process. That process follows a basic rhythmical pattern which begins with the speaker responding to a physical environment, moves forward through his exploration and
realization of the identity thus discovered, and culminates in a recognition of self which bifurcates that identity, so that the cycle starts again. Thus, in sections 1 through 4, the speaker is stimulated by what surrounds him, discovers himself as a physical creature whose sensual capacities seem boundless, and finally observes himself in the act of sensual delight, so that his identity is split and requires reunification through a return to physical sensation. In sections 5 through 24, Whitman moves through a similar process of enactment, realization, and recognition as poet, and in sections 25 through 52, he follows the same process as prophet. In each progression, the identity discovered finally splits into an I who lives through the experience of self-enactment and self-realization, and an I who observes and thus stands apart, to recognize the process.

When "Song of Myself" begins, there is nothing there in the sense that the voice we hear comes out of a place as yet unrealized. It is not that the world does not yet exist, but rather that it does not yet exist for the speaker. It is only when the self is there that the world can be there for that self. Before the self is born, there is no meaningful way in which either self or world can be said to exist. So, in the beginning, Whitman is in exactly the same ontological position as Stevens' singer in "The Idea of Order at Key West" for whom "there never was a world for her/ except the one she sang and, singing, made." What Whitman
does, then, in the opening three lines of the poem is to bring himself, "I," and his reader, "you," simultaneously into being. In the 1855 edition there is no mention of "creeds and schools" to be held in "abeyance"; rather there is an "I" which first observes "a spear of summer grass," and then smells the "perfume" of "houses and rooms" as well as the unperfumed "atmosphere" (2, 6-9). Making his first conscious choice, the speaker resists the intoxication of both his own body and that of society, preferring the "odorless" air of nature. He realizes his senses in the next few lines; he hears "echoes, ripples, and buzzed whispers," smells the now distinguishable odors of "green leaves and dry leaves," and sees the "play of shine and shade on the trees" (2, 12-19). All remains confused and unformed in this, his initial discovery of his own sensual capacities, so that the sounds of his own voice are "belched words," as yet rough and inarticulate. Other people are similarly recognized only in a series of unconnected impressions: "a few light kisses .... a few embraces .... a reaching around of arms" (2, 18). Having discovered a self with physical sensations sufficiently developed to enjoy "the feeling of health," Whitman now takes a step back and, finding his creation thus far good, turns to his reader with pride and invitation:

Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned the earth much . . .
Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems. (1, 22,25)
This move from self-creation to recapitulation is to become a recurrent pattern in "Song of Myself." It is almost as if there were two voices in the poem, one which utters itself into being and another which stands apart and meditates, calling our attention to what is going on, inviting us to continue. But actually, there is only the one self, alternately realizing itself in a series of identities and then reflecting on the meaning of what he has realized. At this point, of course, he has realized only the most fundamental properties of himself, but the central miracle has been wrought -- he is alive. It is this fact which allows him to promise so much. But his now demonstrated capacity for self-reflection calls his attention to his own dual nature.

Having enacted and recognized his existence, he now sees that his detachment implies that there is more to be discovered, viz., his soul:

Sure as the most certain sure ... plumb in the uprights .... I and this mystery here we stand.  

(3, 41,44)

Section 3 is largely devoted to a further flexing of the speaker's muscles; but now his attention is directed not to physical sensations, but to "what the talkers were talking .... the talk of the beginning and the end" (3, 30). Confronted with his newly discovered faculty for self-reflection, he chooses to reject the explanations of the "talkers." His experience so far, an experience of physical sensation, provides the basis of his approach to the questions posed by
the "talkers":

There was never any more inception than there is now.
Nor any more youth or age than there is now;
And will never be any more perfection than there is now.
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. (3, 32-36)

The repetition of "now" pounds out a rhythmical chant, insistently forcing attention on the present moment in which life is seen to be "the procreant urge of the world," pulsing on ceaselessly (3, 37). Almost as easily as he discovered his sense of smell, the speaker now discovers that he contains a "mystery," claiming that his possession of a soul is no less delightful to him than the mystery of his senses: "Clear and sweet is my soul .... and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul" (3, 44). If throughout history, "age vexes age" in the perpetual effort to impose a plot on time, by talking of "the beginning and the end," the speaker is content, "while they discuss," to remain "silent, and go bathe and admire" himself (3, 46-47). Having picked up from the "talkers," no doubt, some strange notions about the relative merits of body and soul, ("Showing the best and dividing it from the worst" \_\_3, 47\_), the speaker luxuriates in his sensuality with a newly insistent tone:

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean,
Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest. (3, 49-50)

Although the duality of his nature puzzles him, he is "satisfied" to enjoy his now demonstrated ability to "see,
dance, laugh, sing" (3, 51). In a playful gesture toward the "talkers," he describes God as "a loving bedfellow" who deposits with him "baskets covered with white towels," no doubt full of sensual delights (3, 52-53). Yet he is obviously troubled by all this talk, and his tone grows fierce in the next line:

    Shall I postpone my acceptance and realization and
    scream at my eyes,
    That they turn from gazing after and down the road.
    And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,
    Exactly the contents of one, and exactly the contents
    of two, and which is ahead? (3, 54-57)

He refuses to forego his present pleasure at self-realization for the purpose of submerging himself in questions of relative values and final judgments.

    But these questions arise again in multiple form:

    Trippers and askers surround me,
    People I meet . . . . the effect upon me of my early
    life . . . . of the ward and city I live in . . . .
    of the nation . . . .
    They come to me days and nights and go from me again,
    But they are not the Me myself. (4, 58-59, 64-65)

Here the speaker registers his full emergence as a social creature and immediately distinguishes himself from what he sees. As long as his world was the scene primarily of "the breed of life" the duality of body and soul was easily dealt with, and he found renewed pleasure in his sensual capacities. But the intrusions of society drive the wedge deeper into the rift between body and soul, so that the "Me myself" must be distinguished from and then related to the external bustle:
Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle,
unitary,
Looks down, is erect, bends an arm on an impalpable

certain rest,
Looks with its sidecurved head curious what will

come next,
Both in and out of the game, and watching and wondering

at it.  (4, 66-70)

The speaker now addresses the "soul," inviting it to join him
in his leisure, and what follows is an epiphany in which body
and soul unite orgasmically, leaving a now integrated self at
peace in a world held together and given meaning and form by
"love."

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy
and knowledge that pass all the art and argument
of the earth;
And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of
my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother
of my own, . . .
And that a kelson of the creation is love. (5, 82-6)

The nautical term "kelson" is a particularly appropriate
metaphor for the structural principle informing this world.
If "kelson" suggests the structural beams of a ship's hull,
then the "creation" structured by a kelson can have substance
and form, and yet remain in motion. Whitman's reunification
of body and soul is grounded in a sexual drama which gener-
ates both his sense of love and his realization of yet
another facet of his freshly discovered selfhood -- imagina-
tion. Just as his registered self-consciousness has revealed
to him his own duality, his capacity to imagine this drama
enables him to resolve that duality. What Whitman was later
to call the principle of "adhesiveness" is grounded in
this initial correlation between love and the imagination, a connection reminiscent of Keats's statement to Benjamin Bailey in which he proclaims, "I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of the imagination."12 From this point on, Whitman's mode of relating the "seen" and the "unseen," the "Me myself" and the "other I am" is through the exercise of this imaginative power which is inextricably bound up with love.

In sections 6 and 7 the speaker begins to flex the muscles of his newly discovered imagination. He immediately establishes another little scene in which a child comes to him asking "What is the grass?"13 If in the opening section the grass was simply observed and enjoyed as a source of physical delight, it reappears here as a mystery. Admitting that he does "not know what it is," Whitman offers a series of tentative metaphors:

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition,  
out of hopeful green stuff woven,  
Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord . . .  
Or I guess the grass is itself a child . . .  
Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic . . . (6, 92-97)

Finally he imagines it to be "the beautiful uncut hair of graves," a metaphor he will "use" "tenderly" to forge once again the bond between the "seen" and the "unseen," in this instance between the living and the dead (6, 101). Once again, Whitman's imaginative appropriation is bound up with love:

It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,  
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,  
(6, 103-04)
The final metaphor for the grass transforms death into life: "I perceive after all so many uttering tongues!" (6, 110). These "tongues" emerge from "the faint red roofs of mouths," so that the transmutation of death into life follows organically out of the initial vision of the graves (6, 109). The speaker cannot yet "translate the hints about the dead young men and women," but he now knows "they are alive and well somewhere," because "the smallest sprout shows there is really no death" (6, 111,116-17). And the ground of this knowledge is the imagination.

In the next section the speaker performs the same self-reflective act we noted in section 2; he proudly affirms his ability to "pass death with the dying and birth with the new-washed babe," an ability which he has just discovered (7, 124). If in section 6 he has exercised his imagination, in section 7 he reaffirms its adhesiveness: "I see through the broadcloth and . . . am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless . . . and can never be shaken away" (7, 139). Sections 8 through 15 find the speaker fully possessed by his imagination. Tentatively opening his imaginative flight with three scenes of himself observing a child sleeping, a young couple in love, and the death of a suicide, he gains momentum quickly in a fleeting glimpse of the throngs of people, the "breed of life," and sets off to observe a series of dramatic scenes. He imagines himself at "harvest-time," "stretched atop of the load" of hay (9, 161,164). He
moves to an isolated spot "in the wilds," imagining himself to be a hunter (10, 168). He then assumes the role of sailor on a "Yankee clipper" (10, 173). At this point, the speaker modulates into the past tense, as his imagination ranges forth now in time as well as space. By setting the scenes of the trapper's marriage and the runaway slave's refuge in the past tense, Whitman not only calls attention to his stretched imaginative capacity, but also gives himself a history. The scenes of the bathers, the "butcher-boy," the "blacksmiths," and the Negro driving his wagon follow, and finally the speaker includes a variety of animals in his vision. Section 15 records a long series of potential scenes as the speaker gains in speed. Whitman is not merely cataloguing life; he is imaginatively enacting it. Just as he realized his senses in section 2, now he realizes his world by exercising his imagination. Although he remains detached from what he sees, his very ability to observe is contingent upon his imaginative capacity to conjure up the scenes he describes.

Section 16 marks another point at which the speaker stands off and announces the implications of what he has just demonstrated. "I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise," he claims, and once again gets carried away in his effort to expose his newly discovered imaginative capacity (16, 326). These periods of self-congratulation and recapitulation always follow and define a newly developed stage in the growth of the speaker's identity. Here he
reflects not only on what he has discovered but on what he has created as well. When he says, "These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands," "these" refers to the very lines he has uttered (17, 353). Having exercised his imagination in the preceding sections, he now defines the identity thus exhibited as well as the exhibit itself:

This is the trill of a thousand clear coronets . . .
This is the meal pleasantly set . . .
This is the press of a bashful hand . . .
This is the touch of my lips to yours . . .

(18, 365; 19, 372)

So assured is he of his newly discovered identity that he teases his reader with riddles:

Do you guess I have some intricate purpose? . . .
Do you take it I would astonish? . . .

(19, 383, 385)

and then assures him of his affectionate good will:

This hour I tell things in confidence,
I might not tell everybody but I will tell you.

(19, 386-87)

Asking in section 20, "Who goes there! hankering, gross, mystical, nude?" the speaker can now reply in section 21, "I am the poet of the body/ and I am the poet of the soul" (388, 422-23). Having discovered and exercised his poetic powers, he now names himself the poet. Having made his "list of things in the house," he now defines "the house that supports them" (22, 465). Locating himself in the midst of "endless unfoldings of words of ages," he transforms himself from simple person into poet (23, 483-84). Only when he has accomplished this feat of self-realization can he name himself "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a
kosmos" (24, 499).

Stimulated, then, by physical sensation, made conscious of himself by his capacity for self-reflection, the speaker has generated an identity out of the sexual union of body and soul. But this very act starts the process going again. Just as he exercised and then recognized his sensuality, now he exercises and then acknowledges his imagination. But in each instance, the act of self-recognition itself leads to a problematical duality. The very act of observing himself exercising his senses generates an awareness of this duality. In section 5 he resolves this duality through an imaginative act of sexual union. He continues to exercise his imaginative capacity for union, but ends by observing himself performing this act of the imagination. He can now call himself "poet" and name himself "Walt Whitman," but the sheer act of self-reflection re-establishes his duality, demonstrating once again the existence of an I who acts and an I who observes that action. This problem as it initially arises in the form of the speaker's consciousness of a rift between body and soul, is resolved by the exercise of a new faculty, the imagination, and that faculty gives rise to a new and fuller self-realization which is assimilated into the new self-definition as poet. But the very act of announcing his role as poet and naming himself generates another riddle and the need for another, inclusive identity. The last half of the poem enacts the struggle for this final
identity.

In sections 20 through 24, Whitman defines himself as poet, exulting in his newly recognized identity as the poet of both body and soul, singing "a new chant of dilation or pride," uttering "a word of reality" (21, 429; 23, 487). Reaching a climax in section 24, Whitman names himself and promises to be the articulator of the "many long dumb voices" of his world, and to worship only "the spread of my body" (24, 509, 530). But as he enumerates the sensual delight provided by "vapors" and "sweaty brooks and dews" the tumult subsides and he is confronted once again with the wonders and mysteries of his identity (24, 540-41). "I dote on myself . . . I cannot tell how my ankles bend,/ nor the cause of the friendship I emit . . . to walk up my stoop is accountable .... I pause to consider if it really be" (24, 545-49). If he began by celebrating "myself" only to discover the splitting identity of that self, he is now doting on that "self," only to find it once again dual. His very senses, those that generated his discovery of the world and his mastery of it as poet, now threaten to overwhelm him as "the heaved challenge from the east" delivers a "mocking taunt, See then whether you shall be master!" to which he responds with a reaffirmation of his poetic powers:

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sunrise
would kill me,
If I could not now and always send sunrise out
of me. (25, 562-63)
His integrated identity as poet of body and soul is threatened by the sheer intensity of his sensual responses, so that both world and self are once again mysterious: "something I cannot see" puts upward the now "libidinous prongs" of the grass (24, 557). Corresponding to this unseen mystery is the poet's "vision" now distinct from and larger than his mere "Speech" (25, 567). This distinction between speech and vision registers the now explicit recognition of a self which stands apart from and eludes the definition of poet, just as the "Me myself" stood apart from the "pulling and hauling" (4, 65-66). While he has demonstrated that his "voice goes after what is his eyes cannot reach," so that with a "twirl of his tongue," he can indeed "encompass worlds," he now registers his undemonstrated conviction that if there is a mystery at work in the hidden "buds . . . waiting in gloom protected by frost," there is similarly a mystery hidden in himself, which, "keeping tally with the meaning of things," eludes the poet's "articulation" (25, 566-79). He is aware of his as yet unrealized identity because he has found himself able to stand apart from the words he utters as poet. Addressing his "Speech," he says:

Encompass worlds but never try to encompass me,  
I crowd your noisiest talk by looking toward you,  
(25, 579-80)

Although the whole section assumes and implies this distinction between the I who acts as poet and the I who stands apart observing, Whitman here makes the duality explicit.
The speaker now deliberately re-enacts his opening discovery of self by assuming the passive posture of the loafer. By retreating behind the "hush" of his "lips," Whitman does not so much repudiate his poetic identity as he holds it in abeyance, awaiting the stimulation which will reveal further dimensions of himself, letting "sounds contribute toward him" (25, 583; 26, 585). What follows in sections 26 through 29 is a gradual convulsion in which Whitman is essentially raped by his senses. What begins as a passive listening to actual sounds ("bravuras of birds . . . the bustle of growing wheat . . . gossip of flames . . . clack of stick cooking my meals") expands to include "sounds of the city and sounds out of the city," and intensifies into the music of the "trained soprano," whose voice, Whitman cries, "convulses me like the climax of my love-grip" (26, 586, 588, 602). The sexual experience here, as opposed to that in section 5, is violent, unexpected, and devastating, issuing not in union but in the disjunction between self and "Being":

I am exposed .... cut by bitter and poisoned hail, Steeped amid honeyed morphine .... my windpipe squeezed in the fakes of death, Let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles, And that we call Being. (26, 607-10)

It is important to keep in mind that the efficient cause of this event is not Whitman's imagination but the sounds emitted by the material world around him. Although those sounds gradually become imagined, Whitman insists at the start
that he is simply listening. The far more intense tactile rape that occurs in section 28 is initiated by this preliminary aural one; the first grows directly out of the real world and has the effect of sensitizing Whitman the listener into Whitman the tactile conductor. The intensified "touch" which comes "quivering me to a new identity" grows directly out of the initial rape, so as to ground the resulting vision in the material world (28, 618). Section 27 provides a moment of rest before the onslaught; Whitman sounds stunned and confused as he tries to comprehend "Being" in terms of "form." Form is simply development, he sees, and has nothing to do with being. He asserts his contentment with pure sensuality, readying himself somewhat fearfully for the next orgasm:

I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,
To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I can stand.  

(26, 616-17)

If this is true, then what follows is a great deal more than he can stand. The "flames and ether" tantalizing him become "prurient provokers stiffening" his limbs and unbuttoning his clothes (28, 619,622,626). Touch chases the "fellow-senses away," with no regard for his "draining strength or anger" (28, 629-30). If Whitman has defiantly refused "putting from me the best I am," he is now unable to resist the "provokers" who would deprive him of his "best for a purpose" (28, 625). What assaults him, he sees, "is hardly different from myself" (28, 621). The passion reaches its
climax at the end of section 28, followed by the release into relaxed euphoria in section 29: "Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterward" (29, 644). A new world is engendered by this rain:

Sprouts take and accumulate .... stand by the curb prolific and vital,
Landscapes projected masculine full-sized and golden. (29, 645-46)

This world, however, is not an illusion, does not exist as the poet's dream over against the real world; it is the material world itself. The imagined world of the poet has become the real world; like Adam, Whitman has awakened and found it true. Materiality has raped the poet, and the issue of the union is a new world which is real and yet not distinct from the self which gives it birth. Like Leda in Yeats's poem, Whitman has been raped by a divine power, and like Yeats we are confronted with the question of whether he has "put on . . . knowledge with . . . power."14

Section 30, like lines 83-89, following the ecstasy in section 5, modulates into solemn peace as Whitman slowly meditates on his experience. But whereas in section 5, each statement of his newly forged convictions was introduced by "I know that . . . .", here he is not stating personal beliefs but eternal verities:

All truths wait in all things,
They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,
They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon,
The insignificant is as big to me as any,
What is less or more than a touch? (30, 647-51)
If his first vision of wholeness was induced imaginatively, this one did not need the "obstetric forceps" for its delivery. The solemn, slowly paced statement of discovery continues through section 31. The natural world is redefined, beginning again with the grass, as an elaborate and supreme work of art:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hands puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depressed head surpasses any statue.  (31, 662-67)

If in sections 1 through 5, Whitman discovers that he has senses with which to feel the material world, here he discovers he is one with that world:

I find I incorporate gneiss and coal and long-threaded moss and fruits and grains and esculent roots,
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over.  (31, 669-70)

Although he had wanted to remain aloof and mute, reserving his "best" for himself, he now acknowledges that he has "distanced what is behind me for good reasons" because now that his imagination has been verified through sexual union with his material world, he can "call anything close again when I desire it" (31, 672-73). "In vain" does any part of this world try to escape him since he is its creator. His imagination had allowed him to observe countless scenes in
sections 16 through 24, but now he is empathically one with the people and animals in those scenes, because of his sexual union with an earth not only imagined but real. "Afoot with his vision," he no longer needs to "ask the wounded person how he feels," since now he has "become the wounded person" (33, 851-52). In section 33, the series of images are connected by repeated introductory words ("Where...Where Where...Over...Over...Over...") , suggesting the eternal presence of the creator who is in all these places throughout eternity, whereas in section 15, the scenes remain unconnected by such locational references because the speaker does not posit himself as the constant referent and source of what he observes. This divine utterance of the world continues through section 37, where the speaker begins gradually to emerge from his vision. A passing moment of self-consciousness is registered with his outcry, "O Christ! My fit is mastering me!" and the syntax strains as he comes dangerously close to the "verge of the usual mistake," once again facing the duality posed by self-recognition:

I become any presence or truth of humanity here,
And see myself in prison shaped like another man.
(37, 941-42)

When he envisions the "mutineer" walking "handcuffed to the jail," Whitman no longer identifies himself with the man but claims only to be "handcuffed to him" (37, 946-47). When he has to say, "Askers embody themselves in me, and I am embodied in them," the self is beginning to split apart
into an I who creates a world and himself, and an I who observes.

By the beginning of section 38, Whitman himself can see this split:

Somehow I have been stunned, Stand back!
Give me a little time beyond my cuffed head
and slumbers and dreams and gaping,
I discover myself on the verge of the usual mistake.

(38, 955-57)

Falling prey to the "usual mistake" at this point would place Whitman in the unlikely role of a wholly transcendent God, indeed the kind of artist which Stephen Daedalus describes as remaining "within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." Horrified that he "could look with a separate look on his own crucifixion and bloody crowning," Whitman now repudiates the Godlike identity he has been demonstrating. By transcending his world in his vision, he has set up the dynamic for another duality between self and not self, soul and body.

Whitman's resolution of this problem takes the form of an elliptical allusion to Christ's death and resurrection. Reminded of his own "crucifixion," Whitman now goes through with it, into the "grave of rock" and out again, but in multiple form:

I remember .... I resume the overstaid fraction,
The grave of rock multiplies what has been
confided to it .... or to any graves. (38, 961-62)

If in sections 28 through 29 he generated a world, he is now
self-consciously incarnating himself into it. He has become "one of an average unending procession, fully human and yet "divine" (38, 964,971). The movement thus enacted is fairly complex. The poet, convulsed by his sexual union with the earth, has generated a world, both real and yet imagined. In the course of exercising his imaginative power to fill out the spatial and temporal dimensions of that world, he has gradually transcended it, assuming a position of omniscience which threatens to alienate him from his creation. By remembering that this world had its beginning in a sexual union between his body and the material world, he consciously incarnates himself into the world from which he has become alienated. His ability to resume a human identity, however, derives from and is fully dependent upon the material origin of the visionary expedition he has just completed. He had to undergo a complete immersion in the earth before his divinity could be realized, and he has now to recognize and re-enact that immersion if that divinity is to have meaning. And this deliberate and conscious immersion takes the form of the logos, the word uttered by God. Whitman has assumed countless identities in his visionary flight through the world, but always as an I: "I am the man .... I suffered .... I was there" (33, 827). Now he can speak of himself as "he" ("the friendly and flowing savage . . .") because he now has become objectified in the world.

This transformation again recalls Stephen Daedalus'
aesthetic theory. He defines the "lyrical form" as

the simplest verbal gesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar or dragged stones up a slope. He who utters it is more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion. The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event and this form progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narrative itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. This progress you will see easily in that old English ballad Turpin Hero which begins in the first person and ends in the third person.16

The repeated shifts Whitman undergoes between realization and recognition bear a close resemblance to the transition Stephen describes between lyric and epic. In his expedition through time and space, Whitman does seem to flow "round the persons and the action like a vital sea," and the sudden shift to the third person in section 39 registers a change in the "centre of emotional gravity" very similar to the one Stephen labels an epic phenomenon. The "flowing savage" is as yet mysterious, but his reality is assured; and as Whitman begins to reveal him, he assumes a prophetic stance:

Behavior lawless as snow-flakes .... words simple as grass .... uncombed head and laughter and
naivete;
Slowstepping feet and the common features, and the common modes and emanations,
They descend in new forms from the tips of his fingers,
They are wafted out with the odor of his body or breath .... they fly out of the glance of his eyes. (39, 980-83)
The familiar grass has become the speaker's "words." What began as wholly other in section 1 and became the "libidinous sprouts" of the world sown by the poet as creator, is now to be the process of articulation through which the world is redeemed and given meaning.

In sections 40 through 50, Whitman performs the same task of self-definition as prophet which he accomplished in sections 16 through 24 as poet. No longer sending sunrise out of him in opposition to the sunrise over another world, he instead overpowers the sun by extracting its meaning and articulating it in himself:

Flaunt of the sunshine I need not your bask ....
lie over,
You light surfaces only .... I force the surfaces
and the depths also. (40, 984-85)

He will not "give lectures of a little charity," but will assume the dynamic role of healing lover (40, 991). Where before Whitman put on power, he now puts on knowledge; the core of his newfound identity is his recognition that he has enacted a myth and so inherits the role played by "Jehovah" and "Kronos" and "Zeus," and "Brahma" (41, 1023-25). "Accepting the rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself," Whitman proceeds to inform the sheer chronos recorded in the catalogues with the meaning provided by the kairos he has just lived through.\(^\text{17}\) The "mechanic's wife with her babe at her nipple" is no longer simply one in a long undifferentiated series, but has assumed the role of Mary, "interceding for every person born" (41, 1038). The
"snag-toothed hostler" who sacrifices himself to save his brother from prison and bankruptcy, is similarly transformed and comes forth "redeeming sins past and to come" (41, 1040). The lowliest are filled with meaning under the aegis of this new myth, so that even the field workers become "lusty angels" (41, 1039). The endless succession of pure chronos is transformed by the moment of vision, so that all time is filled to overflowing with human meaning:

The bull and the hug never worshipped half enough,  
Dung and dirt more admirable than was dreamed.  
(41, 1043-44)

Whitman goes on at some length to articulate the impact of the myth he has just created for himself. It is a myth "to indicate reality," in which "the supernatural is of no account" (42, 1082; 41, 1045). The world is ordered on a pattern of endless regeneration in which "every condition promulges not only itself .... it promulges what grows after and out of itself" (45, 1180). In the midst of this endless procreant urge, "promulging" endless worlds, stands the self, any self, "an acme of things accomplished, and . . . an encloser of things to be" (44, 1148). All persons are potential centers of this world, distinguished from the speaker only by their unconsciousness of the now available meaning which he has discovered and articulated. In his final role as prophet of the new religion growing out of the myth he has constructed, Whitman is essentially preaching a sermon, with Christ's Sermon on the Mount as his model.
But in Section 49 his voice begins to stumble as he acknowledges death. Regressing to the role of observer, he stands timidly by the door between life and death to "mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape" of someone's soul, but not his own. He remains behind to observe the "corpse" and concludes unconvincingly:

And as to you life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before. (49, 1288-89)

Reduced again to a listener, Whitman hears the "stars" "whispering there," along with the "suns," the "grass of graves," the "perpetual transfers and promotions," all of which he had claimed to comprehend and now finds incalculably opaque: "if you do not say anything how can I say anything?" (49, 1290-91). The world of darkness is shrouded in a mysterious melange of "turbid pools," "black stems that decay in the muck," and "the moaning gibberish of dry limbs" (49, 1292-95). Unable to penetrate this dark and threatening scene of death and decay, Whitman returns to the light and the day, to the "steady and central," and reasserts his identity in troubled and halting lines:

There is that in me ..., I do not know what it is ..., but I know it is in me. (50, 1299)

Convinced that he has penetrated to the meaning of life itself, but having lost the power to articulate that meaning, he closes with a pitifully weak assertion:
Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death .... it is form and union
and plan .... it is eternal life .... it is
happiness. (50, 1307-08)

He has not been able to verify his discovery through articulation, but he has realized an identity which allows him to continue to search:

The past and present wilt .... I have filled them
and emptied them,
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future. (51, 1309-10)

It is not finally the mythic product but the process itself of self-discovery and self-creation which allows him to "contain multitudes," to "concentrate toward them that are nigh," and to return to the "dirt to grow from the grass" (51, 1316; 52, 1329). Disappearing into the "leaves of grass" now defined as his words themselves, he merges his destiny with the poetic process through which he has created himself, and by means of which he can and will continue to re-enact that self.

Whether or not the lack of a concluding period in the 1855 edition was intentional, Whitman clearly saw his poem as open-ended. If "Song of Myself" initiates Whitman's message to the world and so is necessarily open-ended in anticipation of future poems, it is also open by virtue of its thematic center -- a self engaged in the endless process of re-creation. We have seen Whitman move through three identities: physical creature, poet, and prophet. Each identity is initially stimulated by his environment and represents an
attempt to relate himself meaningfully to his context. In this sense, Whitman is recording himself in the process of living, stung by new delights and provocations, learning the depth of his responses, growing continually. This record of a single life defines a poetry of sheer process, the same endless process of poetic exfoliation figured in the title, *Leaves of Grass*. To the extent that subsequent editions continue this mode, they represent the poetic enactment of a series of identities, each stimulated by Whitman's context and resulting in a new self. But as our analysis of "Song of Myself" has shown, Whitman is not always content to remain in this mode. Opposed to the passive instinct of the loafer and listener stands the compelling urge to create a final identity, one at home and at peace in the world, one capable of withstanding life's trauma and death's tragedy. We have seen Whitman reach this stage three times, only to find himself once again thrust back into confusion and wonder. His most ambitious effort at final cohesion issues in the construction of a myth with himself as origin and center. But the center does not hold, for reasons more apparent to readers of Eliot and Stevens than to Whitman; for the "death of one God" did not yet mean "the death of all" to him. 18 Confronted with the need for a mythic center in his world (the need to which all his prophetic pronouncements about the American bard speak), Whitman systematically goes about constructing one. In "Song of Myself," as we have seen, this
effort issues in the partial appropriation of the Christian myth. But the transplant does not work because, as Kermode says, "it is hard to restore the fictive status of what has become mythical." Whitman may try to color himself God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost in a world which promulges itself endlessly, but the dye does not take, because the world defined by such a God is not endless but teleologically ordered. It is this "form and union and plan" which Whitman tries to claim for the world defined by this hybrid myth, but fails to verify. To his credit, he partially acknowledges this failure in "Song of Myself," loosening himself from the mythic posturing of a re-enacted Sermon on the Mount, and returning to the "exploitation of Speech as the literary aspect of eternal process" which Feidelson justly claims "is the source of whatever literary value resides in Leaves of Grass." But the urge for ordered meaning which leads to Whitman's spurious mythmaking continues to make itself felt in the later editions of Leaves of Grass, creating a tension with Whitman's proces-sional instinct.
The multiple revisions of *Leaves of Grass* have always complicated critical analysis of Whitman. The problem of which edition to accept raises more questions than it answers -- questions concerning the right of an author to judge his own work, the right of the critic to ignore an author's judgment, the best means of achieving a text which can be agreed upon by the literary community. These questions arise inevitably out of the attempt to judge a poet whose text constantly underwent change. But perhaps if we were to accept the consequences of Feidelson's comment on Whitman as a poet of "process" rather than "substance," we might come to view the successive versions of *Leaves of Grass*, not as independent works to be compared and judged, but as events in a long process of self-enactment and self-recognition. If "Song of Myself" enacts a series of identities, each of which moves beyond its predecessor and struggles to assimilate anomaly and mystery into a more comprehensive identity, it seems probable that *Leaves of Grass* refers not to the 1860 edition or the 1892 edition, but to a series of self-enacting events. A book-length study would be required to analyze Whitman's revisions in sufficient depth to document fully such a view, so what follows is essentially a selective analysis of *Leaves of Grass* as the record of a constantly re-enacted identity, an analysis intended not as proof, but as a justifiable way of viewing a long and complex process.
Viewed as the record of Whitman's repeated efforts at self-enactment, *Leaves of Grass* reveals a constant tension between his urge to "express in a poem . . . the pending action of this *Time and Land we swim in*." and his opposing desire to maintain "over all, as by an invisible hand, a definite purport and idea." Just as "Song of Myself" moves through a series of identities, each of which is "the acme of things accomplished" and the "encloser of things to be," *Leaves of Grass* enacts a series of identities, each of which revises previous selves in the light of the present moment. Stimulated by an environment constantly changing, the poet struggles to enclose within the ongoing poem of his life, the new delights and despairs thrown up by his experience. Accordingly, *Leaves of Grass* develops both by accretion and by assimilation, both by adding to what has been written, and by integrating new poems into a formally coherent whole. But accretion always outruns assimilation, as a brief survey of several editions will reveal.

As we all know, the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* was an odd volume. One of its more curious features was a lengthy preface, which functioned as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord . . . ." (Matthew 3:3). Describing at some length the "bard" who is "to be commensurate with a people" so colossal and significant as the American, Whitman is clearly defining himself as mythmaker. If "Song of Myself" oscillates between periods
of stasis and definition and seasons of realization and exercise, the preface acts as a statement of definition for the poetry's radical exercise in self-realization. Having discovered himself in the first poem, and having continued that process of expansive self-realization in the rest of the volume, Whitman reveals the self thus anticipated in the preface. The nationalistic caste of this preface signals an attempt to impose a certain patriotic glow over the essentially personal poetry to follow. Whitman was not above catering to public taste, but his zealous Americanism may well be attributable more to his conception of himself as the American bard than to any desire for increasing his sales. In any case, what is more important is that the preface attempts to define the final product of the process enacted in the poetry. In 1855 Whitman is already struggling to define prophetically a final and inclusive identity.

From 1855 to 1860, *Leaves of Grass* underwent decisive growth. Twenty new poems were added in 1856, including several which focused on sexual themes with renewed emphasis; "Poem of Women," "Poem of Procreation," and "Bunch Poem" appear here for the first time. What had been the fifth poem in the 1855 edition and later became "I Sing the Body Electric," is amplified with the addition of a ninth section, which must be the most exhaustive survey of the body outside medical literature. The journey motif, only embryonically at work in 1855, moves to the foreground in "Poem of the
Road." And in "Sun Down Poem," later to become "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman expands his vision of adhesiveness among men to span time itself. The 1856 edition is a reaching out toward new themes, a stretching of Whitman's poetic limbs, and an experiment with new metaphors through which to articulate his vision. This is the last edition of Leaves of Grass whose format remains that of a poet in process. Although Whitman now names each poem and provides a table of contents, and even conventionalizes much of his punctuation, there is no attempt to impose a formal structure on the volume as a whole. Yet the process of growth by accretion and assimilation is already at work; the letters to and from Emerson form an appendix, while the preface of 1855 disappears, swallowed into poetic form in "Poem of Many in One," later to become "By Blue Ontario's Shores."

In a particularly apt distinction, Roy Harvey Pearce has called the 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass a move from "diary" toward "autobiography." Whitman's repeated struggle for an integrated self in "Song of Myself" is paralleled here by the explicit shift from a format implying open-ended process to one with a beginning, middle and end; opening with "Proto-Leaf," reaching a climax in "A Word Out of the Sea," and ending with "So Long," the 1860 edition marks the beginning of Whitman's effort to impose a form on Leaves of Grass and thus on his life, for the two were by 1860 inextricably involved. As Pearce argues, the unity of this volume was the
most compelling, and the form the most intelligible that Whitman was to achieve. But viewed dynamically, as one of a series of self-enactments, the 1860 edition is but another of Whitman's efforts to impose form on the changing life Leaves of Grass had come to embody.

In 1860 Whitman had replaced the earlier picture of the free-spirited workingman with cocked hat and nonchalant air with a more civilized portrait of himself as the seer, whose eyes gazed dreamily into the distance. If the presence of this new portrait reinforced the image of sage, the absence of any portrait in 1867 suggests renewed confusion and uncertainty, a notion reinforced by the repeated unsatisfactory arrangements in the editions of 1872, 1876, and 1881. What we see in these editions is more strident nationalism and more careful masking. The 1867 edition is overridden with patriotic fervor, and the Calamus poems are being expurgated, thus initiating the process of masking past selves behind a new and less disturbing visage. At the same time that Leaves of Grass begins to reflect this re-ordering of the past to fit the current image, it also struggles to keep up with an ongoing present. Whitman's current poems, many conceived as new and autonomous works, gradually found their way into the bulging and largely formless editions of 1872 and 1876. Drum-Taps, first published as a single volume, was then appended to the 1867 edition of Leaves of Grass, but by 1872 had been assimilated
into the larger work, forming the dramatic center to the 1872 edition. "Passage to India" appeared first as an annex to the 1872 edition. The poem was to have initiated a second and companion volume to Leaves of Grass, focusing on spiritual themes as a counterpart and completion to the physical emphases of the earlier volume. But in 1881, "Passage to India" was integrated into Leaves of Grass. Two Rivulets, a motley assortment of poetry and prose pieces published as a companion volume to the 1876 edition of Leaves of Grass, was assimilated -- minus its prose -- into the 1881 edition. Assimilation fought a constant battle with accretion.

Whitman reshuffled his poems for the last time in 1881, and he considered the form at which he arrived in this, his seventh edition, to be final. The organization of this volume reveals both the desire to achieve poetic mastery and the desire to trace the course of himself and his era in the process of growth. While the poems are arranged in clusters defined by central images, such as "Birds of Passage," "Sea Drift," and "Drum-Taps," these clusters, as well as several series of poems uncollected into groups, trace the life of a particular man and reflect, as Whitman was later to claim, an effort "to put a Person, a human being, (myself, in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, in America) freely, fully, and truly on record" (pp. 573-74). Thus the volume moves from the introductory "Inscriptions,"

Whitman had been anticipating his death since 1873, as the increasingly apparent compulsion to finalize the book of his life reveals. But he kept on living until 1892, with the result that the famous "Deathbed Edition" of 1892 contained two annexes, "Sands at Seventy," and "Good-bye My Fancy," along with a prose piece first published in the 1888 miscellany, November Boughs. His life simply outran his renewed efforts at final form, so that if Whitman insisted on the completeness of the 1881 format, Leaves of Grass itself continued to grow by accretion. Accordingly, the 1892 edition reflects the same tension between form and process which we have witnessed in the volumes of 1867-1881. Even though Whitman's creative output in his last twelve years was qualitatively and quantitatively negligible, so that the two annexes bestow little if any credit on Whitman as poet-craftsman, their appearance at the end of the 1892 edition is significant, for it registers once again the open-endedness of Whitman's poetic venture. As we have seen, this openness
saved "Song of Myself" from the spurious mythicizing which might have blighted the poem irreparably. Though "Sands at Seventy" and "Good-bye My Fancy" at times seem to protest overmuch on the subject of impending death, they represent the same open anticipation of the future that the closing lines of "Song of Myself" suggest. The final edition of *Leaves of Grass* appropriately reveals the tension at work throughout Whitman's poetic career, the tension between the effort to reach out toward the world, exercising always newfound faculties in response to new discoveries, and the compulsion to articulate and compose those discoveries of both self and world within a coherent form.

Instructing Traubel to preserve the final form of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman said in 1891, "In the long run the world will do as it pleases with the book. I am determined to have the world know what I was pleased to do."25 Once again, Whitman anticipated the future, in terms of the ongoing life of his book and the meddling critics and careless anthologists who would change it. Emphasizing the finality of the structure he had created, he nonetheless registered his hard-won knowledge that no idea, no form, and no edition, constitutes the last word, since there are still to be "endless words of ages" to come. In "A Backward Glance O'er Traveled Roads," published only three years earlier, he meditated on this same issue. "My volume is a candidate for the future," he said, which, instead of "changing the already
performed" is to constitute "a piece out of a man's life" (p. 573). Reminiscing on the motivation behind *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman recalled that his ambition was to articulate and faithfully express in literary or poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual and aesthetic Personality, in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America -- to exploit that Personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book. (p. 563)

This pronouncement registers both poles of his career as poet. He tried to create and express a self immersed in the ongoing process of time, and "in the midst of" the contingencies of "current Reality," but he also tried to "exploit" that self in a "comprehensive" way. He insisted on being both "in the midst of and tallying" his world, both "in and out of the game," and in his career as we have charted it, he was just that.

If Whitman fought a losing battle in his effort to achieve an inclusive form for a changing identity, Henry James struggles against equally formidable odds in his effort to enclose the endless possibilities of life within the redeeming form of art.
Notes to Chapter II


2 Ibid., p. 57.

3 Ibid., p. 57.


5 *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago, 1953), p. 17.

6 Ibid., p. 19.


9 All references to "Song of Myself" are to Malcolm Cowley's edition of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* (New York, 1960). In the interest of convenience, I have noted the section numbers as well as the line numbers, and have used Whitman's ellisions ( .... ) when quoting him, and the regular form ( . . . ) when skipping material.


13 Just as the preceding sexual drama shifts into the past tense, so this scene is set off by a similar shift, marking the revived use of the imagination to conjure up situations.


16 Ibid., pp. 214-15.

17 For a fuller discussion of these terms as used by Kermode, see Chapter 4, pp. 194-96.


19 In Kermode's terminology, the fictive status is the only form of the myth possessing a dynamic for filling time with meaning. See Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (London, 1966), p. 113.


"... the perpetrated act had, unmistakeably meant something -- one couldn't make out at first exactly what ..."

-- Henry James
"Really, universally, relations stop nowhere," according to Henry James, for whom "the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so." Painfully aware of the "boundless number" of "perforations" in the "canvas of life" ready and available to the embroiderer's "needle," the artist is forced to choose and exclude even as he struggles to include. Despite the "tendency inherent in his many-coloured flowers and figures to cover and consume as many as possible of the little holes," the artist is perforce limited to "a careful selection among them" (p. 5). The "tendency . . . to . . . consume" the maximum of life is set against the imperative to "draw . . . the circle" within which that life will "appear" to possess ordered meaning (p. 5). James defines the expansive urge in an organic metaphor ("flowers"), and the limiting need in mathematical terms ("geometry"), thus emphasizing the conflicting imperatives under which the artist works. This fundamental tension between the tendency to consume as much of life as possible, and the need to limit that consumption so as to facilitate ordered growth rather than "large loose baggy monsters," constitutes a central dynamic of James's art (p. 84). His fiction resides on the shifting boundary between the seen and the unseen, the articulated and the as yet inarticulate. Like his major characters, he is himself always bewildered at the still further
prospect to be gained, the still further word to be said. His prose style registers a constant effort to add that one more nuance which will complete the scene and finalize the circle, but always ends by reflecting the further possibilities, the as yet untouched holes in life's infinite canvas.

The Jamesian reflector constitutes a significant locus of the tension between boundless expansion and limiting order. We are well-acquainted with James's technique of anchoring the novel's development to a central intelligence while denying that intelligence the "terrible fluidity of self-revelation" incurred by a first-person narrative (p. 321.) When he does use the first person voice, as in "The Aspern Papers" and "The Turn of the Screw," James deliberately undercuts his narrator's vision with evidence of his unreliability. The Sacred Fount, the one attempt James made at using the first person in a longer form, becomes thoroughly problematical by calling into question not only the narrator's reliability, but the possibility of achieving any credible approach to meaning itself. In James's careful hands, the first person narrative tends to test its own method, since for James technique is not distinct from subject. By the same token, the third person center of consciousness is more than a technique; it reflects James's fundamental concern with the need for balancing expansiveness and limitation. As technique, the third person center of consciousness is both a receptive medium and a perceptual screen; it acts both to amplify and to
control meaning. Because "the figures in any picture, agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situation," James employs a central intelligence as the primary register for the novel's expanding meanings (p. 62). But he eschews the first person register as a "form foredoomed to looseness" (p. 320). If, then, the center of consciousness technique grounds the narrative in a mind both involved in and detached from its predicament, the quality of that mind becomes an object of intense concern for the novelist. The "problem" as James sees it, is "to keep it connected . . . with the general human exposure, and thereby bedimmed and befuddled and bewildered, . . . and yet to endow it with such intelligence that the appearances reflected in it, and constituting together there the situation and the 'story', should become by that fact intelligible" (p. 16). James's concern to make his central intelligence "subject to fine intensification and wide enlargement, without allowing him to know "too much for his minimum verisimilitude" grows out of an epistemological principle (pp. 67, 68).

"Experience is," James says, "our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures, any intelligent report of which has to be based on that apprehension" (pp. 64-65). We must first see, as James so often reminds us, and only then can be "measure" our vision through the validating act of execution. The Jamesian perceiver, like his creator, is a wonderer among the shifting surfaces of life.
who must rely on his ability to see for his survival. What James says concerning the artist holds for his intense perceivers as well:

If you haven't . . . the root of the matter in you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured, but . . . if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resources, even before mysteries abysmal. (p. 78)

The Jamesian perceiver is a bewildered spectator whose capacity to deal with "mysteries abysmal" is grounded in a "penetrating imagination." Of course, there are those who are not bewildered but with such minds James is not finally concerned. "Fools" have their place in the Jamesian world as the "fixed" elements who oppose and impede the destiny of the "free spirit engaged with them" (p. 129). But there is an essential difference for James between bewildered intelligence and sheer stupidity, so that when he insists on a necessary quantity of bewilderment, he is never referring to the irremediable obtuseness of consciousness itself. The intense perceiver, then, would not be bewildered in the first place if he did not possess a "penetrating imagination." This does not mean that James's perceivers are seeing what is not there. James himself, the most intense perceiver of all, consistently presents a fictional world hovering precariously on the brink of the "unuttered and the unknown." Of course, there are those who maintain that James was unnecessarily bewildered, but we have already seen the label James
afixes to such unbewildered minds. The intense perceiver, then, by virtue of the "penetrating imagination" with which he is invested, is prone to exploration and discovery amidst a bewildering spectacle. He engages in a "process of vision" carried forth among the hidden and potentially endless relations which lurk behind appearances (p. 308). Of course, he can never exhaust the "mysterious residuum" of his world. A mind which could fully penetrate all mystery would belong to God. "It seems probable," James says,

that if we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell about us; we should partake of the superior nature of the all-knowing immortals whose annals are dreadfully dull so long as flurried humans are not, for the positive relief of bored Olympians, mixed up with them. (pp. 63-64)

The Jamesian perceiver is neither fool nor God; he is an intensely human intelligence, responding to the constant and inexhaustible appeal arising from "mysteries abysmal." The "question," James says, "has ever been for me but of wondering and, with all achievable adroitness, of causing to wonder" (p. 254). Such wonder arises only when we see, and issues in a potentially endless "process of vision."

But if this process tends to exfoliate meaning by exploring relations, the need to "measure" arises to limit and control it. Once again, this need would never arise if the perceiver were not endowed with the capacity to see; it is because he sees so much that he must impose some pattern, some design on what he sees. "The only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give
away, the value and beauty of the thing," according to James, is "the person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to record it dramatically and objectively" (p. 67). The center of consciousness not only perceives, but reflects; he not only wonders but interprets. As James says of Fleda Vetch, "from the moment so fine an interpretation and criticism . . . is applied without waste to the surrounding tangle," "more or less of the treasure is stored safe" (pp. 128-29). Like the artist himself, the central intelligence, with "eyes greatly open," responds to the "mystic solicitation, the urgent appeal, on the part of everything, to be interpreted" (p. 59). Working in opposition to the endless process of vision is the need for limitation, definition, and control. And the larger our capacity for vision, the stronger is our need for a controlling interpretation. Little Maisie Farange's value as subject and reflector resides in the "weight of the tax" on the "active, contributive, close-circling wonder . . . in which the child's identity is guarded and preserved," a "tax . . . which would have done comparatively little for us hadn't it been monstrous" (pp. 149-50). If seeing derives from a "penetrating imagination," measuring consists of a constructive interpretation, a saving design within which life, thus "felt," is encircled and redeemed through action (p. 45). Just as it is only when the artist enacts his perceptions in the saving form of art that his knowledge
can be measured according to the amount of "felt life" there included, so it is only when Isabel Archer, sitting up by her fire deep into the night, begins to see what has happened to her that she feels the need to measure its meaning. Isabel's failure, as her famous dialogue with Madame Merle regarding clothes makes clear, is a failure to perceive the disparity between appearance and reality. But in her fireside meditation, Isabel for the first time begins to question appearances, to take note of their ambiguity, and to see through the multiple deceptions of her world. Like Maggie Verver at the opening of Book II of The Golden Bowl, Isabel traces the growth of her uncertainty and begins to interpret, to "measure" its source and consequences. In this one scene, the whole Jamesian epistemology is traced out in microcosm. Isabel, bewildered by the image of Madame Merle and Osmond as somehow more intimate than she had ever known, begins to see through appearances to the multiple meanings beyond, and struggles to interpret her perceptions so as to define for herself what has actually happened, the measure of which is finally her renunciation of freedom itself. Renunciation, as she eventually discovers, is what her act of marrying Osmond has finally meant. But her value as a tragic heroine derives from what she does with, that is, how she interprets, the perceptions she has accumulated, just as the artist's value resides in the achieved form of his work. And such action, as Isabel's case reveals, requires sacrifice.
The central intelligence, then acts both to limit and to expand meaning. Technically, it must constitute "a sufficiently clear medium to represent a whole," and yet possess "a sufficiently limited . . . personal state to be thoroughly natural" (p. 16). It must be limited so as to remain natural and credible, and to afford the gradual process of enlightenment which forms the central action of the novel. But it must also be sufficiently intelligent to see and feel all that the subject offers. Thematically, the central intelligence reveals a basic tension between expansive vision and controlling interpretation. Endowed with a penetrating imagination, the central consciousness is given to endless exploration and discovery. But it also responds to the urgent appeal for interpretation. Actually, both seeing and measuring are functions of the imagination. Perception, stimulated by wonder and devoted to exploration, requires a penetrating imagination. But interpretation, originating in a response to the infinite range of perception and issuing in the saving redemption of form, requires imaginative invention.

The technique of "foreshortening" forms another and related locus for James's extensively discussed concern with the opposing demands of expansiveness and limitation:

To give the image and the sense of certain things while still keeping them subordinate to his plan, keeping them in relation to matters more immediate and apparent, to give all the sense, in a word, without all the substance or all the surface, and so to summarize and foreshorten, so to make values both rich and sharp, that the mere procession of items and profiles is not only, for the
occasion, superseded, but is, for essential qual-
ity, almost "compromised" -- such a case of
delicacy proposes itself at every turn to the
painter of life who wishes both to treat his
chosen subject and to confine his necessary pic-
ture. (p. 14)

The problem of foreshortening arises out of the relationship
of the author to his task, a relationship essentially anal-
ogous to that between the character and the "field of life"
he views. That is, just as a Maisie or a Strether must see
and measure what happens in a world resisting final approp-
riation by virtue of its ultimately impenetrable mysteries,
so the author must see and measure his subject, which inev-
itably generates more possibilities than can be fully executed.
And just as the test of Maisie's capacity to measure her
world is her finally achieved act of identity and freedom,
so the test of the author's capacity to measure his subject
is the achieved form within which he is able to compress the
maximum "felt life" (p. 45). The artist's task is one of
salvation. Since "life persistently blunders and deviates,
loses herself in the sand," art supplies us with "the sublime
economy . . . which rescues, which saves, and hoards and
'banks'," the "hard latent value" which gives us meaning (p.
120). Maisie saves her life through the act of sacrifice
and freedom she finally commits. The artist similarly saves
life by the act of appropriation by which he informs it with
meaning, an act entailing its own sacrifice. But his task
is complicated at every point by the conflicting demands of
compression and richness.
As a technical concern, foreshortening refers to the problem of compressing the passage of time. James criticizes Roderick Hudson for allowing its hero to disintegrate too quickly, for providing the reader with an inadequate sense of the slow and relentless passing of time. "This eternal time-question" presses on the author the need to create "the effect of the great lapse and passage, of the 'dark backward and abysm'," the "effect" being one of "compression, of composition and form, by the terms of literary arrangement" (p. 14). But the larger problem of which foreshortening is a technical expression, is generated by the artist's desire "both to treat his chosen subject and to confine his necessary picture" (p. 14). The fundamental dilemma he faces is registered in James's recognition of the "imperative" for the author to have "really . . . finely and . . . concisely treated one's subject, in spite of there being so much of the confounded irreducible quantity still to treat" (p. 87). The source of James's inability to confine a subject within predisposed limits resides in the constant tendency toward what he calls "over-treatment," the tendency which he sees as operating to create misplaced middles (p. 57). The "organic center" for James provides the crucial balance between elaborated "going . . . behind" and an economical "keeping down" (pp. 146, 65). The struggle to achieve this balance makes of the artist an "adventurer" with an "inveterate habit of just saving in time the neck he ever undiscourageably risks" by over-treating his
subject, especially in its preparatory stages (p. 85). On the one hand, James is committed to a tightly woven formal integrity. Stressing this "absolutely premeditated art," James roundly denounces Tolstoy's War and Peace as one of those "large loose baggy monsters" whose "queer elements of accidental and arbitrary" cannot "mean" anything artistically (p. 84). "There is life and life," and since "waste is only life sacrificed and thereby prevented from 'counting'," art becomes life saved and made to count (p. 84). What makes this salvation possible is the principle of "composition," the "principle of health and safety" under whose aegis the world becomes a unified whole (p. 84). But on the other hand, James is equally if not more fully committed to "the extension of life, which is the novel's best gift." If Maisie and Isabel have to rely on their imagination to provide the knowledge necessary for survival, the novelist must exercise that faculty for similar reasons. The artist, like Strether and Maisie, is confronted with mysteries, and his ability to decipher them resides wholly in his penetrating imagination. But James differs from Strether by virtue of a larger imagination. Accordingly, James as artist sees more and more deeply and thus faces a more compelling need for control:

Addicted to seeing "through" -- one thing through another . . . and still other things through that -- he takes, too greedily perhaps, on any errand, as many things as possible by the way. (p. 154)
This addiction contributes the "amount of felt life concerned in producing" the work, on which the "moral sense" of that work perfectly depends (p. 45). That is, it is just to the extent that the author is addicted to imaginative penetration that the novel he produces lives. Burdened and still blessed, then, with his "incorrigible taste for gradations and superpositions of effect . . . that contribute to a view of all the dimensions" of a given subject (p. 154), and simultaneously committed to the principle of "composition," James arrives at his normative prescription for the novel, whose "high price . . . as a literary form" resides in

its power not only, while preserving that form with closeness, to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man . . . but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mold. (pp. 45-46)

The expansive tendency working against the formal need -- this tension is more than the novel's dilemma, it is its supreme value. Just as the tension between form and energy within the novel is the fortuitous boon of art, so the need to sacrifice life in order to save it is the fortuitous providence of life. "Life has no direct sense whatever for the subject and is capable, luckily for us, of nothing but splendid waste" (p. 120).* It is because life is "all

*Emphasis added.
inclusion and confusion" that art, "being all discrimination
and selection" is able to save life at all (p. 120). And
it is because the artist's penetrating imagination tends
toward inclusion that his formal urge arises to control and
limit, to inform with order, all that he sees and continues
to see. Just as the center of consciousness must be limited,
so the novel as a formal entity must be confined. But just
as the center of consciousness must possess imagination, so
the novel must tend toward expansion.

This same need for a rich compression makes itself felt
in James's experiments with picture and scene. It is impor-
tant to understand what these terms imply for James. Picture
is essentially foreshortened narration, the means by which
James compresses a variety of events into a single passage,
usually describing the responses of the central intelligence
whose resulting impressions enrich those events at the same
time they foreshorten them. Thus Isabel's meditation recasts
all the events of her adventure in the light of her now awak-
ened penetration of them. Scene is more simply described as
James's use of the fundamental component of the well made
play -- the dramatic confrontation of characters which typi-
cally constitutes action. However, as James employs it, scene
carries a heavier burden than moving the action forward. His
most extended discussion of the scenic technique occurs in
the preface to The Awkward Age, where the sequence of scenes
constituting the novel is described as a circle of "lamps ...
the function of each of which would be to light with all due intensity one of the subject's aspects" (p. 110). The dramatic scene here is used primarily not to move action forward, but to create a series of perspectives on the central subject -- Nanda Brookenham's crisis. So scenic presentation acts to penetrate and extend the subject even while compressing its effects into a highly charged dialogue. In his dramatic phase in the 1890's, James experiments continually with the uses of scene and picture. The Awkward Age constitutes his most radical attempt to rely wholly on scenic development; The Sacred Fount employs pictorial presentation extensively. Neither, however, is solely scenic or solely pictorial. In The Spoils of Poynton, he tried alternating the two. But it was only in his "major phase" that James succeeded in combining picture and scene so that they worked together, extending and amplifying while operating to limit and contain, each other. The Golden Bowl constitutes in this respect the perfect fusion of the two as we shall see in a moment.

The Golden Bowl constitutes the resolution and complex fusion of the problems and principles issuing from the fundamental tension between James's profound sense of infinitely expandable meanings and his equally insistent commitment to composition and form. Having examined James's last completed novel in the light of this tension, I shall return to the Prefaces, in which James as critic turns the same penetrating
imagination on his novels that the novelist had exercised on life, and so enacts his most ambitious attempt at inclusive and redemptive form.
II

James initially conceived the idea for *The Golden Bowl* in terms of the simultaneous marriage of a father and daughter, with the interesting complications arising from the interacting motives and consequences of each marriage. Indeed, his original title was "The Marriages" which he regretted having already used for a short story. But the final title is particularly appropriate to the novel James eventually wrote, and the difference between the two titles suggests the difference made in the process of executing the idea. The marriages themselves, which constitute the germinal situation on which James builds, become the occasion for the exploration of meaning which the novel ultimately enacts. The specific object within the novel -- the golden bowl itself -- takes on a series of symbolic meanings through the course of the story's development, so that finally it is transformed into a symbol of symbolic meaning. As title, "the golden bowl" suggests that the novel's achieved content, in contradistinction to its germinal subject, the marriages, focuses on the meaning those marriages assume, and ultimately the process by which meaning itself is discovered and made. Like the minister's black veil in Hawthorne's story, the golden bowl comes to symbolize all the multiple meanings attached to it as well as all those that might be. The bowl is alluded to throughout the novel both directly and indirectly as threatening to overflow, to shatter, to reveal the crack hidden beneath its gilt surface. It comes to symbolize not
only the form of marriage which each character in his or her own way, but Maggie most heroically, strives to preserve, but also the formal product wrought by the artist in his effort to contain and control the fluid energy constantly threatening to overflow the boundaries of his predetermined form. As the fate of the bowl itself makes clear, that form must be resilient if life is to be sustained. But by giving the novel its title, the golden bowl also asserts its claim to providing the saving form without which life is lost.

This paradoxical need both to preserve and shatter form constitutes the novel's central dilemma. And just as what threatens the novelist's circle is his tendency to consume, his desire to respond to the inexhaustible appeal thrown up by life, so what threatens form in The Golden Bowl is the process of vision, the imagination's tendency to consume and so to expand beyond the limits set by the predetermined forms in which its characters live. Imagination is the sole mode of knowing in The Golden Bowl. And it is the knowledge gained through the workings of the penetrating imagination which threatens to violate form at the same time it operates to endow form with energizing life. The degree of imaginative force which each character brings to bear on the bewildering scene he confronts, together with the amount of control achieved in preserving the form he inhabits, constitute the measure of his success as well as the "moral sense" of his identity.\textsuperscript{11} It is by such a measure that Maggie Verver
emerges as the novel's heroine. Just as James begins with a situation and proceeds to develop its multiple meanings through the use of his imagination, both the Prince and Maggie begin their respective books with a predetermined form, whose hidden meanings they must imaginatively develop. And just as the novelist must "preserve" his "form with closeness" despite the "latent extravagance" tending to burst his "mould," so both Maggie and Amerigo struggle to contain the developing meanings of their world within the predetermined form of their marriage. Beginning in bewildered innocence before the unknown and unappropriated meaning of the formal arrangement they inhabit, each moves toward a knowledge which threatens that arrangement, making its preservation a task requiring increasing energy and sacrifice. I want now to examine these two movements as enacted first by the Prince, and then by Maggie.

The Prince comes to us as a man whose "fate" is "sealed," whose marriage contract has been drawn up and signed, with all the finality and "grimness of a crunched key in the strongest lock that could be made."\textsuperscript{12} We first see him wandering the streets of London in an aimless reverie. His meditation reveals him as a man split between two identities: the one he intends to abjure through the act of marriage, and the one he hopes to assume as a result of it. "There are two parts of me," he recalls telling Maggie,
one is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless betises of other people -- especially of their infamous waste of money that might have come to me . . . But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant . . . personal quality. (23, 9)

The Prince is saturated with history, a history publicly available in "rows of volumes in libraries" (23, 9). It is this public identity which invests him with his value for the Ververs. "What was it else," Maggie says, "that made me originally think of you?" (23, 9). So enthralled is she with the Prince's polished, old world appearance that his fluent English is for her his "only fault"; he would appear more romantically foreign if only he had a slight accent (23, 6). But the Prince's primary aim in pursuing the Ververs' wealth and Maggie's hand is to repudiate this culturally inherited identity and so to create himself anew in another image. If what appeals to Maggie's romantic tendency is the Prince's status as a "Morceau de musée," what appeals to the Prince in Maggie is her association with machinery, science and power (23, 12). The Prince conceives of his marriage as an act of alliance with the "developments of the coming age" (23, 17). Deeply aware of the "ugliness" of his "antenatal history," the Prince regards his impending marriage as a new beginning:

What was this so important step he had just taken but the desire for some new history that should, so far as possible, contradict, and even if need be flatly dishonour, the old? (23, 16)
If his self-conscious saturation with family history cultivates a sincere "humility," his ambitions for the future engender the dream of empire:

If what had come to him wouldn't do, he must make something different. He perfectly recognized -- always in his humility -- that the material for the making had to be Mr. Verver's millions. (23, 16)

The Prince's family name is not capriciously applied. He is, more than Adam, more than Maggie, full of the American dream. He yearns to define himself apart from and "if need be" in opposition to tradition. He resembles, remarkably enough, Emerson's man of truth and Thoreau's saunterer, at least insofar as he shares with them the urge to repudiate his past, to begin again. He of course differs markedly first in possessing so much of a past, and secondly in his willingness to assume the trappings of stability, the responsibilities of wife and family, the occupation of princehood. Yet to the extent that the Prince opts for that "unknown" "single self" and the unknown world of the Ververs, he allies himself both with the future glory of American Empire, moving westward from Rome to London to America, and with the necessity of self-definition which such an alliance entails.

But the Prince is fatally innocent, in much the same way that Thomas Sutpen is. He will "make something different" of himself simply by acquiring a fortune and a wife. His past will reach an abrupt and final end, after the manner of the "iron shutter of a shop . . . rattled down at the turn of some
crank" (23, 17). Machinery, for him, "was money, was power, the power of the rich peoples," among whom he now figures himself (23, 17-18). Significantly, all the Prince's images of empire, of power and money and machinery, derive from his perusal of shop windows: by acquiring possessions, mere objects, he will become a new person. Sutpen's acquisition of a house, wife, and money, is of the same order, except that at least Sutpen builds his house; he does not buy the home of the great plantation owner in Virginia but rather imitates it hyperbolically. The Prince's attitude toward the Verver fortune as his means is particularly revealing:

There was nothing else for him on earth to make it with; he had tried before -- had had to look about and see the truth. Humble as he was, at the same time, he was not so humble as if he had known himself frivolous or stupid. He had an idea -- which may amuse his historian -- that when you were stupid enough to be mistaken about such a matter you did know it. Therefore he wasn't mistaken -- his future might be scientific. (23, 16-17)

He is, of course, mistaken, and he does not, of course, realize it. If it takes the Verves a long time to learn the "cost" of their marriages, much less to pay it, the Prince is similarly innocent of his attitude toward the price of empire, the cost of a "new history" (23, 12,16). More sophisticated than Sutpen, the Prince nonetheless resembles him in possessing a dream, eventually acquiring the material means to execute it, but still lacking the moral imagination required to fulfill it. If Sutpen simply applies the rifle morality
of backwoods Virginia in his quest for a dynasty in Mississippi, the Prince just as mistakenly, if not quite so blindly, follows the dictates of his European manners in his quest for American empire.

The conversation the Prince recalls between himself and Maggie in Chapter I discloses the innocence of both. The Prince claims to "know enough . . . never to be surprised" by the Ververs (23, 8-9). What he knows, however, is analogous to what Maggie knows about him. Each is enraptured by what the other represents -- Maggie loves the Prince as product of his history, and the Prince loves Maggie as the resource of his future, as the repository of "images" derived from "vast modern machineries . . . whose acquaintance he had still to make" (23, 15). Each claims to "know" the other while remaining unknown, each expresses the superior significance of what remains unknown over what is known, and each is perfectly accurate and totally misunderstood. The Prince accepts the Ververs' offer of wealth and opportunity, but cannot assess its cost because he does not possess the imagination to penetrate their "white curtain" and accordingly cannot "see" them as single selves (23, 22, 30). He opts instead for the "eyes" of others -- Fanny's and Charlotte's (23; 30). Maggie accepts the Prince on purely romantic terms, ignoring his status as a single self, and therefore cannot see his personal desires for redefinition.

The Prince seeks to "reign . . . without any history,"
while Maggie seeks to become a Princess, an heiress of history itself (23, 9). If her innocence consists of a belief that she can instantly acquire a past through romantic and financial appropriation, his consists of a hope that he can repudiate his past just as magically. She is not cheap -- she will not invite friends as substitute relatives to her wedding to make up for the family she lacks. She wants the real thing, all the way up to and including the "wicked Pope" himself (23, 10). But the Prince's standards are equally as demanding. He is not content with anything less than the infinite power and wealth which the Ververs embody. His failure is one of imagination. Since the Ververs demand nothing of him except that he just simply be what history has made him, any assumption of a "new history" is precluded unless he asserts himself from the start, asserts that "single self" at the core of his new world ambitions. By failing thus to make a difference in the Ververs' lives, he fails to make one in his own. Bewildered at the Ververs' mysteriously undemanding attitude, he allows himself to depend first on Fanny, then on Charlotte, for an interpretation of the Ververs. Accordingly, the "funny" form of their lives arises, born of the Ververs' innocent assumption that a husband can be assimilated into the old filial arrangement of father and daughter, that a human being can be treated as an art object, and that a past can be appropriated without changing the present or the future; but born also of the Prince's innocent
assumption that the old habits will suffice in the new world, that Charlotte's assessment of the Ververs as contented lambs to be protected from life itself is accurate, and that the past can be repudiated by the single act of marriage (23, 293). The Ververs, in their innocence, set a trap for the Prince; in making no demands on him to change, they effectively demand that he remain the same -- the same constituting for them an historically determined identity. He fulfills this demand completely, his compliance with it reaching up to and including adultery, which is, after all, among the "infamies" associated with his family history. But he sets a trap for them too. In his "humility," his abject and misconceived desire to pay for all that he is receiving, he fails to demand from the Ververs the sacrifice of each other necessary to any real fulfillment of the marriage vows. Consequently, by making no demands himself, he effectively demands that they remain the same. The Prince is in his own way a bewildered innocent in the alien world of the Ververs, just as Maggie is a bewildered innocent in the face of the dark doings of Amerigo and Charlotte.

The Prince imagines himself as resembling "Gordon Pym," coming upon "a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow" (23, 22). What bewilders him about the Ververs is the motive and source behind the "quantity of confidence" they repose in him (23, 23). Just as
Fanny's matchmaking motive eludes him, so the Ververs' expectations escape his comprehension. What he concludes in the face of the "white air" is that there is nothing, finally, there: nothing is expected of him in terms of action (23, 22). As Fanny informs him, it is what he is to be, not what he is to do, that constitutes his value for the Ververs (23, 24). And, of course what he is to be, is quite simply, the beautiful object possessed by the Ververs. By accepting his status as object rather than asserting himself as subject, the Prince effectively remains what his family history has made him rather than changing his identity as he had originally hoped. Of course, such accommodation is precisely what he perceives to be the Ververs' expectations. But he reaches this conclusion by depending on Charlotte's vision, which proves faulty. When Amerigo pronounces her "stupid" at the end of the novel, he refers to her mistaken perception of Maggie. But he too has been "stupid," not only because he has allowed Charlotte to see for him, but also because he has been blinded to Maggie's status as subject (24, 348). If she has objectified him, he has also objectified her -- as the precious little lamb to be protected from evil, and in consequence, from life itself. The Prince begins in bewilderment, moves toward what he takes to be an accurate apprehension of Maggie, and measures that apprehension by an act of adultery. His "arrangement" with Charlotte constitutes his measure of what the form of his marriage means; but it also tests that form by threatening to shatter it. Of
course, the Prince's failure to penetrate the Ververs' white curtain, to take them seriously as subjects rather than objects, operates in tragic conjunction with their failure in the first half of the novel, to take him seriously, as not simply an art object to stimulate imaginative interest, but as a subject capable himself of thought and desire. Their guilt and innocence is equally distributed and equally debilitating, until Maggie begins to see, and then to measure, and so to transform and save, her world.

The Golden Bowl is most obviously ordered by its division into two books, the first putatively grounded in the Prince as central intelligence, the send more strictly controlled by Maggie's point of view. While the Prince certainly dominates Book I, his centrality is established differently from Maggie's in Book II. Maggie is a center of consciousness throughout her book, and her mental register is interrupted only once by an Assingham dialogue. But the Prince actually functions as a reflector only in Chapters 1 through 3, and 17 through 22 -- nine chapters out of twenty-four, or less than half the time. This is not to say that James mistitled his first book "The Prince," for Amerigo's presence is pervasively felt. But he acts as interpreter primarily in the opening and closing sections of the book, during the days leading up to his marriage in London, and during the days leading up to his adultery at Matcham. In the first sequence, the Prince's thoughts center around his mystification at the
family he is about to enter. In the final sequence he has arrived at the conclusions about them by which he sanctions his affair with Charlotte. The process by which he reaches these conclusions is portrayed through a series of chapters focusing on Adam and Maggie Verver in all their filial piety, on Charlotte in all her devious mastery, and on Fanny Assingham in all her loquacious guilt. In most of these chapters the Prince is an object of interest, a person thought about, talked about, measured and smiled over, but he is essentially absent, a technical feature perfectly appropriate to his status as a Verver acquisition whose value is the same whether he is "buried" or simply carried around from hotel to hotel to adorn the otherwise bland premises (23, 14).

More pertinent, however, is the way in which James represents the Prince's developing view of the Ververs without using him as the constant reflector. Since the Prince is primarily an object purchased by Adam for Maggie, he is also properly an object of consideration rather than a subject. Adam proudly regards him as a fine acquisition, congratulates him for his roundness, and generally luxuriates in the lack of trouble the Prince contributes to Adam's otherwise simple life style. And it is by showing us Adam's objectification of the Prince, both epistemologically and aesthetically, that James represents both the Prince's dehumanized condition and his response to it. Part 2 of Book I is largely devoted to Adam, opening with his Sunday morning flight from the marriage-seeking Mrs.
Rance, and closing with Charlotte's acceptance of his offer of marriage. But since his acquisition of Charlotte is pointedly analogous to his acquisition of the Prince, this, Adam's section of the novel, and his only one, refers back to Amerigo. My point is that James has carefully constructed Book I to trace the Prince's movement from bewilderment to knowledge, albeit false knowledge. The lapses out of his consciousness, by emphasizing his virtual absence from the scene, his ill use at the hands of the Ververs, and his fundamental status as both aesthetic and epistemological object rather than subject, are essential to our seeing his developing sense of his situation.

Unlike Amerigo, Maggie, once she begins to look at her situation, is consciously struggling to offset the objective status to which she has been relegated. Accordingly, Maggie comes to us as subject, as the central intelligence dominating the last half of the novel. If in the opening sentence of the novel there is some question as to the consistent force of Amerigo's imagination ("The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him" (23, 3.),* we are not similarly in doubt about the potential power of Maggie's. The "outlandish pagoda" constitutes for Maggie what the blanket of whiteness has figured for the Prince -- the mystery which stimulates wonder and appeals to the imagination's

*Emphasis added.
power for discovery and development. Significantly, the Prince chooses a pointedly American figure to describe his apprehension of the unknown, while Maggie's pagoda is conceived as an elaborate "structure plated with hard, bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned, at the overhanging eaves, with silver bells that tinkled, ever so charmingly, when stirred by chance airs" (24, 3). Maggie's imagination naturally produces a highly artificial structure, while Amerigo's produces, or more accurately borrows from Edgar Allen Poe, a metaphor whose primary feature is its total lack of form. If the Prince is struggling to conceive what form the overwhelming power represented by the Ververs is to take, or more to the point, what form he is to take by sharing it, Maggie is struggling to perceive what secrets are hidden behind this distinctly "funny" form the Ververs' lives have assumed as a result of their marriages. Like the Prince in his opening meditation, Maggie ponders an accomplished fact in the form of the pagoda, which symbolizes the "arrangement" in which she lives, but which she has not been able to see until now. The pagoda seems to have "no door" through which she might enter (24, 4). So she walks around it, much as the Prince has earlier meandered around London, only to stop finally and take a step toward it to gain a closer view. The Prince's effort to give a "twitch" to the "shrouded object" characteristically takes the form of his visit to Fanny Assingham, whose eyes he seeks to rely on (23, 24).
Maggie's, on the other hand, issues in direct, even though slight and tentative, action. As in the first chapter of Book I, the Prince recalls a previous conversation with Maggie, in this first chapter of Book II, Maggie recalls a previous scene with the Prince, the occasion of that first tentative act with which she has responded to her doubts and uncertain perception of the mystery figured by the "in-scrutable and impenetrable" pagoda (24, 4). In spite of the "poor thing" it is, her act of returning to Portland Place to greet her husband on his arrival from the week-end at Matcham nonetheless constitutes the first stitch in the design she eventually embroiders for herself. Maggie's design is both a devious plot to expose for herself the truth, and an elaborated form within which she hopes to save her life. By a series of painfully considered moves, she both discovers the meaning of the mysterious "arrangement" she is entrapped in, and creates a saving form for the lives of the three people closest to her. As James's most formidable devotee of the "religion of doing," Maggie acts in the face of the boundless mystery she confronts, and so ends by drawing her circle, thus making relations stop at the boundary encircling herself and the Prince, and excluding everyone else. Such is her sacrifice as the artist of her fate, just as it is the novelist's sacrifice as the redeeming savior of "felt life."

By providing a series of slight shocks, Maggie elicits responses which reveal further clues. The Prince's initially
blank visage when he appears at Portland Place registers for Maggie his shock at her deviant behavior; Charlotte's similar response creates the same impression the next day at Eaton Square. As she begins to spend more time with Charlotte, and the Prince consequently spends more time with Adam, her perception of the similarity between Charlotte's and Amerigo's responses is reinforced:

The word for it, the word that flashed the light, was that they were treating her, that they were proceeding with her -- and, for that matter, with her father -- by a plan that was the exact counterpart of her own. It was not from her that they took their cue, but ... from each other. (24, 41)

By acting to rearrange people's roles, Maggie discovers just how they are arranged:

Ah! Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together, but she ... was arranged apart. (24, 45)

Having made this discovery by initiating a certain shock, Maggie again acts to force disclosure of more light. She waits for Adam to renew the subject of the trip they have planned, the trip which Charlotte and Amerigo have encouraged, but which would now constitute for Maggie "the highest hypocrisy" since it would express "an ecstasy of confidence" (24, 47). It is just this "quantity of confidence" reposed in him that had initially bewildered Amerigo (23, 23). But now that Charlotte has convinced him that he need not pay for it, indeed should only take advantage of it, Adam's offhand comment that the trip is off sets off another shock wave.

When Maggie suggests that the Prince accompany Adam on a trip
of their own, explaining Adam's hesitancy as deriving from his desire not to leave Amerigo, she is taking another measure of her growing apprehensions. The Prince's response—that they make the proposal through Charlotte—threatens Maggie's scheme to separate Charlotte and Amerigo, but also verifies her perception of their complicity. Maggie's knowledge grows by a process of exploration and measure; stimulated by her sense of anomaly in the family relations, she begins to exercise her imagination in an effort to articulate for herself the hidden meaning of her situation. She acts to test her hypotheses without allowing her motive to become visible. As her imagination continues to be verified, she appropriates more of her experience into the growing design. All her little acts—her initial greeting of Amerigo, her increasing social involvement, her suggestions and counter-suggestions regarding journeys abroad—disclose new perceptions for her growing imagination. She comes to see her own guilt, as a wife unwilling to grant her husband his deserved precedence over her father, and as a daughter responsible for her father's marriage. She comes to see the counterplot of Charlotte and Amerigo against which she is working. The more she acts, the more she sees, and the more she sees, the larger her actions become; but she takes enormous care to prevent their becoming so large as to upset the "equilibrium" of the form they all inhabit (24, 73).

From the inception of her design, Maggie feels the
imperative to preserve this equilibrium. Acting "up to the full privilege of passion" would breed disaster (24, 8). Her initial restraint is founded on her uncertainty. But as her knowledge grows, her reasons for control assume more profound dimensions. She must protect her father from any disruption, she must protect herself from succumbing to the Prince's overwhelming sexual attractiveness, but most importantly, she must avoid shattering her chances for gaining the Prince's love by merely reverting to the obvious fact that he is her husband. Amerigo is not likely to find Maggie as jealous wife attractive. Accordingly, Maggie's design is worked out in a rigidly self-imposed silence. She cannot even reveal her anxiety to her father; indeed he is the last person she wants to open her mind to, since he needs protection most desperately as it becomes clear that he must be sacrificed. Maggie's design cannot save him; he must save himself. The more taxed Maggie's imagination becomes in the face of her growing perceptions, the greater her need becomes to maintain silence, to preserve the forms, to sustain the equilibrium. But the more her imagination works, the greater the strain on that form. The one person she breaks her silence with is Fanny Assingham, who responds with lies, offered as a token of Fanny's willingness to share in Maggie's design. But the climactic threat to the form Maggie strives to protect arises with the discovery of the golden bowl. The sheer coincidence by which it rises before her as concrete proof of
all that she has imagined, testifies to the unpredictable resources life throws up for art to appropriate. Up to this point Maggie has proceeded alone; she may know that Fannie and Adam share her anxiety and depend on her to save them, but she is always acting by herself, taking her cues on the run, improvising her behavior from moment to moment. The discovery of the bowl constitutes a supreme threat to her efforts at preserving form at the same time that it sanctions and verifies all she has imagined to be true. At the moment Fanny Assingham hurls the bowl to the floor and the Prince enters, the world of the novel absolutely threatens to disintegrate. But Maggie's actions prove once again preservative. Carefully, methodically, she picks up the three pieces of the bowl and replaces them on the mantle, even trying "for a minute . . . to fit the . . . morsels together" (24, 182). "But as there was, naturally, nothing to hold them but Maggie's hands," she leaves them resting next to each other "before her husband's eyes" (24, 183). Maggie's restorative gesture reflects the care with which she proceeds to deal with the Prince. Her crisis all before her now, she exercises all her restraint in the effort to give Amerigo time, to protect him from having to expose "the dreadful blur, the ravage of suspense and embarrassment" she has now "produced" in his "personal serenity" (24, 184). She wants him to "see" that she now sees him, but she must avoid reducing him simply to the guilty and accused, the delinquent spouse.
She has created a "strain on his wit," which any uncontrolled hysteria on her part will simply intensify to the breaking point (24, 185). Instead, she exploits the "new need of her" such a strain engenders in him, not by falling away from her "conviction," but by being "consistently simple and straight" (24, 186). That is, because she knows more than he, she is in command of the scene for the first time, and accordingly can control her crisis by treating it as the Prince's crisis. She proceeds to explain the scene he has witnessed in straightforward terms, revealing how she discovered the bowl and what she takes it to mean. Her overriding purpose is to show him that she knows and consequently to reveal that she is not the innocent he has taken her to be. He is compelled to follow her lead as best he can. "I know nothing but what you tell me," the Prince announces, to which Maggie replies, "then I've told you all I intended. Find out the rest" (24, 202). By revealing herself as the possessor of knowledge, Maggie reveals the Prince as blundering in darkness. Accordingly, she helps him by disclosing her knowledge, finding the truth, on this one occasion, the most compelling tool at her disposal. For the truth relieves the "strain on his wit," proving his need for her and her ability to meet that need; but it also stimulates his imagination and compels his complicity in her design. If what had disappointed the Prince was Maggie's inability to appeal to his imagination, she now fascinates him. By making it
clear that she has known for some time of his affair with Charlotte, she testifies to an intelligence of which he has been totally ignorant. And by placing the burden of further discovery on him, to "find out" for himself who else knows, she implies that she is still far ahead of him, still knows more than she tells. The effect of this scene, then, is again one of new discovery and renewed preservation. Maggie sees, in view of Amerigo's blundering responses, how little Amerigo and Charlotte actually have suspected her of knowing about their situation. She immediately appropriates this fact into her design so as to bring Amerigo over to her side of the "arrangement." By telling him what she knows, she makes him her accomplice instead of Charlotte's, and so re-arranges them all, this time with Charlotte "arranged apart." She expands her knowledge at the same time that she preserves and saves her design -- a design which is now well on its way to achieving perfect congruence with the previously merely imputed form of her marriage.

If the Prince is now appropriated, Adam and Charlotte remain to be faced. At Fawns it becomes apparent to Maggie that Charlotte remains in the dark. The Prince has not told her what he now knows, so that she now reels under the weight of her felt exclusion from the newly effected arrangement. Her delusion imprisons her, as Maggie imagines it, in a "spacious but suspended cage, the home of eternal unrest, of pacings, beatings, shakings, all so vain" (24, 229). In her
terror, Charlotte precipitates the final test of Maggie's preservative effort. By asking if Maggie has any reason to complain of her, Charlotte hopes to force the hidden out into the open, to relocate the issue on the level of the revealed and obvious -- the level on which she can herself masterfully operate. Charlotte, as we know from her previous behavior, functions as fully on the grounds of the literal as Maggie does on the basis of the imagined. Her first statement to the Prince once they have set out on their gift-buying jaunt reveals her straightforwardness in dealing with people. She tells him that her primary purpose in coming to London is to be alone with him for this hour; she wants him to know, to know everything (23, 96-98). Charlotte consistently assumes that appearances are in accord with reality. If the Ververs behave like innocent lambs, they are innocent lambs. If Maggie and Adam spend all their time together, they want so to spend their time. Charlotte is the most skilled deceiver in her world precisely because of her deep conviction that appearances, even when manipulated, are always convincing. Accordingly, she consistently clings to the literal, to the level of the visible. As she tells Maggie in their climactic confrontation: "From the moment I had received it [the impression of a change in Maggie's behavior toward her]. I knew I must sooner or later speak of it -- for that you see, is systematically my way" (24, 249). But Charlotte's "way" is the exact opposite of Maggie's, which consists of systematically
not speaking. Accordingly, Maggie insures her salvation here by lying to Charlotte with all the force at her disposal, and so forging permanently her complicity and union with Amerigo -- who has learned from her how to lie.

If Maggie has previously envisioned herself as an actress improvising lines, she now views her role as that of the author creating a play, peopling his stage and moving his characters skilfully through the action he has devised. The card game in the smoking room refers back to the pagoda image at the beginning of Maggie's process of vision. If she was then tiptoeing carefully around the arrangement of her family, now she is in the position of arranging them herself. But no sooner does she become aware of her role as creator of her characters, and interpreter of their actions, than she realizes how differently Charlotte would dispose and interpret the scene. And Maggie's consciousness of the variability of reality, when viewed through different eyes, provides her with the germ for the last pattern to be woven in her increasingly elaborate design. She has imagined with enough force to penetrate to the truth of her husband's affair with Charlotte; now she employs her powers of imagination to create an alternative truth for Charlotte's benefit. Lying once again, Maggie admits to Charlotte's charge that she has acted against her stepmother, trying to keep her father from his wife. The germ of truth in Maggie's confession is expanded and developed to provide Charlotte with the basis for her
salvation. Maggie thus makes it possible for Charlotte to redeem herself by blaming Maggie for working to destroy Charlotte's marriage, and to begin a new life with Adam on the basis of the challenge now offered her to counter and succeed over Maggie's destructive behavior.

Thus does Maggie's penetrating imagination expand to see and to measure, and so to save her world. From beginning to end, Maggie's imagination works in silence, operating to disclose the hidden meanings of her experience. In her final effort to save Charlotte from absolute disaster, Maggie envisions her being led around by a "silken halter" (24, 287). Such imagined realities dominate Book II, providing the basis and register of Maggie's expanding perception and the motivation for her constant efforts at salvation. Operating always between the conflicting orders of "self-control" and "large expression," Maggie successfully restores the golden bowl to its original state, "as it was to have been," "without the crack" (24, 216-17).

If each half of the novel records the quest of a bewildered innocent for expanded knowledge in the face of the imperative for preserved form, the novel as a whole registers the same struggle to preserve architectural symmetry while simultaneously expanding relations up to and beyond the very limits of imposed, of "predetermined" form. James's efforts at foreshortening reach their ultimate test and achieve their supreme value in The Golden Bowl. As we have seen in looking
at the opening chapters of Books I and II, the novel moves by a complex fusion of picture and scene. If both of these chapters constitute pictures within which remembered scenes are compressed, the Prince's dialogue with Fanny Assingham in chapter 2 of Book I, exemplifies James's use of a scene within which picture is compressed. The chapter begins with a line of dialogue, followed by a compressed picture of what has preceded this line, returning to a repetition of the opening line, "they're not good days" (23, 26). This pattern of beginning in medias res, circling back and going behind to fill in the events leading up to the present, and then moving forward, operates constantly to create the basic rhythm of the novel as a whole. Both Book I and Book II, as we have seen, begin with a situation already formed, the components and history of which constitute the subject of meditation and the stimulus to further action. The novel accordingly moves from static form through expansive development back to a widened form. In the scene with the Prince and Fanny, then, the ensuing dialogue flows on in fine dramatic style, but because we are located primarily in the Prince's consciousness, we receive his impressions interspersed with the dialogue. When Amerigo perceives that Fanny is nervous for some unknown reason, the proportion of expansive going behind to the controlled keeping down of dialogue increases. That is, as mystery presents itself, the expansive urge deepens, threatening to violate the imperative for control. Another way of
putting it would be to say that this section as well as the novel itself, constitutes an alternating system of pressures. As mysteries arise, the expansive urge is stimulated and the longer are the sections devoted to going behind, so that the coherence of scene is threatened. Both of Maggie's confrontations with Amerigo, as well as her final scene with Charlotte provide examples of picture threatening to explode scene. The points of greatest tension, thematically and technically, coincide.

Another example of James's efforts to achieve balance between the expansive tendencies of his subject and the consequent imperative for control is his use of the Assinghams. James distinguishes between characters who belong to his subject and those who belong primarily to the "treatment" of his subject. Clearly, the Assinghams are "ficelles," perhaps the most fully developed ones in James's works. Indeed, the fulness of their development testifies to the richness of the subject they are designed to treat. The Assinghams function as reflectors of the world they observe and inhabit in several ways. First, their marriage constitutes a union of America and Europe, and its successful form prophesies the success of Maggie's marriage to Amerigo. Bob Assingham, with his well-kept appearance and his well-managed club, resembles the Prince insofar as the latter is seen as the refined public personage. Fanny resembles Maggie as well in dressing herself with a monumental artificiality. But the most significant
way in which the Assinghams reflect and help to articulate the relationship between their younger friends is through the dynamic established between Fanny's bent for going behind and Bob's particular ability for keeping down. Just as he edits Fanny's telegrams in the service of economy, so he edits her inexhaustible speculations in the service of coherence. The system of resisting pressures in which they live thus acts to reflect the larger tensions on which the novel is built. Fanny, like Maggie, possesses a large imagination, but unlike Maggie, lacks any control of her own. Accordingly, Fanny is constantly going too far on the basis of her speculations. She starts relationships all around her, but cannot stop them when they go too far -- as her futility in the face of Charlotte and Amerigo makes clear. Further, her tendency toward expansiveness, because she cannot control it, threatens to end in destruction; she is the one who dashes the golden bowl to the floor. While this act is conceived as symbolizing the end of Maggie's crisis, it of course effectively intensifies it. Without the control exercised by her husband, Fanny is a potentially destructive force. But the dynamic established between them reflects in microcosm both the more successful dynamic Maggie seeks to achieve in her marriage and the larger dynamic of the novel itself.

Another and more obvious function of the Assinghams as reflectors manifests itself in James's arrangement of their
dialogues. Especially in Book I, the Assingham scenes act to expand our perceptions as readers as well as to control and regulate the process of our vision. In their first dialogue, we learn that Charlotte and the Prince have been lovers in the past. But coming as it does immediately after the first encounter between Charlotte and Amerigo, the Assinghams' dialogue impedes the forward movement of the plot. Thus their conversation not only invests the events we have just witnessed with further implications, but also impedes the development of further relations for the moment. Each Assingham dialogue immediately follows upon a new discovery and acts both to extend our perception of its meaning and to hold back temporarily the developments to come. After the evening of the ball attended by Amerigo and Charlotte together, after leaving Matcham, and after the scene in which Maggie reveals to Fanny her suspicions, the Assinghams talk -- Fanny worrying and speculating, Bob responding with his usual disinterestedness; each of these dialogues follows a potentially shattering discovery and acts to shore up, to contain, the onward rush of the action. The Assingham dialogues lift our heads above the water for a moment, to borrow the water imagery James uses so often in the novel. Just as Maggie emerges from the water at the beginning of Book II, to stand above and apart in observation, so the Assingham dialogues lift us above the scene momentarily, allowing us to get our bearings -- which we need to do just
as desperately as Fanny. 15

Just as Maggie's effort to see and to measure ends in the act of salvation by which she executes her design, so James's effort to preserve his "form with closeness" while developing "all the differences," and "all the varieties" of relations thrown up by the imagination ends in the act of salvation by which he completes his circle (pp. 45-46). As we have seen, Maggie must sacrifice her father in order to achieve her salvation. Again and again the question of "cost" arises in the novel. The major component of everyone's innocence is their assumption (Maggie's) or mistaken conclusion (Amerigo's) that the form of marriage will entail no expense, no sacrifice. In the end each must make a sacrifice, but no one in the novel makes a larger one than Maggie, who not only gives up her father, but loses every shred of her old familiar life. Similarly, The Golden Bowl enacts its form by paying what James called the "high price of the novel" (p. 45). Maggie and the Prince are finally brought together within the form of an insular family, watching Adam and Charlotte leave for America; the elder Ververs' destiny remains a total mystery not only to us, but to Maggie herself. By the same token, The Golden Bowl absolutely defies any exhaustion of the possibilities it creates. That is, while we are assured of the bonds forged between Maggie and Amerigo, between Europe and America, between the past and the future, between art and life, we nevertheless stare in bewilderment at the multiple
meanings of these relationships, meanings which shade off into an impenetrable mist, much as the elder Ververs' coach recedes into the distance. Adam and Charlotte, after all, are the ones setting off for the new world, with all its attendant opportunities and mysteries. And their unknown fate, like Adam's undisclosed knowledge, reflects the mystery still at large, still unappropriated by the saving form of the novel itself. The Golden Bowl not only "saves" life, but calls attention to its act of salvation by referring beyond its design to the further expanses of meaning available and not fully redeemed. Residing on an expanding horizon between the known and the unknown, The Golden Bowl exists in virtually unrelieved tension between the appeal for expansion thrown up by life and the imperative of control exacted by art.
III

James wrote a preface for each of the eighteen volumes he included in the New York Edition of his works. Despite the fact that these prefaces appeared separately, preceding the novel or collection of tales for which each was intended, they were written at the same time, and taken together, constitute an organic whole. One has only to read The Art of the Novel to appreciate the continuity and shape of the prefaces taken as a single and unified effort. Seen in this light, James's prefaces tell "a thrilling tale... a wondrous adventure," whose subject is "his whole unfolding, his process of production" itself (p. 4). The central intelligence in this tale is of course James himself; and the action, the drama, is "the very drama of that consciousness" as it turns on the works themselves, searching out "the old, the shrunk concomitants" which "lurk between the lines" (pp. 16, 125). The prefaces record the process of re-vision, just as the novels enact the process of vision. Like Maggie Verver, James confronts a mystery and struggles to penetrate it:

It is a pleasure to perceive how again and again the shrunk depths of old work yet permit themselves to be sounded or -- even if rather terrible the image -- "dragged": the long pole of memory stirs and rummages the bottom, and we fish up such fragments and relics of the submerged life and the extinct consciousness as tempt us to piece them together. (p. 26)

His memory stimulated by re-reading his works, James searches beneath the "lurking forces of expansion" for the germ
beneath each work, the "private history" of whose growth he then proceeds to trace (pp. 42, 4). And "nothing more complicates and overloads the act of retrospect than to let one's imagination itself work backward as part of the business" (p. 183). His struggle to "reconstitute the medium and the season that favoured the first stir of life, the first perceived gleam of the vital spark" of any produced effect, issues in "a widening, not a narrowing circle" whose "admirable immensity" constantly poses the threat of "losing its way" (pp. 183, 3). James sees "more reasons involved" in the particular case before him, than he can "begin to go into," and so reiterates the liabilities of expansive revision: "I fairly lose myself in the vision of a hundred bright phenomena" (pp. 132, 108). Each work presents itself as a new and bewildering predicament to be penetrated imaginatively by its author, who announces at the start that the "mark of the relevant" in this perusal will be taken "everywhere for granted" (p. 4). Operating under such an inclusive law, James finds his works infinitely suggestive: "under the first touch of the spring my hands were to feel themselves full," he says, "so much more did it become a question, on the part of the accumulated good stuff, of seeming insistently to give and give" (p. 341). Pervaded by images of water -- a sea on which the young author had set sail, the "stream of composition" which he is always re-mountain, the books themselves as vessels well, or not so
well, constructed for staying afloat -- the prefaces as a whole carry the author into the "deep sea of one's endeavor" where he discovers "the prime consequence of one's own part of re-perusal" to be "a sense for ever so many more of the shining silver fish afloat . . . than the net of widest casting could pretend to gather in" (p. 345).

Faced, then, with the potentially inexhaustible suggestions thrown up in the process of revision, James employs a necessary "system of observation" by which to limit and control his "process of production" and so articulate the "method at the heart of the madness" (pp. 3, 4, 120). The predicament constituted in each work to be revised is scrutinized and penetrated, forming "an experience to which nothing is wanting save . . . some grasp of its final lesson" (p. 100). It is with an eye toward that "final lesson," a coherent articulation of the truths to be flushed out of the re-varnished canvases, that James orders and measures, and so draws the circle around, his subject. Any such system is necessarily selective. James excluded several longer works and many short stories from the New York Edition, and accordingly from full treatment in the prefaces. While some of these are mentioned, they remain outside the boundaries James imposes on his subject. Within those boundaries, a basic pattern is followed in most of the prefaces. The circumstances of time and place are recorded, often at some length; the germ is recalled whenever possible; and the problems of its
development are traced, usually issuing in a theoretical abstraction of the lesson implicit in each particular predicament. Of course, the pattern varies according to the experience to be treated. Roderick Hudson and The American evoke a desire to ascertain what went wrong, and thus provide an opportunity for criticism. Indeed, James regards his early failures of judgment and perception -- naming and yet not representing Northampton, Massachusetts, or forcing the Bellegardes to reject Christopher Newman when French Aristocrats would actually have done no such thing, for instance -- as fortuitous, since they provide "a pretext for . . . present insistence" (p. 10). The prefaces dealing with collections of stories and nouvelles offer James another kind of pretext -- for exploring and measuring recurrent themes and issues such as the international question, stories of writers and artists, and fairy tales. Indeed, every work James approaches yields up another pretext for speculation and "bristles with questions" (p. 3). Just as life throws up an urgent appeal for interpretation, the works issue an invitation for speculation. By ordering the novels in roughly chronological order, by grouping the stories in roughly thematic clusters, and by anchoring his approach in each preface to a basic pattern, James achieves the "system of observation" by which he encircles the expansive process of revision within an inclusive reappropriation.

The prefaces tell the story of the telling of stories,
and so constitute the history of the artist's "process of production." The relationship of the prefaces to the works which form their subject is analogous to the relationship of the novels themselves to the germs extracted from life to be developed in art. That is, just as the novelist responds to the infinite variety of life's spectacle, plucking out for development those ideas which stimulate his imagination, so the revising critic responds to the endless expanse of suggestive questions raised by his "re-perusal" of the novels (p. 339). Each comes to the author of the prefaces as the pagoda rises before Maggie -- in the guise of an achieved fact to be penetrated imaginatively and reconstituted within the saving circle of artistic form. Their failures are redeemed, their method is articulated, their processes are circumscribed and informed with meaning. The artist's life becomes itself the "field of vision" to be penetrated and redeemed through the "sacrament of execution." And the "final lesson" to be discerned in the myriad problems attendant on the "process of production" so traced and recorded is that art as well as life "consists of things done. which do other things in their turn," so that the artist's "behavior and its fruits are essentially one and continuous and persistent and unquenchable" (p. 347). Product and process melt into one continual act, and if the artist "is always doing he can scarce, by his own measure, ever have done" (p. 348). "Conduct with a vengeance" is the first
commandment of the "religion of doing" (pp. 348, 347). Such conduct may "show for ragged, because it perpetually escapes our control," but we must nonetheless continue to act, because such artistic "acts," unlike any of our other "performances," "though they go forth into the world and stray even in the desert, . . . don't to the same extent lose themselves" (p. 348). Even though compelled to engage in perpetual and necessarily incomplete action, the artist enjoys the "incomparable luxury" of knowing that his acts are "essentially traceable," that they need not be "disconnected" and so lost, as are their counterparts in life. Accordingly, the artist becomes the hero of the Prefaces, just as Maggie Verver becomes the heroine of The Golden Bowl. For the artist emerges as sole source of redemption in a world otherwise wasted and lost. He is the active principle which sustains meaning through continual and endless appropriation, much as Berkeley's God sustains reality through constant perception. Without the artist's redeeming acts of appropriation, life would remain a "splendid waste" (p. 120). Accordingly, the artist's responsibility is large, placing on him the same necessity under which Maggie struggles -- to act, and act continually, under the burden of the "sovereign truth," which decrees that, as art is nothing if not exemplary, care nothing if not active, finish nothing if not consistent, the proved error is the base apologetic deed, the helpless regret is the barren commentary, and "connexion" are employable for finer purposes than mere gaping contrition. (p. 348)
And it is this same injunction for constant imaginative action which informs Faulkner's efforts to forge a total world and sustain its continuity through time. Like James, Faulkner struggles to oppose the loss, waste, and dissolution of life through redemptive acts of art. But for Faulkner, this dissolution manifests itself largely in terms of the ossification and decay of the forms men and women inhabit. In Faulkner's world, forms are born and die in time, so that to understand the conflict between the need for ordering fictions and the desire for liberation from ossified structures, we must examine how Faulkner explores and exploits time itself.
Notes to Chapter III

1 R. P. Blackmur, ed., The Art of the Novel (New York, 1934), p. 5. All page references in the text of this chapter are to this edition.

2 I am borrowing the term "problematical" from Charles Feidelson, who uses it to characterize a work "whose characteristic subject is its own equivocal method." See Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953), p. 73.

3 The Sacred Fount focuses directly on this question of whether the "penetrating imagination" does see what is not there. James was clearly aware of the dangers of imputing to a character more imaginative zeal than the scene before him can sustain. But The Sacred Fount presents problems not only because its narrator's interpretation falls apart, but also because the only other interpretation offered -- Mrs. Brissenden's -- is equally inadequate and unreliable. So, while the novel questions its narrator's interpretation, it also leaves the reader with a scene wholly bewildering without an interpretation.


5 Ibid., p. 168.

6 Once again, I am expanding the technical terms, "going behind" and "keeping down" to refer, respectively, to James's expansive urge to elaborate meaning and the limiting need to control his material. While James does not always refer to this conflict in precisely these terms, my metaphorical appropriation follows upon James's own extention of technical concerns into thematic questions. The need for "keeping down," for instance, yields the following extrapolation: "As soon as I begin to appreciate simplification is imperilled: the sharply distinguished parts of any adventure, any case of endurance and performance, melt together as an appeal." See Blackmur, Op. cit., p. 65.


8 Of course, action, in the Jamesian sense of the interior drama of penetration, is moved forward by scenic presentation.

9 For a particularly illuminating discussion of this technique, see Walter Isle, Experiments in Form (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 77-119. For a discussion of picture and scene in


12 *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, New York Edition, (New York, 1907-17) vol. 23-24, 23, p. 5. All page references in the text of this section are to this edition. The first number cited refers to the volume, and all subsequent numbers refer to the page.

13 As Amerigo had put it, "that was what it all came back to again with these people among whom he was married -- that one found one used one's imagination mainly for wondering how they contrived so little to appeal to it" (23, 314).


15 At the beginning of Book II, Maggie sees herself as a "silken-coated spaniel who has scrambled out of a pond and who rattles the water from his ears . . . she had had no accident and had not got wet; this at any rate was her pretension until after she began a little to wonder if she mightn't, without exposure have taken cold" (24, 6-7).

16 Among the more important works excluded are *The Sacred Fount*, *The Bostonians*, *Washington Square* and *The Europeans*. 
Chapter IV

William Faulkner: The Redemption of Time

"The right track is the one that leads to life, to the sunlight. One cannot unceasingly suffer from the cold."

-- William Faulkner
Light in August opens with Lena Grove sitting in a ditch waiting for Armstid's wagon to reach her. In three pages we survey her whole history and return to the present moment of the wagon's approach:

The sharp and brittle crack and clatter of its weathered and ungreased wood and metal is slow and terrific: a series of dry sluggish reports carrying for a half mile across the hot still pine-winey silence of the August afternoon. Though the mules plod in a steady and unflagging hypnosis, the vehicle does not seem to progress. It seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and forever, so infinitesimal is its progress, like a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road.¹

Faulkner goes on to extend and amplify the sense of time as both fluid and static. And in a seamless reverie, Lena anticipates the future, recalls the past, and luxuriates in the present. Time seems to slow down, to approach but never quite to reach immobility. A hypnotic stillness envelopes the "clatter" of the wagon as it approaches the waiting figure. The wagon's movement is evidenced by its sound but contradicted by its appearance. "suspended in the middle distance forever and forever." The familiar Faulknerian contradictions -- motion and stasis, past and present, coexisting in an elongated moment -- exemplify the language for which Faulkner has been both praised and damned.²

While the tensions between motion and stasis, past and present, have been pervasively noted and offered as evidence for Faulkner's "failure" to resolve the very issues his novels develop,³ and while debate continues as to whether his time
is continuous or characteristically discontinuous, an adequate explanation for Faulkner's mysterious behavior remains forthcoming. I think, however, that we can approach the problem by defining a fundamental tension in *Light in August*. On the one hand, Faulkner fragments, distorts, and juxtaposes various time intervals, reconstituting past, present, and future into a newly ordered whole, so that events come to us not chronologically, but according to a principle of related meanings. Such is the principle of order in *Light in August*, where large chunks of the past are interpolated into the present and three separate stories are juxtaposed. On the other hand, Faulkner seems intent on sustaining the flow of time, not so much through a series of chronological events, but through a language which registers the relentless movement of creatures in a world marked by ceaseless progression. From this perspective, Faulkner's world is fundamentally in motion, and it is its very motion which makes it endure. Lena Grove, despite her singleminded and limited nature, persists; and she persists in motion, into and out of Jefferson, to begin and end the novel. Thus, time as segmented and reshuffled into a re-ordered whole, and time as the duration sustaining life, both operate in *Light in August*. And the tension between continuity and discontinuity, grounded in the effort to structure time and the need to respect its endless flow, informs both the novel's meaning and structure. The spatialization of time allows Faulkner to slow it down,
speed it up, fragment and reassemble it, even to half it tenuously; but the sense of duration endows this spatialized and distorted assortment of fragments with the basic continuity which welds it together. This tension operates at several levels: it infuses the language with its peculiar energy, it helps to define character, and it makes possible the structural and thematic integrity of the novel as a whole. However, before approaching that novel, we need to develop a firm notion of what is implied by time as duration.
II

Faulkner's affinity to Bergson is larger than we have realized. Bergson develops a metaphysics of time; his fundamental insights derive from his notion that our habitual spatialization of time should be distinguished from the real duration in which we live. For Bergson, intelligence constitutes one function of the human mind and intuition, another complementary one. Intelligence is the faculty which enables us to act on our environment by focusing on only those aspects of it which we can use. Intelligence allows us to see things as static in order to organize them for our practical and intellectual purposes. Intuition, on the other hand, begins with the perception of movement and sees immobility as only an abstract moment, "a snapshot taken by our mind." Intelligence operates on the principle of "virtual action" which dictates that it extract from perception the information it needs to act (p. 68). It breaks time up into minutes, hours, and days so as to order the world for efficient use. Intuition, however, grasps a "succession which is not a juxtaposition, a growth from within, the uninterrupted prolongation of the past into the present which is already blending into the future" (p. 35). This indivisible flow of time Bergson calls duration. In trying to represent this duration, all we can do is conjure up metaphors, like the one Bergson uses of beads lined up on a thread. The beads represent successive states and the thread is an inadequate emblem for
duration (p. 83). Duration is something we intuit and cannot adequately articulate because the tools of language are all forged by the intelligence and derive ultimately from a spatialization of the external world. Further, this ceaseless flux is endowed with all the reality, all the positive values of Plato's world of Ideas. Duration is not only change, but constant, indivisible, indestructible change. For Plato, the world of becoming was by definition unreal. If Being is given once and for all in the immutable system of Ideas, then the world of flux unfolding before us can add nothing to it; it can only constitute a "diminution" and "degradation" of it (p. 123). But once we note that change itself is constant, we can view it as duration and posit it as the fundamental ground of being, providing for sustenance and growth.

Bergson applies the notion of duration to the solution of a variety of philosophical problems, whose complexity would take us far afield. But his discussion of memory and freedom is of particular relevance to both an understanding of duration itself and its role in Faulkner's fictional world. According to Bergson, the past is "necessarily automatically preserved" (p. 162). The present is a "certain interval of duration" like a sentence now being pronounced. Our attention spans the interval defined by the sentence, which can be elongated or shortened, "like the interval between two points of a compass." The interval represented by one sentence can
be stretched to include two by a change in punctuation. Accordingly, "an attention which could be extended indefinitely would embrace, along with the preceding sentence, all the anterior phrases of the lecture and the events which preceded the lecture, and as large a portion of what we call our past as desired" (pp. 178-79). The present, therefore, is a function of the extent of our "attention to life" (p. 179). The distinction between the present and past is a result of our apparent inability to sustain that attention. The present becomes past only when it no longer commands our immediate interest. In other words, if we did not have to canalize our attention toward the future, if our "attention to life" were not repeatedly interrupted by the urgencies dictated by the practical concern of accomplishing our particular ends, our present would include our "entire past history . . . not as instantaneity, not like a cluster of simultaneous parts, but as something continually present which would also be something continually moving" (p. 180). We forget events in the past as long as they have no bearing on our immediate concerns. But a radical alteration of our orientation toward the future, such as that presented by the threat of sudden death, can effect a loss of interest in the necessities of action and restore that "attention to life" which allows the past to flow into the present as an indivisible part of it. Thus we would live in a "perpetual present" which is like a melody and has "nothing in common with immutability, or . . . with
instantaneity. What we have is a present which endures" (p. 180).

Perhaps the most attractive feature of Bergson's metaphysics is the freedom it bestows on all organic life and particularly on human consciousness. We exist in a "concrete duration where the idea of necessary determination loses all significance, since in it the past becomes identical with the present and continuously creates with it -- if only by the fact of being added to it -- something absolutely new" (p. 185). Perpetually exfoliating unforeseeable forms of life, duration endows us with freedom not as a system of choices, but as an open-ended growth which is never completed. Events do not emerge in two stages as first possible and then actual. The possible is "the real with the addition of an act of mind which throws back onto the past its image, once it has been enacted" (p. 118). The possible is a "mirage of the present in the past" (p. 119). Consequently, the fact that we can look back into the past and find conditions of possibility for the present situation does not imply that those conditions necessarily and inevitably produced the present. We remodel the past in the act of finding causal antecedents to explain the present, just as we recall from our own past only those events which assist us in our immediate enterprise of coping with the future. But in neither case does the past pre-exist as a system of possible options; only in retrospect and in the service of our present needs and interests does the
past organize itself into relationships.

Bergson, then, sees us as cut off from real duration by our habitual need to spatialize time. Our problems derive not from the failure to escape time, but from our inability to penetrate it. Yet this is only an artificial inability arising from the intellectual disposition to hypostatize instants of duration in order to act in the external world. We all experience duration intuitively as the ongoing movement of our world. Bergson views this very persistence of life, manifesting itself in ceaseless change, as the ground of being and the insurance of freedom. All our efforts to spatialize time, to order and regulate and abstract from the change within which we exist, are fabricated structures manufactured in the service of utility and necessary to our survival but ultimately unrelated to our endurance. We survive by organizing our environment so that it will serve our needs, but our endurance is bound up with the duration which underlies and sustains our very continuity with the world of living beings.

What is remarkable about Bergson's discussion of duration is his apparent inability to recognize the urgency implicit in our fabrications. By referring all human effort to organize and spatialize time to an intellectual faculty whose function is basically utilitarian, Bergson fails to account fully for the human need underlying the intellectual enterprise whose dimensions he so readily circumscribes.
While intuition may put us in touch with duration, surely what it discovers there is not wholly attractive. Ceaseless change, while it endows life with freedom and continuity, nonetheless compels us to order it in the effort to create a distinctively human meaning. Bergson's notion of intuition is his way of humanizing duration, but history would lead us to believe that further humanization is necessary. According to Frank Kermode, who is fundamentally concerned with this urge to order as it manifests itself in fictions, men are thrust into the world in medias res and so make "imaginative investments in coherent patterns which by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle." Characteristically, these patterns inform time with meaning by circumscribing it within an interval and organizing it around a kairos, a moment in time filled with significance, whose paradigm is the Incarnation. Fictions, then, perform a larger task than Bergson's "fabrications"; fictions not only enable man to act, but attempt to inform his acts with meaning. The simple fiction of clock time is Kermode's model for the plots we impose on pure duration in the effort to order it and so make meaning of it (pp. 44-45). But in between the tick-tock, the ordered interval, comes the tock-tick of pure successiveness, and as our fictions grow more complex they attempt to accommodate this tock-tick of unhumanized duration into a larger fiction which will invest it with meaning. Moreover, the more
thoroughgoing our acceptance of time as ceaseless and endless, the more complex and urgent are our attempts to appropriate it within a fiction. (Bergson's duration is necessarily endless, since perpetual growth is open-ended, constantly creating unforeseeable forms. The time between tock and tick is that time which repels our effort to circumscribe it within an ordered interval.) What our fictions represent, then, is a fundamental commitment to order and to the spatialization of time such order entails.

Accordingly, we are confronted with a dilemma. Compelled to order our world, we necessarily impose patterns on it which provide meaning and allow us to survive, not only physically, but intellectually and even spiritually. Yet the very order we construct and the meaning we thereby create are inadequate because they limit our freedom and cut us off from the continuity, indeed the communality, of life. By imposing a plot on time, we are consoled because we know where we are going and from whence we came, but this knowledge also restricts our movement to a predetermined course. On the other hand, to live in pure duration, even with the consolations of freedom and continuity, is to deny our fundamental need for consonance. In Faulkner's world, this dilemma makes itself felt in the tension reflected in the order the novel struggles to create out of its disparate fragments and the pure duration its language attempts to sustain, the tension between the ceaseless motion its characters variously enact and the
elusive meaning they try and fail to discover.
III

If we return now to Lena Grove watching the wagon approach her, the tension I have been defining can be seen in operation. The paragraph as a whole defines an interval of duration in which Lena enacts the "attention to life" Bergson describes. The "slow and terrific" sound of the wagon moving vivifies our sense of ceaseless motion, slightly astonishing in its very "steady and unflagging" progress up the hill. Lena knows the wagon is coming closer because she hears "the sharp and brittle crack and clatter of its weathered and ungreased wood and metal," even though "it seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and forever." The apparent contradiction of motion and stasis is resolved if we view the image of permanent suspension as Faulkner's means of creating the impression of constant change. The sound of the wagon assures us of its movement, while its appearance provides it with an aura of constancy. Faulkner is appealing to our predisposition to view immobility as permanence, but complicating our response by attributing that permanence to motion itself. Having established the wagon in a kind of perpetual motion, then, Faulkner enlarges the vision of constant change to include "all the peaceful and monotonous changes between darkness and day" (p. 7). The sense of duration imaged by the conjunction of sight and sound extends to include the earth's rotation. Encasing this allusion to cosmic duration are two images
of motion: the wagon looks like "a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road" and the road itself, which has been stretched to include the earth's revolving motion in space, appears as "already measured thread being rewound onto a spool." The bead-string image not only reinforces the wagon's apparent stasis, but also emphasizes its fusion with the road and diminutive aspect when seen from a distance, appearing to fade and "blend" into the larger monotony of time itself. The thread-spool image comes not as a description of the actual scene, but as a metaphor for the more encompassing vision of perpetual change as viewed from the individual consciousness aware of its own ultimate death. After extrapolating the appearance of the scene into a cosmic dimension, Faulkner again focuses on the wagon's sound and enlarges it in the same way, emphasizing now the vast and incomprehensible extent of this duration. The sound comes "out of some trivial and unimportant region beyond even distance . . . slow and terrific and without meaning." So far, then, Faulkner has created a sense of ceaseless change which encompasses and extends beyond human life, and constitutes a vaguely defined threat, although not, of course, to Lena Grove. She remarks the disparity between the wagon's sound and apparent distance, and then immediately stretches her attention span to include what we would normally call her future -- her sense of being on the wagon and even of having been on it. Lena's present, in fact, is perpetual, for she
can also think of other wagons in the past without any shift of attention. From 'now', to being on and off the wagon, to questions she has asked strangers all along the road, and finally to her anticipated reunion with Lucas Burch, Lena's mind "goes idle and swift and smooth" because her attention to life, like the ceaseless motion around her, while minimal, is constant (p. 8).

Perhaps the most vivid image of Lena's temporal habitat comes with the description of her as advancing in identical and anonymous and deliberate wagons as through a succession of crackwheeled and limp-eared avatars, like something moving forever and without progress across an urn. (p. 6)

The urn offers Faulkner as it did Keats an image of motion in stasis. The word "avatar" is used repeatedly to imply the successive versions of a person or object hyposituated into successive instants. Like the frames of a film, avatars constitute the static images we would see if the film ever stopped. But Lena is moving "through" these avatars. Accordingly, the wagons to which the term "avatars" refers are presented as only artificially distinct from each other and the road down which they move. Each is not only a version of all the others, "identical and deliberate and anonymous," but all are simply metaphors for the motion which they embody.

Lena Grove is ensconced in duration as no one else in the novel can be, for she is a woman fundamentally unconscious of the horror implicit in her world. The contingencies
faced by Mrs. Armstid are totally alien to Lena, because she does not regard the future as built up block by block out of the possibilities inhering in a problematic and distinct present, nor is that present separated from the past as effect and cause. Lena's "tranquil and calm unreason and detachment" endow her with the capacity to exist in the extended interval of a perpetual present (p. 16). Her attention to life is never broken by the need to shift her interest from one concern to another, from the demands of the present moment to the encroaching problems of the next. Even when the baby inside her kicks, causing a spasm of pain, "time has not stopped," because Lena's time is continuous and indivisible into past, present, and future.

Lena's immersion in duration is, however, a mixed blessing. She is endowed with the strength and health to persist against what appear as insurmountable odds. Born in abject poverty, orphaned at twelve, burdened early in life with the responsibilities of caring for her nieces and nephews, seduced and abandoned by a scoundrel at eighteen, she sets out on a quest to find the father of the child she tirelessly carries inside her, a quest which takes her on foot across two states. The fact that she does catch up with him testifies not to a contrived coincidence in Faulkner's plot, but to the very persistence and faith implicit in her undertaking. Lena's effort to find her unborn child's father and so to unify and solidify her family reflects her fundamental
devotion to community. As a child riding to town in her father's wagon, she preferred to walk upon her arrival in town so as to feel herself part of the community. More important, Lena creates a community wherever she is by eliciting from everyone she meets a communal and humane response. Mrs. Armstid, outraged at Lena's naivete, nonetheless gives her the small savings she has gleaned from her private egg enterprise. Mr. Armstid and countless others pick her up and try to help her as much as possible. The sheriff refuses to evict her from Joe's cabin. And Byron, of course, does her the timely favor of falling in love with her. Lena's communality arises from her sense of continuity and relatedness with all people, her fundamental participation in the ongoing duration of life. Finally, Lena, carrying her heavy burden of potential life within her, serves as a principle of fecundity in the novel; she is the woman whose child raises in Gail Hightower's ears "the treble shouts of the generations" (p. 357). With her health and strength, her devotion to community, and her capacity to add to the earth's abundance, she is committed to life -- not as a future possibility nor as a past potentiality -- but as a perpetually present reality.

However, Lena's posture toward the world is not, finally, adequate to us as readers. Like Dilsey, although more inadequate, Lena offers a severely limited response to the contingencies among which she moves. The fact that she and Joe
Christmas never encounter one another serves to reflect not only the principle of verisimilitude, but Lena's fundamental unawareness of the tragic dimension he embodies. The one time she is exposed to the madness of Joe's world as exhibited in Mrs. Hines's hysterical confusion of Lena's child with Joe, Lena is unable to cope with her experience. She can endure Lucas Burch's final and pitiful performance without losing her balance in the least, but Mrs. Hines's odd behavior poses a threat to Lena's stability. While Lena evokes humane responses from everyone she encounters (except Lucas Burch from whom a humane response is probably impossible), her own humanity is limited by her unacknowledged demands on those around her; Lena's reliance on others may grow out of the catalytic effect by which her presence seems to create a community, but it takes only a slight shift of perspective to see that reliance as real dependence. The most compelling aspect of Lena's inadequacy as a full human being, however, is her virtual lack of intelligence. Lena functions as totally by intuition and without intelligence, in Bergson's sense of those terms, as it is possible to do and still be human. Almost bovine in her intellectual outlook, Lena comes to us as a severely limited creature, whose health, communal impulses, and fertility seem available only at the cost of physical dependency, intellectual vacuity and moral deficiency.

Like Lena Grove, Joe Christmas is constantly in motion, but with an obvious and decisive difference. Cut off from
the pure duration in which Lena lives, Joe cannot fit himself into any meaningful time structure. Just as he is alienated from both black and white societies, he can avail himself of neither the consolations of duration nor the consonance of a meaningfully ordered temporal structure. In the opening pages of the large central chunk of the novel which is devoted to his story, Joe comes to us as a man disengaged from the "myriad sounds" of "voices . . . trees, darkness, earth; people: his own voice; other voices evocative of names and times and places -- which he had been conscious of all his life without knowing it, which were his life" (p. 91). The sounds of the earth beyond his door evoke Joe's response to a world constantly alive and "aloud . . . with crickets . . . fireflies . . . whippoorwills," a response filled with the pain of alienation: "thinking God perhaps and me not knowing that too" (pp. 139, 91). When Joe first approaches Joanna Burden's house he hears "the crickets, which had ceased as he moved, keeping a little island of silence about him like thin yellow shadow of their small voices, began again, ceasing again when he moved with that tiny and alert suddenness" (p. 200). The sounds of these tiny creatures which recur throughout Joe's section of the novel persist ceaseless and profound, as an echo of the vital and sustaining duration of the earth itself, but Joe moves among them in an "island of silence" (pp. 207, 228, 246, 289). His disgust at the complex fusion of female and Negro, the
"womanshenegro," is fundamentally associated with his detachment from the sense of duration which renders Lena Grove a principle of fertility (p. 137). Joe prefers anything masculine to the mysterious presence of woman, a principle which by providing "an odor, an attenuation, and aftertaste" to his experience, tends to relate him to the continuous and abundant fertility by which the earth endures (p. 147). When Bobby tells him that she's "sick tonight" and Joe runs away into the woods, his revulsion at the idea of the menstrual cycle is reflected in an image of "a diminishing row of suavely shaped urns in moonlight, blanched . . . not one perfect . . . each one . . . cracked" (pp. 163, 165). Symbols of fecundity, the womb-like urns issue "something liquid, death-colored, and foul" (p. 165). Because of his childhood traumatic experience with the dietician, an experience which comes to be fused with his early associations with "nigger," Joe is repelled by what he unavoidably views as the foul fact of female sexuality. The whole notion of female is intimately associated with blackness as Joe climbs frantically out of the "original quarry, abyss itself" of niggertown, where the "fecundmellow voices of Negro women murmured" (pp. 102, 101). Joe's isolation is grounded in his inability to relate himself to the ongoing duration of the natural world, but it is tragically heightened by the inadequacy of the human structures on the periphery of which he is forced to exist.
Just before Joe virtually turns himself in by going to Mottstown, he is described as having "grown to manhood in the country, where like the unswimming sailor his physical shape and his thought had been molded by its compulsions without his learning anything about its shape and feel" (p. 295). The "shape and feel" of the land, with its aura of endurance, is unavailable to Joe, who inhabits a compulsively chronological time. His motion defines not a perpetual flow, but a series of distinct instants and phases. Applying Bergson's image of beads on a thread, if Lena's time is like the thread, moving through the stages defined by the beads, Joe's time is a series of beads in which the thread is rarely if ever visible. Like Lena, Joe is carried by wagons and other vehicles, but Faulkner's description of Joe's travel provides a striking contrast to Lena's peaceful progress from Doane's Mill to Jefferson:

From that night the thousand streets ran as one street, with imperceptible corners and changes of scene, broken by intervals of begged and stolen rides, on trains and trucks, and on country wagons. (p. 195)*

Joe's wagon rides constitute separate and distinct stages in his flight across the country. Rather than flowing together with the road which carries Joe forward, vehicles break up the street. The basically segmented time scheme of Joe's life is apparent as well in the prose style reminiscent of Hemingway which Faulkner uses to present Joe's experience. The short, deliberate sentences in which his movement on the morning of

*Emphasis added.
the day he murders Joanna Burden is registered could almost
be mistaken for an excerpt from "Big Two-Hearted River":

When he left the cabin it was quite light. The
birds were in full chorus. This time he turned
his back on the house. He went on past the
stable and entered the pasture beyond it. His
shoes and his trouser legs were soon sopping
with gray dew. He paused and rolled his trou-
sers gingerly to his knees and went on. At
the end of the pasture woods began. The dew was
not so heavy here, and he rolled his trousers
down again. After a while he came to a small
valley in which a spring rose. He put down the
magazine and gathered twigs and dried brush and
made a fire and sat, his back against a tree and
his feet to the blaze. Presently his wet shoes
began to steam. Then he could feel the heat
moving up his legs, and then all of a sudden he
opened his eyes and saw the high sun and that
the fire had burned completely out, and he knew
that he had been asleep. 'Damned if I haven't,'
he thought. 'Damned if I haven't slept again.'
(p. 96)

Joe's moments pass in succession as a series of distinct and
delicate acts, in this case simple and unreflective, but
still underlining his need to punctuate time, to live in
marked off intervals. Further evidence for Joe's dependence
on orderly and successive intervals is the constant reference
to clock-time through his section of the novel:

He slept less than two hours ... At seven o'clock
that evening he was in town ..., at nine o'clock
he was standing outside the barbershop ... It
must be near ten now ..., the ten strokes of the
clock ... came ..., he heard eleven strike ..., He
went to work at half past six in the morning ..., at
six in the evening he returned. (pp. 95, 98, 103,
224).

Joe's affair with Joanna moves through three phases, and in
the second, which he recalls as "the bottom of a pit in the
hot wild darkness," the six to six order of the day is
utterly disconnected with the "sewer" which "ran . . . by night" (pp. 235, 224). The most vivid example of Joe's heavily punctuated movement through time comes in the presentation of his final flight. As I shall try to show more fully later, Joe reaches a point of sufficient self-awareness to see himself as having lived "for thirty years . . . inside an orderly parade of named and numbered days like fence pickets" (pp. 289-90).

Detached from pure duration so that he can only "watch the slow flowing of time beneath him," Joe is often detached from his own motion as his body enacts it (p. 97). Joe moves constantly, compulsively, and fatally, a fact which becomes particularly evident at those points when he is able to watch his own physical behavior from a distance in "motionless . . . utterly contemplative moments." Sitting in the dietician's closet as a child, Joe seems "to be turned in on himself, watching himself sweating, watching himself smear another worm of paste into his mouth which his stomach did not want" (p. 106). When McEachern beats him, Joe's body is described as "wood or stone, a post or tower upon which the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and self-crucifixion" (pp. 130-40). And sometimes his detachment is a function of the difference in velocity between his mind's and his body's movement, as in the scene in Bobby's room after everyone but Joe has departed. Before the "wireends of volition and sentience" connect, Joe
lies watching the events above him unfolding in a kind of pure succession, flowing without punctuation until, as the "wireends" approach each other, Faulkner begins to intersperse the events with the connective "then" (p. 194). As the prose moves out of italics, "thens" pile up, reflecting Joe's increasing ability to distinguish between one moment and the next. Finally, when volition and sentience reconnect. Joe's mind still suffers, moving slower than his body so that "he was in the hall without having remembered passing through the door," a condition of some psychic discomfort to him. Finally, after gulping down the whiskey, his mind moves faster than his body, which he has to "coax... along the hall, sliding it along one wall" (p. 194). Whether body or mind moves faster, Joe watches himself move without cessation. The point is he is always moving, cannot stop moving, but also cannot relate that motion coherently to any purpose other than escape until the final stages of his flight. A similar disparity between two velocities is apparent in Joe's frantic ride into town to meet Bobby, after his violent encounter with McEachern. The horse, "going through the motion of galloping" moves, however, at the rate of a man walking, while Joe whips him on with "the same spent and terrific slowness" (p. 183). As long as the horse gallops, he and Joe create a united and "dreamy effect, like a moving picture in slow motion." But "as the progress of the horse slowed, the speed of the stick increased in exact ratio" so
that finally when the horse stops, Joe's motion appears to speed up. Joe's motion is constant, but since the horse's energy diminishes, the rider's seems to increase in order to sustain the "attitude of terrific speed" in which Joe is doomed to live. And when the horse refuses to be dragged "into motion by main strength," Joe beats it savagely and then runs "as completely out of the life of the horse as if it had never existed" (pp. 183-84). Joe's movement continues, despite his efforts to control it within a chronological scheme. His constant and apparently pointless motion reflects both his inability to escape the pure onward flow of time and his insufficient means of controlling that flow within a meaningful order. Joe is a captive of motion, and it is not until the final stage of his flight that he realizes that this motion describes a fatal course.

Joe's fatalism is intimately involved with the quality of his movement in time, for the "street which was to run for fifteen years" constitutes an image of linear, restricted and fatal motion (p. 195). Joe seems not to move down it but to be carried forward by it. The street serves as a kind of moving highway over which Joe has no control, but on which he is fixed, so that, intending to run away from Joanna's house, he finds himself approaching it instead, "as though as soon as he found that his feet intended to go there, ... he let go, seemed to float, surrendered, across the dusk" (p. 207). He is sufficiently detached from his own movement "to see himself
as from a distance, like a man being sucked down into the bottomless morass" of Joanna's corrupting womanhood, but not yet aware that "the street lonely, savage, and cool" runs not out of blackness but into it (pp. 227, 228). "Running up the stairs" from Mrs. McEachern's plaintive questions, Joe appears to be "vanishing upward from the head down as if he were running headfirst and laughing into something that obliterating him like a picture in chalk being erased from a blackboard" (p. 181). Joe is laughing as he runs here, just as he lets out a defiant "Hah" later when, having laced up the Negro's brogans,

it seemed to him that he could see himself now being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered, bearing now upon his ankles the definite and ineradicable gauge of its upward moving. (p. 289)

For most of Joe's life, the road is "wide, empty, shadow-brooded," setting him off as "a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world and lost," until, in its final version, the street can be seen as the confining circle within which Joe is "doomed by motion," driven forward at a speed constantly sustained and fatally directed (pp. 99, 197).

Eventually, the road runs "so fast that accepting . . . take the place of knowing and believing" (p. 155). It runs so fast that Joe no sooner sees a future possibility -- "Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something" -- than it has virtually become a past fact -- "Maybe
I have already done it" (pp. 91, 97). For Joe, the present constitutes something possible, "waiting to be done" because he views the present as already past (p. 97). Bergson asserts that viewing the present as a system of possibles which anticipate a future reality entails a false determinism in which the present is spuriously imprinted with the pattern of a future whose outline is unforeseeable, and Joe's predicament embodies precisely that fatalism which derives from the act of structuring the present as if it were past. According to Bergson, the possible is a concept applicable only to the past wherein we try to find the causes for the present and posit sources for that present. But when we apply this operation to the relationship between present and future, we necessarily fail because the present can only become possible from the vantage point of the future. Joe really has no present here, because he has already imposed on it the pattern which will define the future. The contrast between Joe's and Lena's modes of anticipating the future is instructive. Lena's future and past are enfolded in a perpetual present, out of which she anticipates the future and recalls the past not as distinct states, each one causing the next, but as the indistinguishable phases of a continuous flow, so that the feeling of being on the wagon, even of having been on the wagon, does not disrupt the present but seems to flow out of it without a break in time. Joe's present, however, is here defined by a pattern imposed on it as if it were
past, so that he does not, cannot really, anticipate the future, except as the reality already possible in and therefore determined by, the present. The only pattern Lena can impose on her past is that expressed in the simpleminded generalization, "My, my. A body does get around" (p. 26). But Joe exists in and is doomed by a pattern imposed before it is ever actualized. If for Lena the world is open-ended and creatively evolving, for Joe "his own flesh as well as all space" is a "cage," even though it takes him most of his life to realize this fact (p. 140).

Joe's final flight from Jefferson's panting dogs and outraged citizens constitutes his most compelling endeavor to comprehend his own fatality. And the resolution for which he struggles is reflected in his partially modified relation to time. At first he tries "to keep up with the days, after the old habit," but before long, "time ... had ... lost orderliness," so that the effort to "calculate the day of the week" becomes "an actual urgent need" (pp. 290, 290, 293). Joe imposes a pattern on pure duration by transforming the "flat pattern, going ... going on, myriad, familiar, since all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be," into the figure of the road, so that he sees it as a "circle" (p. 246, 296). That is, having temporarily lost the "orderliness" supplied by chronological time, Joe recognizes the shape of the "flat pattern" as a circle, which he understands to be "the ring of what I have already done and
cannot ever undo" (p. 296). Having understood that he can never outrun his fate because the relentless succession of day and night which constitutes duration for him is already confined and determined by the flat, circular pattern of his life, Joe is able to enjoy momentarily "the looking and seeing -- which gives him peace and unhaste and quiet," the limited repose reflected in his recognition that he no longer feels the necessity to eat. It is not the rewarding satisfaction of natural hunger which Lena's sardines provide her, "not with food," but "with the necessity to eat," previously accommodated frantically by "rotting and worm-riddled fruit" from which Joe is now free (p. 292). No longer, then, compelled to support his survival with food, and reconciled momentarily to the unrelenting progression of time, Joe is "hurrying" no more, but "is like a man who knows where he is and where he wants to go and how much time to the exact minute he has to get there in" (p. 295). Joe has finally imposed a plot on time, a plot which, though it entails doom, yet provides the consolation of order and a limited meaning. Joe has not really transcended chronological time at this point, nor has he fully penetrated pure duration. Rather, by connecting the road with time's ceaseless progression, and by re-ordering that progression into a circular pattern, Joe has endowed his movement with a directedness which his previous flight has not had for him. The meaning he thus discovers allows him
to relate himself to his world for the first time. For by building a more adequate structure for appropriating time's flow, Joe is allowed a fuller understanding of duration and an accordingly deeper sense of his inescapable immersion in it. If, as Kermode says, "we perceive a duration only when it is organized," then we must form a more comprehensive organization in order to perceive a more comprehensible duration (p. 45). Joe's circle goes beyond pure chronos but does not redeem it; and his sense of time "going on" reveals a partial penetration of duration, but not a total reconciliation with it. These are tasks left to the larger structure of the novel, in which Joe's final apotheosis is tested as kairos in the light of Gail Hightower's reluctant role as presiding consciousness over the uncertain drama culminating in his final vision.

Gail Hightower comes to us as a static and drooping figure behind a window from which he rarely moves. Repeatedly, our attention is called to the fact that he "has not moved" (pp. 77, 80, 277, 339). When Byron begins to make demands on him, Hightower's sweat, his expression of "shrinking and denial," reflects his reluctance to move, to act, to participate in the human struggle which Byron's predicament represents (pp. 87, 72). Hightower listens to Byron in brooding silence, "not offering to help," refusing to accept the obligations and risks entailed in Byron's dilemma (p. 264). Hightower's withdrawal, in fact,
constitutes his own peculiar version of flight; he is fleeing the entanglements and the burdens of life itself. He sees the church as a refuge from the world enduring beyond his window, from the "harsh gale of living and dying" (p. 419). As a youth the "hot still rich maculate smell of the earth" had both attracted and terrified him, but the terror overruled the love and he decided to "flee from it, to walls, to the artificial light" of the church (p. 278). Hightower's refusal to leave Jefferson is paradoxically a kind of flight as well, grounded as it is not only in the reasons Byron deduces in a revery echoing Hamlet, that a man will "cling to trouble he's used to before he'll risk a change," but also in the masochistic self-crucifixion in which Hightower masks his refusal to live (p. 65). In the face of the grotesque madness of old Doc Mines, Hightower sits stunned "like an awkward beast tricked and befooled of the need for flight," filled really with terror and pity at the sight of what is happening in "this terrible place," but not yet ready to add himself to that picture (pp. 338, 275). As Hightower gradually allows himself to be drawn into the drama he has only been listening to Byron tell, we see the tension between structured and durational time playing a significant role in defining his dilemma and his failed attempts to resolve it.

Hightower's life, once he is "Done Damned in Jefferson," is really divided between those moments of "green suspension"
between twilight and dark in which he relives the instant of his grandfather's death, and the careless disorder of his daily existence in which he seems to "eat like an animal," emitting the "smell of unwashed flesh" and moving amidst crumbs and dirt (pp. 52, 410, 56, 261). This duality is reflected in a face "at once gaunt and flabby... as though there were two faces, one imposed on the other," the soft flabby flesh reflecting the decay of waning years and passing time, the "gaunt" alertness reinforcing our sense of a mind still functioning, still struggling for order and meaning (p. 77). Later Byron recognizes this same duality in Hightower's appearance, making it look "as though the whole man were fleeing away from the nose which holds invincibly to something yet of pride and courage above the sluttishness of vanquishment like a forgotten flag above a ruined fortress" (p. 318). But the terms which constitute that "pride and courage," and the form which that meaning and order takes, are indeed curious. The temporal structure which Hightower has imposed on his life is essentially a series of kairoi whose significance is fundamentally inadequate because basically unrelated to the present. Psychologically, Hightower's sacred hypo-statization of the galloping horses and clashing guns derives from the "phantoms" of his childhood, both living and dead (p. 415). Enchanted by Cinthy's tales of his grandfather, a lively and robust man whose gleeful and
harmless irreverence is coupled with a "delicacy of behavior and thought," and morbidly fascinated with the possibilities implicit in the blue patch on his father's old confederate jacket. Hightower fuses and heightens the heroic dimensions of both men into the absurdly heroic incident, the famous chicken-coop disaster, which he sees as an emblem of "that fine shape of eternal youth and virginal desire which makes heroes" (pp. 413, 423). Faulkner is here alluding again to Keats's "virginal pant", but in a rather complex way. Hightower's temporal ordering, indeed fixation, is rooted in the assumption that the present represents a falling off from the past. This notion is reflected not only in the content of Hightower's repeatedly enacted instant with its Keatsian emphasis on "eternal youth" as opposed to consummated passion, but in its relation to the present world of approaching Fall as well. And yet both the content and relation to the present of Hightower's instant are absurd; his grandfather is shot with a "fowling piece" for chicken theft -- an utterly meaningless event in the context of the war itself, and despite Hightower's concerted endeavor to raise the incident to a heroic level, he can only make it more absurd, thinking "any soldier can be killed by the enemy in the heat of battle, by a weapon approved by the arbiters and rulemakers of warfare . . . But not with a shotgun, a fowling piece in a henhouse" (p. 425). Of course, it is hard to believe there is no irony here, to
believe that Hightower is not at least minimally aware of this absurdity. If he were not, he would resemble Doc Hines, whose structure has swallowed him up into a state of sheer madness. But until Hightower recognizes the futility of living in this instant, he re-enacts it every evening at twilight, not only because it punctuates and informs his existence with its own meaning, but also because it must continually be relived if it is to offer even that limited significance to his life. Because Hightower's kairos acts to halt change, to catch and preserve a single moment from the ceaseless progression of time, it has to keep on halting it because that change persists. Fundamentally severed by its very meaning from the flow of pure duration, Hightower's kairos cannot disperse its meaning beyond itself, and so must be repeated indefinitely.

However, the moment and setting in which Hightower chooses to perform this almost sacred ritual relates it tenuously to the world of change. From beyond his window, Hightower constantly hears the "myriad" sounds of insects, the same echo of life persisting that we noted in relation to Joe Christmas (pp. 79, 339, 342, 338). And while the instant functions as a kind of "momentary stay" against the "confusion" of night, it nonetheless interpolates itself into the natural world of duration in which dark and light follow each other in endless succession. While Hightower is not as unaware of change and process as is Joe, he still views it
with real horror as the endless duration in which "man performs, engenders, so much more than he can or should have to bear" (p. 262). It is only after delivering Lena's baby that Hightower is able to relate himself positively to the earth's duration: "the intermittent sun, the heat, the savage and fecund odor of the earth, the woods, . . . the treble shouts of generations" (pp. 356, 357). Unable to repress his own exuberance, Hightower sees Lena as an emblem of "the good stock peopling in tranquil obedience to it the good earth" (p. 356). Hightower feels, apparently for the first time, the perpetual boon of duration, the exfoliating and self-renewing fecundity of life, just as Joe was able momentarily to sense the "shape and feel" of the land across which he had been running.

But it is not until Hightower's final revery that the full force of the tension between the world of pure duration and the structure by which it is patterned and controlled is felt. Here, Hightower comes to see that the "shelter" which he sought in the church was really the shelter of a tomb (p. 419). Keats's "classic and serene vase" is brought forth one last time for redefinition, this time to reinforce our sense that Hightower's appropriation of a defunct meaning is a refuge from the passing of time, forming for him "safe walls within which the hampered and garmentworried spirit could learn anew serenity to contemplate without horror or alarm its own nakedness" (p. 419). The urge for order is so
strong that Hightower clings to his vision of the galloping horses at the same time that he admits it may be Cinthy's invention: "And if Cinthy did not invent the incident, I still believe," he says, "because even fact cannot stand with it" (p. 424). And as he leans forward in rapt attentiveness at the realizations about to unfold before him in a kind of epiphany, Hightower recognizes the division in his life reflected in "the two instants about to touch: the one which is the sum of his life, which renews itself between each dark and dusk, and the suspended instant out of which the soon will presently begin," the discrepancy between the constant process which sustains all life in pure duration and the inadequate pattern imposed on that duration by the re-enacted instant, whose approach is heralded each evening by the whispered "Now, soon . . . soon, now" (pp. 426, 52).

Hightower's memory of the church elders who had hesitantly greeted him on his arrival in Jefferson reflects a similar distinction; forming a "picture of hale and respected full years," they embody an accomplished and successful ordering of life, but the "sheer accumulation of frustration and doubt which is so often the other side of the picture" registers the inadequacy of that ordering and the cumulative weight of unredeemed time, inadequately structured duration. The church itself is a failure, not because of the "outward groping of those within it nor the inward groping of those without," but because of the barriers which make that groping
necessary, the walls it has erected against change in its
dogmatic hardening and consequent distortion of the "truth"
(pp. 426, 427). Those within are unsatisfied with the
limited meaning afforded by the church's rigid structure,
but those without lack even that structure, and so exist in
the uncertain contingencies of duration. "The professionals
who control" the church have "removed the bells from its
steeples," severing its relations with the real world of
durational time, and thus rendering inadequate the structure
of meaning. the "truth," whose vitality depends on its
capacity to inform pure duration, the sheer ongoing process
of meaningless change with "that peace in which to sin and
be forgiven . . . is the life of man" (pp. 426-27). The
missing bells, like the "clatter" of Armstid's wagon and the
whirr of the insects, registers duration in an auditory
image. The church's "truth" is the paradigmatic fiction,
constituting an organization of time in which a kairos
allegedly fills all time before and since with meaning and
thus redeems history by providing man with a place in it.
But the church, having defiled that organization by severing
it from the duration which it was its purpose to order and
redeem, now emerges as itself "without order," simply another
feature of the "endless . . . empty . . . and bleak" terrain
of unstructured duration, an institution now "symbolical"
not of the "ecstasy or passion" it was designed to offer,
but of "adjuration, threat, and doom" (p. 426). In Kermode's
terms, the church has regressed from fiction to myth; 9 by
hypostatizing time into a rigid dogma for which it demands
total credulity and obedience, the church has severed its
fiction from the pure duration which thus stands again in
need of a structure to give it human meaning.

Accordingly, Hightower's final vision constitutes the
novel's most concerted attempt to create a meaning adequate
to man's needs. The "wheel of thinking" which becomes a
"halo" is the complex vehicle for a metaphor whose tenor
includes "all the faces which he has ever seen" (pp. 428,
430). As wheel, the vehicle moves incessantly; as halo it
appears to be static. The metaphor forms the culmination
of all the novel's images of motion and stasis -- Lena
on the urn, the numerous "corridors" through which people
move, the "equestrian statue" formed by Joe and his stum-
bling horse, McEachern poised for the kill, the trains
and wagons seen in the distance. 10 Having realized that
he has been "a single instant of darkness in which a horse
galloped and a gun crashed," and has therefore been totally
enthralled by a radically limited structure his commitment
to which has severed him from the constant change which
sustains life itself so that he has "not even been clay,"
Hightower enacts the novel's most ambitious single effort
for a structure which will accommodate man's need for meaning
without ignoring or defiling duration itself (p. 430). Yet
the faces of Joe Christmas and Percy Grimm still "seem to
strive" with one another, "not of themselves striving or desiring it . . . but because of the motion and desire of the wheel itself" (p. 430). So the wheel becomes a kind of wheel of fortune, grinding on, oblivious to man's needs and desires, lifting him up and lowering him but never fully affording the peace for which he struggles. So the wheel too, and the vision it embodies, fail finally to inform duration with meaning, to redeem man by imposing a comprehensive structure on time. Defeated, Hightower hears "the lost and unheeded crying of all the living who ever lived, wailing still like lost children among the cold and terrible stars" (p. 431). He understands that duration implies continuity, that the living and the dead are indissolubly linked by their immersion in the flow of time, but he fails to impose a plot on that flow which will redeem their suffering and stop their crying, changing the alien and "terrible" heavens into an image not of incomprehensible duration but of comprehensive order (p. 431). Accordingly, Hightower is left only with his phantoms, "the wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves," and we are left with an image of his figure still in the window brooding in profound despair at the sight of "poor man, poor mankind" caught as it is between its longing for peace and its search for meaning (pp. 432, 87).

Hightower's vision symbolizes the larger task of the novel as a whole, which struggles to fulfill the need for a
structure sufficiently resilient to appropriate the ceaseless flow of time into an ordered 'fiction' within which man can find meaning. The most obvious feature of this struggle is implicit in the relationship the novel creates between past and present. While the present time of the novel moves forward, the past is cumulatively enfolded into that present. That is, from the moment we encounter Lena sitting in the ditch to the final moment in which the furniture salesman relates his curious story to his wife, time pushes forward, seeming never to stop despite the lengthy flashbacks into the past. Faulkner's technique is something like montage, the cinematographical insertion of flashbacks into the progression of the frames which creates a sense of a perpetual present. But montage only suggests the way in which Faulkner sustains our feeling of time's uninterrupted motion. For Faulkner's medium is language, not film, and while Morris describes his technique, it does not explain it. More helpful to an understanding of Faulkner's means of modulating into the past without violating the flow of the present is Bergson's notion of memory as automatically preservative. The paragraph leading into Joe's history, which constitutes the longest foray into the past if not the deepest penetration of it, works primarily on the principle that memory is not a system of pigeon holes, but simply a part of the flow of our consciousness, our "attention to life" from which we are artificially alienated by virtue of
lost interest. Accordingly, "Memory believes before knowing remembers," because memory represents that intuitive awareness, that "attention to life," which never wanes but is only interrupted, so that "knowing," intelligence, must "remember," must search for and select those moments from the past which it deems relevant to the present (p. 104). "Memory . . . believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders," and so represents a sustained subterranean flow, fundamentally unaffected by the interruptions imposed from above by the contingencies of survival (p. 104). Accordingly, Faulkner modulates into the past without interrupting the flow of the present by referring his shift to a dimension which includes both past and present within the ceaseless flux of duration. He not only introduces the shift in this way, but repeats his appeal to memory as an enduring aspect of the present like a refrain throughout the following chapters, reinforcing our sense of the fundamental continuity of time (pp. 123, 128, 153, 192, 201). Consequently, as the present of the novel flows on, we move simultaneously deeper and deeper into the past until, with Hightower's reverie, we reach a point before the civil war with Hightower's grandfather. Moving further into the past, the novel appropriates larger and larger chunks of time into a structure which is constantly struggling to enfold them in its accumulating meaning. The effort to circumscribe more and more of time's pure flow within an increasing
interval is founded on the principle that we can come to terms with duration only as it is ordered within an interval.

But the novel not only operates on this structural principle but calls our attention to it by deliberately biting off more than it seems able to chew. By imposing not one but three plots on an interval of duration which accordingly spreads out both laterally in the present and vertically into the past, the novel sets itself an enormous task of assimilation which forms, however, the necessary structural base for its larger thematic concerns. As the structure informs more and more of duration with meaning by circumscribing it within an ordered whole, that order is continually revealing itself as inadequate to the larger demands for meaning posed by the continually expanding duration against which it is set. Thus there is a constant tension in the novel between time's ceaseless motion and man's attempts to impose a structure large enough to give that motion a meaning, to humanize it. The repeated allusion to Keats and the cumulative refinements and redefinitions of the urn reflect the constantly renewed attempt to create meaning which just as constantly fails, but seems to fail in increasingly more important, because more energetically committed, ways.

I have tried to provide evidence of this tension as it makes itself felt in the novel's major characters, whose predicaments are reflected at least partially by their
inability to define a satisfactorily meaningful relationship to pure duration. But the individual attempts to accommodate ceaseless change punctuate the larger struggle which the novel as a whole enacts. *Light in August* is thematically informed by the vision of a radically diminished world, a vision cumulatively reinforced by that recurring moment of lambence when "all light has failed out of the sky and it would be night save for that faint light which daygranaried leaf and grass blade reluctant suspire, making still a little light on earth, though night itself has come" (pp. 51-52). This world is diminished not because it has ceased to grow and change, as the constant and "myriad" buzz of the insects always associated with this lambent moment remind us, but because of the lack of ordered meaning available to its inhabitants. The church's meaning has been relegated to a realm analogous to the Platonic Ideal, severed from the pulsing flow of life and consequently emptied of human relevance. The townspeople of Jefferson form a community devoted not to life, but to death, by virtue of their commitment to the rigid distinctions, both literal and figurative, of black and white. The novel enacts a struggle for a form which will compensate for the lack of coherent meaning that constitutes its diminishment. And while it fails to find that form, fails adequately to impose a plot on duration which will humanize it, the struggle itself emerges as an exercise in redemption.
That is, if Lena Grove's tranquil obedience to the earth fails to offer a meaning for the horror embodied in a diminished world, and Joe Christmas' circumscription of his life within the coherent pattern of fatalism fails to redeem that life, and if Gail Hightower's tragic vision of the human community as continuous and whole fails to provide a kairos sufficiently ample comprehensively to order the sheer chronos of life, the cumulative effort which each and all represent reflects the ongoing struggle for meaningful form which the novel itself enacts. Even Byron Bunch, who represents in a way the most resilient effort to accommodate order and duration by modifying his strictly ordered life style in the service of the larger demands of both Joe and Lena, fails to offer an example of fully adequate meaning. For while his habitual conversations with Hightower represent a minimal community, and while he responds humanely to all the characters, he emerges as almost pitiful in the final chapter where Lena treats him like a naughty boy. His pain is less acute than Joe's and Hightower's, but the meaning he finds sufficient to his needs, though impressive, is finally too limited to appropriate fully the world in which he lives.

Finally, the tension between endless duration and the human endeavor to impose a plot, a redemptive order on that flux, persists unresolved and unalleviated. The novel as a whole seeks to redeem a diminished world by making of Joe
Christmas' death a *kairos* for which Hightower's vision can supply a context and reference, but fails ultimately because that world keeps on moving. The distancing effected by telling the final episode in Lena's story and the final chapter of the novel through a new character, the furniture salesman, serves to reinforce the sense of time's incessant onward progression. Lena Grove's story acts as both bracket and ellipsis, to enclose and relieve the tragedy of Joe Christmas, and to extend and heighten its intensity. By virtue of her health, her fundamental communality, and the sheer humor of her simple responses to life, she acts as comic relief to an intensely horrifying drama. But by virtue of the persistence and endlessness she comes to embody, her story extends and amplifies the tragedy it circumscribes. For, as Hightower realizes, it is the very endlessness of time itself, its unrelenting onward movement, which forces man to keep on bearing the pain of living without being able to inform it fully with meaning.
Notes to Chapter IV


4 Representative of the arguments for continuity is Peter Swiggart's *The Art of Faulkner's Novels* (Austin, 1962), while Donald Sutherland's "Time on Our Hands," *Yale French Studies* 10 (1953) no. 10, argues for discontinuity.

5 Darrel Abel has dealt with some of the Bergsonian aspects of Faulknerian time which concern me, but as I try to show, his treatment stops short of developing what I consider the full significance of Bergsonian duration as it functions in *Light in August*. See Darrel Abel, "Frozen Movement in *Light in August*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of *Light in August*,* David L. Minter, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, 1969), pp. 42-53.

Two studies which also attend to the affinities between Faulkner and Bergson are Donald M. Kartiganer's "The Sound and Fury and Faulkner's Quest for Form" *ELH* 37 (December, 1970), and Karl E. Zink's "Form as Experience," *South Atlantic Quarterly* (July, 1954), pp. 384-403.


8 Indeed, Hightower’s grandfather is presented as the most attractive character in the novel. With his "swagger, his bluff and simple adherence to a simple code," he is presented in terms which make him hard to resist, as the anecdote about his invasion of a revival meeting makes clear: "... he invaded a protracted al fresco church revival being held in a nearby grove and turned it into a week of amateur horse racing while to a dwindling congregation gaunt, fanaticfaced country preachers thundered anathema from the rustic pulpit at his oblivious and unregenerate head" (p. 413). Such a character, lurking in the background of the novel, serves to reinforce the sense of a diminished world.


10 See especially pp. 6, 7, 104, 178, 183, 5, 386.

11 Hightower comes to understand this devotion to death as he listens to the hymns being sung in the church, noting that "the music has still a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant justice" (pp. 321-22). Death comes to be allied with form in the novel, just as life comes to be allied with formlessness.
Epilogue

"We are here to preserve disorder."

--- Robert Lowell, quoting Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago
It does not take a huge leap of imagination to perceive the contemporary scene as roughly analogous to the Emersonian era. The desire to reform if not destroy existing institutions, the violent rejection of role and conditioned temperament by Blacks and women, the Dionysian thrust of rock music, the suspicion aroused by the impersonal designs of technology, the growing impetus to return to the land beyond the stifling confines of urban living -- these are only a few of the symptoms of a rejection of form as repressive and dehumanizing. Communes again proliferate as the urge to begin again makes itself felt. But just as Emerson rejected the Brook Farm experiment in favor of a radically personal repudiation of form, many now reject social reform in favor of a personal retreat through transcendental meditation, drugs, or the heady intoxication of newly discovered eastern religions.

After thirty years of large-scale social planning by the growing bureaucracy of government, we now seek independence and de-centralization. Richard Sennett has suggested that urban living can be redeemed only by actively creating disorder. In opposition to the purified and exclusive rigidity of the suburban enclave, Sennett poses an urban neighborhood where conflict is allowed to manifest itself on a personal level, so as to prevent the escalation into violence which he sees as a consequence of leaving the control of society to the external and impersonal forces of police and city government. Instead of planning cities so as to separate
hostile elements from each other, he claims we should actively encourage a mixture of those elements by eliminating zoning restrictions. What is remarkable about Sennett's argument is that he is advocating the creation of disorder, the active courting of spontaneity and unrestricted interaction among people. No longer struggling to find a form which will impose order on a changing and chaotic scene, we seem again to be seeking the elusive boon of open-ended and unpredictable process.

Other examples of the struggle against repressive form are plentiful. Norman O. Brown's argument for the "poly-morphous perversity" of the as yet unpressed child, Herbert Marcuse's advocacy of "negative freedom -- i.e., freedom from the oppressive and ideological power of given facts," R. D. Laing's theory that psychosis should be allowed to follow its course rather than being opposed by misguided therapy -- these are among the better known instances of contemporary minds seeking a perspective from which life can be seen to persist beneath the oppressive forms of an advanced technological civilization.

The same opposition is apparent in literature. Sylvia Plath's "bell jar" marks a decisive shift from Stevens' "jar in Tennessee." The stifling confinement of schizophrenia is imaged in a metaphor strikingly similar to that used by Stevens to convey ordered meaning. The world of Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is presented as a well-oiled
machine, whose sterile efficiency is epitomized in the figure of Big Nurse. Against the strictly ordered forms of the psychiatric ward, McMurphy brings to bear the full force of individual freedom, so that the "rules" are seen for what they are -- artificial tools of repression and dehumanization. McMurphy's disruption of this machine leads to his lobotomy but also to Chief Broom's liberation. The possibility of redemption is, however, absent from James Dickey's *Deliverance*. Here the Ishmaelean quest for meaning beyond the confines of civilization leads to the discovery that civilization cannot be escaped. Seeking deliverance from the "normalcy" of stable existence, the narrator discovers that murder and rape can be assimilated into that "normalcy" because they are essentially extensions of it. The four men in *Deliverance* do not conquer the wilderness, nor are they conquered by it; they find that it does not exist at all, save as a fundamentally impersonal medium through which they come to express their sickness and despair. Self-consciously enacting their desire to pit the self against nature, they end up enacting a contrived ritual in which they play out their fantasies of violence and heroism. The desired deliverance eludes them because the wilderness they seek cannot be separated from the adolescent fantasies through which they perceive it. What makes *Deliverance* so disturbing is not the notion that man explodes into violence once he steps beyond the regulations of civilized life, but
rather the revelation that that violence is implicit in man, and that though he can move outside the given form of civilization, he cannot escape either the desire for form or the urge within him to violate it.

Just as Emerson repudiated form as given to discover the possibilities of form as created, writers like Barth, Borges, and Coover, faced with the fact that reality is a system of increasingly insufferable forms, have taken on fiction-making as a liberating role. No longer constrained by the delusion that fiction must conform to 'reality' (the latter itself being, after all, a fiction), they construct elaborate designs and variations on familiar designs, whose appeal both for reader and author resides in the pleasure of imagining for its own sake. In "The Magic Poker," Coover focuses on the open-ended possibilities of fiction-making:

I wander the island, inventing it. I make a sun for it, and trees -- pines and birch and dogwood and firs -- and cause the water to lap the pebbles of its abandoned shores. . . . I deposit shadows and dampness, spin webs and scatter ruins . . . I impose a hot midday silence, a profound and heavy stillness. But anything can happen.  

If culture and nature are increasingly difficult to distinguish, both coming to us as the finished products of the human mind, one way of asserting human freedom is to play with our heads, as it were, building fictions upon fictions in a fantasy world we can no longer distinguish epistemologically from the 'real' world. Accordingly, Barth weaves elaborate new variations on both the traditional myths and
the structures we presently inhabit, to make *Giles Goat Boy*. 
Faulkner was engaged in this kind of play when he took the 
old myths and worked potentially endless variations on them, 
revivifying them by imagining them anew. Such 'play' is 
similarly at work in the "new journalism" of Tom Wolfe. 
Given the fact that objective perception is impossible, that 
the 'actual' event is wholly subjective, i.e., wholly 
dependent on the perceiver's point of view, Wolfe employs 
the techniques of fiction to portray the 'actual' events 
he reports. Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night* is ex-
plicitly grounded in the ambiguous relationship between fact 
and fiction, between "The Novel as History" and "History as 
a Novel." In Book I, or "History as a Novel" Mailer depicts 
the picaresque adventures of the "reporter" as he moves 
through the chaotic assault on the Pentagon; in Book II, or 
"The Novel as History," he fills in social and political 
background but freely admits his perceptions are refracted 
through a "warped telescope." The effect of his dually 
conceived enterprise is to blur the line between fact and 
'fiction' altogether. By the time he writes *Miami and the 
Siege of Chicago*, the line has disappeared altogether; the 
book opens with a vision of Miami modeled on Dickens' 
opening description of London in *Bleak House*. Mailer is 
still writing journalism, but journalism has become an 
open-faced lie. The reader who seeks objectivity must 
settle for a choice among or a synthesis of, fictions. We
may have to abandon any hope of objective truth, but we can still find room to move through imaginative play.

Another response to the current sense of form as repressive is exemplified in the open poetry of the last two decades, a movement whose debt to Whitman is obvious. Monroe K. Spears sees in this poetry "a drive . . . toward openness, toward eliminating any aesthetic discontinuity; the poem is no longer timeless artifact, but designed to draw the reader into time, immerse him in immediate experience." 9 Spears refers not only to the "confessional" poets -- Plath, Sexton, Snodgrass, but to the "anti-poets," such as Ginsberg, Creeley, and Felinghetti as well. 10 If, as Tony Tanner's recent study reveals, contemporary fiction is thematically concerned with rigidly defined structures and the insistent desire to explode and transcend them, contemporary poetry evinces a similar urge. Robert Lowell's career is especially revealing in this respect. The transition from Lord Weary's Castle to Life Studies and finally to Notebook, traces a gradual opening of poetic form as well as personality. Viewed in retrospect, Lowell's early work appears not only as a stratifyingly accomplished poetic apprenticeship, but also as the construction of a history, a stage from which the maked lines of Life Studies and Notebook are to be uttered. Or, to put it another way, if Lord Weary's Castle establishes Lowell's cultural heritage, and Life Studies and For the Union Dead realize his personal history, Notebook 1967-68 and Notebook
(revised) enact his present, forming the "poem of the act of the mind," continually "in the act of finding what will suffice." Out of his experience, Lowell forges a poem which appropriates a continually present experience. Time pushes him forward, forcing upon him an imperative imaginatively to assimilate the present moment. While there are occasional flashbacks to the past, the present seems to render impossible the kind of interior search into a private past which dominates Life Studies. Toward the end of Notebook, in "For John Berryman," Lowell looks back wistfully to the private mode of Life Studies: "Ah privacy," he says,

... as if you wished to mount some rock by a mossy stream, and count the sheep -- fame that renews the soul, but not the heart,12

and restates his sense of the richness of the present, saying, "the ebb tide flings up wonders: rivers, linguini, beer cans, bloodstreams, eddies" (p. 255). The imagery of the ebb tide flinging up wonders is echoed in Lowell's "Afterword," where he reaffirms his method of responding poetically to what time "flings" before him; "accident threw up subjects," he says, "and the plot swallowed them -- famished for human chances" (p. 262).

Just as Whitman struggled to realize and to integrate self and world through an ongoing poetic act, Lowell imaginatively realizes "this Land and Time we swim in" in relation to a single life -- his own. So essential is the integration of self and world through the ongoing poetic process, that
when in "My Death," Monsignor Illich asks "Will you die, when the book is done?" Lowell replies, "I have begun to wonder" (p. 129). The growth of Notebook has already begun to resemble the growth of Leaves of Grass; the 1969 editions, both entitled Notebook 1967-68, were again revised and expanded to become, simply, Notebook, a volume unlimited by dates. Like Whitman, Lowell is both telling "the story of my life," and struggling to give it form. The new poems added to the 1970 edition, he says "have not been placed as a single section or epilogue. They were scattered where they caught, intended to fulfill my poem, not sprawl into chronicle" (p. 264). Just as Whitman continued to enact self and world poetically, struggling continually to inform that process with coherent meaning, Lowell enfolds the "subjects" thrown up by "accident" within a pattern of seasonal change, whose unifying image is the green leaf turning to brown. If for Whitman, the grass became the symbol of endless proliferation, for Lowell, the "green grass turns to hay" (p. 230), and the grass comes to symbolize eternal process -- birth, decay, death, and rebirth. Lowell's unifying design is not set in opposition to process but derives from the basic life cycle represented by seasonal change. Process, for Lowell, is not incessant growth and progress, but "the green paint . . . always peeling from the prospect" (p. 47). While Whitman struggled to assimilate and realize an endlessly expanding world, Lowell is confronted
with the Oven Bird's problem -- "what to make of a diminished thing," how, that is, to cope with a world in which life is stifled by the oppression man himself has conceived and established. Lowell's "plot," then, struggles not to impose a "sense of an ending" on time, but to "run the doubtful parallel between having human life and the moment just now gone" (p. 230), to preserve a sense of life's vitality in the face of the "steamroller" crushing "the flower" (p. 229). The sterile, impersonal, and brutal forces of modern civilization are opposed by the fragile voice of the aging poet, who asserts that "Life, hope, they conquer death, generally, always," but has to re-assert his faith continually.

At the beginning I said that a major function of form is to preserve meaning, to sustain the viability of the pattern by which we order our lives. What we see in contemporary literature, as well as American culture to a significant extent, is a large-scale effort to recover and preserve the "unconquered flux" at the heart of life (p. 261). Whether by exercising our imagination to create fictional worlds, or by immersing ourselves in the flow of time, we are following Mayor Richard Daley's unwitting injunction "to preserve disorder" in the face of an order we cannot tolerate. Just as preserving the wilderness is no longer simply desirable but essential to our survival, preserving our sense of life as open-ended process seems no longer an Emersonian
pipe-dream, but a vital necessity. Accordingly, the forms which our major poets and authors forge are designed to create and preserve not a pattern within which life can be contained, but a vision of life as uncontained by the patterns we have imposed. If for James, art redeemed life by giving it form, for Lowell in the Notebooks, poetry redeems form by giving it life.
Notes to the Epilogue


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