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Springhouse in Snake Time
Melville’s The Confidence-Man:
   Epistemology and Art
Museum Piece No. 16228
“To Make a Prairie”: Language and Form
   in Emily Dickinson’s Poems
about Mental Experience
Women in the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald
Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!
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On Sitting Up Late, Watching Kittens
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M.A. (art) ’79, Ball State University. Cash award, 1979 Drawing and Small
Sculpture Show, Ball State University Art Gallery.

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Muncie, Indiana
A blacksnake
sticks an
    inch
of darkness
out of a
stone crack
over the
springhouse
doors—
    slowly,
    ice-edge-
    slowly,
pulls
nine rings
    out
of ice-age
chill—
oozing
over the
lintel—
    head
in the sun
asway in
time with the
blackberry’s
swaying canes.
Epistemology interested Melville. In an important scene from *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael gazes at two whales’ heads which hang on either side of the Pequod to balance it. One reminds him of the British empiricist John Locke, the other of the German idealist Immanuel Kant. Both heads must be present, Ishmael says, in order to steady the boat.1

Melville was well-aware of the philosophical debate, important in his times, that this scene embodies: the relationship between the mind and the world. He knew the relevant literature: those endless discussions in the eighteenth century on the nature of the imagination, as in Akenside’s popular philosophical poem, *The Pleasures of Imagination*, and Addison’s influential *Spectator* papers;2 the issue of the sublime, particularly in Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*;3 Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* and Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*;4 the thought, if not the essays, of Emerson;5 and especially, the Transcendentalism of Kant. Though Melville may not have read Kant in the original, he was familiar enough with the German’s ideas to have sat up all one night, on his 1849 voyage to England, discussing them.6

In his fictions, Melville examines the issues this debate involved. Does the imagination act as a lamp? Do fancies color reality with their own light, or is the mind like a mirror, seeing and reflecting the objects before it?7 Ishmael’s idea of balance provides one answer.

This was not only an epistemological question, however. Since the imagination is also responsible for art, the issue became one of aesthetics as well. In this connection, *The Confidence-Man* is especially interesting for the changes it indicates in Melville’s epistemology and his aesthetic creed. Published in 1857, *The Confidence-Man* came at the end of a series of experiments in prose forms. Melville began with the travel narratives, *Typee* and *Omoo*, where he stressed the factuality of the works he was writing. In the preface to *Typee*, he said that he would “speak the unvarnished truth”...
(my emphasis) while in that of Omoo he wrote that “he [had] merely described what he [had] seen.”

In 1849, Melville turned from these travel tales to the romance, in Mardi, and again, after Redburn and White Jacket, in Moby-Dick and Pierre. His remarks indicate his awareness of the change. He wished to see, he said in the preface to Mardi, whether “in this romance . . . fiction might not, possibly, be received for a verity,” while, in a letter to Richard Henry Dana on Moby-Dick, he stressed the imaginative act. “Blubber is blubber you know,” he said. “. . . tho’ you may get oil out of it, the poetry runs as hard as sap from a frozen maple tree;— + to cook the thing up, one must needs throw in a little fancy.”

After the disappointing reception of Pierre, however, which Melville called his “regular romance,” he went on to other modes. He wrote for the magazines in the short story form and the sketch, then the novel, his term for The Confidence-Man. Obviously, aesthetic theory was much on his mind as he searched for forms which would sell but would also be powerful and effective art.

What is not so obvious, however, are the connections between Melville’s epistemology and his aesthetic creed.

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9 Melville, Letters, p. 150.
10 Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, ed. Elizabeth S. Foster (New York: Hendricks House, 1954), Chapter XLIV. Future references are to this edition and appear as CM in parentheses in the text.
11 Melville mentioned in one famous letter that dollars damned him, preventing him from writing as he wished. He also spoke derisively, in a letter to his brother Allen, of Typee, his first book. He was obviously displeased with the travelogue form. See Melville, Letters, p. 199.
finds more than blubber in them. Melville's romance of Ahab and his supernatural revenge is the fictional result.

The right whale's head and the sperm whale's head are perfectly balanced in *Moby-Dick*. This idea of balance was important in Melville's later career as well. However, the union of perception and imagination rests on the condition that the eye *can* see and the fancy imagine. *The Confidence-Man* indicates that Melville questioned this belief. When he did—when his epistemology grew more bleak—his aesthetic theory followed suit.

Since epistemology precedes aesthetics, the source of knowledge is Melville's first concern. Ishmael's idea of balance still furnishes the paradigm, but in *The Confidence-Man*, Melville reverses his sailor's thought. Here we enter an epistemological nightmare, baffling to the eye and the imagination as well. Melville explores this philosophical tangle then shows its significance for the storyteller's art.

The theme of imperception is central to the *The Confidence-Man*. This is a world where appearance is not reality and the eye cannot see, as the experience of many characters attests. The old miser down in the Fidèle's hold, confronted by the agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company and wanting to decide whether to invest money or not, provides a model. He has no perceptions on which to base his acts. He is asked to have confidence: "Honesty's best voucher is honesty's face" (CM, p. 84) but in the gloom he is not able to judge. "Can't see yours, though," he replies "peering through the obscurity" (CM, p. 84). His own feeble eyesight and the dim light of the hold combine to make perception impossible.

The miser's difficulty is that of the other characters as well. Passengers on the Fidèle's deck "scrutinize" (CM, p. 11) Black Guinea closely but cannot discover whether he is an imposter or not. The good merchant, Mr. Roberts, stares at Mr. Ringman. Yet, look as hard as he might, he does not see in this fellow the friend Ringman professes to be. Charles Arnold Noble, who tells us the story of Indian haters and Indian hating, tries to catch a glimpse of Colonel Moredock yet never succeeds. However, the "clean, comely old man" (CM, p. 273) who closes the novel is in the worst straits of all. He first wants to test the validity of his money, but look as he might, he cannot discern the goose reputed to be on his bill. Moreover, he does not see the life preservers he has been told are on board, or even his way back to his own state-room. To him, perception is simply impossible.

Melville's metaphor for this situation is taken from drama. He compares the world to a masquerade. His choice of image is important since drama is primarily a *visual* art, but this is a drama which baffles the eye. Moreover, because its Transcendental insights rest on perception, the imagination is stymied as well.

Melville makes this clear when he considers the imagination's tools. The eye observes facts; the fancy works with images. Thus, in *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael called the whale his "symbol." Metaphors and symbols are important in *The Confidence-Man* too.

Like perception, however, they take
part in that masquerade which pervades the novel. Melville's prose is filled with metaphors and symbols, but their connections with Transcendental meaning have broken down. They tell character and reader little or nothing of what existence is like. Aboard the Fidèle, then, we enter a world of metaphoric and symbolic "no trust" without Ishmael's authoritative voice to interpret the images for us.

Melville studies the metaphor first, with vivid comparisons for his cast of characters. From the "lamb-like" (CM, p. 5) mute at the beginning of the book to the "Toucan fowl" (CM, p. 149) at the end, the persons we meet seem to be fully described. Thus Black Guinea is compared to a dog, the wooden-legged man to a "Canada thistle" (CM, p. 15) and a porcupine. The backwoods invalid is a "Titan" (CM, p. 96) and Pitch a "queer 'coon" (CM, p. 158). But perhaps the most extensive metaphor, running throughout the book, is that of the Confidence-Man in many of his guises, and the devil. Pitch best articulates this comparison when he reflects on the Philosophical Intelligence Officer after the man has left him: "Analogically, he couples the slanting cut of the equivocator's coat-tails with the sinister cast in his eye ... the insinuator's undulating flunkyisms dovetail into those of the flunky beast that windeth his way on his belly" (CM, p. 148).

These metaphors should be illuminating comparisons; their intent is to give knowledge. Unfortunately, aboard the Fidèle, they merely promise information that they do not deliver. Since the surface of life is a masquerade, the terms of the metaphors constantly change. There is no essential nature or stable fact to which an image can refer.

Thus a likeness reflects only a momentary correspondence. Look again and the comparison might change. Is the mute we first meet Christ-like, as the term "lamb" would suggest, or is he too a manifestation of the Confidence-Man? Is Black Guinea a friendly dog or another guller, a white operator in disguise? Is Pitch a bristly 'coon, a misanthrope, or a disappointed philanthropist, hiding his love of man under his quills? And what about the running comparison of the Confidence-Man and Satan? Critical debate indicates that this metaphor is hardly clear. The epistemological situation is grim for character and reader alike.

The exchange between Pitch and the Philosophical Intelligence Officer is about this problem: the nature of metaphor in the world of the Fidèle. Over the years, Pitch has had experience with many boys, "five and thirty" (CM, p. 12)
132) to be exact. He has seen them; he has observed them. He should know what they are like. Rascals all, he says, basing his judgment on his perceptions; he will not trust another.

At least he won’t until the Philosophical Intelligence Officer introduces his doctrine of analogies. With his adept comparisons, this avatar of the Confidence-Man shakes Pitch’s convictions. A boy is like “a little preliminary rag-paper study, or careless cartoon, so to speak, of a man” (CM, p. 137), a bud that will one day flower, or a caterpillar that will become a butterfly. Just as a beard fills out a hairless chin or permanent teeth replace the old, a boy’s youthful state is only the beginning of a very different growth.

Pitch is able to resist these metaphors, but at last one of them parallels his experience just closely enough to sway him. The Philosophical Intelligence Officer draws on the horticultural kingdom. A boy is like Indian corn, sickly when planted in May but growing stiff and straight by harvest time in August. Pitch becomes excited. Because of what he has seen, his own corn, he feels he can trust this comparison, and thus another boy. The doctrine of analogies has inspired his faith.

Unfortunately, in The Confidence-Man, metaphors, as Pitch has observed earlier, are only puns with ideas instead of words. Mere superficial games, analogies tell nothing about the nature of the objects they describe. In fact, Pitch’s name itself indicates this. He is not pitch-like; he does not stick to what he says despite the analogy which suggests that he will. With this reverse pun, Melville makes his epistemological point.

In the final scene between the Cosmopolitan and the comely old man Melville makes his point again. Ribaldly he reminds us, one last time, that comparisons do not reflect truth. The old man wants a life-preserver but is unsure of where to find one. “What are they like?” (CM, p. 285) he asks his guide, wanting a helpful analogy in reply. “They are something like this, sir, I believe,” says the Cosmopolitan, “lifting a brown stool with a curved tin compartment underneath” (CM, p. 285). Of course, the comparison is totally inapt. Life preservers are nothing like chamber pots, and, in an emergency, the old man would be foolish to trust that they were. He is helpless. Metaphors direct him falsely. On the Fidèle their ability to suggest valid correspondences has broken down.

If metaphors are of no assistance aboard this boat, symbols fare no better. Nevertheless, the surface of the novel seems as replete with symbols, hinting at meanings beyond themselves, as it is with metaphors. Characters who seem to have transcendental significance appear: for example, the agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company or the little peddler boy with his flame-like dress. Places—the land in New Jerusalem; the Devil’s Joke where the Philosophical Intelligence Officer leaves the boat—and things—the Black Rapids Coal Company; the horned altar; the Fidèle itself—all seem meant to convey a symbolic pattern that will illuminate the novel. What such a pattern might be, however, Melville never makes clear, as critical debate over The Confidence-
Man indicates. Are we on a world-ship, directed by the devil and headed for the pits?15 Or is our situation less bleak, if only we recognize the Confidence-Man's spurious demands?16 The emblematic quality of Ishmael's white whale, which he articulated for us, becomes symbolic confusion aboard the Fidele.

This is indeed an epistemological nightmare, and one Melville knew had profound implications for art. That transcendental world, where objects point to meanings beyond themselves, cannot be reached because the artist's ability to capture those meanings in metaphors and symbols has broken down. The imagination is helpless. It cannot balance the eye; the author cannot write Romantic art.

Therefore, The Confidence-Man is not a romance, with "a little fancy" thrown in, but a novel, and Melville stresses the only faculty that remains: the terribly weak and terribly uncertain, but now very important, eye. Perception, not the transcendental imagination, is the sole basis for the novelist's art.

Melville creates a parable for this situation in the storyteller Judge Hall, whose tale is confined to what he can observe. Though the Judge wants to tell about the Indian-Hater par excellence, he finds that he cannot. This creature's life "... has the impenetrability of the fate of a lost steamer ..." (CM, p. 170), for he exists far away in the woods and has never been seen. "How evident," says the Judge, "that in strict speech there can be no biography of an Indian-Hater par excellence, any more than one of a swordfish, or other deep sea denizen; or, which is still less imaginable, one of a dead man" (CM, p. 170, my emphasis).

The term "biography" for the writer's task is important. Melville had used it before, in "Bartleby the Scrivener," to indicate a truthful tale. There the lawyer-narrator had said, "What my own astonished eyes saw ... that is all I know of him. ..."17 That was all he could tell as well. Though the fact that "no materials exist, for a full and satisfactory biography" of Bartleby was "an irreparable loss to literature" (PT, p. 16), such a situation could not be helped. "Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from original sources, and, in his case, those are very small" (PT, p. 16). Confined to what the lawyer had seen, a full story—a "complete life" (PT, p. 16)—was simply not possible.

It is impossible for the Indian-Hater par excellence as well, and for the same reason: the "original sources ... are very small." Instead, the diluted Indian-Hater is the Judge's only possible material. Because this character comes to the settlements from time to time, he can be observed. Thus, the Judge says, he "enables us to form surmises, however inadequate, of what Indian-hating in its perfection is" (CM, p. 171). Based on this knowledge, Judge Hall can nar-

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15 Foster, p. LXXXVI, feels that this is so. The end of
the book represents "the extinction of faith and
hope."

16 Shroeder, p. 379, finds hope in the Indian-Hater, a
"strong purge" for the disease of the Confidence-Man
and one of the few people able to resist his wiles. Paul
McCarthy, "Affirmative Elements in The Confidence-
Man," American Transcendental Quarterly, 7 (1970),
56-61, also discovers positive elements in several of the
characters. Other critics stress the ambiguity of life as
Melville's central message. See Buell, p. 19, Cawelti,

17 Herman Melville, The Piazza Tales, ed. Egbert
Future references are to this edition and appear as PT
in parentheses in the text.
rate a tale. His story of Colonel Moredock, the diluted Indian-Hater he has seen, is the fictional result.

This aesthetic is important, for it is Melville's aesthetic in *The Confidence-Man* as well. "The novelist," he says in Chapter XLIV, "goes for his stock" to the town, since "every great town is a kind of man-show" (CM, p. 270) where the artist might see any character he could choose to describe. With the term "novelist," which Melville knew referred to realistic work, and a second linking of writing to drama, Melville stresses the importance of perception. Fiction "cannot be born in the author's imagination" (CM, p. 271, my emphasis). The eye must be the basis of the writer's trade.

Melville knew, however, that the eye was terribly uncertain, as the experiences of characters in *The Confidence-Man* showed. Thus, the stories these characters narrate in the novel are uncertain as well, often not based on first- or even second-hand perceptions. Judge Hall tells Charles Noble who tells the Cosmopolitan and the reader of Moredock, a man neither we nor Noble has ever seen. Hearsay and implication, impossible to verify on the Fidèlè because human nature, Melville says, is "past finding out" (CM, p. 77), often comprise the storyteller's art. He cannot describe what he cannot know.

For a writer, then, the situation seems bleak. Epistemology confines his craft to a very narrow area: the surface drama played out before his eyes. Melville, however, calls his Fidèlè a "daedal" boat, a term meaning skillful or cunningly contrived. The word does not suggest the weakness, but instead the dominance, of art. This is, in fact, precisely the case.

When nothing is certain, when reality cannot be known, the world itself becomes fiction. Everyone creates a story; everyone plays a part. Thus people wearing colorful masks pass before us, "[dressing] as nobody exactly dresses, [talking] as nobody exactly talks, [acting] as nobody exactly acts" (CM, p. 207). Artificiality triumphs and the novelist's work, because it mirrors this masquerade, has "more reality, than real life itself can show" (CM, p. 206).

Therefore, far from encouraging aesthetic despair, Melville's equation of fact and fiction means that the artist and his craft rule the Fidèlè. This is evident from Melville's "cunning contrivance" in the novel, where his technique is very different from the romance *Moby-Dick*.

There his approach was organic, according to the tradition of Romantic art. Nature was Ishmael's starting point. The ocean world and the white whale provided him with the metaphors and symbols he then used in his tale. Fictional form developed directly from the material before him.

Melville's language in his whalemen's passage indicates this fact. Those "fabulous rumors" "grow"; the fancy gives

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18 Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1956), discusses the aesthetic climate of Melville's time and the distinctions he would have known, from Scott and Cooper, between the novel and the romance.

19 Nathalia Wright, "Form as Function in Melville," *PMLA*, 67 (1952), 334, also feels this novel is not strict realism. However, to her, Melville's approach is organic, as it is in *Moby-Dick*. She does not distinguish between the romance and the novel form.

birth in a union of mind and detail. Thus, meditation and water "are wedded forever" (MD, p. 2), Ishmael says, and Moby Dick is a real creature but also a symbol and a written work. In organicism, these are one and the same.

Melville's novel is a very different piece. Here society, not nature, provides the writer's material: "Where does the novelist pick up any character? For the most part, in town, to be sure" (CM, p. 270). Moreover, Melville's metaphors for his form are not organic. Instead, the idea of the masquerade underlies his structure. Thus, in *The Confidence-Man* characters appear before our eyes, converse, then disappear when their roles are over and their conversation done, bound on a picaresque journey through the social strata of life.21

Such a play implies a director, one who arranges the scene. In fact, in *The Confidence-Man* the omniscient narrator controls the action. Melville makes this clear in several ways.

We become aware of the narrator's presence very early, with the Fielding-esque titles in the Table of Contents.22 We know he is a man who enjoys puns ("A sick man, after some impatience, is induced to become a patient") and will puzzle us with cryptic comments ("Worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering"). We also meet him in those chapters where he addresses us directly, especially in the three chapters on the writer's craft. There he steps out of the novel, tells us his theories on art, then with a sentence steps back into the tale. ". . . so nothing remains," he says after Chapter XIV, "but to turn to our comedy, or rather, to pass from the comedy of thought to that of action" (CM, p. 79). And after Chapter XLIV, " . . . the best use the smoke can be turned to, will be, by retiring under cover of it, in good trim as may be, to the story" (CM, p. 271). These interpolated chapters and lead-in words stress for us the narrator's manipulation. This is not plot in the traditional sense with its internal direction from character and event.23 Instead, the omniscient narrator, who introduces persons and incidents, moves the novel along.

The artist behind the tale, then, is the most important character we meet on the Fidele. In the seeming drift of *The Confidence-Man*, where "helter-skelter" (CM, p. 8) many characters appear, he is the unifying force. His voice, however, will baffle since he too participates in that masquerade. In fact, his style is not very clear. His sentences are typically long and involved, made up of phrases difficult to follow. He is fond of qualifying words: "seems," "appears," "might be." The result is tentative and ambiguous prose that our minds work with but often cannot fathom. As with all else aboard the Fidele, even the style leaves us wondering where truth lies.24

21 Foster, p. XCII, discusses Melville's picaresque form.
22 Buell, p. 21, talks of these chapter headings, finding the tone of the whole book comic in the manner of Fielding or Sterne.
Thus Melville's narrator is the ultimate Confidence-Man. The metaphors and symbols he uses to describe characters, his intellectual style, his picaresque form with its satiric intent, and the dominance of his narrative voice, all traditionally promise certainty. They call for our belief, evoke our confidence, which, if given, are immediately undermined. We never receive the knowledge these devices imply. In *The Confidence-Man* everyone creates a fiction, and Melville's masquerading narrator, in a world where art triumphs, is no exception.

MUSEUM PIECE NO. 16228

ELAINE WATSON

Elaine Watson is a resident of Dearborn, Michigan.

You lie there, with your line of stiff red griffins
dissolving into linen colorless with age:
a scrap of history pressed beneath some glass.
The museum card says “circa 1550.”

Whose body-warmth enhanced your gaudy threads
and made those griffins prance
and dance with sixteenth-century flesh
now long dispersed and lost

but for this little linen scrap that says
“Remember me”? 
"TO MAKE A PRAIRIE": LANGUAGE AND FORM IN EMILY DICKINSON'S POEMS ABOUT MENTAL EXPERIENCE

Suzanne Juhasz


1

Emily Dickinson's poems describing mental experience are set in the space of the mind, a place that she considers to be actual, substantial, there. "The Landscape of the Spirit," she calls it in a letter;1 in the following poem it is referred to as the "Undiscovered Continent."

Soto! Explore thyself! Therein thyself shalt find The "Undiscovered Continent"— No Settler had the mind. (832)

With spatial metaphors like "landscape" and "continent" she grants dimension to the mind, the setting for significant experience.

Dickinson's poems that explore what happens in mental spaces—emotional and intellectual experience—use a poetic language and a formal structure which may be viewed as responses to the epistemological problems raised by this subject matter. Vocabulary, figures of speech, structures of thought and stanza, modes of presentation all contribute to the language that Dickinson fashions in order to talk about life in the mind. This essay examines closely such language patterns, because they are the components that fit together to make the poems, and because they embody the philosophical issues that surface when Dickinson examines the nature of mental experience. Especially in question is the relation between the world of the mind and the world of nature, between idea and object.

Dickinson's poetic vocabulary contains two special categories of words: dimensional—words of space and time; and conceptual—abstractions, the words for ideas. Because she conceives of the mind as a place, she describes the acts occurring there with a vocabulary that gives them spatial and temporal dimensions. At the same time, and usually in the same poem, she employs a conceptual vocabulary to establish the intellectual, theoretical aspects of the mind: the fact that it categorizes, generalizes, and hypothesizes on the basis of its own experience. Dickinson's poems reveal a structure based upon the encounter, dramatic and reciprocal, between the dimensional and conceptual vocabularies.

This encounter is most frequently achieved with metaphors initiated by

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analogy. In smaller and larger units—phrase, line, sentence, stanza—analogy compares and conjoins abstract and concrete, idea and thing, the world of the mind and the world of nature. Analogy solicits the participation of nature for the representations of the mind’s doings, if only because the natural world offers the poet available terminology for the concrete. Dickinson, after all, thinks of mental acts as real and is faced with the lack of an adequate language for expressing this attitude. Medical or psychological terms, even if she had known them or if they had been invented, wouldn’t do. She doesn’t think of the brain as a muscle, but as a place; she doesn’t think of emotion as a symptom, but as an act. The life of the mind, albeit different in significant ways, bears a genuine relation to the life of the outer world. Therefore, nature is a frequent guest in Dickinson’s poems about the mind, entering them via analogies that are constructed along an abstract-concrete axis.

The form of analogy is based upon parallelism. A is like b; a is b; as a, so b; these are versions of the fundamental analogical pattern. Larger units in Dickinson’s poems about mental experience—sentence, stanza, and argument—are often generated from this central structure. But because there are at the same time profound ways in which nature and the mind are as different as they are like, the parallelism that analogy encourages is rarely pure or neat in these poems. It is as much a rule to be broken as it is a ruler for poetic organization, so that formal development is frequently complicated by inversions, conversions, and other maneuvers in which parallelism is “exploded.”

Finally, these analogical metaphors composed from dimensional and conceptual vocabularies that extend throughout the poem in parallel units are frequently presented as aphorisms: short, pithy statements avowing a general doctrine or truth. Dickinson may be describing personal, private experience (she was neither doctor nor psychologist, and her only subject was herself), yet in these poems she is persistent in categorizing her experience as every-

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Suzanne Juhasz

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Dickinson’s use of analogy and an accompanying parallel structure has been noted by many scholars. For example, Carroll Laverty, in the brief article “Structural Patterns in Emily Dickinson’s Poetry,” Emerson Society Quarterly, No. 44 (1966), p. 13, lists structural patterns in Dickinson’s poetry and identifies them as “1) statement or presentation of situation followed by explanation or example and sometimes an application of the statement to the theme; 2) parallelism in various forms; 3) statement based on analogy; 4) a logical argument—inductive or deductive development of a thought; 5) statement in the form of definition; 6) dramatic structure; 7) one single statement; and 8) the combination of two or more of the first seven.” Laverty attributes these patterns to the intellectual process of a mind trying to deal with emotion. Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, in The Voice of the Poet: Aspects of Style in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 92-97, 198-204, comments on Dickinson’s tendency to contrast concrete and abstract and on parallelism as a significant rhetorical pattern in her poems; she notes emphasis as a purpose for contrasting abstract and concrete; binding as a function of the parallelism.

By far the most interesting discussion of analogy is in Robert Weisbuch, Emily Dickinson’s Poetry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). He writes, “Dickinson’s typical poem enacts a hypothesis about the world by patterning a parallel, analogical world” (p. 12). He discusses in sensible and sensitive detail how analogical progression develops by a series of perceptions or stories. “Each is at least partially analogous to the others and each reveals a new aspect or consequence of putting the world together in the particular, often unstate way which links the otherwise disparate examples” (p. 14). Weisbuch’s conclusion is that the poem is, finally, “sceneless,” that “mimetic situations are transformed, transported to a world of analogical language which exists in parallel with the concrete, as its definition” (p. 19). I would argue only that the scene, or setting, is the mind. The world of the poem is always mimetic of something, is more than simply itself, and that the analogical structure is patterned upon mental structures, the world of the mind.

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* "I call Dickinson an analogical poet," writes Robert Weisbuch, "because analogy suggests an extended equation [a is to b as c is to d] carried out by a rigorous logic whose ends are always functional and never decorative. Further, we may think of metaphor as a completed analogy, in which the progressive logic of the associations is buried; conversely, we may think of analogy as a metaphor-on-the-making, in which the associative process calls attention to itself" (p. 13).
one's. She speaks in general truths, and this is one reason why the conceptual vocabulary is as essential to her as the dimensional one. With its abstractions she defines and classifies experience, she establishes norms for behavior. The poems that thus diagram mental events are prescriptive as well as descriptive. Because of the striking generality of their rhetoric, they seem like blueprints: if you repeat the variables, you get the same experience, they suggest. In fact, one of the remarkable aspects of these poems, which is underlined by their aphoristic stance, is how, confined as they are to the dimensions of one mind, they so often speak for so many.

"Presentiment—is that long Shadow—on the Lawn—" (764); "Experience is the Angled Road" (910); "A still—Volcano—Life—" (601); "The Suburbs of a Secret" (1245); "Delight's Despair at setting" (1299); "My Faith is larger than the Hills—" (766): thus poems begin.

In each of these examples an abstraction—presentiment, experience, life, secret, delight, despair, faith—is connected by the process of metaphor to a concrete image—lawn, road, volcano, suburbs, hills. In most cases the relation created between abstract and concrete calls attention to either the spatial or temporal qualities of the concrete ("larger than the Hills"; "long Shadow—on the Lawn—") so that the dimensions are transferred in some manner to the abstract word. Already in these first lines analogy is underway, and the aphoristic voice is immediately present. As I proceed, I shall try to isolate the linguistic features for the sake of clarifying the function and the significance of each, but it is obvious from the little catalogue of opening lines how very much a part of one another they are. Vocabulary, figure, structure, tone—these are different perspectives on the same language.

Let us look at the continuation of one of these phrases to see what happens to its elements as they combine to make a poem.

Presentiment—is that long Shadow—on the Lawn—Indicative that Suns go down—
The Notice to the startled Grass
That Darkness—is about to pass—

(764)

A mental state, presentiment, the feeling that something will happen, is equated with a shadow on the lawn. As the poem continues, the nature of the shadow is revealed. It is seen, in the second line, to function as a sign, coming before the fact of sunset. In the middle of one situation, afternoon, nature has ways of revealing the situation that is to follow. The metaphor begins by connecting the general emotion, presentiment, to a specific shadow; but by the conclusion of that sentence the shadow is becoming itself generic, indicative not that the sun on this day but that suns in general set. The message has become prescriptive, aphoristic: a teaching text.

The second stanza appears to parallel the first; in apposition to the phrase, "Presentiment is," it offers another analogy. The scene is still the lawn. Both lines one and three end with it, even as the announcements of change that conclude lines two and four are also parallel: "go down," "about to pass." But there are differences. In line three
the concrete shadow of line one has turned into another abstraction, "the Notice." And the lawn has been personified: "startled." It is the mind that grants abstract meaning to the shadow, even as it understands the grass to have human emotions. If nature is akin to the mind, this relationship is at least in part due to the fact that the mind interprets nature as well as itself. There are other ways, too, in which the parallelism of the second stanza has been altered, "exploded." The scene in nature is the same but different: the same lawn but a different shadow, the one that comes at dawn to announce not the setting but the rising of the sun. Dickinson's brief poem includes therefore the full cycle of nature: the onset of dark when it is still light, the onset of light when the dark is still there.

What does this have to do with presentiment? Presentiment is the apprehension of a signal for change. It is knowing ahead of time, yet it happens because change is inherent in a given condition. Presentiment is based on real, not hypothetical, evidence. Yet the sign, when it comes, comes as a shock. We may understand change as an abstract principle, but we have a habit of getting used to the way things are. Thus presentiment is a useful sensitivity because, in offering foreknowledge, it stirs us from our sluggish, accepting ways and helps us anticipate the forces of life. Presentiment occurs in nature as it occurs in the mind. But of course, only a mind observing natural acts can understand them to be versions of presentiment.

As my discussion of the nature of presentiment in the previous paragraph indicates, the poem is a tidy aphorism, a statement of general truth. When Dickinson defines presentiment as that long shadow on the grass, she is calling it everybody's experience. She labels her personal feeling of something about to happen with a generic abstraction, presentiment. She uses the copula is, not can be or may be or in this case, but confidently and radically, is. She equates her feeling with an act in nature, one that, we understand as we read on into the poem, is governed by natural laws. Such rhetorical devices turn an individual perception into a truism.

Aphorism, with its compression and its comprehensiveness, is a hyperbolic mode. Some functions of Dickinson's dimensional and conceptual vocabularies are clarified when we observe their operation in aphorism. For example, the usefulness of words of dimension drawn from nature for the task of generalizing becomes apparent. Since natural laws are accepted as universal, Dickinson calls upon their validity to underwrite, via analogy, pronouncements about mental activity, which is less accessible for generalization because it is private rather than public.

Abstractions are her other means of generalizing. The fact that Dickinson's poems which seek to understand the workings of the mind are filled with abstractions indicates how the process of abstracting itself is an essential one in mental activity. Aphorism may seem to be a generalization for everybody, but it is based on the mind's tendency to make rules for itself. "A finger in the flame brings pain," it says. Or, "Pain is the kiss of finger and flame." If one takes an instance of putting a hand too
near the fire and another instance of the same phenomenon, the mind will want to stop calling it "finger plus flame" and label it "pain." So that although Dickinson's poems use a single mind as subject rather than conducting experiments on others, they articulate, in an exaggerated rhetorical form, aphorism, a characteristic of their subject matter, the mind.

In poems defining mental experience, language features such as vocabularies of dimension and concept, metaphors based in analogy, parallelism, and aphorism combine. Yet the nature of this combination is rarely simple because the subject matter is complex. The formal neatness of analogy and parallelism is useful because contrast clarifies. But in building poetic structures out of analogy and parallelism, Dickinson makes combinations characterized by the intricacy of their arrangement. The following poem demonstrates the complexity that analogy and parallelism often achieve.

The difference between Despair
And Fear—is like the One
Between the instant of a Wreck—
And when the Wreck has been—

The Mind is smooth—no Motion—
Contented as the Eye
Upon the Forehead of a Bust—
That knows—it cannot see—

(305)

The poem begins with an analogy comparing the difference between two emotional states possessing, we are to assume, aspects in common—despair and fear—with an example drawn from the world of nature: the difference between a wreck taking place and afterwards. It is a familiar inner-outer maneuver, except that the speaker's matter-of-fact tone of explanation (the difference between \(a\) and \(b\) is like that between \(c\) and \(d\) ) is belied by the opaqueness of her terms. The difference between \(c\) and \(d\) is as non-self-evident as that between \(a\) and \(b\). We look gratefully to the next stanza with its ostensible parallel structure for help.

Smooth; no motion: it appears to have been a shipwreck. Yet this new information in a concrete vocabulary does not describe the wreck after all, but the mind. The poem, setting out to explain an emotional state in terms of a physical state, doubles back on itself by further describing the physical state in terms of the mental state. Smooth and without motion, the mind feels like, not the instant of a wreck, but when the wreck has been.

Next, smoothness and motionlessness are compared to a mental state, contentment (abstract explaining concrete). The mind is contented as an eye, a blind eye, one that knows it cannot see. But this eye is not an instance of synecdoche because it is not the eye of the person whose mind is under discussion but the stone eye of a statue. Such an eye would be smooth and motionless, but its "contentment" would be a negative virtue: the cessation of struggle in the face, as it were, of impossibility ("That knows—it cannot see").

At its conclusion the poem has presented three analogues for the difference between despair and fear, a device that Weisbuch calls "analogical progression" or "the analogical collection": "Each is at least partially analogous to the others
and each reveals a new aspect or consequence of putting the world together in the particular, often unstated way which links the otherwise disparate examples,” he explains.4 Here the first analogue is the difference between the instant of a wreck and when the wreck has been; the second, the bridging analogy, describes the mind in one of these states, either despair or fear, as like the moment when the wreck has been; the third is the comparison of this same state to the eye of a statue. The accumulation of analogies should result in our understanding of the two states of mind and of their relationship. Any of the analogies alone won’t do it; we need the combination.

The difference between the instant of a wreck and afterwards is the difference between struggle and its absence. The smooth surface after the ship has gone down is like the stone-blind eye of the statue, powerless to do anything about its condition. The necessary content occasioned by this condition is a profound despair: the powerlessness to affect events. Fear comes during the instant of a wreck, despair afterwards. Fear is an active condition, despair passive: smooth, motionless, “content.”

If we accept these definitions of despair and fear, we must invert the overt parallelism of the first analogy, that despair is to the instant of a wreck as fear is to the aftermath of the wreck. Such an inversion would consequently “explode” the parallelism. Yet that explosion of parallelism as well as the combination of analogues is exactly what tends to happen in the poems defining mental events. The complexity that they require is achieved here as in “Presentiment—is that long Shadow—on the Lawn—” by changing the predetermined route of parallelism when necessary. The very sense of shock that comes to the reader whenever this change happens seems to be a part of the poem’s purpose when it shows us how analogy, especially that between the world of the mind and the world of nature, at once exists and does not exist.

In other words, although analogy is possible between mind and nature—helpful and apt—there are real differences between these two places. Mental events and natural events are not at all mirror images of one another.

“Nature” is what we see—
The Hill—the Afternoon—
Squirrel—Eclipse—the Bumble bee—
Nay—Nature is Heaven—
Nature is what we hear—
The Bobolink—the Sea—
Thunder—the Cricket—
Nay—Nature is Harmony—
Nature is what we know—
Yet have no art to say—
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity.

(668)

In defining nature Dickinson uses the poetic format that we have been discussing—analogies, parallelism, aphorisms, concrete and abstract vocabularies—and makes them the theme of the poem.5


5 Perhaps for this reason the poem, well-known, oft-analyzed, and usually considered central to Dickinson’s attitude towards nature, has given rise to contradictory interpretations. For Albert Gelpi, Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), p. 82, it shows how “Matter and Spirit, concrete and universal, are the same.” For Charles Anderson, Emily Dickinson’s Poetry: Stairway of Surprise (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 83, its concluding lines “place ironic limitations on her
The poem is a dialogue, or perhaps a trio, in which concrete and abstract, object and interpretation, are contrasted. The first voice begins. Nature, it says, is apprehended with our senses; we see hill, afternoon, squirrel, eclipse, bumblebee. Nature is out there. No, corrects a second voice: nature is heaven. Heaven as a place may be created from things, the objects that we see around us, but the arrangement is the mind’s work.

These first four lines, in which point and counterpoint are sounded, are parallel with four more lines that follow the same pattern. The first voice calls upon another sense, hearing, and pronounces nature to be bobolink, sea, thunder, cricket; whereupon the second voice comes back with “harmony.” Harmony may be composed of elements apprehended with the sense of hearing, but the mind must order them for there to be “harmony.”

So far the idea that nature is beyond the self, is physical and objective, is therefore apprehended by humans through their senses, has been contrasted with the idea that nature is more than that; it is what the mind does with objects through interpretation and abstraction. (The poem has nowhere at this point denied the existence of the outside world; the concepts “heaven” and “harmony” are based upon those objects that the senses encounter. The argument is about meaning.)

Now another set of four lines completes the poem, beginning, as did the earlier two, with “Nature is.” What voice is speaking? This third unit appears parallel to the others but not entirely because no second voice speaks in the last line to dispute the statements of a first. Let us call the third voice not a brand-new speaker but a composite of voices one and two that, combined, create a third. The third voice describes a situation which assumes both positions, that nature is out there and that the mind’s interpretation is also real, and extends them into further insight. The third voice’s argument is based upon the idea that nature is what we know; know parallels in its position see and hear, but it represents the cognitive perception implied by heaven and harmony as much or even more than it does sensory perception. It denotes most accurately a combination of the two. Finally, we might wish to note that the mind’s propensity to abstract, as portrayed by voice two, is also demonstrated in the language of voice one, the exponent of all that is concrete, when it includes afternoon in its list of things in nature. We may be seeing already in the supposed antithesis the implicit synthesis.

The concluding voice continues the pattern of beginning with a definition of nature; this one pauses after one line but is not finished. “Nature is what we know— / Yet have no art to say—” is the complete thought. Know most certainly includes the mind in the fact of nature. Know demands perception, both cognitive and sensory; so that whatever nature is, its meaning is invested in the mind’s perception of it. What we know but have no art to say: a new and necessary distinction has been
made between thought and expression, suddenly making this a poem about poetry as well. It is one thing to perceive nature, quite another to tell what it is (the purpose of this poem). Why? The concluding lines explain. Knowledge is paralleled by "Wisdom" and juxtaposed against nature's "Simplicity." In the light of that simplicity, our wisdom is impotent, powerless. If the poem to this point has been emphasizing the mind in its transaction with nature, now it presents the other side. It is the mind which sees pattern in sound to create harmony, but it needs the objects that make sound with which to work. Further, the mind has to work at meaning, while the objects are simply there. They demonstrate the articulateness of sheer embodiment that the mind does not possess. How does one talk about this? The minute that the mind grants meaning to objects, turns bobolink and thunder into harmony, it fails to express what Dickinson will call in another poem the "Object Absolute."

The mind is like nature because through perception it creates meaning for nature: "The Outer—from the Inner / Derives its Magnitude—" (451). Nevertheless, nature is there; it has an existence of its own and is not a projection of the mind. Its acts can be analogous to the mind's acts because both exist in this world. But mind and nature are not exact versions of one another. The mind possesses the creative power of the imagination; nature does not. Nature in turn possesses the simplicity of embodiment uncomplicated by meaning; the mind does not. Therefore in trying to speak of these relationships the poet may begin with the parallelism that her analogies project, but she will consistently have to "explode" it in order that her language might thereby approximate the true and complex situation. Our wisdom may struggle with impotence, but one of the tasks that Dickinson set herself was precisely that of making an art that could say.

3

Analogy, parallelism, and aphorism are language features that extend and expand in the various forms just described, but their components are individual words, the vocabulary that I have separated into two strands: dimensional and conceptual. I should like to examine more closely dimension and concept as they function in definitions of mental experience.

We have already observed that the natural world is a primary source for the dimensional vocabulary used to show how mental acts take up space and occur in time.

No Man can compass a Despair—
As round a Goalless Road
No faster than a Mile at once
The Traveller proceed—

Unconscious of the Width—
Unconscious that the Sun
Be setting on His progress—
So accurate the One

At estimating Pain—
Whose own—has just begun—
His ignorance—the Angel
That pilot Him along—

(477)

Despair is a mental state, an emotion. To seek to measure it is an impulse which grants to that emotion a condition
of dimension. The analogy upon which this poem is structured further defines the kind of dimension that despair occupies in the space of the mind.

The boundaries are not simple to chart. Although this poem offers a concrete example for an abstraction, the example is negative because the act of measuring a despair is impossible. Nevertheless, lack of boundary is also an aspect of dimension.

The poem's first word, "No," initiates the negative rhetoric upon which the entire statement is based. The negative is a difficult construction: it gives, then takes away, in order to show with language (which is) what is not. "No Man can compass a Despair--" is the opening aphorism, followed by an analogy, drawn from the world of nature, that will help explain this truism. That is, "road" comes from the world outside the mind, but what about "goalless"? This is a road that doesn't go anywhere, never ends. At the very outset the neatness of the analogy is exploded because such a road never did exist in nature and is the mind's work only. The vocabulary of this analogy, road, mile, traveler, width, sun, and progress, gives concrete dimension to the image, the depiction of what happens along this road. But that experiential concreteness belongs to the wrong experience, which is the point of the analogy. The man travelling on a goalless road is aware only of the individual moment, the individual mile, and cannot see its actual width, is not aware of the totality of time that passes. His experience of this road is not of a goalless road but of an ordinary road: so much the better for him.

The words as and so determine the form of the analogical structure here. As the man on a goalless road, so the person trying to measure pain. Just "so" accurate: i.e., inaccurate. The negative appears again, couched in the form of the positive. The complete poem plays the inaccuracy of the concrete against the accuracy of the abstract in order to make a case for ignorance and lack of a fully realized consciousness. The poet knows, of course, or she couldn't say.

The concluding line of stanza two and the first line of stanza three return to the poem's first line by paralleling it, "So accurate the One / At estimating Pain--," then giving further details of the situation: "Whose own--has just begun--." It is important that we understand how the impulse to measure comes at the beginning of the condition. The person entering upon despair wants to know how far, how long it extends. For this reason his very ignorance is his better guide in the situation, his pilot angel. The last two lines of the poem turn, with their metaphor, back into the analogical situation of the goalless road, thereby conflating tenor and vehicle. If the man starting the journey, the man commencing despair understood that perceived dimension was acutally non-dimension, that the experience to be encountered had no limits, he might go mad from the knowledge. That possibility is implicit in the poem rather than explicit, but it is there on the other side of the negative concrete that is offered for rhetoric. The other side is the existence of what Dickinson calls in another poem "Illocality" (963), although there is no direct vocabulary for describing it. Of course there isn't, because the natural world, the primary source for words of
dimension, is located. And while the poet is keen on indicating that the mind, likewise, is occupied space, there are other aspects of the mind that are limitless, without boundary. The extent and duration of despair is one of these aspects.

Talking about the extremes or edges of dimension requires concept, the abstract.

A nearness to Tremendousness—
An Agony procures—
Affliction ranges Boundlessness—
Vicinity to Laws

Contentment's quiet Suburb—
Affliction cannot stay
In Acres—Its Location
Is Illocality—

(963)

This companion poem to "No Man can compass a Despair" is also concerned with situation and boundaries of emotional events, but it presents a different attitude towards the subject, admiring instead of fearing illocality. In its discussion of agony the poem develops by means of analogical progression. What is almost missing, however, is the concrete vocabulary that we associate with analogy. There is some but not much: what doesn't appear along with what does demonstrates some boundaries of the issue of boundary.

Specifically, agony, although treated in terms of the space that it occupies, requires for its description an abstract vocabulary, while its opposite, contentment, is allotted concrete imagery. Contentment is, possesses, inhabits a quiet suburb, a region near or adjacent to or structured by "laws." Context helps in determining what is meant by "laws."

Placed in direct contrast to "Boundlessness," it seems to connote the opposite—that which creates boundaries. Suburb is concrete; so is acres, where affliction couldn't stay, but by implication contentment could. Agony's terrain, on the other hand, is near to tremendousness, moving freely over boundlessness.

In other words, although nearness, ranges, vicinity, stay, and location make clear the fact that this poem is about the space an emotion occupies, these words are used to help develop a theme that shows how certain emotions, like agony or affliction, are of such depth, width, intensity, profundity, that they must occupy mental space without boundaries. To denote those places that are really non-places, the abstractions that we associate with conceptual vocabulary are required.

Tremendousness and boundlessness are two such abstractions. Tremendousness has aspects of place because one can be near it; on the other hand, its abstract form labels it as the idea of great size, not a specific instance of it. Boundlessness, likewise capable of being ranged, is in some sense there; on the other hand, as the idea of no boundaries, there is another sense in which it is not there. In contrast to the opening two parallel and analogous statements about the relationship between extreme emotion and extreme space are lines four and five bridging the two stanzas, narrowing the mental field with their vocabulary of closeness and domesticity. We have been shown point (twice) and counterpoint. Conclusion comes with a final analogue, in lines six through eight, which rephrases the statements about agony and affliction that began the poem.
but which uses both vocabularies in doing so. Development and closure come from the fact that both thesis and antithesis (abstract and concrete) have been used to make the final aphorism. It has its own double or parallel structure: a negation followed by its positive version. The negation cannot help but imply the opposite position: affliction can't stay in concrete space, i.e., acres (because, as we know, it demands abstract space). Then appears the final paradox, based directly upon the tension between abstract and concrete that has been operating throughout: agony's location is therefore no location. There is a location that is not a location, and that is abstract space rather than concrete space, a space which must therefore be mental space. To describe conceptual space, words drawn not from nature but from thought, abstractions, are required.

Time is the other dimension delineating mental experience. In certain poems time and space are aspects of one another.

Pain—expands the Time—
Ages coil within
The minute Circumference
Of a single Brain—

Pain contracts—the Time—
Occupied with Shot
Gamuts of Eternities
Are as they were not—
(967)

Some of Dickinson's poems, as we have seen, find analogous situations between mind and world; some, like the one above, make their point by explicitly differentiating the two realms. Time as it functions here, within the space of the mind, overcomes so-called natural laws.

Within the brain it expands and contracts as it does not do in nature. To show this, Dickinson relies upon a dimensional vocabulary. Time is pictured as a tape, now coiled, now uncoiled, taking up significant space in the brain.

What makes time different in the brain is the experience of pain. This poem focuses upon pain's propensity to heighten sensation. In pain one's sense of time is "expanded": each moment seems intensified to an abnormal degree so that "ages" are experienced. On the other hand, pain can cause one's sense of time to become selective (contracted) as pain creates moments of supreme intensity, "Shot," upon which one focuses to the exclusion of other less significant and therefore less fully realized moments.

In making its case for a different sense of time, the poem carefully contrasts a description of the physical brain—"The minute Circumference / Of a single Brain"—with an equally physical, dimensional set of images for time: ages that are coiled within, gamuts of eternity. Insisting on a physiognomical view of the mind, insisting likewise that time takes up space, the poem forces us to see that there is another kind of circumference involved. Its measurements are determined by the mind's view of itself, by perception.

Mental experience, like pain, affects perception, the poem says. Perception controls the rolling up, the rolling out of time. The poem develops out of the philosophy also expressed in "'Nature' is what we see—," the idea that although things exist out there in nature—time does—it is the mind which grants meaning to it.
“Two Lengths has every Day,” Dickinson writes: “Its absolute extent / And Area superior / By Hope or Horror lent” (1295). There is a reason, as another poem explains in more detail:

Perception of an object costs
Precise the Object’s loss—
Perception in itself a Gain
Replying to its Price—

The Object Absolute—is nought—
Perception sets it fair
And then upbraids a Perfectness
That situates so far—

(1071)

Absolute is the essential word in both the quotation and the full poem because it is the word Dickinson uses for the nature that exists without benefit of perception. Absolute can mean pure, total, ultimate, intrinsic; free from limit or restriction or qualification; determined in itself and not by anything outside itself. The mind may seek to obtain for itself such pureness, but it never can since the mind’s relation to the world is precisely that of qualifier. The mind is what is outside the object. On the other hand, the mind can understand that it is exactly its own “impurity” which is interesting and significant. While the quotation from “Two Lengths has every day” opts for the latter attitude, “Perception of an object costs” discusses them both.

In the quotation, “absolute” is contrasted to “superior.” Superiority is granted to the natural world, the time/space dimension of day, by perception, which is in turn influenced in its decisions by the mind’s emotional situation, by hope or horror. Nevertheless, two lengths exist for the day, simultaneously, and both are real.

The first stanza of number 1071 more carefully explores this seeming paradox with a vocabulary of financial investment, profits, loss, and gain. To perceive the object is to lose it, announces aphorism number one. But, continues aphorism number two, though the object is lost, perception is itself a gain. “Replying to its price”: the gain is in direct ratio to the price paid. That is, when the mind perceives an object, the object cannot be the object as it was without the perception, determined in itself and not by anything outside itself. That object, what Dickinson will call in the second stanza the “Object Absolute,” is forever lost. But what is gained in the process by means of the loss of the object absolute (the price paid) is the meaning of the object: “Area superior / By Hope or Horror lent.”

Perhaps because the first stanza has been enigmatic, the poem provides a second stanza, one more aphorism, for explanation. That the second stanza is more difficult to interpret than the first may be a further indication of the complexity of the issue raised. In stanza two the idea of the object absolute is introduced and immediately declared to be “nought.” It is all perception’s fault for believing in the first place that the object absolute could be a potential possession. Perception puts the highest price on it, to revert to the original metaphor, then gets angry with the object because it has been set at such a cost that it is unobtainable. Perception ought rather upbraid itself. Perception understands that the idea of the object
absolute is the idea of an object existing without the presence of perception, then wants to possess it anyway. Nevertheless, it is important that although the mind cannot possess the pure object, and, as the first stanza has maintained, there is even benefit in that situation, the mind can imagine the idea of the object absolute. (The mind has set it fair, called it perfect, situated it far.) In that way, in the space of the mind only (and in the companion space of the poem), a kind of possession is enacted.°

In the mind, dimension and concept are necessarily aspects of one another. Although I have identified two vocabularies, the dimensional and the conceptual, they fit together to form the language of poems about mental experience. Talking about dimension requires both concrete and abstract words: both association with the natural world and acknowledgment of the peculiar aspects of mental space.

At first glance the next and final poem does not look as if it belongs in this series. It appears to be a poem about nature itself, about prairies. But by the end of the first line we begin to understand that once again action is set in the mind and not somewhere in Kansas, that in this recipe we are concerned with prairie-ness and not an instance of it.

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee,
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few.

(1755)

Although the poem’s vocabulary is concrete enough—prairie, clover, and bee—the statement made in the opening line is, upon reflection, absurd. No actual prairie consists of a clover and one bee. However, the following line, emphasizing through repetition the importance to the formula of the clover and bee, also points to their representative nature. Yet with the inclusion, as the sentence ends, of the abstract revery into this prescription for prairie-ness, we might well be startled. For what has revery to do with prairies? And where would one put it, how next to clover and bee? If we are not quite so literal, we can understand how the sensation of seeing a prairie might be similar to the feeling of revery: a dream-like beauty, epitomized by the scent of a flower, the drone of a bee. Practically for Dickinson to make a prairie, she has to do it in her mind: she has never seen a prairie and probably does not need to see one. For her to make a prairie, revery—i.e., imagination—is necessary. Necessary and sufficient, as the conclusion of the poem announces, with some humor: “The revery alone will do, / If bees are few.”

To make. This poem, when set along-

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°Charles Anderson’s remarks about this poem in Emily Dickinson’s Poetry comment more historically about Dickinson’s use of the word absolute. He reads the poem similarly but does not go on to talk about ideas about ideas.

Her meaning presumably takes off from Locke’s distinction between the primary qualities of objects, which are absolute in the sense that they exist whether perceived or not (such as bulk, extension, and motion), and their secondary qualities, which depend on the perceiver for their existence (such as taste and color). But by adding that the Absolute Object is “nought” she embraces the modern extension of this concept, namely, that since these absolute qualities lie beyond the bounds of human perception that they are as nothing to her. This central negation, then, is not so much a denial of the existence of the material world from the standpoint of traditional Idealism as it is a recognition that in a strict sense it is unknowable by the consciousness, as in the terms of the new theoretical physics, and hence has no graspable meaning for man. He is left in the end with his perception. He can only know what he perceives, what he himself “creates.” This alone has value or meaning (p. 91).
side "'Nature' is what we see—" and "Perception of an object costs," defines the mind's creativity in its relations with the world. A prairie in the world of nature cannot be composed from one clover and one bee, but the idea of prairie can. A prairie in the mind is another kind of real. In this poem Dickinson uses the existence of clovers and bees in nature as source for her revery; yet she also insists that the revery alone will do. Which comes first, we are tempted to ask, idea or thing? Neither, we can surmise from the evidence of these poems. Idea and thing exist in a simultaneous, interdependent relationship, as do the conceptual and dimensional vocabularies in Dickinson's poems on the subject of mental experience. There is an object absolute, but there is also the idea of an object absolute. The mind's idea of a given object creates it, makes it, insofar as, through the act of perception, mind provides object with meaning. And, since the mind can also think of an object that is unperceived, in that sense it creates the object before perception. In addition, it can think of a goalless road: it can create idea before object. Each idea is a creation. If it is the idea of an object, then the object is created by the idea. It is created in the mind, if not in the world, and in the poem.

When, in "'Nature' is what we see—," Dickinson speaks of creating harmony from bobolink, sea, thunder, and cricket, she is using an abstract word to show the conceptual power of the mind. In "To make a prairie" she uses a concrete word, prairie, for the same purpose. In the mind, abstract and concrete partake of one another: abstract has dimension; concrete is representative. This helps to explain a peculiar and often noticed quality of Dickinson's use of abstract and concrete words. Abstract words seem concrete: see Tremendousness, nearness to; Eternities, Gamuts of. Concrete words turn out to be abstract: see Road, Goalless; Suburb, Contentment's Quiet. Especially, through a frequent and thorough use of metaphors based upon a structure of analogy, the interaction between these linguistic opposites is effected. "Faith—is the Pierless Bridge"; "Presentiment—is that long Shadow—on the Lawn—"; "The Suburbs of a Secret." Metaphor, as in these first lines of poems, renders abstract concrete, concrete abstract, not annihilating differences but underlining relationships.

To make the prairie that is revery Dickinson uses dimensional and conceptual vocabularies which connect in structures of analogy, patterns of parallelism, modes of aphorism. These features of language combine to create poems that can articulate the shape and meaning of mental experience.
WOMEN IN THE FICTION OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

DAVID FEDO

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When F. Scott Fitzgerald was working for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in the summer of 1938, he wrote what he called a "bitter" letter to his daughter Scottie in which he attempted to account for what he felt were certain personal failures. "Of course," he had written two years earlier, "all life is a process of breaking down,"1 but in the letter to Scottie, Fitzgerald blamed his wife Zelda for his disillusionment and eventual collapse:

When I was your age I lived with a great dream. The dream grew and I learned how to speak of it and make people listen. Then the dream divided one day when I decided to marry your mother after all, even though I knew she was spoiled and meant no good to me. I was sorry immediately I had married her but, being patient in those days, made the best of it and got to love her in another way. You came along and for a long time we made quite a lot of happiness out of our lives. But I was a man divided—she wanted me to work too much for her and not enough for my dream. She realized too late that work was dignity, and tried to atone for it by working herself, but it was too late and she broke and is broken forever.

It was too late also for me to recoup the damage—I had spent most of my resources, spiritual and material, on her, but I struggled on for five years till my health collapsed, and all I cared about was drink and forgetting.

The mistake I made was in marrying her. We belong to different worlds. . . .2

Zelda's role in her husband's depression and breakdown is not easy to measure. She bore some responsibility, of course, but Fitzgerald's self-destructive behavior, well documented, was itself a major factor.3 Yet his common perception was that the fault lay elsewhere, with someone else, most likely Zelda, but perhaps with another person. Readers of Fitzgerald's fiction might do well to keep that point in mind. If Richard Lehan is right, that Fitzgerald's "best work was written out of his own sense of experience,"4 then it may be instructive to note the relationship between what Fitzgerald discovered about women (Zelda is only a starting point), and how he characterized them in his work.

There are indeed aspects of Zelda, "a child of the century,"5 in Fitzgerald's major fiction: Gloria Gilbert in The Beautiful and the Damned and Nicole Warren in Tender Is the Night are obvious examples. And there are other women—Ginevra King, for example—

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3 For a full account of the relationship between Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, see Sara Mayfield, Exiles from Paradise: Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Delacorte Press, 1974). One passage may be cited here: "Undeniably, as one of Scott's critics, Dr. John Kuehl, has pointed out in The Apprentice Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1965), Zelda became the prototypal heroine, the femme fatale—as Scott himself became the hero, the homme mangue—of his fiction. On the other hand, she was never La Belle Dame sans Merci or the heartless charmer that Scott in his jealousy sometimes imagined her to be" (p. 23).
upon whom Fitzgerald drew freely for other works.

The notion that women are predators, that they are capable of destroying even the men they want most, becomes a central idea in nearly all of Fitzgerald’s fiction: the principal romantic male characters (Jay Gatsby and Anthony Patch, for example) are partly defeated by careless women who are unable to give themselves unselfishly in love, who in fact turn from their lovers at the terrible crises of life, and who lack what might be called moral strength. Over and over the theme is repeated. “Nine girls out of ten can stand good looks without going to pieces,” Fitzgerald writes in his notebooks, “though only one boy out of ten ever comes out from under them.”8 In his “Basil and Josephine” sketches, Josephine sets power above love and scarcely realizes her wanton irresponsibility. “Two Wrongs,” a short story written in 1930, details the pitiless decline of Bill McChesney, a Broadway producer who falls in love with and marries a dancer from South Carolina. It is a grave mistake. The woman exploits her husband, ruins him, and goes her way; meanwhile, McChesney drifts sadly and is finally abandoned in a tuberculosis sanatorium. The flapper types in This Side of Paradise, moreover, are hardly more appealing. As Maxwell Geismar says, they are “undergraduate Madame Bovars,” forever enamored of themselves and forever selfish.7 The list continues, but Charles Shain summarizes the point concisely:

> “To understand Fitzgerald’s life and his stories of love and marriage,” he adds pointedly, “we must be prepared to accept the tragic love plot strongly implied in his biography.”8

Thus Fitzgerald’s fiction becomes a literary record of personal disillusionment. The central tragedy of the Fitzgerald hero is that the ideals he holds concerning women (and life) are corroded and finally destroyed; a kind of buoyant, romantic eagerness is gradually replaced by waste, by a cold recognition of certain grim facts, and then by despair or death. That is why John Aldridge can speak about “The Horror and the Vision of Paradise” (in, for example, This Side of Paradise):9 there is an ugly underside to all the glitter. As Arthur Mizener explains, Fitzgerald’s heroes (and indeed Fitzgerald himself) always attempt to grasp “some romantic dream of a meaningful existence”;10 a great part of that dream is embodied in a woman, a woman who regularly fails the victim. The romanticist’s illusion is shattered: “He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves,” says Nick Carraway of Gatsby in that novel’s fa-

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mous soliloquy, "and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass."11

Of course, Gatsby and Fitzgerald's other heroes are not without blame. They are, on their own, flawed, indecisive, sometimes weak. Anthony Patch, for example, needs no one to lead him astray. Dick Diver comes eventually to be a very feeble man, and his decline is almost willful—Nicole or no Nicole. Yet Fitzgerald makes it clear that both men were capable of regeneration, a regeneration made impossible by the selfish actions of their spouses. Fitzgerald's heroes are morally weak men cast adrift by morally weaker women; the men have no one to sustain them. Nevertheless, they are seen as having about them much to admire; the women are not.

I.

The first thing that Richard Caramel in The Beautiful and the Damned says of his cousin, Gloria Gilbert, is that she hasn't "a brain in her head."12 Mrs. Gilbert promptly insists that her daughter is "irresponsible" (p. 39). "I want to just be lazy," Gloria says, "and I want some of the people around me to be doing things, because that makes me comfortable and safe" (p. 66). "Aren't you much interested in anything except yourself?" asks Anthony. "Not much," is Gloria's answer (p. 112). But Anthony can't accept that, even though Fitzgerald, almost paraphrasing Keats, assures his readers that the girl "was beautiful—but especially without mercy" (p. 116). Gloria takes, Fitzgerald continues, "all the things of life for hers to choose from and apportion, as though she were continually picking out presents for herself from an inexhaustible counter" (p. 62). When Anthony kisses her, she is emotionless: "No love was there," the narrator warns, but Anthony, struck by her beauty, only replies, "You're such a swan in this light" (p. 102). Gloria is, in short, a dangerous, if beautiful, gamble. Yet her lover is hopelessly enthralled:

... as she talked and caught his eyes and turned her lovely head, she moved him as he had never been moved before. ... She was a sun, radiant, growing, gathering light and storing it—then after an eternity pouring it forth in a glance, the fragment of a sentence, to that part of him that cherished all beauty and all illusion. (p. 73)

Anthony, for his part, is an aesthete, a young man growing old (i.e., vaguely approaching thirty), whose only ambition, besides desiring to inherit his grandfather's money, is to "do nothing, for there's nothing I can do that's worth doing" (p. 65). And yet there is no doubt that Anthony has the mind and the ability to accomplish something (he hoped to write); he just can't adjust, can't find himself. So he marries Gloria, commits himself to another human being. "All he has," writes Shain, "he invests in his life with Gloria."13 It is, of course, the fatal error, for the rest of the novel is a meticulous chronicle of his slow, deliberate decline.

Gloria begins the marriage by almost taunting Anthony, by ridiculing his romantic ideals. "Beautiful things grow to a certain height and then they fail and

13 Shain, p. 103.
fade off,” she says viciously, “breathing out memories as they decay” (p. 166). Anthony survives such slights, but is unable to keep catastrophe back for long. One wet Monday night Gloria forms a party (with Anthony and a few of his friends in tow) and leads them “on as gay and joyous a bacchanal as they had ever known” (p. 224). It was the beginning of the nights of recklessness, of the heavy drinking. In short, it was, as Fitzgerald remarks, the beginning of the end:

It was with this party, more especially with Gloria’s part in it, that a decided change began to come over their way of living. The magnificent attitude of not giving a damn altered overnight; from being a mere tenet of Gloria’s it became the entire solace and justification for what they chose to do and what consequences it brought. . . . 

“No one cares about us but ourselves, Anthony,” she said one day. “It’d be ridiculous for me to go about pretending I felt any obligations toward the world, and as for worrying what people think about me, I simply don’t, that’s all.” (p. 227)

If she worries at all, it is, as Lehan points out, only about such minutiae as whether her legs will tan well. Thus Fitzgerald portrays in Gloria an appalling irresponsibility, appalling because Anthony himself loses the will to do anything about the colossal wreckage. Gloria says that the only lesson to be learned from life is that “there’s no lesson to be learned from life” (p. 255); she tells Anthony, derisively, that she wants “to use every minute of these years, when I’m young, in having the best time I possibly can” (p. 304). Her husband initially tries to set up “props” around him, but as Fitzgerald shows with care and painful exactness, they are all futile. Old Adam Patch intrudes on a drunken party at the most inopportune time possible and disinherits his son. Anthony discovers suddenly that he is incapable of work. His health begins to break; he grows mentally sluggish. To Dot, the southern girl he had ignominiously seduced near an army camp, he relates the tale of his life with Gloria:

Things are sweeter when they’re lost. I know—because once I wanted something and got it. It was the only thing I ever wanted badly, Dot. And when I got it it turned to dust in my hands. (p. 341)

Anthony regains his money at the end of The Beautiful and the Damned, but he has lost everything else, including all his illusions. He is, if anyone is, in the legion of the hollow men. But Gloria, with that fierceness that somehow runs through Fitzgerald’s female characters, endures in her own peculiar way. Actually, Fitzgerald had given Gloria a shred of respectability midway through the book; it grew, he said, from “the skeleton, incomplete but nevertheless unmistakable, of her ancient abhorrence, a conscience” (p. 278). Arthur Mizener even grants her a kind of status:

What she believes in—the rights and privileges of her beauty—is more trivial even than what Anthony believes in—the rights and privileges of his own undemonstrated intellectual superiority. But she believes in it with courage, and when she is forced, in brutal circumstances, to recognize it is fading, she takes her defeat with something like dignity.15

Yet Gloria, who has been spoiled all her life, really undergoes no metamorphosis in Fitzgerald’s portrait; Mizener’s statement is clearly an exaggeration. And “dignity” is hardly the word to use in

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14 Lehan, p. 80.

describing her final actions. In the last pages of the novel, faced with what appears to be certain financial doom, she shows the extent of her courage and poise in a thoughtless suggestion to Anthony. "Let's sell all the bonds and put the thirty thousand dollars in the bank—and if we lose the case we can live in Italy for three years, and then just die" (p. 427). To the end she is essentially the "distracted narcissist" (to use Geismar's phrase).16

The tale of Anthony and Gloria Patch is not a tragic one because the Patches only rarely draw the reader's sympathy and only acknowledge virtue in order that they may scorn it. But it is an American story with authenticity in the documentation; the damning of the beautiful is an interesting spectacle. Anthony, Fitzgerald seems to say, loses to the world by losing to Gloria: "All the distress that he had ever known," Fitzgerald writes at the end, "had been because of women. It was something that in different ways they did to him, unconsciously, almost casually—perhaps finding him tender-minded and afraid, they killed the things in him that menaced their absolute sway" (p. 444).

II.

_The Beautiful and the Damned_ was published in 1922. _The Great Gatsby_ was published three years later in 1925. Again, Fitzgerald's theme is in part about the failure of women. Daisy Buchanan, like Gloria, is exquisitely beautiful, vivacious, wealthy, and impossibly confident of her appeal to men. "Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth," observes Nick Carraway early in the book, "but there was an excitement in her voice that men who cared for her found difficult to forget" (p. 9). Gatsby's mistake is that he doesn't forget the past, that he can't shake off an illusion. He loves Daisy without reservation while courting her in Louisville even though he is aware of the danger of his dream: "He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath," writes Nick, "his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (p. 112). Since most of the sharing in the affair is on his part, two days after their first sexual experience "it was Gatsby who was breathless, who was somehow betrayed" (p. 149). Still, Gatsby goes to the war confident of the young debutante's passion for him; he doesn't know that Daisy, impatient, would marry Tom Buchanan, marry him with "a certain struggle and a certain relief" (p. 152).

The fact is that Daisy, despite her undeniable charm, is portrayed by Fitzgerald as a woman of little conscience and courage. Her devotion means little: in the climactic scene in the novel—where Gatsby and Tom have it out in a suite at the Plaza Hotel—she is both won and lost in a matter of seconds. "I never loved him," she forces herself to say of Tom "with perceptible reluctance" (p. 133), but she is unable to draw closer to the man who loves her, to the man who has watched the green light at the end of her dock for five years. Daisy, in a sense, washes her hands of Gatsby at the moment when the slightest show of strength could have carried her past the crisis. Thus it is not surprising for

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16 Geismar, p. 300.
her not to publicly admit her guilt in the traffic accident which killed Tom’s mistress. Tom reclaims her to his world of “vast carelessness” (p. 180) in the following brief, but unforgettable, passage:

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table, with a plate of cold fried chicken between them, and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table at her, and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement.

They weren’t happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale—and yet they weren’t unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together. (p. 146)

So Gatsby is destroyed, writes Fitzgerald, by “the colossal vitality of his illusion” (p. 97); his death is a mean one despite Nick’s assurance that he was “worth the whole damn bunch put together” (p. 154).

III.

The theme of the failure or inadequacy of women is most clearly realized in Tender Is the Night, published in 1934. For if ever a man were “used,” Dick Diver is that man, and it is clear that Fitzgerald, haunted by the depressing condition of Zelda, identified with him. “I think that the pull of an afflicted person upon a normal one is at all times downward,” he once wrote to Scottie, “and it should be left to those who have chosen such duties as a life work.”17 That is really the crux of the novel. Nicole Warren, seduced by her father, has serious psychological problems and is sent to a professional clinic in Zurich. There she meets Dick Diver, a graduate of Yale, a Rhodes scholar, a young psychiatrist who has listened to Freud in Vienna and is, at twenty-six, “the very acme of bachelorhood.”18 Dick is instrumental in “curing” Nicole (who is, of course, beautiful), then fatefuly falls in love with her and marries her. For all practical purposes, his career is now over; his life is over. Dick and Nicole waste their time on the Riviera, throw parties for a group of dissolute friends, and end up hating each other. But Nicole survives it all, survives her own schizophrenia, her own willful cruelty, and runs off with a handsome hedonist. For Dick she has one caustic remark: “You’re a coward! You’ve made a failure of your life, and you want to blame it on me” (p. 330).

Nicole, writes Geismar, is “a perverse phoenix arising from the ashes of her distorted youth.”19 Her family in Chicago is a wretched and demoralizing one, but that is by no means the whole story. Nicole has, for example, a great deal of money, and she uses it to enslave, not support, her husband. “Naturally Nicole, wanting to own him,” notes Fitzgerald, “wanting him to stand still forever, encouraged any slackness on his part, and in multiplying ways he was constantly inundated by a trickling of goods and money” (p. 187). More important, Nicole’s moods begin to baffle him. “His work became confused with Nicole’s problems” (p. 187), the first indication that he is losing control:

Dick tried to think what to do. The dualism in his views of her—that of the husband, that of the psychiatrist—was increasingly paralyzing his faculties. In these six years she had several times carried him

17 Letters, p. 81.

18 F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tender Is the Night (New York, Bantam Books, 1951), p. 124. All further references to this work appear in the text.

19 Geismar, p. 331.
over the line with her, disarming him by exciting emotional pity or by a flow of wit, fantastic and disassociated, so that only after the episode did he realize with the consciousness of his own relaxation from tension, that she had succeeded in getting a point against his better judgment. (p. 207)

"Nicole," Dick ponders, "was alternately a person to whom nothing need be explained and one to whom nothing could be explained" (p. 211). Thus, when his wife almost kills the entire family by veering their car off a road, he can do nothing. And yet, simultaneously, he still loves her and gives to her. When he is courted by a young movie starlet, Rosemary Hoyt, Dick still makes it clear how he feels about Nicole:

"Kiss me once more," [says Rosemary].
He kissed her, but momentarily he had left her.
"Nicole musn't suffer—she loves me and I love her—you understand that" [says Dick]. (p. 81)

Dick foolishly thinks that he can have Rosemary as well as Nicole; he ends up, of course, having neither. But that is because Nicole is already fading away, drifting into her own harshness and confusion. "She's not very strong," Dick says helplessly. "And that makes rather a mess" (p. 82).

"Please be happy, Dick" (p. 189), Nicole once tells her chafing husband. The irony is obvious: it is she who is making him unhappy, and it is she who will ruin him. Nicole can almost be forgiven for her inability to understand what she is doing, but Fitzgerald finds no excuse in innocence or ignorance. Tender Is the Night is no tragedy, but the terrible consequences of the book must be placed at the feet of Nicole Diver. She finds that with her lover, Tommy Barban, she has grown stronger, and this fact seems to be all that matters to her:

Her ego began blooming like a great rich rose as she scrambled back along the labyrinths in which she had wandered for years. She hated the beach, resented the places where she had played planet to Dick's sun.

"Why, I'm almost complete," she thought. "I'm practically standing alone without him." And like a happy child, wanting the completion as soon as possible, and knowing vaguely that Dick had planned for her to have it, she lay on her bed as soon as she got home, and wrote Tommy Barban in Nice a short provocative letter. (p. 316)

Fitzgerald, who watched with some terror the deterioration of Zelda, is personally moved by the consequences of Nicole's fall: "Moment by moment all that Dick had taught her fell away and she was ever nearer to what she had been in the beginning, prototype of that obscure yielding up of swords that was going on in the world about her" (p. 325).

So Dick, a victim finally of emotional bankruptcy," lets her go. He is both a victim of his good will and of his own incapacity to objectively take account of his situation; he hasn't the strength to fight back. And Nicole, clearly, hasn't anything to give him. Only once does she sense the enormity of his loss; only once does she allow him sympathy:

Approaching noiselessly she saw him behind his cottage, sitting in a steamer chair by the cliff wall, and for a moment she regarded him silently. He was thinking, he was living a world completely his own and in the small motions of his face, the brow raised or lowered, the eyes narrowed or widened, the lips set and reset, the play of his hands, she saw him progress from phase to phase of his own story spinning out inside him, his own, not hers. . . . For almost the first time in her life she was sorry for him—it is hard for those who have

Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, p. 244.
once been mentally afflicted to be sorry for those who are well, and though Nicole often paid lip service to the fact that he had led her back to the world she had forfeited, she had thought of him really as an inexhaustible energy, incapable of fatigue—she forgot the troubles she caused him at the moment when she forgot the troubles of her own that had prompted her. That he no longer controlled her—did he know that?

(p. 329)

But when the final confrontation arises between Tommy Barban and Dick, she shows where her sentiments do lie. "I've gotten very fond of Tommy, Dick," she says evenly, and it is over. Accusing Nicole of a kind of moral treason here is beside the point, and Fitzgerald doesn't do it. But it is clear that she has little substance, little conscience, little sensitivity. She is, consequently, the perfect Fitzgerald heroine.

In Fitzgerald's fiction, the men—even in their futility, even in approaching death—come at least to acknowledge the sterility of their illusions. The women do not. They never seem to recognize the blight of their lives. Fitzgerald sees them as weak, frail creatures, unfit for the spell of their beauty; they are, actually, human beings. But Fitzgerald never excuses their inadequacies, always pointing to the romantic ideal. Women need to be strong in this world, he seems to say, and strength to him meant being loyal to and supportive of the men who count on their love. That attitude, reflected throughout his work, seems rather narrow, and today may be quite unpalatable. After all, strength for a woman might lie in being resourceful enough to leave a failed man. Fitzgerald's fiction and his letters to Scottie show that he may never have seen male-female relationships in that light.
FAULKNER'S ABSALOM, ABSALOM!
AN AESTHETIC PROJECTION OF
THE RELIGIOUS SENSE OF BEAUTY

ALMA A. ILACQUA

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In his proposed magnum opus, "A History of the Work of Redemption," Jonathan Edwards optimistically describes a meaningful order in which "grace is growing" from "generation to generation," despite "declension" or periodic lapses during which "corruption prevails." He makes clear in well-known and oft-quoted works like "Religious Affections," "The Nature of True Virtue," and "Freedom of Will" that perception of this meaningful order is granted only to the elect. He describes this spiritual vision in physical terms. The elect perceive the total pattern of past, present, and future. Their unfragmented vision derives from the ability to view history as if they were looking through the broad lens of a telescope.

In many of his works, William Faulkner appears to translate, perhaps unconsciously, the Edwardsian idea of spiritual beauty into aesthetic terms. This religious sense is distinguished by awareness of an order which includes both good and evil, acceptance of this order as beautiful, and optimism toward the future. Like Edwards, Faulkner refers to patterns. Instead of stream and ocean analogues, he employs, among others, rug, wheel, and chess metaphors. Faulkner also uses eye and sight imagery to distinguish between the regenerate and the unregenerate. Characters who might be designated in Edwardsian terms as elect have a kind of total vision that sees "the beginning and the end," like Dilsey, or all the way from Varner's Corners into Jefferson, like Mrs. Armstid. They are apt to have heavenly-blue or periwinkle-purple-blue eyes. Sometimes, these telescopic and royal-blue eyes are further described as bright, sharp, clear, piercing, or bottomless. The damned, on the other hand, are myopic, blind, or purblind. Often, their eyes are scarcely visible behind spectacles with thick lenses that either obscure or distort the eyes they cover. In some instances, either organs of sight or spectacles are opaque, like those of Ab Snopes and "Mama Bidet." Frequently, the eyes are compared to black rubber knobs, flint, or stagnant water, like those of Popeye, Buck Hipp, and Flem Snopes.

In all of Absalom, Absalom! the only person who is able to view the whole

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2 This figure is treated in "Freedom of Will." Works, I, 617.
3 Use of Edwardsian definitions is in no way intended to imply that Faulkner studied Edwards or to suggest a direct influence of Edwards on Faulkner. Indeed, the only assumption made by this study is that Puritan patterns of thought are part of our American heritage and, as such, tend to infiltrate the work of American writers.
“rug” from the perspective of the “Ones that set up the loom” is Shreve McCannon. Despite the fact that he is an “outsider” and not directly involved in the action of the novel, he is a major part of the narrative voice. He is the spokesman who asks the right questions of the narrator Quentin and who makes the proper comments. He frequently asks Quentin to wait while he sifts the information and places it in proper perspective. After hours of “trying to make sense out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking” (p. 303), the “outsider” develops into a kind of alter ego for Quentin: “It might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking became audible, vocal” (p. 303). Shreve is an important part of the book not only because he helps Quentin try to “make sense” of the Sutpen story, but because he, rather than Quentin, finally succeeds in reaching a viable conclusion. Quentin himself remains a “ghost” (p. 9) who can only repeat hysterically, “I don’t hate it [the South]” (p. 378), after he and Shreve have reconstructed the drama of dynasty. Quentin does not repudiate his past, good as well as evil, in the manner of an Ike McCaslin who was revolted by his grandfather’s arrogance and miscegenation. He cannot hate the evil and try to stem its tide while accepting responsibility for his past, like Buck and Buddy and Cass. Instead, Quentin is simply immobilized by his irrational attachment to his sentimentalized vision of the South. Ultimately, it is Shreve who perceives some kind of order and hope for the future evolving out of the “original sin” of tainted land and miscegenation. Only he possesses the total vision which enables him to view events of past and present objectively and to bring them into some meaningful unity. He looks upon America in general and the South in particular from his perspective as a Canadian. He can perceive American history as if he were looking through the wide lens of the telescope. Hence his vision is whole and realistic, not partial and romantic.

Because Shreve is not, like Quentin, immersed in “the cigar smell, wisteria smell, the fireflies” (p. 207), he does not cloak facts with romanticism, but sees accurately. He sees the Sutpen drama of dynasty as “better than the theatre” (p. 217). The contrast between Shreve’s realistic viewpoint and Quentin’s romantic one is nicely accentuated by the reactions of the young men to the ice-cold room in which they sit discussing the past. The cold-sensitive southerner is progressively warmed by memory and does not notice the freezing temperature. The fresh-air enthusiast from the Canadian north who habitually sits half-naked in his room or exercises before an open window dons more and more clothing as the drama unfolds (pp. 293, 346, et passim).

Shreve is the only character in the book who never uses the romantic epithet “innocent” for Sutpen’s non-recognition of evil. Rather, he consistently refers to him as a “demon,” a “Faustus,” or a “Beelzebub” (pp. 178, 246, et passim). He clearly sees Sutpen as the

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fallen angel who succumbed to the Mephistophelian lust for power:

... this Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub ... who appeared suddenly one Sunday with two pistols and twenty subsidiary demons and skull-dug a hundred miles of land out of a poor ignorant Indian and built the biggest house on it you ever saw and went away with six wagons and came back with the crystal tapestries and the Wedgewood chairs to furnish it and nobody knew if he had robbed another steamboat or had just dug up a little more of the old loot, who hid horns and tail beneath human raiment and beaver hat and chose (bought her, out-swapped his father-in-law, wasn't it) a wife after three years to scrutinize, weigh and compare, not from one of the local ducal houses but from the lesser baronage whose principalty was so far decayed that there would be no risk of his wife bringing him for dowry delusions of grandeur before he should be equipped for it. (p. 178)

Shreve also has a firm idea of cosmic order. He refers repeatedly to God as the "Creditor" (p. 179 et passim). He knows that Sutpen's books will be balanced in a higher court than his own. He knows that no matter how Clytie and Judith and the rest try to balance the ledger of Sutpen sins, "You can't tear out the pages and burn them" (p. 378). His conviction of universal order as one in which justice and mercy will triumph over commerce and chancery leads him to his optimistic view of the future. Although it may take "two niggers to get rid of one Sutpen" (p. 378), eventually evil will be its own undoing. Even the idiocy of Jim Bond will be bred out. Thus the "evil" of miscegenation will lead to the disappearance of divisive color lines and the restoration of the unity of mankind (p. 378).

Clearly, one of the themes of this very complex story concerns miscegenation. This interbreeding of races is a reality which, in the total aesthetic of the book, is "beautiful." However, it is a reality with which individual characters in Faulkner's South cannot deal rationally. Sutpen repudiates his Haitian wife and son because of color. Bon, in protest, refuses to repudiate his Creole wife and son. Clytie must sleep on a pallet, Judith in a bed, because of color. Henry shoots Bon, not because of the incest, but because of the color. It rests with the "outsider" Shreve to interpret the facts rationally. He sees interbreeding as part of a cosmic design to destroy the "empty clanging terms of ... race" or 'color.' Shreve, then, is capable of perceiving a larger order. He consents to the whole and sees all things, good and evil, as meaningful.

Thomas Sutpen, on the other hand, possesses the distorted and fragmented vision which characterizes the damned. His fall from innocence is total and unredeemable. Like Goodman Brown, whose vision of evil haunts him to the grave and beyond, Sutpen is irrevocably doomed. His rebuff at the hands of the Negro servant, who is, himself, but a thread in the portion of the rug of that time and of that place, marks his fall. For him, all time begins with that single rebuff.

Until the age of thirteen or fourteen, Sutpen remains unaware of the existence of a "country all divided and fixed and neat" along color and property lines (pp. 221-22). When he is sent to deliver

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6 The point Shreve makes on the last page of the novel is epitomized in this quote from Faulkner's 1953 "Address to the Graduating Class, Pine Manor Junior College," Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, ed. James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 142. Faulkner makes the same point fictively in many works. A later novel, A Fable, talks about the unity of mankind and the special interests which work against unity. Both Absalom, Absalom! and A Fable make the point that private motives often ignore the "universal truths."
a message to the master of the Pettibone mansion, he welcomes his errand as an opportunity to glimpse the wondrous contents of the big house. Instead, the “monkey nigger, who through no doing of his own happened to have had the felicity of being housebred in Richmond . . . told him, even before he had had time to say what he came for, never to come back to that front door again but to go around to the back” (p. 232). The rebuff fills Thomas with hatred and vengeance, and the message remains undelivered. He refrains from killing the master of the house where he was spurned because he realizes “That wouldn’t do no good” (p. 237). Nevertheless, he vows to fight “them” on their own grounds: he determines to acquire “the fine land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with” (p. 238).

His fall is not accompanied by the greater perception of good, in the Miltonic manner. Rather, it fragments his vision so that evil becomes the sole reality. This warped view leads Sutpen to conceive his own order. In his design, he functions as sole creator and final arbiter of justice. But Sutpen’s design is based on private interests which are not harmonious with the universal design. His private system is inspired by anger, pride, and vengeance—all forms of self-love.

Granted, his youthful resolve to avenge the rebuff by the “monkey nigger” (pp. 220, 234, et passim) evokes sympathy. His dynastic pride is also understandable. But the fact that he allows the “boy symbol” (p. 261, et passim) to distort his vision to the end of his days suggests spiritual blindness. Furthermore, his dynastic plan disre-
He appears in Yoknapatawpha County astride his roan horse, red-bearded, and with "two pistols . . . which he used with the precision of knitting needles" (p. 33). He seems, like R. W. B. Lewis' American Adam, to have been "created out of thin air" (p. 32). Having formed, like Gatsby, a platonic vision of himself, he continues to weave his own pattern in the "rug." The warp and woof of his "design" are money, power, and bloodlines.

After creating himself in the image of Pettibone, he proceeds to create his universe. He sits astride his horse, "Immobile, bearded and hand palm-lifted. . . [creating] house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing . . . creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the Be Sutpen's Hundred like the olden-time Be Light" (pp. 8-9). Olfactory images of "sulphur reek" and visual images of red beard, red horse, and naked, wild, black half-human figures establish the act of creation as demonic. Although this version of Sutpen is Rosa's (filtered through Quentin), it presents essentially the same picture of Sutpen as does subsequent information given Quentin by his father. Mr. Compson affirms the mysterious appearance of the red-bearded stranger and roan horse who looked "as though they had been created out of thin air" (p. 32). He ratifies the "legend of the wild men" (p. 36). He confirms the vision of "black-ones . . . stark naked . . . plastered over with mud" (p. 37). Mr. Compson's version substitutes commercial and animal imagery for Rosa's demonic imagery. But his more objective approach brands Sutpen as no less bereft of virtue than Rosa's subjective description. His story reflects the opinion of the townspeople as recorded by General Compson. Sutpen goes "to town to find a wife exactly as he would have gone to the Memphis market to buy livestock or slaves" (p. 42). Since the blood of the Coldfields seems suited to his design of founding a dynasty, he picks Ellen Coldfield "with the same care and for the same purpose which he blended that of the stallion" (p. 85). This animal imagery is echoed later when Sutpen asks the midwife if Milly bore him a "horse" or a "mare" (p. 386). Indeed, as Sutpen attempts to people his world "with cold and ruthless deliberation" (p. 42), his acts of "creation" appear to grow increasingly blasphemous.

Sutpen's truncated vision leads him to believe that time actually begins when he decrees it shall. This American Adam is convinced that he can escape the responsibility for his own acts by saying he was tricked into marriage with his Haitian wife. He believes he can escape his original sin of repudiating wife and child by buying "immunity" (p. 265). He deludes himself into thinking he can "shut that door himself forever behind him on all he had ever known, and look ahead along the still undivulged light rays in which his descendants . . . waited to be born" (p. 261). He considers his financial settlement on his Haitian wife and son "part of the cleaning up" (p. 265) which balances the ledgers and wipes his slate clean of responsibility to the past.° Like

° While this "book balancing" is refined to an extreme degree in Thomas Sutpen and his issue, it is not exclusively a Sutpen trait. The Coldfield mania for retribution is also seen in the aunt's lifelong attempt to pay back the town which refused to accept Ellen's wedding invitations delivered by the aunt "house to house . . . like a challenge" (p. 54). The aunt "even ten years later was still taking revenge for the fasco.}
Addie, who was unsuccessful in her attempts to “clean up after herself” by having children to “negative” other children, he finds that his private system of book balancing fails. He learns to his amazement that one can neither erase the past nor anticipate the future.

Sutpen sees his design disintegrating, but he does not recognize the reason for his failure. Neither conscience nor justice figures in his appraisal of the situation. Indeed, he tells Quentin’s grandfather, “I had a design in mind. Whether it was a good or a bad design is beside the point; the question is, Where did I make the mistake in it . . . what did I do or misdo in it . . . whom or what injure by it” (p. 263). Quentin’s grandfather describes Sutpen’s truncated vision as “innocence which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake would come out” (p. 263). His epithet “purblind innocence” (p. 265) for such myopia suggests spiritual shortsightedness or obtuseness. It is this “purblind innocence” that makes Sutpen unaware of the fact that he “could have bought immunity from her [his Haitian wife] for no other coin but justice” (p. 265). Even when Charles Bon appears on his doorstep and he sees the face “he believed he had paid off and discharged twenty-eight years ago” (p. 265), he cannot concede that the event may be “retribution . . . sins of the father come home to roost” (p. 268). Although he feels the “design—house, position, posterity and all—comes down like it had been built out of smoke” (p. 268), he continues to see the flaw in the fabric as a “mistake” which “a man of courage and shrewdness” might yet rectify (p. 267). He cannot perceive that his own plan may be contrary to a larger order. Therefore, he is amazed when despite his grand design, he seems destined to found his dynasty on mixed blood. If he acknowledges Bon as his son, he is admitting black blood to the Sutpen line. If he keeps his “secret” and allows Bon to marry his daughter Judith, he is admitting black blood into the Sutpen dynasty, also. In perplexity, he confides to General Compson:

Either course which I might choose, leads to the same result: either I destroy my design with my own hand, which will happen if I am forced to play my last trump card, or do nothing, let matters take the course which I know they will take and see my design complete itself quite normally and naturally and successfully to the public eye, yet to my own in such fashion as to be a mockery and a betrayal of that little boy who approached that door fifty years ago and was turned away, for whose vindication the whole plan was conceived and carried forward to the moment of his choice. (p. 274)

Sutpen is damned, then, because of his faulty moral vision. His initiation into evil does not result in any greater perception of good. It fails to become even the mixed blessing experienced by the initiates in Hawthorne, James, and R. P. Warren. Rather, it is the Melvillian fall that totally damns. Unlike Dilsey, Anse, and Lena Gove who consent to the whole, Sutpen cannot accept evil as a meaningful part of a larger order. His glimpse of evil so distorts his vision that it becomes the focal point of his world. Instead of awakening him to the
eternal "verities" of "love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice," the experience deadens him to everything save hate and vengeance. To vindicate the rebuffed child, he conceives the dynastic design he intends to complete at any cost. For the sake of this design, he is willing to repudiate wife and son. He "buys" the Coldfield bloodline. He exposes his daughter to the danger of an incestuous relationship. He drives his son Henry to murder. He makes an indecent proposal to Rosa. He seduces a fifteen-year-old child. He later repudiates the child because she bears him a daughter instead of a son. Heartlessly, he tells her, "Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare like Penelope. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable" (pp. 185, 286). This final expression of inhumanity leads to his physical death. When Wash kills him with his own scythe, he reinforces Faulkner's thesis that evil is ultimately self-destructive.

That Sutpen's design is based entirely on private interests which are contrary to a larger order is a sign of damnation in both Edwardsean and Faulknerian terms. That these private interests are false affections founded in self-love is further evidence of damnation in both Edwardsean and Faulknerian terms. Sutpen's design leads him to the ultimate sin of trying to play God. He creates himself in the image of a grand chateleine. He creates Sutpen's Hundred from land wrested from Ikkemotubbe and with sweat wrung from his savages and the manacled French architect. He lacks even the natural instincts of love of family and love of justice. He substitutes commerce and chancery for love and justice. Having allowed his pride to distort his vision, he fails to see that in refusing to acknowledge his son, he is denying the child who knocked at the door of the Pettibone mansion fifty years earlier. In an ironic reversal of the Old Testament tale, he mourns because his son is alive.

The Sutpen saga begins and ends with demonic imagery. Emerging out of a "thunderclap," the "man-horse-demon" creates Sutpen's Hundred amid "sulphur reek" and "wild" half-human figures. Seventy-seven years later, "the doomed house" resembles a smoke-filled, devil-infested inferno as it is consumed by crimson flames. All that remains of the Sutpen line is the idiot "Jim Bond, the scion, the last of his race . . . howling" (p. 376).

Yet, despite the wholesale deaths and demonic images, Faulkner's basic optimism is present in Absalom, Absalom! as it is in his every work. Although the degenerate, ineffectual, aristocratic seed symbolized by the Coldfields is gone, the hardier mountain-Sutpen/Negro seed remains. Jim Bond himself is doomed because he lacks the understanding necessary for election. But he is alive. He is free. He is vocal. He is, presumably, capable of begetting children. As Shreve McCannon puts it: "You've got one nigger . . . Sutpen left" (p. 318). As long as one is left, there is hope that, through atavism, the good that was in

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10 His heartlessness is an aesthetic projection of the total lack of "Christian tenderness" or "heart of flesh" described in Edwards' "Religious Affections," Works, I, 303-309.

11 Bond cannot "prevail," and he can "endure" only at the most elemental levels. Denied understanding, he is incapable of the "consent" that would inform him of order.
Sutpen will emerge in some future generation.

In Edwardsean terms, although every man since the Fall is born with only common grace, some are singled out by God to have the special grace restored to them. This gradual restoration of the holy spirit is part of the beautiful order which sees “the whole of human history . . . connected to and inseparable from showers of Grace that impelled humanity not on a prescribed course but toward a destined and predictable goal.”

In Faulknerian terms, this gradual redemption and regeneration are expressed by his oft-repeated “maybe in a thousand or two thousand years” and by his conviction that evil contains the seeds of its own undoing. It is insured again and again by those Faulkner characters touched with “irresistible grace” who possess the ability to repudiate evil and advance good. One of the ways of advancing the Kingdom on earth is through atavism and avatars. These “avatars,” or incarnations of deity, may be throwbacks or reversions of either the dark spirit or the spirit of light. Presumably, the innocence and strength that were in Sutpen before his fall, the compassion that shows in Bon’s final act, and the stoicism and loyalty of Judith and Clytie may appear as “avatars” in Bond’s probable issue. So Bond may, in truth, become Bon.

In any event, Shreve McCannon, whose vision is not the fragmentary vision of the damned but the total vision of the elect, states what is apparently Faulkner’s thesis: “I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won’t quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they won’t show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings” (p. 378). From Quentin’s—and presumably from the southern—point of view, such a prospect is tragic. From the point of view of a larger order for which Shreve may be the spokesman, man’s redemption in time may ironically rest with the unborn issue of the Jim Bonds of the world.

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12 Alan E. Heimert, Religion and the American Mind (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), p. 66. For Edwards’ optimism imaged with upward-streaming, see Works, I, 120. Edwards’ thesis that the work of redemption is one with the regeneration of humanity is everywhere apparent. See especially Works, I, 533-34, 540.

13 The idea that evil is self-limiting is suggested by the fact that Flem Snopes is impotent; Thomas Sutpen is killed with his own scythe; Doc Hines’s only grandson takes a suicidal course; Jason IV and McCashen have no issue; Joanna is barren. The examples are numerous.

14 See “The Bear” and the Snopes trilogy. Refer in particular to sections of The Mansion which show Mink Snopes resisting the Snoopian tendency to cheat and steal (p. 261) and the section on Eck Snopes and his sons Wallstreet Panic and Admiral Dewey who are so unsnopesian that Montgomery Ward Snopes says they “don’t count . . . they don’t belong to us: they are only our shame” (p. 83). Mink is unsnopesian enough to believe in God. Providence saves him time and time again. Even the convict who had vowed to kill him is himself destroyed when a church in Mexico collapses on him in The Mansion (p. 101). Obviously, such creatures are the elect, chosen to advance the Kingdom.

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Jesse Stuart, the well-known author of *Taps for Private Tussie* and *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow*, has published *The World of Jesse Stuart: Selected Poems*, *Up the Hollow from Lynchburg*, and *My World*.

A young man from one of America's most reputable universities, a thousand miles away, wrote me asking if he could pay me a visit of two hours. A portion of Appalachia had furnished his early ancestors. This, I learned in the three or four letters we had in exchange before his visit. One family of his ancestry was also a family in my ancestry.

He (let us call him John Preston and his university Mayberry University) wanted to visit his grandfather and grandmother who lived in central Kentucky, two hundred miles off. John Preston left his grandparents' home fifty miles west of Louisville and he was here, a distance of two hundred miles, by ten A.M.

"It couldn't be you John Preston, arriving this soon?" I said, meeting him at our front door. About six feet tall, twenty-four, clean-shaven, dressed in a checked shirt and dungarees. He had a natural smile, curved lips, his white teeth were slightly uneven. His hair was parted on the side and of average length.

I was glad to have this young visitor who wanted to see me. At twenty-four he was young enough for our grandson. I introduced John to my wife, Naomi. I could tell she was pleased with him. When he came in our old living room, his eyes quickly surveyed our front bookshelves, where there were nine hundred books, a few elementary, many secondary and college, textbooks, plus several prose and poetry anthologies—all books in which I had some of my own creativity: story, article, essay, poem, or excerpt from published books reprinted.

"Here's a book I used in high school," he said, pulling the book happily from the shelf. "Here is another I used in high school. Here's one I used in college while I was doing undergraduate work."

John Preston was a pleased young man. He was still walking around with a book in his hand. Naomi and I let it be known to each other by expressions on our faces and our smiles we were pleased with our young visitor.

Then a thought went through my mind while John Preston studied a book that he had taken from the shelf. I had found the young intelligent man I had been awaiting for a long time. I would ask him questions about writers I had known and loved as a young man. I wanted to link the past to the present. I also wanted to include all the years between my youth and his youth.

"John, I believe your major is English," I said.

"Right, and my English professor, Dr. Langsford, assigned six of your novels for me to read. This is how I know you as well as I do—I read your *Taps for Private Tussie*, *Mongrel Mettle*, *Foretaste of Glory*, *Hie to the Hunters*, *Good Spirit of Laurel Ridge*, and *The Land Beyond the River*. And of all these books, I liked *Hie to the Hunters* most!"
Another thought came to my mind. We wouldn't let young John Preston leave here before we gave him lunch. We'd take him for a drive across Greenup County, only eight miles to Jesse Stuart Lodge, Greenbo State Park, youngest of Kentucky's state parks. By doing this, Naomi and I would be taking John through the *Hie to the Hunters* country. Right now he was talking about Arn and Peg and Did and Sparkie, characters in the book, as if he knew them personally.

“Sparkie is a great character,” John said. “I can see him, younger than I.”

“Halt right there,” I said. “Even characters in the flesh grow old and die like the rest of us. Sparkie grew older and died. He's buried at Plum Grove!”

Young John Preston was silenced. He stood there in amazement. He couldn't believe the real Sparkie was dead.

“Would you like to sit down, John?” Naomi asked him.

“No, not particularly,” he said. “I'd like to look around in this house. That is, if you have more books!”

“We have plenty of books here,” Naomi told him.

Our home has ten rooms and in nine of these are books. Outside is an unheated building with four rooms and there are books in three of these. An almost certain estimate would put the number here at ten thousand books. Our home has often been called “The House of Books.” I knew John Preston wouldn't explore all of this in his allotted time of two hours. But I knew now and so did Naomi that we would hold our young visitor over for lunch and, perhaps, another two hours after lunch. We couldn't afford to lose a whole day but we would. Actually, we weren't losing a day but we were gaining one with such an intelligent, well-educated, curious-minded, handsome young visitor we would have liked to have claimed for a relative—perhaps that grandson.

John Preston looked at books, talked, moved along slowly from room to room. He did not want to sit down and talk. In a separate chest in the new living-room he took a look at my personal books, checked those he had read, found a few he had never heard of, which surprised him. In our bedroom, which has a high ceiling, he was amazed at the bookshelves on either side of our bed from floor to ceiling. All of these shelves were crowded with books—with books standing and laid in flatwise in stacks. Actually there wasn't enough room for all the books we had in this room.

Our last place to go was to the three rooms outside. We would just about have time for this before we took John to the Greenbo State Park lodge and drive across the Plum Grove Hills, Sparkie and Did country in *Hie to the Hunters*.

Now, these three rooms outside were where old books, culled books due to age, were kept because we could not throw a book away. These old books did not have the appeal to John Preston that the rooms with books in our home had. Out here were many of the old elementary school books Naomi and I had used in the one-room Kentucky schools. Out here were many of Naomi's brother Malcolm's textbooks. He was lost at sea near Wake Island in a submarine in World War II. And many of my high school and college textbooks were here. Many were old textbooks,
older than ours, back to the McGuffeys, even before, now in a deplorable condition, that did not excite John Preston as they had excited me. I had always liked textbooks, poor, medium, or excellent. I could never pass one up that was on sale in an old store. Out here were collections of world almanacs and *Who's Who in America*.

"I've never seen these collected before," John Preston spoke rapidly with a quick smile.

Out here were hundreds of magazines which I did not have anything published in but could not throw away. A side of one room had the shelves loaded from floor to ceiling with magazines, sometimes a dozen of the same magazine, in which I had stories, articles, essays, or poems published. "I didn't expect to see all this," John Preston said.

"Any young man come over a thousand miles to see us we enjoy showing him around," Naomi said. "Jesse, now don't you think we had better take Mr. Preston to Greenbo." I glanced at my watch. It was twelve noon. Time had slipped quickly but interestingly away.

Naomi drove down W-Hollow and we showed John our farm all the way out to State Route One. Now here was the beginning of the Plum Grove Hills. Here was the real setting for *Hie to the Hunters* which John Preston dearly loved as a book, as much as I had ever loved Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* in my high school days.

"See that church house on top the hill," I pointed. "That is the Plum Grove Church. There are two cemeteries there now. There is the old one where my father, mother, two brothers, and other kin lie buried and in the new one behind the church house is where Sparkie lies buried."

"I can't believe Sparkie is dead," he spoke in a lamenting tone. "To me he will always be alive and young."

"Remember him that way," I said. Now, we approached the Barney Tunnel Hill where State Route One went up and over without a single curve.

"See the woods over there," I said. "Peg and Arn lie buried somewhere in those woods. I don't know where. I've never been to their graves. I don't know whether or not they have stones up to their graves. Did and Sparkie used to hunt in those woods." As we dropped over Barney Tunnel Hill on State Route One, going south, on our right was a lane road, seldom used. One could tell by the grass grown up on either side and in the middle between two narrow tracks seldom used by wheels or footsteps.

"Drive slowly here Naomi," I said as I pointed to the lane road. "Here is where Sparkie and Did used to walk. Right out there in the oak grove, two hundred yards from here, is the log barn where they lived. Peg and Arn's house is beside it."

"Well, it's hard to believe I'm seeing the background of my favorite novel," John Preston said.

"Over here to our left is the country we used to call Buzzards' Roost. There are any number of old deserted coal mines. And there were many bobcats that denned in them. Both bobcats and buzzards are gone now. See all these houses! There used to be only one here! Civilization pushes wildlife farther and farther back until there is no more wild earth left for it!"

"Just to think Sparkie and Did walked
there,” John said with a sigh. “And Sparkie will never walk there again. Does Did ever return for a visit?”

“Yes, about once a year for a brief visit,” I said. “He has a sister and two brothers living here. And he drives out to see me. We grew up together and I’m about as close to him as either of his brothers!” Now we were at the foot of the hill.

“Over to my left where that house is was the Tom Fitch store where Did and Sparkie sold their pelts and bought their supplies,” I said. “The old store is gone. It’s the same house, renovated and added to! Up to my left on that high hill was a flag station where Did and Sparkie often flagged the train and shipped a batch of pelts. They never went anywhere on the train for visits. They loved this country so much they stayed right here.”

“I couldn’t blame them for that,” said young John Preston. “I could love this country despite all the new homes along this highway. It’s still a beautiful place. No wonder Sparkie loved it and Did was so fond of him and his way of life, he left the city to come to live here.”

“To our right is Sleepy Hollow which flows down to Little Sandy River at the Putt-Off Ford where long wagon trains in other years took people to be baptised in the spring after the ice had thawed,” I said. “I never was at one of these baptisings when I was a boy that I didn’t see Sparkie there. Later, Sparkie took Did. After Sparkie took him, Did never missed one.”

“I’d have given anything to see something like that,” John Preston said. “This morning I drove my car over two hundred miles of Interstate—what a change! But I’d like to have seen a wagon train of people on their way to the Little Sandy to be baptised. Do they never baptise people there any more?”

“No, not any more,” Naomi said. “This used to be a common practice to baptise in the Sandy River in spring all the way out to Hopewell where I was born and lived until I was twelve.” Now Naomi was driving up the MacIntyre Tunnel Hill, where the tunnel of the Old Eastern Kentucky Railway had caved in.

“You’re out of the Plum Grove Hills now,” Naomi said as we reached the hill top. “This is entirely different country with higher hills, more and better Sandy River bottom farmland!”

“Yes, in this area there are several large dairies,” I said.

“It’s such beautiful country,” John Preston repeated. “It’s a wonderful country for youth to live in.”

“You’ve just passed through the village of Argillite,” Naomi told him. “Many people were killed here back in prohibition days when they had their moonshine wars. It’s nice and peaceful now but it was once a rough place. And my people, the Deerings, brought the first iron furnace to Greenup County right here in 1820.”

“Have your people been in Greenup County that long?”

“Yes, longer.”

We drove on up State Route One and turned off to the Greenbo State Park. Here the sumac, sourwood, sweetgum, and blackgum leaves had begun to turn color very early. The entrance road from the highway went up and over hills and wound around them for three miles. Then we came to the Jesse Stuart Lodge
nestled in pines above the Greenbo Lake.

John Preston was enjoying his visit with us as much as he had enjoyed my books. I did not think *Hie to the Hunters* was my best novel but he did. He said he had read it three times and that he knew it was the best novel he had ever read. Now, when he went home he planned to read it again.

The dining room was not crowded. We got Darlene, the waitress who usually waits on us. I paid her the highest price I ever gave for a book, $350.00, which was for my own first book, *Harvest of Youth*. I gave it to Conrad Juergensmeyer, my grandson. The book belonged to Effie Hartley, a rural teacher in Greenup County. After her death it was found in the attic among papers knee deep on the floor.

"I like catfish," John said, looking at the menu.

"So do I," Naomi said.

"Make it three," I told Darlene.

After a catfish luncheon at the lodge, then a look around at the lobby, and a close inspection of the gift shop, we were on our way home. We knew that John Preston was driving back to his grandparents today, two people of whom he was very fond and visited once a year, driving all the way from Texas to see them. And we knew we had a few more things to show John Preston. Naomi brought us over the eleven miles from the park to home in a hurry.

"You've seen the lower rooms of this house and the three rooms outside," I said to John Preston. "Now, let's go upstairs!"

"More books?" John asked.

"Plenty more," I said. "Books published and unpublished. And a big roll-away desk I had when I was a young principal of McKell High School."

"How long ago?"

"1933 until 1937."

"We had it refinished," Naomi said. "All but the bottom of the big front drawer. Here are many of Jesse's high school students' names and initials."

We climbed the stairs and went straight to the desk, which was in the last addition to this house, built in 1971. It was made by Gene Darby, *The Beatdest Boy* in a popular junior book of mine that must have sold close to a million. He works for DuPont in addition to owning and running a small farm.

"Now here's the desk, John," I said.

Naomi pulled the big drawer out to show him the hundreds of initials and names never removed from the bottom—too many to count—perhaps a few hundred.

"What a desk," John said. "This must bring memories!"

"It certainly does for there are initials of my students left here who no longer live. Boys who were lost in World War II and the Korean conflict. I used this desk in the 1930's. I used it again in the 1950's second time I was principal of McKell. Then, I got it in the 1960's when it was no longer used at McKell. It was given to me. I had an expert to refinish it. I used it in the 1960's to write a book. I've used it in the 1970's on which to write a book, any number of poems, stories, articles, and essays. I like to write up here."

"This is the most attractive room in the house," John said. "What's in those labeled boxes?"

"Unpublished manuscripts."
“You have about as many unpublished manuscripts as published books,” he said.


While I sat in the chair at my desk he and Naomi walked around, looked at the books on the shelves, and at the autographed books in two sections. John Preston’s eyes had taken in almost everything in this house except for two other rooms upstairs where we stopped briefly. We knew he had a long way to drive and it was time for him to be on the road.

“Naomi Stuart, I want to thank you for this house and your showing it to me,” John Preston greeted her with a happy smile.

Then, he turned to me: “I want to thank you for writing books that have given me pleasure; I especially want to thank you for *Hie to the Hunters*. I’ll go back to graduate school and read it for the fourth time!” We watched John Preston walk toward his small car. He turned and waved before he entered and drove away.

“What a nice young man,” Naomi said. “If we’d had a son, I would have liked him to be like John Preston.”

“I can’t get over the way he likes *Hie to the Hunters*,” I said. “All the characters in that book for him are alive and breathing. Today I have not written a story I planned to write. This has taken one of our last days in time allotted to us to live. But John Preston has been worth every minute of it.”

ALL SONGS

B. Sanford Page

B. Sanford Page is a resident of Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

The graveyard is wet
and white marble meets my hand
with careless kiss.
Angels, caught in forever flight
guard the names carved in rock.
My shoes move through green
and rain slips down the faces of trees.
All songs can not be of love.
Some are written in green rain and stone.
THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE IN ROBERT FROST’S
“THE PAUPER WITCH OF GRAFTON”

CHRISTINE A. BRIGGS

Christine A. Briggs is a senior teaching fellow at the University of Detroit.

Writing is unboring to the extent that it is dramatic.”

“Everything written is as good as it is dramatic.”

“A poem ought to be something going on; not mere description or ejaculation.”

It is widely recognized that Frost equated the dramatic with poetry, that Browning was one of his favorite poets, and that the love question was central in Frost’s canon. Thus it is surprising that “The Pauper Witch of Grafton,” which draws together all of the above, has not received sufficient critical attention as a dramatic monologue.

Uttered by a sensuous woman, grown old, widowed, and indigent, “The Pauper Witch of Grafton” is rare in Frost’s work both in its form as a dramatic monologue and also in its ability “to give sexual love, passion itself, as breathtakingly conclusive an embodiment.” As Ronald L. Lycette notes, “Frost saw more alienation and lack of communication between men and women than he did fulfilling experiences.”

Although the theme of subjugation/dominance prevalent in many Frost poems (“Home Burial,” “The Housekeeper,” “A Servant to Servants”) surfaces in the poem, it is a minor mutation in a work whose leitmotif is erotic fulfillment. The witch, unlike most of Frost’s women protagonists, who recoil in horror from the sexual impulse, delights in her sensuality, encouraging her husband’s libidinous improvisations. As a dramatic monologue, the poem highlights the witch’s inner conflict, requiring the reader to participate in the moral and psychological nuances of the speaker’s mind.

Although K. P. Saradhi and John Lynen acknowledge that “The Pauper Witch of Grafton” resembles the “best of Browning’s own” and is one of only two dramatic monologues composed by Frost, the poem has “received very scattered praise and only fragmentary explanation,” according to Mordecai Marcus. His claim is substantiated by a survey of many of Frost’s major critics who either ignore the poem or only award it superficial mention.

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7 K. P. Saradhi, “Frost and Browning: The Dramatic Mode,” Kyushu American Literature, 10 (December 1967), 23.
Watkins states "that Frost's interest lies in the fact, in the minds, and souls of his characters," yet Watkins does not explore the witch's character, but only labels her a "puzzling witch . . . a combination of querulousness, regret, cruelty, and love." Elaine Barry in her book Robert Frost dismisses the poem as "essentially farcical"; George Nitchie inaccurately depicts the witch as "pathetically guilt-ridden." Nevertheless, some prominent critics, such as Randall Jarrell, Elizabeth Jennings, and John Lynen rate the dramatic monologue highly. One penetrating treatment is contained in the article, "The Whole Pattern of Robert Frost's 'Two Witches': Contrasting Psycho-Sexual Modes" by Mordecai Marcus. He examines the two poems as companion pieces, using "The Pauper Witch of Grafton" to illuminate and clarify "The Witch of Coos." Although his psychological analysis contains many insights, he does not thoroughly consider the poem's relation to its genre of the dramatic monologue. According to

Robert Langbaum, the speaker in a dramatic monologue "does not use his utterance to expound meaning but to pursue one, a meaning which comes to him with the shock of revelation . . . The meaning the speaker pursues is precisely his Song, his life's meaning." However, Marcus feels that "The Pauper Witch of Grafton" is deficient in character self-recognition, containing a speaker who reveals to her audience only knowledge that she has already confronted and secured. Agreeing with this assessment, John Lynen also maintains that "it is clear that she understands her own nature as well at the beginning of the monologue as at the end . . . the action consists in the gradual unfolding of her secret as we come to realize the sexual basis of her eccentricity." However, "The Pauper Witch of Grafton" is not only a monologue with "a situation reminiscent of some of Browning's plots," but also a monologue with an internal revelation characteristic of a Browning narrator. In the poem, the witch fends off the towns' attempts to efface her identity by "going backward in time, through memory, through nature, and through spirit" to achieve a Frostean "clarification of life." Aware of "the sexual basis of her eccentricity," the witch's self-discovery arises from another source. The poem's dramatic tension springs from the pauper witch's realization that all of her bewitching talents cannot stem the flood of time, a force which threatens to undermine her
recollections of shimmering beauty and independence.

The source for the witch’s “erotic sexuality” which so distinguishes the pauper witch from Frost’s other women can be traced to an anecdote from Frost’s life. Lawrance Thompson has identified the primary source for Grafton as factual, a six-page chapter of William Little’s History of Warren, New Hampshire, A Mountain Hamlet.21 In the account no references are made to the woman’s sexual ventures, although the text states that she “had the very enviable reputation of being a witch.”22 This account is generally conceded to be the extent of Frost’s factual foundation. But the author of “fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows”23 also had a prototype for the witch’s alluring sexuality. Raymond Holden, who initially told the story of the pauper witch to Frost, also shared in this model-engendering incident. While the two men were cutting wood, Frost described a bewitching young girl whose amorous adventures had been discovered at an “awkward moment in the woods.” Later the girl appears, with her “Hair . . . falling from the knot loosely down her back . . . walking barefoot down the woods path along the edge of the clearing.”24 Her assurance and sensuality captivated the men, leaving them speechless. It is this woman who appears to be the “sweetest dream” for Frost’s portrayal of the pauper witch.

And it is this vision of her past erotic powers which haunts the old pauper as she “juggles past and present tenses,”25 and hides her feelings in “cloudy” or “slightly illogical” statements.26 Since the speaker’s crisis centers in her confrontation with time which strips her of her allurements, it is befitting that her logical ability flounders when she is forced to face the loss of her powers, first in a flashback when she tells the story of Mallice Huse, and finally when she must confront her present diminished situation in the last lines of the poem.

This tension between past and present is reflected in conflicts between public and private, and between the town and her sweet erotic truths. From her youth the witch’s sensuality has been opposed by her neighbors. The town has always assumed the role of the collective, impersonal “they”—the enemy constantly threatening her identity, an effort that “they” partially succeed in when they divest her of her name, labeling her the “pauper witch.” However, the defiant witch exhibits the courage “To make so free and kick up in folk’s faces” to obtain the “room” that Frost adjudged the right of any spirited individual. Frost maintains that “Between the tyranny of being handled and judged by general laws and statistics at the large end and the tyranny of being handled and judged by gossip at the small end, there should be room for any real fellow with a little effrontery to take his liberties more or less at ease.”27 Effrontery is what the witch of Grafton possesses in good measure.

Her initial indignation against the

22 Marcus, pp. 75.
24 Thompson, pp. 140-41.
25 Barry, p. 69.
26 Marcus, p. 71, p. 76.
Christine A. Briggs

towns' arbitrary decision to incarcerate her in Warren and her joy in creating "double trouble" for the two towns is not mere petulance, branding her as a "harridan" or a "thorough bitch of a witch": instead her anger emerges from a desire to avenge the wrongs perpetrated on her by the towns' near-sighted inquiry. That the New England towns of Warren and Wentworth are trying to shirk their Puritan duty to the poor is painfully evident to the woman who sarcastically comments: "Flattered I must be to have two towns fighting / To make a present of me to each other." Secondly, the towns in their extensive effort to unearth all "the facts" neglect to consult her during the "twelvemonth," and finally, the boroughs commit the ultimate affront to a woman's vanity, designating an older Arthur Amy as her husband. This mistake is what most enrages the speaker since it forces her to consider her advancing age and her loss of the sensual endowments which once made her fetching, a fact which she cannot confront until she imaginatively relives her past.

Initially censoring the parsimony of her neighbors, she resolves to pry their fingers from their money, forcing their gold out in law court fees. But underlying this resolve is a note of pathos, a willingness, cloaked in a defiant manner, to accept some overture of reconciliation from the town. Even though she indignantly remarks that she "knows of some folks that'd be set up / At having in their town a noted witch," she softens her declamation, exhibiting a willingness to compromise in the lines "It'd make my position stronger, think, / If I was to consent to give some sign / To make sure that I was a witch?" Her question is both paradoxical and revealing for the aged woman no longer possesses her youthful repertoire of "signs," yet the word "consent" indicates that she has not accepted her loss of power.

Motivated by the town's lack of moral integrity, she reminds her audience of her youthful interaction with the town's inhabitants. Labeled a witch by Mallice Huse, an old man whose name suggests his temperament, the "strapping girl of twenty" rejoiced in the erotic texture of his accusation and was disappointed when a "smarty someone" rends the illusion. Visited by erotic fantasies, Mallice, ensconced in the Puritan heritage, externalized his dreams in an attempt to gain the town's support, but instead he appropriately reaped the borough's punishment. Forcing him to keep "on gnawing till he whined," the townspeople discredited the old man's claim. Since the town's hitching posts weren't initially gnawed, but Huse's bed posts were, the citizens concluded that Mallice's account was a tall tale, a fable. However, the witch, both then and now, is disappointed that her libidinous impulse is not recognized publicly. In the past, she turned to the private act of marriage for her sexual outlet. Now she has no such consolation. Rather she must begin to accept that her days of "strapping" power were "then," and this rambling realization affects her narration, producing a rambling, slightly illogical recital of her exploits with Mallice Huse.

That she is able to detach Arthur

28 Barry, p. 68.
Amy, whose name implies his propensity for courtly gallantry and love, from the province's gradgrind mentality is a profound tribute to her sensual powers. At this point in the narrative, the witch drops the descriptive "smarty someone" label for Arthur, consults with her audience, "You know who he was," and then initiates her recollection of her private existence with Amy. As her husband, Amy changes sides, aligning himself with his wife, opposing the intrusion of the public impulse as exemplified by the town, voting against the village's plan for usurping the "tote road to our clearing." Once married, he circumfuses her with magical powers; however, he conceals his erotic pleasures from the prying eyes of the town, pretending instead that he "was plagued to death with" her. The witch herself is unsure of what powers effected his conversion. She ascribes it initially to a motivation the town could plumb, greed, saying, "I guess he found he got more out of me / By having me a witch," but then relents, allowing for the mystical "Or something happened to turn him round."

The transformed Amy accommodates his wife, letting her be the sexual initiator, who "made him do it for me in the dark." Lending more significance to this role reversal is the earlier poem "Home Burial," the only other time Frost employed the name Amy. The first Amy is cruelly dominated by her husband, who cries a "man must partly give up being a man / With women folk." Significantly, the second Amy, a man who does not love, abdicates his male prerogative as sexual initiator so the lovers can achieve "a reconciliation of the sexes, not their erasure." This reconciliation is aided by the couple's use of nature as "a vehicle for their feelings, a means of bridging the gulf separating their personalities." Together, they achieve a sensual paradise, which transcends their austere environment, distancing them from the contaminated barn, allowing them to express their sensuality in a place where "the trees grow short, the mosses tall." The snowberries and the waterfall are luscious symbols of fruition. Ultimately, it is this breathtaking erotic vision which prevents the reader from exercising moral judgment, from dismissing the speaker as a garrulous, withered old lady; instead her remembrances promote a sympathetic identification in the reader. This is a different interpretation than that implied by Barry when she states: "It all got too much for her, and Arthur Amy went the way of most husbands of witches."

However, it is the richness of her own imaginative recollection, more than the towns' rejection of her, which forces the speaker to confront her decline and deterioration. The italicized "can" in her assertion "You can come down from everything to nothing" unquestionably indicates that this is a new revelation, or at least an old discovery suddenly understood, a discovery which leaves her verging on despair.

In conclusion, a consideration of this poem as a dramatic monologue where the focus is on the "self-revelation of the speaker" precludes a superficial dismis-
sal of the poem, allowing instead for an excursion into the witch’s motivations. An in-depth analysis of this poem reveals that it exhibits the contradiction present in much of Frost’s work, the contradiction between “experience as it is imagined, remembered or longed for—full, exhilarating, unbounded—and experience as it is felt—partial, limited.”\textsuperscript{33}

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It is the imaginative juxtaposition of these two modalities that renders the witch, once she realizes how far she has fallen, incapable of sustaining her youthful vision. Instead she can only echo the Oven Bird in his complaint: “The question that he frames in all but words / Is what to make of a diminished thing.”\textsuperscript{34}

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\textbf{ON SITTING UP LATE, WATCHING KITTENS}

\begin{center}
\textbf{ERIC W. PAFF}
\end{center}

Eric W. Paff is in the Department of English at the University of Arizona (Tucson).

The cats are home tonight. Unblinking eyes
Like gilded floating discs beneath the couch
Creep silently as kitten-tiger lies
Beside the fireplace. Her sisters crouch
And stalk their kill, but, pouncing, cuff her ear
And roll away, exposing bellies plump
With milk and egg to squeaking vengeance. (Here,
In this, the rage of jungle beasts—who jump
For fireflies, and dance with pipe-smoke shades.)
Their panther-mother smiles; her footstool-cave
Is too the surrogate of feral glades.
She stretches there, and knows that they behave
As she has taught them, living dual lives,
And even in the fat domestic, something purely \textit{cat} survives.

\textsuperscript{33}\textsuperscript{34}
Dee Birch Cameron, reference librarian at the University of Texas (El Paso), has published in *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* and *Texas Libraries*.

The upper-middle-class man, struggling with metaphysical uncertainties and toying distractedly with epistemological questions, is a familiar figure in the work of John Updike. Depending on the predilections of individual readers and critics, he may be pondered as a contemporary everyman or dismissed as a superstitious anachronism. Updike develops him subtly. He makes the man’s concerns seem valid, central, and compelling, while at the same time he undercuts them, showing them as destructive, self-centered, and possibly unnecessary.

Updike’s story “Guilt Gems,” is a recent example of this technique. Several vignettes from the life of a man who is estranged from his wife and three children are presented in such a way that the reader empathizes with the protagonist’s guilt. Yet, at the story’s end, the man acknowledges that, in distancing himself from the events enough to turn them into emotional touchstones—the “guilt gems”—he further compounds his guilt.

One strategy Updike uses to put a hero’s suffering in perspective is the employment of an equally sympathetic foil. This character, though just as sensitive and intelligent as the hero, appears immune to the peculiar emotional malaise which is part of the hero’s personality. The Unitarian wife, pale, vulnerable, but magically untouched by the drive for salvation, appears first as Macy in the 1957 short story “Sunday Teasing.” Later she is fully developed as Ruth in the novel *Marry Me.*

“Sunday Teasing” demonstrates the way in which a day can take on a certain tone and shows how people come to know, and often misunderstand, each other in casual conversation. Sunday holds subtle stresses for Arthur and Macy, partners in something of a mixed marriage. He is a neo-orthodox Christian intellectual, and she is a liberal Unitarian. Their friend, Leonard Byrne, who is Jewish, has been invited to Sunday dinner, and the table conversation centering on family life and customs, even though it is ostensibly light-hearted, results in general uneasiness. Later in the evening, after Leonard has gone, Macy feels “fluish,” and Arthur comforts her and himself by cleaning up the day’s accumulated debris. Mulling over all that has gone on, Arthur finds one thought predominating: “You don’t know anything” (S, p. 111).

*Marry Me* is a novel of adultery. The protagonist, Jerry Conant, spends the length of the book vacillating between his wife Ruth and his mistress Sally Mathias. The plot is complicated by a
short-lived affair involving Ruth and Sally's husband Richard Mathias. Updike plays with the third person point of view, starting out with the story as reflected by Jerry and Sally. Chapters in which their spouses, Ruth and Richard, react to the affair and the impending dissolution of their marriages follow. Finally, there is a Surrealistic chapter titled "Wyoming." It corresponds to the closing section in "Sunday Teasing" in its demonstration that the hero truly does not know anything and that his reality must be relative to his own weaknesses and hopes.

In the more realistic parts of the narrative, Updike uses the wife to demonstrate the various forms perception of reality may take. Though Jerry is the protagonist of Marry Me, Ruth is the more engaging character. Updike tends to give the man, be he Jerry or Arthur, the obvious, theme-stating lines, such as, "Maybe our trouble is that we live in the twilight of the old morality, and there's just enough to torment us, and not enough to hold us in" (M, p. 53). Such pronouncements are valid for the works in which they appear, but they have a certain corniness. Jerry plays to the grandstand. He is flamboyant.

Ruth keeps him honest, artistically. At one point, when he is telling her he must leave her, she ignores the content of his speech to focus on his style. "He was using his hands again in that disagreeable way, and Ruth was angered by the flicker of conceit in his expression when he struck upon the image of the bluebird flying backwards" (M, p. 191). Updike says of Jerry that "Ruth was the one earthly topic that never failed to interest him" (M, p. 56). The author himself gives Ruth's reactions the largest part of the novel. Her perceptions make her appealing to the reader. She is revealed in her thoughts, memories, responses, and evaluations, and in these she has received some of Updike's best gifts.

There is a sequence near the end of "Sunday Teasing" in which Arthur and Macy discuss a short story they have just read. Readers know only that it involves a man on a train, watching his wife's face disappearing in the distance, a face which he perceives as a white heart. The story seems similar to Marry Me. Macy says the man in the story has treated his wife badly and wonders, tearfully, how he could have acted the way he did. Arthur maintains that the hero was a good man who succumbed to his own frailty.

"It's so horrible," Macy said. "Why was he so awful to his wife?"
"It's all explained. He was out of his caste. He was trapped. A perfectly nice man, corrupted by bad luck."
"How can you say that? That's so ridiculous."
"Ridiculous! Why Macy, the whole pathos of the story lies in the fact that the man, for all his selfishness and cruelty, loves the woman. After all, he's telling the story and if the wife emerges as a sympathetic character, it's because that's the way he sees her." (S, pp. 85-86)

Arthur's explanation holds true not only for the story they are discussing but for the one in which they appear, as well as for Marry Me. This is a pattern in Updike's writing.

In both works, the central figure is a man in anguish. Arthur and Jerry read the existentialists and are imbued with Protestantism's most damning assessments of the human condition. In Marry Me and in "Sunday Teasing"
Jerry adopts a strategy of undermining his wife's perceptions, so as finally to induce in her a mild depression, at which time putting her to bed and comforting her become activities whereby he is comforted. Because he is always suffering, he can feel good about his wife only when she is suffering, too. This is why Jerry warms to Ruth only when he has hurt her or when she is feeling low, and why he rails at her during his asthma attacks for having had too many children, for not dusting the house well, and for not believing in God and the resurrection. Such men require their wives to validate the pain and terror they feel by sharing it.

Sally, the paramour, is a relatively easy mark for this strategy. Early in the book readers are told that, since the affair started, there have been times when “Sally truly feared for her sanity” (M, p. 23). “He had gotten her so confused, her husbandly lover, she didn’t even know if she believed in God or not. Once she had a clear opinion, yes or no, she had forgotten which” (M, p. 35).

Accompanying Sally’s emotional vulnerability is a certain elemental physical strength. The secluded beach in the opening scene is Edenic, and there are references to Adam and Eve. At one point, when Ruth is mulling over how easy it would be for her to “lie down and die, to sacrifice herself to this other woman’s vitality,” she realizes that “Sally had no doubts of her right to live” (M, p. 129). Updike describes Sally as “a gaudy bird, outlandish in her plumage” (M, p. 174). And Jerry notes that her body feels cool in comparison to Ruth’s (M, p. 32).

Ruth and her antecedent, Macy in “Sunday Teasing,” are described in terms of pallor and fever. Arthur is both attracted and repelled by Macy in her mild illness. He notes the “bluish underside” (S, p. 109) on her arm as she lies down, weakly. Her paleness recalls that of the wife in the story she and Arthur have been reading and discussing, whose face is described as “a radiant white heart” (S, p. 108).

Ruth is pictured in terms of whiteness. She was a prisoner; the crack between her mind and the world, bridged by a thousand stitches of perception, had quite closed, leaving her embedded, as the white unicorn is a prisoner in the tapestry. (M, p. 186)

This quality fascinates Jerry, but at the same time he finds it repellent, as when he complains about the “virginal” quality of her voice when she talks to him (M, p. 91).

What infuriates Jerry is Ruth’s lack of intense reactions to the things that bother him. There is plenty of material in the novel to establish Ruth as a sensual person. When Jerry precipitates the violent dinner-table scene which starts the disintegration of their marriage, his description of her as a “pathetic, frigid bitch” (M, p. 107) can mean only that she is not susceptible to fear or longing as he is.

The contrast between his own anxious fits and her seeming calm tempt the Updike man to badger the Unitarian wife. Of Macy, Updike reports that she “seldom volunteered her opinions” (S, p. 103). Therefore, her husband baits her with his throughout “Sunday Teasing.” Similarly Ruth’s behavior elicits Jerry’s harassment. “He hated Ruth’s pale faith, which receded and evaporated still further under his hatred” (M, p. 78).

One event Jerry and Ruth remember
as an example of his anger at her occurred one night when he awakened from his sleep moaning about death. He never forgave her for her sleepy rejoinder, "Dust to dust" (M, p. 78). During the brief period of Ruth's affair with Richard Mathias, Sally's husband, the lovers discuss Jerry, and Ruth says:

He hates it if I suggest there's anything abnormal about his state. When I say I'm not afraid of death, he tells me I'm a spiritual cripple. He says I'm not afraid because I have no imagination. No soul, I think is what he means. (M, p. 88)

This speech recalls an incident somewhat earlier in the book. The author reports that when Ruth was young her mother's housekeeper had warned her that she was a magical girl and that the world would be hard on her because she did not fear the right things (M, p. 83). In fact, her failure to share her husband's anxiety about death does seem to be the catalyst in the disintegration of her marriage.

In both "Sunday Teasing" and Marry Me the magical quality of the wife is symbolized by her Unitarianism. Not only are Macy and Ruth Unitarians, but they are Unitarians by birth. They are seen by their husbands as having been exempt, from the beginning, from the fears as well as the manic hopes Christianity can arouse. The difference between the wives and their husbands is an ironic play on the Calvinist doctrine that some people are predestined to salvation.

If Ruth is exempt from the dread of sin and death, hers is an ironic kind of election, for it does not result in anything resembling heavenly peace. Nor is the wife's spiritual state as simple as Jerry, or Arthur, would like to believe. Each husband tries to dismiss the wife's religious situation as simple godlessness. Arthur speaks of Macy's parents as having been atheists, but she corrects him, pointing out that they did belong to a religious group. Later the young couple play out a poignant scene in which they point to their noses, eyes, and mouths in an attempt to show how much alike they are.

Like Macy, Ruth refuses to let Jerry get away with dismissing her as an odd moral curiosity. After she has an automobile accident that ruins their car, he rages at her for remaining unhurt.

"That's the great thing about you," he said, "everybody else has all the problems. You don't have any, do you? . . . How do you do it, baby? You smash the car up to brighten a dull day and don't get a scratch. Your world's coming to an end and you lie down on that fucking beach all summer happy as a clam. That old One-in-One God of yours must be a real cucumber up there."

"I'm a Judeo-Christian, just like you are," Ruth said. (M, p. 174)

There is an analytical quality in their wives' approach to most experiences that disturbs their husbands. Arthur reads Macy a passage from the Bible in which Paul puts women in their place, hoping that she will react with anger, as his mother used to. Instead she confuses him by trying to examine the scriptural passage as if it were something to be understood rather than believed. Similarly, when Jerry is trying to sort out his feelings for Ruth and Sally, he hears Ruth's comments as inappropriately analytical. "There were intervals of Ruth's voice, gentle yet, with something sharp, something Unitarian and confident and even destructive, about its search for truth" (M, p. 284).

But in getting to know Ruth, readers learn that being a Unitarian does not
mean that life is a bowl of cherries or that pain is not present and felt. Ruth's Unitarianism is largely defined by her relationship with her father, a Unitarian minister. Because of his obvious neglect and failure to confirm her feelings of self-worth and femininity, she has learned to expect to fail in marriage. From poignant recollections scattered throughout the novel, it becomes clear that, to Ruth, being a Unitarian has meant getting used to being on one's own. It meant, too, that one could not expect miracles.

If there was a supreme Unitarian commandment, it was "Face things." "Having things out" had been her father's phrase, returning post-midnight from some ecumenical, interracial scrimmage in Poughkeepsie. (M, p. 85)

Ruth thought of turning to her parents now and they vanished in her mind. "Face things." They had overlooked her, it would take too much explaining, for them to see her now. (M, p. 113)

The sight of her father's bespectacled, benign, pontifical face reminded her of an old anger, at his impervious public goodness, and his absent-minded way, increasing as he aged, of turning his public face to private matters. (M, p. 151)

Trembling and transparent and brimming she had stood before the mirror of their marriage and was given back—nothing. The sensation was familiar. Her father had been absorbed by love of his fellow-man, and her mother by love for her father, and Ruth had grown up with the suspicion of being overlooked. She was a Unitarian, and what did this mean, except that her soul was one unit removed from not being there at all? (M, p. 96)

Throughout the process of deciding between Ruth and Sally, Jerry occasionally mentions looking for a sign from God to tell him what he should do. When he hears that Ruth may be pregnant, even though she offers to have an abortion as a gift to him, Jerry turns lighthearted, thinking he has been given a divine solution to his dilemma.

However, eventually Ruth learns that she is not pregnant after all, and her reaction to having her life's course determined by her body's whims is a direct contrast to his response.

Sunday morning, at first light before the children were awake, and the mechanical chimes of the Catholic church across town beckoned to the first Mass, she discovered that she was bleeding. In the bathroom she gazed down at the piece of toilet paper in her hand and experienced a clear perception in which the paper, the blood, the morning light intensified by the bathroom tiles, and her own veined hand were interlocked. A kind of photography had been developed in the night. Her recent life, all her striving and confusion had come down to this, this spot of red on white, this simple stain. A letter from her body to nobody, a blank announcement of emptiness. In the manner of modern abstraction, what she held was not a hieroglyph or symbol of herself, it was herself, that to which she had been reduced; it was, indelibly, what she was. She flushed it down. (M, pp. 201-202)

This Sunday morning scene is an ironic sort of resurrection in which, rather than one breaking the bonds of the other, spirit and flesh are viewed as united and ultimately disposable. The time, the bells calling the faithful to early Mass, and the events themselves recall Ruth's offer to solve Jerry's problems by means of abortion and, with it, the idea of "blood shed for the remission of sins."

Readers who may be put off by the use of Biblical and religious allusions should realize that their role here is not to be part of a tract but to evoke responses in readers who, like Ruth, despite their personal beliefs and histories, are to some extent Judeo-Christians. Even Ruth's name recalls the Biblical woman who promised that her
husband's god would be her god, and thus it sheds light on her role in the novel and explains Jerry's disappointment in her. Updike has used this name for a comforting woman before, in *Rabbit, Run*. But the Ruth in *Marry Me* falls short of the promise inherent in her name, thereby angering her husband.

Neither Jerry nor Arthur seems capable of being satisfied with the kind of vision that is Ruth's and Macy's. Arthur hates to go to church on Sunday morning because he feels the religion he will hear expounded will be diluted. He reads Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life* instead. Jerry reads Barth, Marcel, and Berdyaev. He seems to court pain as a way of affirming the division he perceives between flesh and spirit. Ruth has a hard time taking seriously his asthma attacks and his compulsive way of risking injury in the neighborhood volleyball games. "I love insomnia. It's proof that I'm alive," he tells Sally at one point (*M*, p. 31). And when she suspects that she is a burden to him, he tells her, "It's a burden I need" (*M*, p. 37).

As an only child, he seeks proof that he is special, even if this proof be punishment from an angry God. He wants whatever happens to him to mean something in a grand design. Even the names of his daughter, Joanna, and of Sally's daughter, Theodora, mean "gift of God."

Jerry tends to interpret the effects of chance as the results of election, as in the scene in which he and Sally are waiting in an airport, having a hard time getting back from one of their meetings without being found out. The gate had become something shameful that they must bribe and beg to enter. When the last of the reservations were checked through, there was a consultation at the desk and two numbers were read off, numbers that had no relation to the numbers Jerry and Sally held. Two men, the mysterious elect, in costume and appearance no different from the others, detached themselves from the pack and passed through. (*M*, p. 49)

According to his system of belief Jerry is, at least to some extent, absolved of the responsibility for his actions. When he finds out about Ruth's affair with Richard, he remarks snidely that being a Unitarian doesn't seem to saddle a person with an overload of bourgeois morality. She snaps back that Lutheranism doesn't seem to hamper him. And he replies that he lives by faith alone (*M*, p. 145).

For Jerry, doing right and feeling good are matters of grace. These states are gifts. "In this life we must seize on anything that is clearly right or wrong, so much is neither," he says at one point (*M*, p. 201).

Sally, the mistress, is the least clearly drawn of any of the characters. Like Jerry, she reads existentialist literature but chooses lighter stuff than Berdyaev. She reads Camus and also Alberto Moravia. She has been raised a Catholic, though she is uncertain of her own beliefs. However, to Updike, being raised in a certain religious atmosphere seems very important as a determiner of personality.

In an important early scene in which all four principal characters are together, Richard impiously cleans his fingernails with the outstretched hand of a small plastic figure of Jesus he has received in the mail. Sally is shocked and snatches the statue from him, saying...
“something to the effect that she really didn’t know what she believed, but . . . really, Richard” (M, p. 82).

Rather than drawing her in great detail, as he does Ruth, Updike relies more heavily on religious allusion and imagery in his portrayal of Sally. The surname Mathias links her to the disciple chosen by lots to replace Judas. The words of the disciple Peter, commenting on the choice of Mathias, are relevant to Marry Me.

“The text I have in mind,” Peter continued, “is in the Book of Psalms: ‘Let his homestead fall desolate; let there be none to inhabit it; and again let another take over his charge. Therefore one of those who bore us company all the while we had the Lord Jesus with us, coming and going, from John’s ministry of baptism until the day when he was taken up from us—one of those must now join us as a witness to his resurrection.’” (Acts 1:21-26)

Another incident linking the characters in Marry Me with Christ and the disciples occurs late in the book when all four meet for an evening of drinks and negotiation at the Mathias home. Jerry Conant sits in the center of the couch, arms outstretched, flanked by the others, in a tableau suggesting depictions of the Last Supper. Ruth, like Judas, decides to leave the gathering early, and, as if to reinforce the impression of this as a decisive Last Supper, Updike inserts this comment on Jerry’s thoughts:

As a boy he had been bored by all of church except communion, the moment when a crowd of them rumbled to the rail and dissolved the wafer in their mouths. Now he felt that in the living room something comparable would occur or had occurred. (M, p. 216)

At the same gathering, Jerry recalls an incident that took place once while he and Sally were making love. Suddenly she had become upset, realizing that she had forgotten the day was Ash Wednesday. She had apologized for spoiling their time together, but Jerry had assured her that he loved her for it and urged her to go to church. She had replied that she must be insane to have been interrupted by such a thought and confessed that she was frightened. “Who isn’t?” had been Jerry’s reply (M, p. 217). It is their mutual discomfort with life in a world they see as split between the spiritual and physical that brings Sally and Jerry together.

Each vacillates uncomfortably between the two halves of a compartmented world. More than once Sally uses the phrase “roast in hell” to describe a fitting form of punishment, and once, in a story related by Ruth, she uses it in a situation which demonstrates this wavering plainly and comically. Sitting in the Conants’ kitchen, holding Theodora on her lap, talking hurriedly, she flits from ethics to eating and back again, gracelessly.

She said you were the devil and she would roast in Hell for what she’d done to Richard. She actually did say that. And she wouldn’t let go of Theodora, that’s her name, just kept holding on to this poor miserable confused child, and making me feed her. “Ruthie, your husband’s a real bastard, do you think you might have a cookie for Theo, he fucked me twice Saturday night, and could we have a little glass of milk?” (M, p. 280)

Similarity draws Jerry and Sally together. Ruth comments on Sally’s ambition, and Jerry asks what she is ambitious for. “For whatever she can get. For life. Just like you” (M, p. 101).

While Jerry and Ruth complement and to some degree challenge each other with their differences, the similarity between Jerry and Sally, even though it
Dee Birch Cameron

is based on shared fear, is a source of fleeting comfort. The idyllic scene opening the novel, in which the lovers meet on a beach, describes their attraction for each other in terms recalling life before the Fall.

They felt no hurry; this was perhaps the gravest proof that they were, Jerry and Sally, the original man and woman—that they did not so much excite each other as put the man and woman in each other to rest. (M, p. 7)

In that same scene, the reader's only impressions of Ruth and Richard come secondhand, in Sally and Jerry's reminiscences about why each of them had children. Jerry says Ruth had three in order to perfect her childbirth technique. Sally reports that Richard made Sally quit riding lessons and go into analysis to prevent a third miscarriage, and that after their first child was born, she had the other two to make the first one right. It seems their mates definitely do not belong in this Eden on the beach but are tough characters from an outside world in which women bring forth children in pain and suffering (M, p. 12).

Through Ruth, a source of perceptions readers come to respect, Updike comments on the undesirability of sameness in lovers. After a lunch with Richard, when he puts his hand on hers, Ruth notes, "their hands . . . looked too much alike, his too small for his size and hers too big" (M, p. 90).

The couples, Ruth and Jerry, and Macy and Arthur, are uncomfortable with their dissimilarities. In "Sunday Teasing" details work to create a picture of a couple whose tastes are not much alike. Arthur reads the Bible; Macy reads Jane Austin and Henry Green. She listens to Scarlatti and Purcell, and he likes Benny Goodman. She reads a collection of short stories, while he prefers Unamuno. As the story develops, Arthur acts out the differences between them, teasing and irritating her. Finally, when she points out their dissimilarity, he denies it, the fanciful silliness of his argument helping to validate her view.

Jerry employs the differences between himself and his wife to tease and sicken her, finding an old chink in her armor.

From an anxious depth within her there awakened the suspicion that the people around her—mother, father, sister—were engaged in a conspiracy, a conspiracy called life, from which she had been excluded. . . . She found herself in the impossible position of needing to will belief; somehow she could not quite believe in Jerry and he, feeling this inability, nurtured it, widened it, for it was the opening by which he would escape. He encouraged her illusion that there was a world into which she had never been born. (M, p. 147)

She does not share Jerry's sense of sexual relationships as surrogates for salvation. After her affair with Richard has come to an easy end, she decides that affairs ask too much. "We all want a fancy price, just for existing" (M, p. 94).

Of Jerry and Sally's liaison she forms an equally prosaic opinion.

An innocent man and a greedy woman had fornicated and Ruth could not endorse the illusions that made it seem more than that. They were exaggerators, both of them, and though she could see that beauty was a province of exaggeration, someone must stand by truth. The truth was that Sally and Jerry were probably better married to Richard and her than they would be to each other. (M, p. 143)

Again Updike has her express the view that similarity in couples is undesirable, despite the fact that it may produce a feeling of comfort. Updike seems to share Calvin's view that marriage is a school for character. Since it is impossi-
ble to see all facets of life, one should embrace a mate capable of seeing what one misses. To join with someone whose vision is the same as one’s own is devitalizing. So, too, is the effort to encompass all viewpoints within one’s own vision.

Ruth disliked, religiously, the satisfaction he took in being divided, confirming thereby the split between body and soul that alone can save men from extinction. It was all too religious, phantasmal. (M, p. 186)

Their early relationship had been based not on religious orientations but on humanistic pursuits. Jerry and Ruth had met as art students. Their styles complemented each other. He was good at line; her forte was color.

Someone viewing their paintings thus might well have concluded, as did they, that between them they had everything. . . . Their merger was perhaps too easy, too aesthetic. . . . [When she became a housewife and he an animator of commercials] unexpected shadows deepened, emphasizing the differences overlooked in the ideal overhead light they had once painted by. (M, p. 77)

References to vision are common in Marry Me, and they become especially important in the next to last chapter, “The Reacting of Richard.” Richard, the one-eyed man, is a blasphemer, both literally and figuratively, in that he does not, like Jerry, aspire to include all vision, all possibilities, in himself. He does not toy with that “split between body and soul that alone can save man from extinction.”

As the four discuss their futures, Jerry suddenly experiences a shift in his attention, focusing away from the Mathias children and onto his own. “In the silence, a great immaterial weight shifted, like a tissue page in a Bible, unmasking the details of an infernal etching” (M, p. 226).

Nearer the end of the chapter, as Jerry is putting his children to bed, much is made of the difficulty of seeing and the rarity of seeing well. Geoffrey, the youngest, is the only one of Jerry’s children who says prayers, and Jerry notices that, in enumerating the people he wants God to bless, the little boy counts himself, “seeing himself from the outside, as one of a family” (M, p. 282). Charlie goes to sleep too quickly for prayers. “Jerry was just as glad. He loved the child’s pride, this child the one of his three who saw most, and therefore must be bravest” (M, p. 282). Joanna, the eldest, has been reading Mr. Popper’s Penguins and admits there are words she almost knows, but that they don’t seem to make any sense to her, a problem inherent in many books, according to her father.

She tells Jerry that Mr. Mathias is her mother’s boyfriend. He foolishly discounts her observation and then, ironically, warns, “Don’t tire your eyes. Dr. Albany says you shouldn’t read in bed at all. . . . Your eyes are very precious” (M, p. 283).

After the children are on their way to sleep, Jerry sits down with Ruth and tries to sort out the reasons he has finally decided not to marry Sally. Here again, the answer lies in a quirk of vision. “As an actual wife, or whatever, she stopped being an idea, and for the first time, I saw her” (M, p. 284).

It is in this land, where binocular vision can be such a source of torment as to amount to a state worse than blindness, that “the one-eyed man is king.” Updike, with his familiarity with myth, must have hoped readers would remember the deities, including Zeus and Odin, who have been portrayed as having one
eye, as well as the terrifying monsters, such as the cyclops. He seems to be indicating that Jerry's trouble is his persistence in trying to see both the spiritual and the physical and his refusal to be, in a sense, one-eyed. He refuses to live with Ruth as a complement to his vision, to live parallel, to choose a mate unlike himself.

But Updike makes certain that readers appreciate the seductive quality of the vision to which Jerry aspires.

Jerry wondered what it would be like to see with only one eye. He closed one of his and looked at the room—the chairs, the women, the glasses invisibly shed a dimension. Things were just so, flat with nothing further to be said about them; it was the world, he realized, as seen without the idea of God lending each thing a roundness of significance. It was terrible. He had always hated Richard's looks, the tilted ponderous head, the unctuous uncertain mouth, the crazy lack of one socket. Was this why—because this face presented him with this possibility, of his own lacking one eye?

He opened it, and a roundness sprang, vibrating, around things. . . . (M, p. 205)

Here Jerry's hope appears not fatuous or silly, but alluring, even noble.

The climax of the plot comes when Jerry abandons his efforts to have everything and makes a choice. In making the choice, he accepts the human reality that choosing cuts off other options. He acknowledges his mortal limitations.

When Richard calls to ask whether Jerry will stand by Sally, Jerry's first impulse is to hedge that nothing is either black or white. This would be typical of Jerry. However, instead, he simply answers no. He chooses black. Under scoring this, Updike has Ruth turn on lights all around the periphery of the room, leaving only a spot of darkness in the center, in which she stands. Ruth and Jerry talk about the situation as it stands, not really conversing but each speaking his own thoughts, with intervals of twinned silence, which did not pain them, for they had begun in silence side by side, contemplating, by fits and starts, an object posed before them, a collection of objects, a mystery assembled of light and color and shadow. In their willingness to live parallel lay their weakness and their strength. (M, p. 284)

Jerry's perpetual suffering finds relief when he makes a choice and faces the hatred of Richard, whom he views as a demonic tormentor, picking his fingernails with Jesus. Put this way, Jerry's decision is not interpretable as the noble expedient of returning to his wife and children. As Ruth has said earlier, the issue has not been she or the children, but his soul. By declaring that he will not stand by Sally, he acknowledges human finitude and looks mortality in the eye, in the form of Richard.

The darkness outside the cool glass held Richard; the arms of the elm crawled and rotted in a godless element that was his enemy's essence. Richard was the world. I'm going to make you pay for this, Jerry boy. An automobile that had been parked up the road roared by; Jerry flinched, conscious of himself as silhouetted. Its tires screeching, the car went by, kids, nobody; there was no gunshot. Jerry smiled. You're an amazing guy. Amazingly cruel. He had never been hated before. He had been disliked and dismissed but he had never been hated; it was a way, he saw, of being alive. Look, Sally-O, doesn't Christ make a good fingernail-picker? Gazing through the half-mirroring black glass, glass that seemed the cold skin of his mind, Jerry rejoiced that he had given his enemy the darkness an eternal wound. With the sword of his flesh he had put the mockers to rout. Christ was revenged. (M, p. 287)

There is irony in the idea that cuckold ing a blasphemer might be considered a deed done for Christ. But aside from that, this is the scene in which Jerry first accepts his humanity, rendering Christ more than just a fingernail picker.
Now he can begin to relax. Despite his initials and his status as an only son, he is not spirit incarnate. He is just a man. Having come down from his own peculiar cross, he feels his asthmatic chest loosening. He has faced the world's dangers as other men do, "through a glass darkly."

But the seductiveness of complete vision, the possibility of seeing without looking through a dark glass, without one's vision needing amplification from others, without having to decide to be in only one place at any time rather than another, are desires that do not die easily in Updike's men. The final chapter, "Wyoming," is a dreamlike tribute to the power of the vision Jerry has given up in order to live among the one-eyed men.

In "The Reacting of Richard," there are hints that this longing will remain, to some extent, part of Jerry's life. When Jerry listens to Ruth's story of Sally sitting in her kitchen, alternately berating Jerry and begging snacks for Theodora, he laughs, "relieved to learn that Sally was a fool. And relieved, too, that she still lived; her life was his, always" (M, p. 280). Later, when Ruth asks him how he was able to know, while he was on the telephone with Richard, that Sally was listening on the other line, he replied, "Because she's everywhere!" (M, p. 286).

In "Wyoming," the final chapter, in which Jerry is on a trip with Ruth and his children—or is it Sally and her children?—Updike orchestrates a last reprise for Jerry's fantasy. Ending the novel in this way raises the possibility that monocular vision, with its prospect of a life in which choices are made and bodies are necessarily either one place or another, may be illusory. Perhaps no one can know where he is or whom he is with.

In this, the ending is similar to the ending of "Sunday Teasing," the story that is, in so many other ways, the prototype of the novel. In a world of teasing it is hard to know what is really happening. Both works present reality as seen through the eyes of several characters successively. Both leave the protagonist, and the reader, with the sense that nothing can be known with much certainty. Readers are left with Arthur, cleaning up after the group has met, eaten, talked, and dispersed, each member inevitably limited by his own idiosyncrasies.

Lastly, he collected the dishes and glasses and washed them. As he stood at the sink, his hands in water which, where the suds thinned and broke, showed a silvery gray, the Sunday's events repeated themselves in his mind, bending like nacreous flakes around a central infrangible irritant, becoming the perfect and luminous thought: You don't know anything. (S, p. 86)

The Unitarian wife, and, to some extent, the one-eyed man emerge as reminders of the futility of the artist's drive to find design in everyday events and to see his own life as meaningful. The success of Marry Me lies in Updike's ability to make the wife, especially, a respected and moving character at the same time that he strongly conveys the seductive quality of the husband's hope to transcend that which she represents. By the end of the novel, conflicting impressions have been offered with skill that leaves the reader believing in all of them wholeheartedly.
DEATH AND DESIGN IN IN COLD BLOOD:
CAPOTE'S "NONFICTION NOVEL" AS ALLEGORY

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Truman Capote's In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences is only on its most literal level a crime story. Capote insisted that the subject matter of his nonfiction novel must have a "timeless quality," and he selected the Clutter murder because it seemed to him "symbolic in a kind of textbook fashion." His goal of timelessness and perception of symbolic significance naturally led him toward a journalistic form that was not only fictional but fabulist. Terming the book a "moral allegory" or pointing out that it "often seems less realistic than symbolic," many critics have noted this aspect of In Cold Blood, though usually only in passing and not always with approval. But Capote's wedding of allegory to fact is neither simple nor insignificant, either to an understanding of the book or to the development of contemporary literature, and deserves a fuller consideration than it has so far received.

By constructing an allegory which is journalistic in subject matter and realistic in formal method, Capote presents a fabulist vision which has both the credibility of promised fact and the authority of apparent objectivity. In doing so he tries to combine previously disparate forms, for during the latter part of the nineteenth century authors turned away from allegory because it presupposed the reality of an "ideal" scheme; instead, they wrote works of "realism" which claimed to present an objective study of material that, while invented, was closely based on exhaustive research. Drawing their inspiration from history and science in an age in which empiricism seemed capable of revealing all there was to know of man and the world, the nineteenth-century realists and naturalists equated the concrete fact with reality and emphasized the temporal fragment as the basic unit of experience. In her lucid study, Realism, Linda Nochlin observes that "for the realist, horror—like beauty or reality itself—cannot be universalized: it is bound to a concrete situation at a given moment of time." Capote goes further

than even Zola or Dreiser in claiming to write a novel which is not merely based on extensive research but is composed solely of it. And he is as resolute as Flaubert in seeking an objective presentation of the material through an impartial approach and realistic devices.

But Capote employs this material and these devices in order to create a narrative that is universal and symbolic even as it is particular and factual. In *In Cold Blood* he approaches horror as a particular reality of the material world which is also a universal reality of an invisible world perceptible in recurring patterns. While the realist seeks to show only the mechanical how and never the philosophical why of events, Capote focuses primarily upon the latter. Whether presenting victim or murderer, traumatic event or delicate detail, Capote seeks the language and pattern which will point toward universal significance. *In Cold Blood* is as much allegory as it is journalism and realism because Capote has shaped his facts into an aesthetic construct which constantly points toward a realm of mythic truth. Capote's true interest in his material is its symbolic value, but he emphasizes its objective factuality in order to strengthen the power of the symbolism. For if the symbolic meaning seems to be present in undeniable facts, rather than merely the result of philosophically motivated invention, then allegory takes on new power.

Yet Capote does not organize his facts into a simple allegory that suggests a vision of the world as ordered in a clear design either divine or natural in its source. Writing in an era which no longer finds the world comprehensible in terms of either design, Capote joins contemporary fabulators such as Barth and Murdoch in organizing his material through patterns which must not be viewed with the certainty enjoyed by either the medieval allegorist or the nineteenth-century realist. But while Barth and Murdoch create their self-conscious fictions by working in fantasy, Capote has chosen the opposite route. He portrays factual events as unfolding in an overall allegorical pattern, but a pattern that develops in ironic contrast to the expectations of the characters and to those of the cultural sources from which the allegory is drawn. This ironic allegory creates not certainty but anxiety for the reader, in that it suggests possible pattern and meaning without affirming any particular order.

Narrating *In Cold Blood* from a perspective of self-effacing omniscience, Capote repeatedly moves “inside” certain characters and uses them as Jamesian “reflectors,” a technique which enables him to retain an “objective” overview while simultaneously providing the subjective views of a variety of characters. The major subjective views in this scheme are those of Herb Clutter (the victim), Al Dewey (the detective), and Perry Smith (the murderer). Each is shown living within a privately shaped “fiction” which makes up his personal reality. Capote emphasizes this by portraying each as a representative archetype who moves within the overall allegorical pattern of the book. As omniscient narrator Capote shapes his own fiction of the material through a highly stylized and ironic manipulation of these

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points of view within this allegorical pattern. That pattern is one of paradise lost and the attempt to regain it, and Capote develops it by drawing upon three major sources—the Book of Genesis, classic American literature, and the formula detective story—sources which enable him to portray his timely journalistic material in the relatively timeless contexts of Judeo-Christian tradition, the American dream, and popular culture.

Because it clearly draws upon those sources but twists their conventional elements to fit the actual events and characters of its content, *In Cold Blood* becomes an exploration not only of the validity of various characters’ fictions as interpretative orderings of events, but also of the validity of the various cultural sources’ orderings. Finally, in its highly stylized and thus highly apparent patterning, *In Cold Blood* insists upon its own status as a fictional ordering of actual events. By presenting journalistic material through individual and mythic fictions, Capote has constructed a sophisticated inquiry into the relationship between world and man, between undeniable but meaningless fact and tentative but meaningful fiction.

II

The mythic theme of paradise lost determines the overall allegorical pattern of *In Cold Blood*. Each of the sources which Capote draws upon elaborates this theme, which he introduces in the brief opening passage of Book I. After portraying the setting of his tale as a community blessed by a “droughtless beneficence”\(^6\) epitomized by its “steep and swollen grain elevators” (p. 15), Capote is able in this passage to portray the murder as a fall from Eden as he intones a summation of the events his book will reconstruct:

But then, in the earliest hours of that morning in November, a Sunday morning, certain foreign sounds impinged on the normal nightly Holcomb noises—on the keening hysteria of coyotes, the dry scrape of scuttling tumbleweed, the racing, receding wail of locomotive whistles. At the time not a soul in sleeping Holcomb heard them—four shotgun blasts that, all told, ended six human lives. But afterward the townspeople, theretofore sufficiently unafraid of each other to seldom trouble to lock their doors, found fantasy re-creating them over and again—those somber explosions that stimulated fires of mistrust in the glare of which many old neighbors viewed each other strangely, and as strangers. (p. 15)

The elements of this highly wrought passage—the sonorous rhythms of the sentences, the portentous understatement of “certain foreign sounds,” the formal dignity of “theretofore sufficiently unafraid,” the fairy-tale quality of “not a soul in sleeping Holcomb,” the moral tone of “viewed each other strangely, and as strangers”—convey to the reader that he is entering not a mere journalistic crime story or sociological case study, but rather a fable, a parable of innocence destroyed.

After this introductory section, Book I consists of a series of scenes alternating between the Clutters and their murderers on the day leading up to the crime. Capote’s main concern in this first book, entitled “The Last to See Them Alive,” is with establishing the Clutters’ world as an attempt to impose a new Garden of Eden. In this portrayal Capote draws upon the Book of Genesis as well as the American literary

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archetype of the New Adam to examine the “reality” which these descendants of pioneers have made up and attempted to impose upon the land.

Capote does not arbitrarily impose his allegorical frameworks upon his journalistic material, but rather draws from the concepts of the characters themselves, for these people view themselves in Adamic terms. Central to his Edenic symbolism is the name which the founders gave to the larger community of which Holcomb is a suburb—Garden City. By emphasizing the community's location “in the middle—almost the exact middle—of the continental United States” (p. 45), Capote extends the significance of this name by portraying Garden City in terms that suggest a prelapsarian state so that, as George Creeger has pointed out, it serves as an emblem for the historic attempt of America's protestant settlers to “recapture Paradise, to fulfill the American dream.”

Capote portrays Herb Clutter's River Valley Farm as an individual epitome of this communal impulse to found a garden. Clutter is the foremost figure of the Garden City community, a man who embodies the traditional protestant American values of initiative and hard work. An “American Adam” of the pattern R. W. B. Lewis has traced as the dominant American literary archetype, Clutter has combined bold agricultural experiments with eighteen-hour days to transform the land he first purchased with borrowed money into a bountiful farm. His life “a march of satisfying conquests” (p. 39), Clutter personifies the American virtue of self-reliance.

He is not, however, satisfied with his success. Capote, quoting Clutter's repeated assertion that “an inch more of rain and this country would be paradise—Eden on earth” (p. 23), shows that, like Garden City's original settlers, Clutter is possessed by the dream of returning his land to the state before the Fall. But despite his scrupulous observance of the religious mores of his community, Clutter is also shown to place his faith primarily in his own abilities. Although the area has insufficient rain, Clutter has set about attempting to create the garden anyway: “The little collection of fruit-bearers growing by the river was his attempt to contrive, rain or no, a patch of the paradise, the green, apple-scented Eden he envisioned” (p. 23). Like Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, who was determined to complete his “design” of a great plantation amidst the wilderness, Clutter is so obsessed with his orchard that his wife Bonnie complains that he loves its trees more than his children (p. 23). Likewise, Capote tells us that the townspeople recall Clutter's seemingly inhumane wrath when a pilot crash-landed into his Eden: “Why, the propeller hadn’t stopped turning before he slapped a lawsuit on the pilot” (p. 23). In these and other scenes Capote indicates that Clutter's prideful self-reliance is in some ways life-denying and unable to protect his “garden” from the irrational (his wife suffers from mysterious “little spells”). Nevertheless, Ca-
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Capote’s portrayal of Clutter’s world—especially of his loving daughter Nancy—is one most Americans would see as a fulfillment of the Dream.

III

The formula detective story or “tale of ratiocination” asserts the validity of the Hebraic conception of an ordered universe against the relativistic chaos that threatens it. Marjorie Nicolson has written one of the most succinctly acute analyses of its meaning for us:

Perhaps we are protesting against a conception of the universe as governed—if governed at all—by chance, by haphazard circumstance; against a conception of men and women as purposeless, aimless, impotent; against a theory of the world as wandering, devoid of purpose or meaning, in unlimited space. In our detective stories we find with relief a return to an older ethics and metaphysics: an Hebraic insistence upon justice as the measure of all things—an eye for an eye; a Greek feeling of inevitability, for man as the victim of circumstances and fate, to be sure, but a fate brought upon him by his own carelessness, his own ignorance, or his own choice; a Calvinistic insistence, if you will, upon destiny, but a Calvinistic belief also in the need for intense and constant activity on the part of man; last of all, a scientific insistence upon the inevitable operation of cause and effect.

Also central to the detective story is the assumption that innocence is dangerous, for the classic pattern or formula begins with an inexplicable murder. This crime—reenacting the Fall—opens society to chaos and requires it to respond in order to reassert the validity of its notions of rationality and justice. A detective hero is soon introduced who, through the application of rigorous observation and reasoning, reveals the pattern which lies within the apparent chaos. His quest leads to the exposure of the murderer’s identity, explains his motivations, and ends with the murderer’s arrest. Through the rational perspective of cause and effect, the detective restores order and thus meaning to his world.

Capote, who once confessed that “I enjoy thrillers and would like someday to write one,” draws upon this popular culture formula for the allegorical framework of Books II and III, which relate the events from the murder of the Clutters to the capture of the murderers. Closing Book I with the discovery of the bodies, Capote opens Book II with a portrayal of the irrational chaos which the inexplicable murders embody for this world which had “theretofore” seemed one of rationality and order. Because the murders have revealed the danger of Clutter’s attempt at living in a garden of innocence, both fear and depression soon pervade Garden City as perceptibly as “the cider-tart odor of spoiling apples” (p. 235) which eventually exudes from Clutter’s abandoned orchard. Assuming that the murderer is within their midst, the inhabitants of the larger paradise of Garden City speculate upon a possible motive, buy stronger locks for their doors (Clutter had left his unlocked), and even stay up all night with their houses lit. Suspicion extends even to the Clutters themselves, with people wondering if Herb Clutter might have been murdered as a result of an adulterous affair (p. 119).

Capote sums up the nihilistic effect of

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the murder through the words of members of the community. A local schoolteacher reveals how important the Clutters' success was to the community as a manifestation of cosmic beneficence:

But that family represented everything people hereabouts really value and respect, and that such a thing could happen to them—well, it’s like being told there is no God. It makes life seem pointless. I don’t think people are so much frightened as they are deeply depressed. (p. 105)

Capote dramatizes this effect on the community through images of the sky and prairie wind drawn from the perceptions of actual people in the community. At the end of the first section of Book II Capote poses the central question of *In Cold Blood* through the eyes of a close friend of the Clutters, Andy Earhart, as he watches the burning of the Clutters’ bloodstained possessions: “How was it possible that such effort, such plain virtue, could overnight be reduced to this—smoke, thinning as it rose and was received by the big, annihilating sky?” (p. 95) Somewhat later Capote quotes an Englishwoman who settled in Garden City and claims to love it. In her words we see Garden City’s acute new awareness of the chaos in the surrounding wilderness:

*Train* whistles. Coyotes. Monsters howling the bloody night long. A horrid racket. And since the murders it seems to bother me more. So many things do. . . . And after dark, when the wind commences, that hateful prairie wind, one hears the most appalling moans. I mean, if one’s a bit nervy, one can’t help imagining—silly things. Dear God! That poor family! (pp. 135-136)

Faced with an act that has transformed their previous faith in a benevolent universe, the community must seek an explanation which will affirm some reason for the crime, thus revealing pattern in the blankness of the “big, annihilating sky” and walling out the chaos of the “hateful prairie wind.” The community’s representative in that quest is detective Al Dewey, an agent of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation who resides in Garden City and was personally acquainted with the Clutters. If Clutter is the embodiment of the community’s dreams, Dewey is the staunch believer in the validity of those dreams: “A belief in God and the rituals surrounding that belief—church every Sunday, grace before meals, prayers before bed—were an important part of the Deweys’ existence” (p. 124). Capote shows Dewey to be a determinedly decent representative of the ordered world the murder has disrupted—a man who exchanges his holster for an apron when he returns home, and who seeks truth through methodical investigation and an absolute disbelief in coincidence.

The crime opens even Dewey’s home to chaos. The telephone rings night after night as callers interrupt the Deweys’ sleep with questions, morbid jokes, theories, and possible clues. Dewey’s youngest son reacts to the disruption by bursting into tears at breakfast, and Dewey’s wife Marie patiently asks him if their lives will ever return to “normal living” (p. 123). The effect of the inexplicable crime upon Dewey’s ordered existence is perhaps best symbolized in an image Capote provides of Marie finding her husband one morning, waiting for a pot of coffee to percolate, as he looks at “the murder-scene photographs spread before him on the kitchen table—bleak stains, spoiling the table’s pretty fruit-patterned oilcloth” (p. 123). To remove the stains which these mur-
orders have made upon his vision of a meaningfully patterned cosmos becomes his obsessive quest.

Dewey operates on the assumptions of eye-for-an-eye justice, inevitable destiny, personal effort, and cause and effect which Nicolson pointed out as the universe of the detective novel. As a result of these concepts he becomes obsessed with finding the "link" that will explain the crime and lead to the arrest and execution of the "hidden animals." He constantly studies the murder-scene photographs and makes daily trips to the Clutters' empty house. His friends begin to warn him that the case is his only topic of conversation; he becomes absent-minded and ineffective in his domestic affairs, loses twenty pounds, and eventually suffers a heart attack. While viewing Dewey primarily through the expectations of detective fiction, Capote also draws upon classic American literature to suggest the spiritual significance of Dewey's physical deterioration in his single-minded pursuit of evil. In Capote's words, as Dewey has lost weight and gained in "dedication to the puzzle" (p. 172), his face has begun to look like that "of an ascetic absorbed in occult pursuits" (p. 173). Like Hawthorne's Chillingworth, Dewey is shown in his impassioned search for justice to be in danger of losing his humanity, of changing from the decent into the demonic.

Dewey begins his search by swearing that "however long it takes, it may be the rest of my life, I'm going to know what happened in that house: the why and the who" (p. 96). In following Dewey's search, Capote places the reader in the position of already knowing the who but not the why. In this way he focuses the reader's attention upon the causes of the crime while enabling him to evaluate the effectiveness of Dewey's search for the murderers. Like the community as a whole, Dewey feels certain that the Clutters were murdered by someone they knew well. Although the reader knows that Dewey is wrong, Capote nevertheless follows Dewey's reasonings in minute detail in addition to showing his pursuit of several perfectly logical false trails and self-incriminating suspects. Moreover, he juxtaposes Dewey's impassioned efforts with scenes of the murderers indifferently passing the time hundreds of miles away. He thus repeatedly shows Dewey's detective work leading not to design but "toward the blankest of walls" (p. 121), a narrative patterning that Melvin J. Friedman has pointed out is reminiscent of the mock-detective motifs of the nouveau roman. In exposing the futility of Dewey's investigative efforts Capote joins not only Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute but also Borges and Pynchon in using the detective formula as a means of undercutting belief in man's ability to comprehend the cosmos.

Capote shows events gradually undercutting even Dewey's faith in the efficacy of his approach. When the criminals are identified through information volunteered by a former cellmate, Dewey's elation at this first significant "break" in the case is tempered slightly by his realization that it has not come through his investigative efforts:
Funny. The past three weeks, that's the angle we've concentrated on. Tracking down every man who ever worked on the Clutter place. Now, the way it's turned out, it just seems like a piece of luck. But a few days more and we'd've hit this Wells. Found he was in prison. We would've got the truth then. Hell, yes. (p. 189)

This obsessive need to believe in a rational cause-and-effect universe responsive to man's efforts echoes Dewey's earlier insistence that he would eventually find a connection between the murder and some earlier event in the Clutters' lives: “The link. Got to be one. Got to” (p. 123). Capote repeatedly emphasizes this aspect of Dewey's world-view, that he is a man who “does not believe in exceptional coincidences” (p. 291). In direct conflict with that view, however, Capote shows elements of luck and coincidence continuing to play a major part in Dewey's capture of the criminals. When the police finally arrest the murderers, for instance, it is just after the latter have picked up Perry's belongings in a post office in Las Vegas. Those belongings include the boots that match the tracks left at the Clutters and provide the only tangible evidence of Perry's and Dick's guilt. Capote emphasizes the importance of this lucky timing by quoting an agent who helps Dewey in the case, “Like I told Al Dewey, suppose the squeeze had come five minutes sooner!” (pp. 245-46)

Ironically, the most profound shock to Dewey's belief in pattern comes at the moment he has apparently completed his quest. Learning that Hickock has placed the primary blame on him, Perry gives a detailed account of the crime, a confession which shocks the detective's belief in the “meaningful design” of the cosmos:

Sorrow and profound fatigue are at the heart of Dewey's silence. It had been his ambition to learn "exactly what happened in that house that night." Twice now he'd been told, and the versions were very much alike. . . . But the confessions, though they answered questions of how and why, failed to satisfy his sense of meaningful design. The crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act; the victims might as well have been killed by lightning. (p. 277)

Capote has emphasized throughout Books II and III that Dewey believed that there must be some tangible “link” between the murderers and their victims. He had even led the reader up to the point of this deliberately withheld account of the murder to believe that Dick, not Perry, was the primary killer. As a result, the confessions suggest to both detective and reader that “meaningful design,” if it exists at all, is not easily available to human reason and perception. With the murderers now captured and their motivations revealed, Dewey can only see the crime as an act of “lightning,” a chance annihilation from the sky. The conventional action of the detective story has been completed, but its goals and assumptions have proven illusory.

IV

While portraying Clutter in Book I and Dewey in Books II and III, Capote also continually shifts in cross-cutting scenes to a portrayal of the murderers. Just as Clutter and Dewey function in the paradise-lost allegory of In Cold Blood against the background of more than one mythic source, so do Perry and Dick. Viewed through the Genesis myth, they are Cain and the serpent; through
classic American literature, Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer; through formula detective fiction, the criminal embodiment of evil. As with Clutter and Dewey, Capote portrays Perry and Dick through these various archetypes in order to suggest their multi-leveled significance.

Capote builds Perry’s and Dick’s roles in the Genesis allegory from their physical qualities and Perry’s consciousness. Perry himself, who in addition to Clutter and Dewey, is the third major reflecting consciousness of Capote’s narration, provides Capote with the Cain image by his self-description in a poem he once left behind for a girlfriend: “There’s a race of men that don’t fit in,/ A race that can’t stay still” (p. 116). Capote also tells us that Perry felt a forced kinship with Dick because they were “brothers in the breed of Cain” (p. 292). Like the Biblical Cain, Perry has a grudge against God because he feels rejected. In the Catholic orphanage where he spent part of his childhood, he claims, the nuns beat him: “The one where the Black Widows were always at me. Hitting me. Because of wetting the bed. Which is one reason I have an aversion to nuns. And God. And religion” (p. 154).

Perry also resembles Cain in his role in the narrative, for he murders in outrage and wanders in exile. Like Cain, he kills Clutter (Abel in this version of the Genesis myth) in a fury at the contrast between the blessing of God that seems apparent in Clutter’s prosperity and the withholding of that blessing that seems apparent in his own misery. For that crime, Cain was set apart from other men without hope of charity and condemned to wander for the rest of his life. But Perry has suffered that torment all of his life, for as a child his involuntary bed-wetting forced him into humiliating isolation, and he has always been on the road—riding in the back of a van as his parents followed the rodeo circuit, being shifted from orphanage to orphanage, prospecting with his father in Alaska, serving in the Merchant Marine, and after the murder, pursuing a purposeless “long ride” of twelve thousand miles with Dick.

While Capote draws upon such sources, he obviously does not hold rigidly to the original versions. Instead, he employs them loosely to suggest the archetypal significance of these actual characters. Thus Dick serves as a tempting Satan in the form of a serpent, although that role is more appropriate to the Eve story than to that of Cain. Capote finds a basis for this symbolism in Dick’s luring Perry into killing Clutter and in his physical features. He emphasizes Dick’s guilt in that, knowing Perry’s capacity to kill, he calculatingly led him into the situation for that purpose. Preparing the reader for Dick’s role as Satanic tempter, Capote early describes Dick’s “inky gallery” of tattoos and his “serpentine” left eye, with its “venomous, sickly-blue squint that although it was involuntarily acquired, nevertheless seemed to warn of bitter sediment at the bottom of his nature” (p. 43).

Capote constructs this allegorical interpretation of the murder from Perry’s own private reality. In contrast to Clutter’s complete faith in his self-reliance and Dewey’s belief in the efficacy of
rational effort and meaningful destiny, Perry has a completely helpless view of his relation to the cosmos. While his pursuer believes only in facts and logical, cause-and-effect links, Perry is dominated by fantasy and obsessive superstitions. He fears nuns, the number fifteen, red hair, white flowers, priests crossing a road, and snakes appearing in a dream, among many other seemingly arbitrary things (p. 55). Capote, who is admittedly also superstitious, tells us that “the compulsively superstitious person is also very often a serious believer in fate; that was the case with Perry” (p. 55). Slipping into Perry’s mind as he waits for Dick to get some black stockings to use as masks during the murder, Capote shows us that Perry believes that he is there “not because he wished to be but because fate had arranged the matter” (p. 55). Perry has even contrived for himself in this scene a little morality play with himself as passive Everyman. He has come to Kansas with the hope of meeting Willie-Jay, a former convict who has tried to rehabilitate him. Perry regards Willie-Jay, in effect, as his Good Angel, and he feels that by going to meet him he is offering himself up to the forces of good. If “fate” does not put him in the safe-keeping of Willie-Jay, he will then allow himself to be used by Dick, the Bad Angel who wants him to participate in murder: “The journey’s aftermath was up to fate; if things didn’t ‘work out with Willie-Jay,’ then he might ‘consider Dick’s proposition’” (p. 59).

Similarly, Perry has a recurring dream in which he comes upon a garden of diamond-bearing trees that he cannot resist entering, even though he knows there is a huge snake waiting for him in the trees. The snake always falls upon him and begins swallowing him feet first, until at last a giant parrot descends and lifts him into the sky after killing the snake (pp. 109-11). This abandonment of will to agents of fate for good or ill dominates his approach to life. In confessing his cutting of Clutter’s throat, he implies that it was an unconscious act: “But I didn’t realize what I’d done till I heard the sound. Like somebody drowning” (p. 276). Later, when he talks with an old army friend who visits him in jail, he once again implies forces beyond his individual will: “They never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. Maybe it’s just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it” (p. 326). While in prison he not only continues to dream of the parrot coming down to pluck him from the confining walls, but sees two mysterious figures watching his cell window and imagines that they seek to free him. The only willful acts that Capote portrays Perry considering or performing during his stays in the Garden City jail and death row are ones of self-negation; he shows effort only in considering the possibility of suicide with a broken lightbulb and in attempting to starve himself to death. In his acceptance of injustice and blankness as the condition of the world, relieved only by irrational acts of destruction, he contrasts sharply with both the reliance in individual will of Clutter and the faith of Dewey in a cosmic order.

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12 Cowley, p. 298.
Over the course of the 280 pages which comprise the first three books of *In Cold Blood*, Capote has manipulated various centers of narrative consciousness within his overall allegorical pattern. In the process he has dramatized three essential approaches to reality: Clutter's attempt at imposing an inviolate order upon the world, Dewey's attempt at completing the meaningful design he believes patterns the cosmos, and Perry's abandonment of will to an impersonal fate. Clutter's Eden is destroyed by an accident he could not anticipate (One of his neighbors muses, "Funny, but you know, Bess, I'll bet he wasn't afraid. I mean, however it happened, I'll bet right up to the last he didn't believe it would. Because it couldn't. Not to him" [p. 137]). Dewey's obsessive quest to vindicate his and the community's belief in a beneficent cosmos is frustrated by luck and accident even as the crime is solved. And Perry's belief in fate, while the personal fiction most nearly confirmed by the fictional ordering of the book itself, seems clearly an illusory flight from personal responsibility. None of these approaches to reality proves satisfactory.

But a fourth approach has dominated the book as well, one close to that of Dewey's, yet separate from it—that of the omniscient narrator. Despite a superficial self-effacement, Capote has throughout the work been noticeably present through his artistic selection and arrangement of scenes as well as his heavily ironic focusing and juxtaposition of detail. He has deliberately broken up chronological sequence and made extensive use of the flashback, cunningly supplied certain bits of data at different stages, and employed parallel narratives. He has also presented his factual narrative as unfolding in an allegorical pattern. Thus, as an artist dealing in facts, he has selected and arranged pieces of information much as a detective does in trying to arrive at a truth. And he has therefore used Dewey's consciousness as a "reflector" more often than any other character's because he is on the same quest to find the meaningful design behind the crime.

Throughout these three books Capote has undercut the fictions through which his major characters make up their realities by showing their fatal lack of correspondence to actuality. His dominant unifying device in *In Cold Blood*—irony—constantly announces the failure of the characters to comprehend their fates (Clutter buying a $50,000 double-indemnity life insurance policy on the day of his death; Dick, unaware of the arresting patrol car pulling up alongside, asking "This it?"). Donald Pizer has pointed out that the ironic juxtaposition that pervades *In Cold Blood* "implies that a shaping destiny controls all life despite our unawareness of that destiny as it fulfills itself—a theme similar to that of Thomas Hardy in 'The Convergence of the Twain.'"13

Because of this heavily stylized narrative technique and allegorical pattern, the reader follows Capote's "true account," expecting this carefully designed fiction to yield the meaning he finds eluding Dewey. On this level, the thematic climax of the book occurs when

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Capote inserts a Dr. Satten’s psychological analysis of seemingly unmotivated murders, strongly suggesting that it does indeed explain Perry’s act. (This analysis argues that Perry went into a schizophrenic “mental eclipse” [p. 338] in the presence of Clutter, identifying him in his unconscious with such lifelong tormenters as his father, the nuns who beat him in the orphanage, and the authorities who told him never to come back to Kansas.) Capote here seems to suggest that there is a meaningful design, if only a deterministic one patterned by unconscious drives and environmental forces which negate free will. Charles Newman has criticized this seeming attempt by Capote to provide a neatly scientific explanation of the murders and the chaos they represent:

For the book purports to analyze and dramatize an act of violence, but to explain this violence he resorts to, as climax, a lengthy quote from a Menninger Clinic report on psychotic behavior. On this dull shaft of officialese, the entire narrative momentum of the book impales itself. As an empirical justification for the imaginative reconstruction which precedes it, it fails utterly.14

Capote’s purposes here, however, are far more sophisticated than Newman suggests, for just as we may come to feel that we have at least understood the meaning of this horror, Capote shifts into long accounts of the crimes of other murderers who share Death Row with Perry and Dick. In such a tightly and artfully contrived work, such seeming digressions demand to be viewed with care. They do, indeed, have an important function at this point in the book—the effect of suddenly throwing us off balance just as the world has begun to seem rational, at least in the sense of being comprehensible and deterministic. But now we learn of crimes that, far from fitting into the deterministic and allegorical patterns we feel we have at last discerned in Perry’s act of madness, seem to defy all reason or comprehension. (With further irony, we learn that an unsolved crime, which seems to emulate the Clutter murders perfectly and occurred when Perry and Dick were in close proximity, was not committed by them, an extraordinary but factual coincidence which is difficult for both Perry, the fatalistic murderer, and Dewey, the rational detective, to accept [p. 291].) Just as the narrator had seemed to have led us to the answer, we are made to see that no such definitive and thus comforting explanation of the irrational exists. As William L. Nance has commented, “Capote titled Part Three simply ‘Answer,’ refusing to bestow on the accusation of Smith and Hickock that definitive rightness it would seem to possess.”15

Book IV is entitled “The Corner,” which is prisoners’ argot for the execution chamber. But as the final book title it suggests not only the entrapment to which Perry and Dick’s purposeless twelve-thousand-mile “long ride” over the southern United States and Mexico has led, but also the blank end to which our following of Detective Dewey’s quest and the author’s quest for pattern has finally led us. Therefore, as Capote moves into the gallows scene which will end this “true account of a multiple murder and its consequences,” he moves

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us back into the narrative consciousness of Dewey. Earlier, when Dewey had heard Perry's confession, Capote told us that it had failed to fulfill his sense of "meaningful design," but that he had looked forward to seeing Perry hanged for his crime. Now, Capote shows that Dick's death elicits little remorse from Dewey, but that Perry's "aroused another response, for Perry possessed a quality, the aura of an exiled animal, a creature walking wounded, that the detective could not disregard" (pp. 381-82). Capote shows that Dewey has at last come to some human understanding of the murderer as victim, has journeyed from the Hebraic code of the classic detective figure to a more Christian empathy.

Whereas "Dewey had imagined that with the deaths of Smith and Hickock, he would experience a sense of climax, release, of a design justly completed" (p. 382), he instead recalls an afternoon in the previous May when he was visiting his father's grave in Valley View Cemetery. Stopping at the tombstone of Judge Tate, who presided over the trial but has since died, Dewey becomes intensely aware of the passage of time: "Deaths, births, marriages—why, just the other day he'd heard that Nancy Clut- ter's boy friend, young Bobby Rupp, had gone and got married" (p. 383). Walking towards the Clutters' graves he sees Sue Kidwell, Nancy's best friend. In this last scene Dewey and Sue stand in the cemetery, as in a sense do we and the narrator. All of the other major characters have either died or we have just learned of events in their lives that mark the inexorable unfolding of time. And in the design of the book we have just seen Perry and Dick hang.

By ending the book in this cemetery, which Capote describes in terms of a garden (p. 382), he contrasts the timelessness of the cycle of life and death to the personal realities of the various characters. The reader is made acutely aware that all of the fictions by which men attempt to order actuality end finally in this endlessly recurring mystery. But as Sue talks to Dewey of her own life and what might have been for Nancy, suddenly she realizes the time and rushes off on an important errand. The detective watches her as she leaves, "a pretty girl in a hurry, her smooth hair swinging, shining—just such a young woman as Nancy might have been" (p. 384). Life and death continue, unexplained and impervious to man. It is with this ambiguous image, full of reference to life and death, that Dewey ends his quest and starts home "toward the trees, and under them, leaving behind him the big sky, the whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat" (p. 384).

In the early pages of Book II, in the period when the murders were unsolved and seemingly inexplicable, Capote dramatized their profound significance for the community in two images he drew from its members' personal reactions. Dewey had set out at that time to show that there was indeed a "meaningful design" and that man could indeed control chaos by discovering the causes of the crime and punishing the criminal "animals." At the end of In Cold Blood he has heard Perry's confession and seen him hang, but he has found in both of these resolutions of the
Hebraic code only injustice, with both murdered and murderer seeming victims of a purposeless fate. And yet the capacity for love and life Nancy embodied continues in the hurrying figure of Sue Kidwell. As Dewey walks off towards the cemetery trees which symbolize the shelter of death, he leaves behind neither a "big, annihilating sky" nor a "hateful prairie wind"; but neither does he leave behind a "meaningful design." The cosmos is not revealed as either malevolent or beneficent. After all the human labor, tragedy, and suffering, there is still only the neutral mystery of "the big sky" and "the whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat."

Capote's intricate, multi-leveled allegory of paradise lost and the attempt to regain it has ended in a similar mystery. By portraying factual events in terms of cultural sources, Capote has repeatedly forced the reader to view events as manifestations of recurring, timeless patterns. But he does not develop this allegory into a coherent vision of an ordered universe. Narrating the facts in ironic juxtaposition to the expectations of the cultural sources' elements, he continually suggests pattern through his allegory only to reveal blankness. As a result, \textit{In Cold Blood} is an allegory of possible meanings, not meaning. The combination of a journalistic contract and an allegorical form gives \textit{In Cold Blood} a unique tension between the impervious mystery of fact and the human need for meaning. As a fable of fact, it both explores and embodies the need for the human consciousness to pattern experience.
POEM FOR DAVID JANSSEN

R. T. SMITH

R. T. Smith is in the Department of English at Auburn University (Alabama).

I am no worshiper, but a member of your constituency. As a kid I could never remember if your legal name were Janssen or Kimball. Your plight was universal, a flight from law, pursuit of the secret, the guilty maimed. Now, late nights I know you as wry private eye Harry O., wearing that carapace of scorn to cover the widower's heart you have borne from show to show. Each week I watch you debate cops, interrogate, and always pursue, your hairline receding, middle-aged breath resisting the chase. It's hard to believe you're dead. The papers said you had a heart attack at home, but I have known what would happen since your Kafkaesque career began: you have found the one-armed man and found him certain kin.
A VALENTINE FOR CHERYL

MICHAEL BROCKLEY

Michael Brockley is a master's degree student in counseling psychology, Ball State University (Indiana).

She sums the potlatch of my whims,
bemused by my bizarre potpourri:

oregano sauce, artichokes,
anchovies, and turtle soup;

white sangria, a coconut,
a can of hominy, strawberry yogurt,

and Chicken of the Sea;
a box of Brach's Assorted Chocolates.

I rank them on the counter,
price up for her convenience.

Her register outwits my TI calculator
by $1.56.

A high-school Harpo Marx look-alike
sacks my random cornucopia

while I leave the heart-shaped box,
chic in violet ribbons,

on a stack of brown paper bags
by her purse.
In filling library orders for back files of the Ball State University Forum, the editors are finding the following issues in critically short supply: all of I (1960-61); II, ii (Winter 1961-62); III, ii (Winter 1962-63); all of IV, V, and VI (1963-65); VII, I (Winter 1966); VII, iii (Autumn 1966); VIII, i (Winter 1967); VIII, ii (Spring 1967); X, iii (Summer 1969); X, iv (Autumn 1969); XVII, iii (Summer 1976); XVIII, i (Winter 1977); XVIII, iv (Autumn 1977). If subscribers who have any of these issues and are no longer using them will return them to the Forum Office (English 403A), the editors will gratefully extend the donors’ subscriptions by the number of rare issues returned.

Ball State University Forum announces the creation of a trust fund in its name. Contributions to the fund should be directed to the Ball State University Foundation for the Ball State University Forum Fund.
POETRY
Michael Brockley
Ernest Kroll
Eric W. Paff
B. Sanford Page
R. T. Smith
Elaine Watson

ARTICLES
Christine A. Briggs
Dee Birch Cameron
David Fedo
John Hellmann
Alma A. Ilacqua
Suzanne Juhasz
Nancy Roundy
Jesse Stuart