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To be prosecuted, banished, and shot: motives, morals, and the modern American hero: a thesis...

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TO BE PROSECUTED, BANISHED, AND SHOT: MOTIVES, MORALS, AND THE MODERN AMERICAN HERO

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School
University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Anna Tuttle Villegas

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This thesis, written and submitted by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. THEY DON'T BREED ANY OF THAT KIND</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOM SAWYER</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIM</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUCK FINN</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE DESCENDANTS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. METHOD IN THE MADNESS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THOMAS SUTPEN</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIS FATHER'S BUSINESS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAY GATSBY</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. YOU ARE YOUR WORLD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUGENE GANT</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST TO KNOCK, FIRST ADMITTED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUGIE MARCH</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE DREAMS OF MANHOOD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEORGE WILLARD</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I SWEAR TO GOD I'M A MADMAN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOLDEN CAULFIELD</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THAT BEST OF RATIOCINATATION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

THEY DON'T BREED ANY OF THAT KIND

Introduction

Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn contains three character types which serve as models for the protagonists of certain twentieth century writers. The distinguishing characteristics of Tom, Jim, and Huck reappear in the central figures of later American novels, novels dealing explicitly with the relationship between human perception and consequent behavior. The contrasting perceptions of Mark Twain's characters provide his novel with thematic tensions that, in distinct and enlarged forms, become basic interests of major twentieth century writers. The tragedy of fixed perceptions in a world of constant flux concerned William Faulkner in Absalom, Absalom! and F. Scott Fitzgerald in The Great Gatsby. Saul Bellow's The Adventures of Augie March and Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel depict heroes dissatisfied with but undaunted by the limitations of human perceptions. Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio and J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye illustrate the evolution to maturity of George Willard and Holden Caulfield. Mark Twain's conscious presentation of three different and conflicting characters creates an appropriate categorization of types which elucidates thematic patterns in later
American novels.

Tom Sawyer conducts himself according to preexisting social norms. His perceptions of time, of human experience, and of himself are products of his reliance on these norms. Jim refuses the social "typing" which prescribes that he be meekly and docilely sold down river. Jim does not initiate independent action but instead responds to threatening, negative forces with a superstitious faith that confirms his belief in a better existence elsewhere. Both Tom and Jim's perceptions function to translate and sometimes transform their experiences into forms which coincide with their peculiar methods of perception. Huck reacts to external stimuli with an alert and aggressive investigation of the elements which compose the stimuli. Unlike Jim, Huck does not exaggerate the supernatural implications of an event. Tom and Jim approach experience with preconceived criteria for judging the meaning and value of those experiences. Huck alone derives his opinions and attitudes by analyzing his observations.

Tom Sawyer

In Tom Sawyer's allegiance to books, especially old romances, lies the most pronounced feature of the type he represents: conformity to pre-existing standards of behavior. Tom's reliance on the models of romanticized behavior that he finds in books illustrates his dependence on prescriptive formulas. "'Don't I tell you it's in the books?"' Tom asks
his gang. "Do you want to go to doing different from what's in the books, and get things all muddled up...Don't you reckon that the people that made the books knows what's the correct thing to do?" (203). Tom believes that one must "do things regular," i.e. according to books. When Huck suggests a method different from Tom's for rescuing Jim, Tom ignores him simply because, according to Huck, "it was his way when he got his plans set" (489). To deviate from a book's prescription "'ain't right and it ain't moral'" (487) says Tom, revealing that his sense of morality is directly related to close adherence to pre-established codes and formulas. The value of any adventure, for Tom, lies not in its inherent qualities but in the adventure's compliance with the literary model. "'It don't make no difference how foolish it is, it's the right way--and it's the regular way. And there ain't no other way, that ever I heard of'" (484) Tom explains to Huck. Tom's behavior is thus determined by his allegiance to the established behavioral patterns he finds in books.

Tom's tendency for seeing actual events as literary types is sometimes challenged by Huck. When Huck objects that they have not raided a crowd of Spaniards and A-rabs but instead a Sunday school class, Tom says "there was hundreds of soldiers there, and elephants and treasure and so on, but we had enemies which [Tom] called magicians and they had turned the whole thing into an infant Sunday school" (209). Tom's reliance on literary models forces
him to try to preserve the past and to recreate it in the present. "'Why, hain't you never read any books at all?''" Tom asks Huck, "'Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henri IV, nor none of them heroes?'" (479). Then, because Tom feels Jim would not be familiar with "'how it's the custom in Europe'" (480), Tom carefully revises his idea of amputating Jim's chained limb. Although Jim is actually a free man throughout the "splendid rescue," Tom pretends that Jim is still a slave in order to authenticate his literary, anachronistic adventure. Materiality and time and place are all susceptible to distortion under Tom's willful perspective.

There are degrees of excellence in Tom's conformity to preconceived standards. His oath is the type that "every gang that was high-toned had" (201), and Tom scorns burglary as having "no sort of style" (202). The gang does not merely enact the adventures from Don Quixote, they must show flair and class. Tom insists that even the "swords and guns [be] all scoured up" for capturing "even a turnipcart" (207). Tom's pride in the escape plan he devises for Jim is increased by his conviction that Jim is "'going out right, and there ain't going to be no flaws in his record'" (500). The final detail of the escape plan must correspond to the literary model before Tom will concede the plan's "regularity." So, although Tom's adventures are not unique, they are gilded with excellence.

Because his moral judgments are based on the correspondence between an adventure and its literary counter-
part, Tom measures the quality of his behavior by the accuracy of that correspondence. This peculiar moral sense subordinates ordinary human responses to Tom's adventure principle. When Aunt Sally asks him why he has freed a free slave, Tom replies, "'Why, I wanted the adventure of it, and I'd'a waded neck-deep in blood" (535) to attain the ultimate excitement. Bloodshed, be it real or fictionalized, is a primary ingredient of Tom's ideal adventure.

Tom relishes the acquisition of "money and watches and ransoms" (202). He understands well the influence money has on others. Tom soothes little Tommy Barnes with "five cents to keep quiet" (204), and later he silences Uncle Silas' slave with a dime for "telling nobody" (477) about Jim's recognition of Tom and Huck. Also, he indicates his scorn of petty burglary when he reprimands Huck for Huck's misuse of the term "borrowing." Tom said "it warn't borrowing, it was stealing...he said...nobody but a mean ornery person would steal when he wasn't a prisoner" (483). Tom himself "steals" only in his adventures. When he takes something he does not plan to replace, he pays for it: "We slid in there [Miss Watson's house] and got three candles and Tom laid five cents on the table for pay" (199). Tom assesses property and human feelings alike with monetary equivalents. He rewards Jim's needless imprisonment with "forty dollars for being prisoner for us so patient, and doing it up so good" (538). For Tom, money and riches are tools for communicating with other people and for insulating
himself from contrary attitudes. As Tom sees it, money can alleviate or calm distress, silence truth, and atone for hardship.

Tom's behavior is characterized by a conspicuous dependence on and adherence to a pre-existing behavioral code. The inflexible nature of the code demands that Tom translate immediate events and circumstances into forms that are prescribed by that code. Tom's moral sense evaluates right and wrong according to the correspondence between a character's behavior and the behavior prescribed by the pre-existing code. A consistent and discrete preoccupation with wealth as a means for wielding power, creating justice, and communicating meaning is the final feature of Tom's character type.

Jim

Jim's behavior is typically reflexive. There is no revision of empirical reality for Jim as there is for Tom, but Jim's passive response to events is characterized by an interpretive, superstitious evaluation of an event's meaning. Miss Watson's desire to sell Jim down river causes him to "light out might quick" (243). When Huck tells Jim they must flee Jackson's Island, "Jim never asked no questions, he never said a word, but the way he worked for the next half an hour showed about how he was scared" (263). Jim describes his distress upon losing their raft: "He judged it was all up with him anyway it could be fixed, for if he
didn't get saved he would get drowned, and if he did get saved whoever saved him would send him back home so as to get the reward, and then Miss Watson would sell him South, sure" (279) Jim pictures himself as being manipulated by outside influences, so he attributes his experiences to supernatural and unknowable causes. After Tom hangs Jim's hat on the tree under which Jim is sleeping, Jim says "the witches bewitched him [Jim] and put him in a trance and rode him all over the state, and then set him under the trees again and hung his hat on a limb to show who done it" (199). "Who done it" is anybody but Jim, because Jim is not a "doer." Jim's tendency to "terpret" dreams and seemingly inexplicable phenomena is a manifestation of his passive attitude toward experience. While discussing the origin of stars with Huck, Jim reveals his belief in cause and effect: "Jim allowed they was made but [Huck] allowed they happened" (343). Witches or moons or other characters are causes, but Jim is not.

A characteristic which complements Jim's passivity is his superstitious faith in a better existence elsewhere. Despite the severe rigidity of the slave system, Jim harbors hopes that he will become a rich man and that he will locate his family and release them from slavery, too. He tells Huck that "the first thing he would do...he would go to saving up money...he would buy his wife and then they would both work to buy the two children" (308). Although Jim implies that he will "go to saving" in an aggressive, determined manner, his behavior throughout the novel suggests that while his talk is impelling, his actions are not.
Not only does Jim dream of being reunited with his family, but he also hopes for riches: "'Maybe you's got to be po' a long time fust, en so you might get discourage' en kill yo'sef'f you didn' know by de sign [hairy arms and a hairy breast] dat you gwyne be rich bymeby'" (245). If Tom orders his experience by imposing literary patterns on it, then Jim orders his by maintaining that all events, good and bad, foretell what is to happen to him in the future. Jim's experiences may not corroborate or substantiate his faith, but they do not undermine or dampen it. His hope for the good life exists in the realm of faith which is untouched by the influence of Miss Watson, Huck, or Tom. Jim's perceptions, like his trust in a gentle fate, are based on his willingness to interpret every experience, large or small, as meaning more than the literally apparent. Jim evaluates omens, signs, and his own experiences so that they do not contradict his hope for future happiness. A hairy breast portends riches to come, a dream persuades Jim to give money to Balum's Ass (246), and "counting the things you are going to cook for dinner would bring bad luck" (244).

Jim's character type is marked by a distinctly passive, reflexive attitude toward experience. Accompanying this passive stance is a tendency to interpret experience in terms of supernatural causes and their effects, and unknowable omens and their implications. Jim's type orders experienced events with a faithful belief in a personal destiny, a destiny which is believed to be superior to and compensatory for one's immediate existence. Although this
belief is seldom substantiated and often directly challenged by experience, it remains fixed and compelling.

**Huck Finn**

Huck Finn is the markedly dynamic character of the novel. While Tom's reliance on literary adventures persists throughout the book, as does Jim's superstitious belief in a fortuitous destiny, Huck's attitude toward the other characters and toward his own experience changes considerably. Early in the book Huck "wanted to see the camels and elephants" (207) that Tom has promised him. At Phelps Farm, however, he is no longer patient with "just one of Tom Sawyer's lies" (209). When Tom proposes that they light out together for the territory, Huck disqualifies himself from participating in another of Tom's bookish adventures. "All right," Huck replies, "that suits me but I ain't got no money to buy the outfit and I reckon I couldn't get none from home" (539).

Tom and Jim retain static and constant perspectives for appraising experience; Huck's perceptions evolve and mature with every new observation.

Huck's capacity for reforming his opinions is assisted by his constant appraisal of his environment. His own conscience guides him as he protects Jim from the slave-hunters: "I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low because I knowed very well I had done wrong...then I thought a minute and says to myself, hold on; s'pose you'd'a done right and give Jim up, would you feel better than what you do now?"
No, says I, I'd feel bad" (312). Huck disregards both preconceived standards and superstitious interpretations. When Jim advises Huck that bees do not sting idiots, Huck uses his own experience (he is no idiot) to prove Jim wrong. Huck discerns the frequent discrepancies between an object or a person's label and its or his essence. He senses immediately that the Duke and the Dauphin are fakes: "It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes at all...if they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn't no objections, 'long as it would keep peace in the family" (350). Although Huck agrees to use traditional labels, even blatantly misrepresentative ones, he acknowledges consciously that the labels are deceptive.

Tom Sawyer does not qualify his distorting depiction of a Sunday school picnic as a horde of A-rabs. To overcome Huck's objections he resorts to quoting even more exotic tales of enchantment. Unlike Tom and Jim, Huck is always willing to modify his impression according to what a situation warrants. When Pap's surprise appearance does not warrant fear, Huck does not feel it: "I reckoned I was scared now, too; but in a minute I see I was mistaken--that is, after the first jolt, as you may say...but right away after, I see I warn't scared of him worth bothered about" (213). Huck will not let his preconceptions determine his evaluation of an experience, either. Therefore, the passage of time and event always reshape his initial expectations. In spite of his reluctance to be civilized by the Widow, Huck admits that
"I liked the old ways best but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit" (210).

Tom's sense of moral obligation is linked to the congruity between his behavior and that of literary models. The suggestion of a practical, unliterary scheme for freeing Jim incites Tom's moral indignation. Watching the Shepherdson's bloodthirsty pursuit of Buck Grangerford, Huck poignantly reveals that his own moral sense rests on his examination of human behavior: "It made me so sick I almost fell out of the tree. I ain't a-going to tell all that happened...I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever gonna get shut of them--lots of times I dream about them" (339). Though Huck ostensibly desires to erase the memory of Buck's murder from his mind, the senseless cruelty he witnesses makes a deep and enduring impression on his memory. The Grangerford-Sherpherdson feud, the Duke and the Dauphin's greedy antics, and Colonel Sherburn's impassioned speech all contribute to Huck's evolving understanding of the human condition. His observations and his freedom from the formulas which limit Tom and the superstitions which blind Jim enable Huck to remain compassionate and to refrain from making oppressive moral judgments. Because he does not adhere to the behavior endorsed by Tom's romantic novels, Huck sincerely repents of the sorrow he has caused Aunt Sally and promises to modify his future behavior: "I wished I could do something for her, but I couldn't, only to swear that I wouldn't never do nothing to grieve her any more" (528).
Because he does not refer to a social conscience, Huck can consult his own conscience as to the morality of his freeing a slave.

Huck's bitter account of the town of loafers in Arkansas indicates the disgust he feels for human beings who desecrate their own humanity: "There couldn't anything wake them up all over...like a dog-fight--unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail and see him run himself to death" (367). Human savagery is exactly what Huck wishes that he did not have to see, yet the loafers--and Tom Sawyer--thrive on it. Human kindness merits Huck's ultimate approval. He responds to Jim's endearments such as "child," "honey," and "boss" by commenting that Jim "had an uncommon level head for a nigger" (279). Huck cries for Buck Grangerford, "for he was mighty good to [Huck]" (339). Poor "Harelip" Wilks apologizes so beautifully to Huck that he "wished [he] could tell her a thousand lies, so she could do it again" (407). To Huck, endearments, kindnesses, and apologies represent the ideal behavior for human beings. Most importantly, it is behavior which Huck himself practices.

The definitive feature of Huck's character type is a dynamic and malleable approach to experience which relies on empirical, observed reality as the sole criterion for accumulating knowledge. A keen awareness of the discrepancies between appearances and essences and an ability to modify
existing judgments create a pliant, adaptable perspective for viewing events and people. Huck's constant observations of human interaction are the criteria with which Huck forms his moral judgments. Huck's character type affirms the human power for questioning falsehoods and ascertaining truths.

The Descendants

Thomas Sutpen and Jay Gatsby share with Tom Sawyer the predisposition to conform to established standards and practices. Like Tom, both Sutpen and Gatsby interpret their experience in terms of established, accepted standards without questioning the validity of the norms to which they conform. Their major concern is to find themselves a secure position within the existing order. Like Jim, Eugene Gant and Augie March believe that somewhere, somehow, a "better fate" awaits them, a fate their experiences may not suggest. Much as Jim devotes his attention to the interpretation of dreams, Eugene allows himself mad flights of fantasy, and Augie lapses into an imaginary world where he is the celebrated hero.

George Willard and Holden Caulfield display the same allegiance to empirical relaity that Huck shows. George and Holden evolve through time and event, constantly refashioning their opinions and assessments of events as they grow from adolescence to manhood. What is distinctive about Huck, George, and Holden is their refusal to rely on patterns, codes, or prescriptions. While Tom consistently translates experience into literary
forms, and Jim insists on elevating experience to metaphysical levels, Huck, George, and Holden evaluate experience in terms of their own observations. Because they are not limited or restrained by preconceptions, they encounter life dynamically. Their encounters reveal the interaction between a developing psyche and the continuous onslaught of events which typifies modern America. Tom Sawyer, Thomas Sutpen, and Jay Gatsby energetically apply themselves to codes which exclude the possibility and necessity for individual growth. Jim, Eugene Gant, and Augie March sustain themselves by insisting that all random experiences bespeak a final and glorious fate. Only Huck, George Willard, and Holden Caulfield evolve toward a comprehensive understanding of human experience.
Chapter II

METHOD IN THE MADNESS

Thomas Sutpen

"How account for the ruling class, then?" W. J. Cash asks in his analysis of the Southern aristocracy, The Mind of the South. "Manifestly, for the great part, by the strong, the pushing, the ambitious, among the old coon-hunting population of the backcountry. The frontier was their predestined inheritance." 2 This strong, pushing, ambitious group of men is the model to which Thomas Sutpen aspires in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!. Cash's observation reveals an essential aspect of Faulkner's hero. Sutpen's meteoric rise to stature in the South's economic system was not an inherently rebellious or socially defiant gesture but, rather, the standard behavior for a Southerner living in pre-Civil War America.

Sutpen is exposed to the newborn American class system when he is denied entrance to the plantation door. Carl Degler notes that this system depended primarily upon property ownership for its class delineation: "Quite early in the colonial period, great disparities of wealth appeared in the agricultural South, as well as elsewhere, but this was stratification resting initially and finally upon wealth, not upon honorific or hereditary conceptions derived from Europe." 3
"'This ain't a question of rifles,'" young Sutpen tells himself, repudiating the code of manhood that he had obtained in West Virginia. "'So to combat them you got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with. You see?'" (238) he asks himself. With his simply stated but accurate assessment of the system he is pitted against, Sutpen chooses conventional means for putting himself into a position where he will never again be threatened with rejection. Unable to beat the system, he joins it. But his tragic flaw lies in his inability to perceive the immaterial consequences of that system, an inability which Melvin Backman terms "moral blindness." 4

"'That's the way he got it,'" Quentin says of Sutpen's slowly growing acquaintance with the South's class system. 

"'He had learned the difference not only between white men and black ones, but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men, not to be measured by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink... He had begun to discern that without being aware of it yet'" (226). That gap between detection and consciousness sometimes alters Sutpen's self-prescribed conformity to aristocratic behavior. In Mississippi Sutpen observes that the difference between men is not to be measured by brute strength. Yet he retains his brutish habit of wrestling with his slaves: "'Yes, that's what Ellen saw: her husband and the father of her children standing there naked and panting and bloody to the waist'" (29).
Sutpen does not grant respectability sufficient importance in his design, thereby offending Miss Rosa and the townspeople. Cash notes that the affected manners of the nascent Southern aristocracy self-consciously aimed to exude respectability and "to capture much of the beautiful courtesy and dignity and gesturing grace...and seem to move, as it were, with stately tread and in the rustling of silken robes." Despite Sutpen's acknowledgement that physical contests will not further the achievement of his design, he maintains his crude, backwoods habit as a subconscious affirmation of the retributive effect of his design. A West Virginian was denied entrance to the Tidewater plantation, and it is for a West Virginian that Sutpen's Hundred is "torn violently" from the Mississippi mud. Sutpen thus imbues an intense and individual purpose into his apparent conformity.

Sutpen failed to incorporate the feigned appearance of an inherited graciousness into his design. Instead, he maintained those traits which would deem him manly in West Virginian terms. Consequently, the townspeople regarded him with some reservation: "'He was not liked (which he evidently did not want, anyway) but feared, which seemed to amuse, if not actually please, him. But he was accepted; he obviously had too much money now to be rejected'" (72). Sutpen continued his hand-to-hand combat with his slaves, "that florid, swaggering gesture to the hat" (46), and his "pompous arrogance" (74) because, although these traits did not contribute to the "substance of that respectability Miss Coldfield anyway
believed to be his aim" (41), they preserved the vestiges of the Virginian mountain "boy-symbol" for whom the entire scheme of retribution existed. Sutpen chose the existing system as the means by which he would gain revenge, but he fostered the Virginian within himself so that he would never lose sight of the original purpose of his design. Though Sutpen is finally judged by the conventional standards he adopts for avenging himself, he infuses his design with the purpose of redress.

"'Sutpen's trouble was innocence!'" (220) Quentin Compson tells Shreve. As Cleanth Brooks suggests, it is Sutpen's innocence which makes him feel that financial retribution can serve true justice.6 This confusion between the material realm of wealth and property and the moral realm of goodness and evil typifies Sutpen's perceptions. Tom Sawyer does not perceive the moral distinctions between the "rightness" he finds in adhering to novelistic codes of behavior and the rightness Huck advocates in his concern for Jim's life. Similarly, Thomas Sutpen equates the acquisition of "land and niggers and a fine house" with moral compensation for his initial denial from the plantation door. Sutpen measures the morality of situations by simply balancing wrongs with retributions, hardships with compensations, insults with greater insults. His innocence causes him to believe that "the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and put them in the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out" (263). Sutpen
tells Grandfather Compson, "'I had a design in my mind. Whether it was a good or bad design is beside the point; the question is, where did I make the mistake in it?'" (263). The virtue of the design is not only beside the point, it is virtually beyond Sutpen's powers to determine. Like Tom Sawyer, Sutpen's main object is to stick to the code, the design, the preconception. The morality of the design is, for Sutpen, assured by its very existence: the system shamed Sutpen, so to "live with himself for the rest of his life" (220) he assumed the moral outlook of the very system that shamed him.

Because he relied on an existing moral code, Sutpen failed to shape his own experiences into a logical network of knowledge. His shrewdness "broke down, it vanished into that old impotent logic which had betrayed him before" (279). Sutpen's behavior becomes static and predictable. He rejects Eulalia Bon, not because she poses an actual threat to the establishment of his dynasty, but because her minute Negro inheritance places her in an inferior role in the Southern design to which Sutpen conforms. "The old logic, the old morality...was already falling into pattern, already showing him conclusively that he had been right, just as he knew he had been" (279) in his repudiation of Eulalia and Charles. The "old morality," the conventional Southern morality which excused (necessitated, even) Sutpen's denial of his first wife and firstborn, obviated the necessity for Sutpen's individual analysis of his predicament. Sutpen assumed not only conventional aspirations, but also conventional
perspectives for assessing those aspirations.

It is important to note that while Thomas Sutpen measures the success of his design by the wealth he has accumulated, wealth is never and has never been the primary object of his energetic, unfailing motivation. Sutpen is committed to an ideal; be it mad, illogical, or immoral, it is nevertheless an ideal. Degler comments on this often illogical relationship between men and ideals. Man "is more than an animal. He surrounds himself with ritual, ideal, and prejudice to such an extent that the essentials of life... are unnecessarily hedged about with obstacles to immediate gratification." "Often," Degler concludes, ideals "are more powerful than the elemental drives." 7 Rosa Coldfield, in the midst of many mistaken conclusions about Sutpen, makes one especially piercing comment which substantiates and particularizes Degler's generalization: "'I mean that he was not owned by anyone or anything in this world, had never been, would never be, not even by Ellen, not even by Jones' granddaughter. Because he was not articulated in this world. He was a walking shadow" (171). Sutpen is so committed to the image of the ragged boy in front of the plantation home that he does become a "walking shadow," a timeless reflection of that "boy-symbol." Sutpen's ideal, the restitution of his self-respect, interferes with his marriages, his love for his children, and his perceptions of his place in the world.

Though Sutpen does not expressly articulate the idea, Sutpen's Hundred, Ellen Coldfield, Henry and Judith and Milly
Jones are all evidence of the payment Sutpen feels to be due him for his harsh and bitter initiation into the Southern class structure. While Sutpen adopts the values and biases of that structure, he never does consider himself a part of it. He participates in "what is probably the most moving mass-sight of all human mass-experience...the bright gallant deluded blood and flesh dressed in a martial glitter of brass and plumes" (122) not because he feels any loyalty to the South but because the war threatened the antebellum world which contained the raw materials for Sutpen's design and dynasty. Rosa describes Sutpen's inflexible attitude after the war. He was "held by that electric furious immobile urgency and awareness of short time and the need for haste as if he had just drawn breath and realized that he was old... not that old age might have left him impotent to do what he intended to do, but that he might not have time to do it in before he would have to die" (160). Sutpen was made immobile and impotent not by old age but by his rigid adherence to a formula which was warped and made obsolete by the passage of time. Tom Sawyer never concedes that a Sunday school class could not become elephants and camels; Thomas Sutpen refuses to admit that, mistake or no mistake, Charles Bon is the first scion of his dynasty.

Sutpen's character is static because neither Sutpen nor his perceptions change. For Sutpen, experience is not a growing process. Instead, it is the accumulation of "courage and shrewdness and the one he knew he had and the
other he believed he could learn" (244). Sutpen never relinquishes the rules he discovered in "his little den beside the game trail" (234). Rosa Coldfield accurately describes those rules: "'Because there is a practicality to viciousness: the thief, the liar, the murderer even, has faster rules than virtue ever has; why not madness too? If he was mad, it was only his compelling dream which was insane and not his methods; it was no madman who bargained and cajoled hard manual labor out of men like Jones'" (166).

Sutpen's methodical shrewdness was demanded by the Southern frontier described by Cash. Sutpen's compliance with antebellum standards is superficially complete. His compliance with his own unique standards, however, is devastatingly rigid and tragically thorough. According to John Lewis Longley Jr., Sutpen exchanges his essential humanity for his dynasty, a dynasty which never fulfills the task it was given. 8
HIS FATHER'S BUSINESS

Jay Gatsby

Thomas Sutpen conformed, perhaps not quite consciously, to the economic practices of the antebellum South. Sutpen assimilated the South's standards without fully realizing or ever articulating them. Blindly, he achieved his dynasty without the assistance of a rational, critical faculty. Jay Gatsby, in contrast, conforms to a style of life which he admires and emulates with complete approval. Sutpen chooses to establish himself within the existing, conventional societal framework when he envisions how "the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing them all the time—as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them" (235). For Gatsby, however, it is the "universe of ineffable gaudiness" (89) represented by Dan Cody's yacht which entices him to join the money-making establishment. Each character chooses established methods for different reasons and toward different ends. Whereas Sutpen is motivated by dread, Gatsby acts from desire.

William Fahey states that Gatsby's naive dream of success is based on the fallacious assumption that material possessions are synonomous with happiness, harmony, and beauty. This equation of material goods with qualitative goodness was
present in Sutpen's design, but Sutpen defended himself against the degradation of his self-respect while Gatsby enthusiastically pursued the "promises of life" (8). The tragic accommodation of the American Dream in *Absalom, Absalom!* suggests that perhaps, were Sutpen not hampered by his primal innocence, he might have discerned that his design was outmoded by the passing of time and event. James Gatz becomes Jay Gatsby, however, because he sincerely hungrys for the "meretricious beauty" of monied elegance. Gatsby's zealous appreciation of the good life resembles Tom Sawyer's eager pursuit of adventure, the bloodier the better.

In the final chapter of *The Great Gatsby* Nick Carraway reads the fly-leaf of Gatsby's childhood copy of *Hopalong Cassidy*. Gatsby's "General Resolves" begin with several self-improvement reminders and end, significantly, with:

"Read one improving book or magazine per week
Save $5.00 (crossed out) $3.00 per week
Be better to parents" (153).

Gatsby's casual attitude toward his many acquaintances and his cursory dismissal of Myrtle Wilson's death suggest that he listed the resolves in order of importance. Apparently, self-improvement—the creation of Jay Gatsby—was more important than saving money, which in turn was more important than good relations with his parents. With his Franklinesque schedule of self-improvement James Gatz remakes himself in the image of the capitalist baron. He discards his family and his background: "His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful
farm people--his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (89). Gatsby does not merely adopt the accoutrements of a splendor to which he was not born, as Sutpen does, but he virtually remakes his own ancestry.

Whereas Sutpen maintains some backwoods gestures to preserve a certain individuality, Gatsby is willing to relinquish every aspect of his background in order to identify with wealthy America: "He was balancing himself on the running board of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American" (59). Max Weber observes that "the resort to entailed estates and the nobility, with sons whose conduct at the university and in the officers' corps tries to cover up their social origins...is a product of later Western decadence."10 Young Gatsby, epitomizing upward mobility, refers vaguely to his Oxford education and his midwestern family with a worldly awareness of the importance of a proper background. Gatsby also shares Ragged Dick's belief that material acquisitions and the profit motive ensure good character and heavenly salvation. Even Gatsby's desire for Daisy echoes the capitalist theory of supply and demand: "It excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy--it increased her value in his eyes" (131). Although Richard Lehan calls Gatsby's love for Daisy "the one pure impulse in a corrupt world"11 it is Gatsby himself who recognizes that "her voice is full of
money" (107). Sutpen accommodates American capitalism, but
he does so without a conscious appreciation of profit for
profit's sake. Gatsby, "overwhelmingly aware of the youth
and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves" (132),
careses his pink suits and his English shirts and his
green leather carseats with the proud, constant knowledge
that they are all symbols of his achievement.

Just as Tom Sawyer's adventure novels color his
interpretation of experienced events and Thomas Sutpen's
omnipresent need for retribution shapes his reading of
experience, Gatsby's desire for Daisy distorts his perceptions.
He erroneously assures Nick of Jordan Baker's honesty
because he is intent on devising a secret meeting with
Daisy: "'Miss Baker's a great sportswoman, you know, and
she'd never do anything that wasn't all right'" (66). In a
particularly ironic episode, Owl-eyes expounds on the
authenticity of Gatsby's library: "'See...it's a bona-fide
piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a
regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What
realism! Knew when to stop, too" (45). Gatsby's perceptions
are not thorough, not realistic, and most importantly, he
ever does know when to stop his fantastical dream. Like
David Belasco, Gatsby deals with scenes, with staging, and
with performing, all toward the formation of himself into a
suitable mate for Daisy. When Daisy disapproves of Gatsby's
garish parties, he immediately stops them. Gatsby's perceptions,
then, transform his experience and his own behavior into
forms which are supportive of his desired union with Daisy.

Like Sutpen, Gatsby attributes the flaw in the accomplishment of his dream to a tactical error rather than to his own moral shortcomings. When his reunion with Daisy is not immediately the joyous one he envisioned, Gatsby whispers to Nick, "'This is a terrible mistake...a terrible, terrible mistake'" (79). Like Sutpen, Gatsby proceeds against monumental obstacles to his dream. His lonely vigil beneath Daisy's window after Myrtle Wilson's death is a pathetic one, but it is pathetic because of the enduring life in Gatsby's dream and not because of the extinction of that life. Sutpen and Gatsby's behavior reveals that one must wear a curious set of moral blinders to pursue the American Dream, whether the dream is of social equality or romantic love, even though it is precisely these blinders which doom the dreamers to inevitable failure.

Another inherently self-destructive factor of both Sutpen and Gatsby's visions is their backward-looking perspective. Sutpen does not hear the "sharp and final clapto of a door between us and all that was, all that might have been--a retroactive severance of the stream of event" (158). Sutpen believes that what was possible before 1860 is still possible, indeed still necessary, after 1865. Gatsby, too, attempts to crystallize the fleeting moment on which he hinges all of his aspirations. "'Can't repeat the past?'" Gatsby asks Nick, "'Why, of course you can!'" (99).
Both Sutpen and Gatsby study the system they adapt to, but they fail to allow for the mutations and alterations that time wreaks on people and institutions alike. Daisy is no longer the virginal flower she once seemed; Sutpen's Hundred could more accurately be called Sutpen's One. To preserve their dreams and their reason for enduring, Sutpen and Gatsby maintain the strangely idealistic point of view which initially allowed them to decide there was an earthly path to a supernal happiness.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the characters of Thomas Sutpen, Jay Gatsby, and Tom Sawyer is their inflexible adherence to a preconception. Tom Sawyer considers the Territory as a prime subject for "howling adventures amongst the Injuns" (539). Sutpen persists in the pursuit of his dynasty, "so running his little crossroads store with a stock of plowshares and hames strings and calico...and who knows maybe what delusions of making money out of the store to rebuild the plantation" (181). And Gatsby, in the face of obvious rejection by Daisy, persists in his sacred vigil, "standing there in the moonlight--watching over nothing" (129).

It is paradoxical that while Sutpen and Gatsby choose the most substantial, material, and timely realm--the marketplace--in which to erect their dreams and their dynasties, their visions remain transcendent, ideal, and timeless.
Eugene Gant and his parents, Eliza and Oliver, represent in miniature the three attitudes which W. M. Frohock believes to comprise American cultural displacement. Eliza, with her constant cycles of pregnancy and real estate deals, embodies the American spirit of capitalism; Oliver Gant, with his stentorian oratory and his inchoate hunger for creating a masterpiece, is the American idealist; Eugene, rejecting both the base productivity of his mother and the ineffective and airy artistic pursuits of his father, is the displaced person who is seeking his own identity in a world which threatens to force an identity upon him. At Pulpit Hill Eugene feels sharply the task of being an alienated American: "He felt suddenly the devastating impermanence of the nation... and the old hunger returned--the terrible and obscure hunger that haunts and hurts Americans, and that makes us exiles at home and strangers wherever we go" (352). Frohock explains that Europeans treat alienation as an inherent characteristic of all humanity, regardless of nationality, while Americans define alienation in terms of specifically American pressures and neuroses. Rejecting both materialism and idealism, Eugene exemplifies American cultural displacement. Sutpen
and Gatsby mimic one standard of American life, but Eugene lives in utter and total alienation. In the midst of so many half-truths, the only truth he can be sure of is that he is doomed to a lonely, isolated, and confused existence.

The external standards confronting Eugene operate as causes rather than options. Eugene does not choose to "pitch right in and take an interest in the town's progress" (10) as Eliza does. In fact, throughout the novel he responds with veiled defiance to the "ethics of success" (94) that Eliza proposes. Neither does he choose the "familiar weakness of the sensualist " (19) which engulfs his father, the failed artist. An example of the clashing outlooks of of Eliza and Oliver is their conception of their Altamont home: "For him [Oliver] the house was the picture of his soul, the garment of his will. But for Eliza it was a piece of property, whose value she shrewdly appraised, a beginning for her hoard" (14). Eugene adopts neither his mother's capitalism nor his father's idealistic humanism because he observes first-hand the crippling effects both attitudes have on his parents. In her unending search for profit, Eliza forsakes the intimacy of her family and the sacred role of mother. Oliver, in his loyalty to the angel's head which he will never carve, often overlooks the human needs around him. He escapes to his fantasy world created by drink and rhetoric when the real one fails his aspirations.

But, as Richard Walser notes, Eugene does inherit his father's urge to create and his mother's capacity for sensory
impressions. Eugene perceives what eluded Sutpen and Gatsby: that a dependence either on an unearthly dream or on material profit can never satisfy the demands of the human heart. Perceiving these failures, Eugene refuses to arm himself with any optimism. His repudiation of Oliver and Eliza causes Eugene to scrutinize his own psyche while he disclaims affinity with "the great figures that came and went about him, the huge leering heads that bent hideously into his crib, the great voices that rolled incoherently above him" (31).

Eugene's distaste for his family and eventually all humanity is more violent that his refusal to conform to the ideals of his parents. He displays impatience with the baser aspects of human nature in his abhorrent reaction to his brother Steve. Eugene "hated him because he stunk, because he brought fear, shame, and loathing wherever he went; because his kisses were fouler than his curses, his whines nastier than his threats" (199). Eugene's initial revulsion toward the leering countenances above his crib magnifies with every human encounter. Although he does sporadically and ineffectually advocate filial love to his family, his final gesture toward his parents is one of rejection. When Eliza tells him that "we must try to love one another" (513), Wolfe advises the reader that "this beautiful sentence is spoken too late, wearily," and Eugene is well on his way to spiritual isolation. Even his emotional alliance with his brother Ben is one that is based on a
mutual symbolism of escape; ironically, Eugene's symbolic fantasies restore Ben to the life Ben has denounced.

Eugene's perceptions are appropriate to his rejection of both material gain and the human community. The infant Eugene assimilates a host of empirical impressions: "Eugene knew by the stillness that it was Sunday; against the high wire fence there was the heavy smell of hot dockweed...Eugene heard with absolute clearness all the brisk backyard sounds of the neighborhood, he became acutely aware of the whole scene" (32). Yet, despite his appreciation for non-verbal experience, Eugene was "in agony because he was poverty-stricken in symbols: his mind was caught in a net because he had no words to work with" (30). Eugene yearns to become a symbol user. Thomas Wolfe explains that Eugene "belonged, perhaps, to an older and simpler race of men; he belonged with the mythmakers" (325). The material world, the repertoire of sense experience, gains special significance for Eugene when he can symbolize the substance and translate the material "stone, leaf, unfound door" into symbolic ones. It is not enough that Eugene prizes the "clean lovely ugliness" (356) of Laura James; he must turn her from a fleshly woman into a representation of something more: "all the young beauty in the world dwelt for him in that face that had kept wonder, that had kept innocence, that had lived in such immortal blindness to the terror and foulness of the world" (363).
While Sutpen and Gatsby bypassed linear time and immediate materiality in their pursuit of an ideal, Eugene's idealism is born in his initial perceptions of an all-too-disenchanting physical world. Eugene's search for symbols is a search for a static and enduring perfection, a perfection which he cannot find in the material world. Jim "interprets" experience so that it yields the promise of goodness, happiness, and tranquility. Eugene, too, elevates himself from the world of earthly imperfections to the distilled purity of linguistic symbols. To Eugene, the words "love, family, father, and mother" symbolize all that Laura James, his motley siblings, Oliver, and Eliza fail to be. His unhappiness with materiality is so great that he resists translating the "shame of nature" into words. Once, "deathly sick, but locked in silence and dumb nausea, he had vomited finally upon his cupped hands" because he could not reveal that "shame" (73) to his teacher. For Eugene, language functions to alleviate dissatisfaction with materiality in much the same way that Jim's inevitable omens relieve the tedious harshness of his own experience.

With language Eugene strives to transcend "the senseless nihilism of life" (204). "The torturing paradox of the ungenerous-generous, the selfish-unselfish, the noble-base" nettles Eugene's spirit in the "complexity of truth and seeming" (96). Eugene refuses to accept that the "seeming" paradox is not really a paradox at all, and that lies and deceit and semblances are all essential aspects of human
nature. The exact and exclusive distinctions offered by language picture the world Eugene hungers for, just as Jim's omens and signs forecast a liveable future. During his discovery of language, Eugene equates the "line of life" with the "beautiful developing structure of language" (72). Eugene peoples his fantasy existence with words, not people, because words are constant and certain while people are fluctuating and unstable.

Eugene's fantasy existence, the "doorless land of faery, that illimitable haunted country that opened somewhere below a leaf or a stone" (229), is created and supported by his disappointment with materiality as Jim's poverty functions as a prerequisite for his expectations of wealth. Eugene's faith "was above conviction. Disillusionment had come so often that it had awakened in him a strain of bitter suspicion" (186). Neither human company nor capital gain is a viable alternative for Eugene because human beings are too contradictory and imperfect, and gain is too inescapably material and timely. In his wildest fantasies Eugene turns away from human companionship, "clenching his hands, madly in love with himself" (444). Because materiality will not corroborate his conception of himself and of his destiny, Eugene employs language to create a world which will.

Like Jim, Eugene Gant withdraws from the external pressures which threaten to limit and define his character. Like Jim, he adopts a responsive, reflexive pose which
supports an unsubstantiated faith in a personal destiny. Whereas Sutpen and Gatsby conscientiously adhered to a pre-existing behavioral pattern, Eugene adheres only to his ideal faith in a unique personal destiny. Augie March is more tactful, less scornful in his withdrawal, but finally he, with Eugene and Jim, rejects the alternatives pressed on him, sustaining himself with his rejection.

FIRST TO KNOCK, FIRST ADMITTED

Augie March

In Chapter Seven of *The Adventures of Augie March* Mr. Einhorn says to Augie, "'You've got opposition in you. You don't slide through everything. You just make it look so'" (123). Augie gratefully realizes that he is indeed a rebel, and he carries this knowledge with him throughout the novel. Augie explains that he lives by Heraclitus' credo, "a man's character is his fate." What Einhorn has observed in Augie's many samplings and refusals of possible alternatives is that Augie is determined to create his own distinctly individual fate and character, regardless of what a larger, impersonal Fate may have planned for him. Augie's ultimate refusals of Thea, Mrs. Renling, and Basteshaw reveal that Augie is, like Jim and Eugene, a responder and not an initiator. Augie does not manipulate causes. Proponents of various causes manipulate Augie. As Robert R. Dutton suggests, Augie's obstinate and persistent nay-saying is
reminiscent of Bartleby the Scrivener and places Augie in a long line of rebels. Augie's behavior also resembles that of Mark Twain's Jim because it consistently defies what is warranted by immediate experience.

Grandma Lausch is the first spectre of American capitalism to haunt Augie: "she watched for business opportunities" (28). She literally transforms human emotions into hard cash, extracting profits from human mating as though people were cattle. It is Grandma Lausch who masterminds Georgie's entrance into a mental institution because of the financial infeasibility of his condition. Even though the young Augie participates in her schemes, his denial of Mrs. Renling's offer of adoption shows that he will not conform to the capitalist spirit as Simon does. "I was supposed to become Augie Renling, live with them, and inherit all their dough" (158) Augie says, but then succinctly expresses why he turns down the offer: "Why should I turn into one of these people who didn't know who they themselves were? The unvarnished truth was that it wasn't a fate good enough for me" (159). For Augie, the key to a better fate is self-acceptance, which can only be achieved through self-scrutiny. While the glamour of svelte clothes and impressive cars amuses him for a period, Augie will not change his name, as James Gatz did, and remake himself into a conventional image. Augie asserts that he "had family enough to suit [him] and history to be loyal to, not as though [he had] been gotten off of a stockpile" (160). In his
determination that his experience will create both a character and a fate, Augie will not relinquish any of the elements of his personality or his experience. Jim includes seemingly negative experiences in his superstitious projections for a better life just as Augie insists on maintaining all components, favorable or not, of his own background. "I had never accepted determination and wouldn't become what other people wanted to make of me" Augie explains. What is significant about Augie's rejections is not that he resists the essential philosophies proposed by Simon, the Renlings, or Mimi Villars, but that he resists becoming the character that those philosophies would demand that he become. In the confrontation between materialism and idealism, Augie strives to extricate himself and to create a third alternative, a synthesis of the societal pressures of modern America and his own individual and optimistic expectations.

In the episode in the Pennsylvania police station, Augie expresses the importance of the individual versus that of institutions: "For me that wasn't what it was for, but to have the bigger existence taking charge of your small things, and making you learn forfeits as a sign that you aren't any more your own man, in the street, with the contents of your pockets your own business" (182). Augie, like Jim, remains his own man though the system serves to break down individuality: "It really was a crowded cell, but they pushed us in anyway, and we did as well as we could, squatting on the floor" (183).
Augie thus discerns the dehumanizing effect of social institutions and social theories upon real men. Just when it seems that Augie will not see the tragic irony in the difference between the cost of his mother's board, fifteen dollars, and that of the haute couture dogs in the luxury dog service, twenty dollars, "the often needling thought that their membership fee in the club was more than I had to pay for Mama in the Home" strikes Augie. Augie, like Jim, preserves his character by withdrawing from established patterns of behavior and upholding his own fixed faith in a better fate.

Augie describes himself as being "democratic in temperament, available to everybody and assuming about others what I assumed about myself" (155). At the same time, he does not yearn for any political alliance with his fellow man. Without a hint of guilt or obligation Augie explains, "'No, I just didn't have the calling to be a union man or in politics, or any notion of my particle of will coming before the ranks of a mass that was about to march forward from misery...It wasn't what I was meant to be'" (325). But, for Augie, there is always time and cause for self-betterment: "as long as I could keep improving my mind, I figured, I was doing okay" (488). Though Augie espouses self-improvement, he is not interested in becoming one of many conventional "doctors, engineers, scholars, and experts" (132). He will not pursue a fate which is dependent on any one person or
any specific scientific knowledge. For Augie it is the single man, the separate self, which is the most important component of human society. Just as Eugene turns inward to survive in his discovery of his secret self, Augie finds that for him, real sustenance is derived from a separate and independent existence.

While Augie's perceptions do correspond with the characters and ideas about him, his expectations, like Eugene's, continue unsupported by experience. With his characteristic profundity Augie describes the human condition and makes a concession to physical reality: "External life being so mighty, the instruments so huge and terrible, the performances so great and threatening, you produce a someone who can exist before it. You invent a man who can stand before the terrible appearances...That's the struggle of humanity, to recruit others to your version of what's real" (418). Augie, born under the "sign of the recruit" (528), is not the recruiter but the recruited. Jay Gatsby and Thomas Sutpen "invent" personas to withstand the terrible appearances, but Augie resists inventing a stereotypic self. He has been persuaded to accept and attempt several "versions" of reality: the Renlings', Einhorn's, Thea's, even Joe Gorman's. No version persuades Augie completely, however, so he never does assume a version for his own. "Why did I always have to fall among theoreticians?" (522) Augie asks in despair. The answer is that everyone, including Augie himself, is hunting for a theory with which he can design his fate.
Like Eugene, Augie sees enough of common existence to hope there is something better in store for himself. This hope is articulated by Augie's vague expression of "the ambition of something special I have always had" (473).

Augie prefaces each of his budding love affairs with idealistic imaginings. In spite of the fact that none of the affairs fulfills the ideal, he persists in his expectations of it. Love offers him "the endorsement of the world, that it was not the barren confusion distant dry fears hinted and whispered, but was necessary, justified, the justification proved by joy" (146). Even his marriage to Stella fails to provide Augie with evidence of this endorsement. One trait which causes Augie to aspire toward ideal emotions is that he "wanted simplicity and denied complexity" (418). When external reality does not supply him with pure emotions and distinct facts, Augie confesses that "fantasy went ahead of me and prepared the way...this imagination of mine, like the Roman army out in Spain or Gaul, makes streets and walls even if it's only camping, for the night" (419). Augie identifies his own fantasies and realizes his own inclination toward dissembling. As Jim relies on omens and signs, Augie relies on fantasy to assist him in coping with the appearance of a "terrible reality."

Gilbert Porter comments on Augie's final affirmation that a man's fate is also his character. Porter suggests that whatever conditions a man becomes willing to limit himself to reflect the nature of his character. 15 "Death,"
decides Augie, "is going to take away the boundaries from us, that we should no more be persons...When that is what life also wants to be about, how can you feel except rebellious?" (538). Augie creates his own boundaries, and therefore his character, by refusing to become the Augie Renling-eagle trainer-corporate executive that his many recruiters would have him be. The sequence of rebellion and withdrawal characterizes the response of Jim to slavery, Eugene to mass humanity, and Augie to adoption. Augie is determined to be self-made, not in the style of Sutpen and Gatsby, but with complete acceptance and celebration of all aspects of his personality and experience.
Chapter IV

THE DREAMS OF MANHOOD

George Willard

Thomas Sutpen and Jay Gatsby chose to incorporate certain established patterns into their own behavior. Eugene Gant and Augie March resisted the determination of mainstream forces threatening to categorize and classify them. George Willard differs from these characters because he acts positively and independently. He does not conform to Winesburg's limitations because he perceives his own abilities and devotes himself to developing them. He does not merely withdraw from experience and human contacts because he observes how withdrawal has handicapped the citizens of Winesburg. Like Huck Finn, George Willard exercises keen insight which enables him to see the reality behind a facade of seeming. He is a character who is not limited by his experiences, but instead evolves with them.

Rex Burbank says of Winesburg, Ohio that as a whole the stories represent the growth to maturity of George Willard, who becomes the symbol of the whole person against the fragmented grotesques. George Willard does proceed through several developmental stages in the stories. George's point of view can be likened to a camera's focus. His point of view moves from a distant, exterior focus to a gradually more intimate and probing interior focus. Initially, George
is indeed the reporter, the observer, the recorder of fact. In "Hands" Wing Biddlebaum employs George as the "medium through which he expressed his love of man" (53). George does feel an "almost overwhelming curiosity" (49) about Wing's history, but his primary attitude is that of a listener and reporting mouthpiece. In "Mother" George's growing curiosity about the inner lives of his fellow human beings has not yet resulted in any real understanding, so George feels "awkward and confused" about his inability to communicate. But, despite their failure to exchange any verbal meaning, George and his mother share a "communion," "a deep unexpressed bond of sympathy" (59) which creates an intimacy where language fails. Although George has not yet succeeded in articulating his emotions, he has a pre-verbal, sensory capacity for responding to the throes of "uncontrollable ideas" (113) presented by the Winesburg grotesques. He shares an inarticulate closeness with Tom Foster in "Drink" and Helen White in "Sophistication." Elizabeth Willard, trapped though she is by her own secret and impotent desires, believes that George "'is not a dumb clod, all words and smartness. Within him there is a secret something that is striving to grow'" (62). Precisely because George is not "all words and smartness" he is willing to grant a special esteem to the human communions he witnesses. George's attitude toward language stands in direct contrast to Eugene Gant's. For George the essential substance of life is not adequately
represented by words; indeed, words tend to diminish and dilute the qualities they purport to mirror. What is important for George is the substance and the human complexity behind the words. George strives to make language support and substantiate the experience and reality which it represents.

George's position as reporter for the Winesburg Eagle suggests his objective perspective of events. His daily life as a reporter involves the accumulation of facts: "All day he wrote little facts on his pad" (138). George's technique as a budding writer reveals his belief in an empirical method. "'I've been trying to write a love story,'" he tells Seth Richmond in "The Thinker." "'I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to fall in love. I've been sitting here thinking it over and I'm going to do it'" (139). Before he will attempt a fictional reproduction of love, George insists on experiencing love. He will validate only what he knows to real or true.

In "An Awakening" George pretends "in a spirit of play" to be a pompous soldier. He expounds upon the necessity for law and order. His rhetoric excites him and together with a sharp remembrance of some reading on life in the Middle Ages, it transforms George into "someone oddly detached from all life" (183). In the height of this "fervor of emotion" George whispers "words without meaning, rolling them over on his tongue and saying them because they were brave words, full of meaning. 'Death,' he muttered, 'night, the
sea, fear, loveliness'" (183). George has not experienced the reality these words represent. They are "words without meaning" for George because they represent unknown qualities, unseen landscapes. When he holds Belle Carpenter in his arms, he whispers again "'lust and night and women'" (185), but these words do represent George's immediate experience. He feels lust for Belle Carpenter's womanly figure in the night. After Ed Handby so rudely terminates George's spirit of play, George awakens to his responsibility to experienced reality, that reality which Augie March calls the "terrible appearances." The streets of Winesburg revert from magical and enchanted ones to "the neighborhood that now seemed to him utterly squalid and commonplace" (187). George accepts the strength of external reality and learns that he is not and can never be detached from real life.

In "Death" George attempts to block the realization of his mother's dying from his mind. He was "in fact a little annoyed that his mother had died on that day" (223). In the room with his mother's deathbed, George distracts himself with the image of Helen White's embrace: "He closed his eyes and imagined that the red young lips of Helen White touched his own lips...And then something happened" (224). The fantasy of the warm young girl is so inappropriate to the reality of the cold corpse of his mother that George dispels the fantasy. By directing his attention to the actual event at hand, George again affirms his obligation
George's affirmation of experience results in his empathetic understanding of his fellow man. In "Respectability" George delves beyond Wash Williams' monkey-monster exterior to discover "something almost beautiful in the voice of Wash Williams, telling his story of hate" (130). George is flexible as Jay Gatsby and Thomas Sutpen could never be, because his expectations are not superimposed on an incomplete understanding of the world. Instead, they grow organically from his observation and participation in life. Because he perceives the failed dreams which dwell in Winesburg, he tempers his own dream of artistic achievement with a moderation which neither Eugene Gant nor Augie March could command.

George is, significantly, a member of the human community. Seth Richmond thinks "'George belongs to this town'" (141), and to Elmer Cowley George represents "public opinion...Did he not walk whistling and laughing through Main Street?" (192). George is a confessor to Enoch Robinson in "Loneliness," and his company is a "relief to her feelings" for Belle Carpenter. What Rex Burbank terms George's "wholeness" affects the characters who come in contact with him. In a world where other men attempt to cure grief, hatred, and loss with money, they sense that George will not shortchange human relations. Wash Williams, Sutpen-like, left his wife without a word of explanation, although he had "four hundred dollars in the bank and I gave
her that...Pretty soon I had a chance to sell the house and I sent that money to her" (131). Enoch Robinson forsakes the company of his family: "he got eight thousand dollars from the bank that acted as trustee for [his aunt's] estate...he gave the money to his wife and told her he could not live in the apartment any more" (172). Elizabeth Willard's father offers her eight hundred dollars to abandon her groom. She later intends to bequeath this money, untouched, to George so that he can escape Winesburg as she could not. Because George accepts his position in Winesburg and in human society, he assumes an aura of "wholeness" and is able to depart from Winesburg without his mother's money and without the handicapped emotions which plagued so many of the money dealers. George's refusal to measure human emotions with material criteria grants a special and immaterial value to his consideration of humanity. George sees that existing standards do not serve justice to the human beings the standards attempt to measure.

George's loyalty to experienced reality and to human emotions makes him impatient with hypocrisy of any kind. In "Nobody Knows" George receives a love letter from Louise Trunnion, but when she acts cool and sulky toward him, he thinks it "annoying that in the darkness by the fence she had pretended there was nothing between them" (75). When Tom Foster slanders Helen White with his drunken tall-tales, George reprimands him curtly to stick to the truth. George senses his own inexactness when he is unable to convey the true meaning of his emotions. "'Well'" he corrects himself to Helen in "Sophistication," "'that isn't the point."
Perhaps I'd better quit talking!" (229). Words and language can be misleading so George constantly works to turn mere words into semi-accurate representations of experience. The holders of ideal expectations tended to do the opposite: Eugene Gant relied on symbols to conceptualize perfections which reality did not contain; Jay Gatsby lived for the romance that was symbolized by Daisy's green light; Augie March adhered faithfully to the sonorous ring of "a better fate." For George Willard, however, the efficacy of language exists only in its ability to suggest the real, the experienced, the material.

George's commitment is to experienced reality. Therefore, he leaves Winesburg not in the spirit of rejection but in the spirit of discovery and renewal. In "The Strength of God" George is interrupted by the Reverend Curtis Hartman while George is trying to write a story. George lays aside his artistic struggle to participate in Curtis Hartman's spiritual one. Though his fiction will attempt to reproduce life, George insists on experiencing life, actively and vicariously, before he writes. Kate Swift wants desperately to communicate to George the importance of experiencing life before attempting to write about it: "'Now it's time to be living...You must not become a mere peddler of words. The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say'" (165). Kate doesn't realize that George is already following her advice completely. George is ultimately interested in "what people are thinking." "An Awakening"
portrayed that he is also acutely aware of the temptations of "peddling words." George, the empiricist, is determined to make his experience and observations the basis for his knowledge and judgments. Life may seem inexplicable at first, but for George close scrutiny alone has the potential for revealing meaning which in turn yields understanding.

I SWEAR TO GOD I'M A MADMAN

Holden Caulfield

If one judges Holden Caulfield's character by his intentions rather than by his achievement, Holden shows that he is not trapped by either societal standards or egocentrism. Holden is a dynamic hero because, like George Willard, he reassesses his opinions of himself and his experience throughout the novel. Though Holden occasionally lapses into conformity and egocentricity he invariably recovers from these pitfalls. The novel manages to end on an upbeat affirmation of the humanist principles that Huck Finn exhibited nearly seventy years before. Holden refuses to succumb to defeatist principles and, by his refusal, he affirms his own possibilities for further growth and enlarged insights into the human condition.

"They didn't do any damn more molding at Pencey than they do at any other school" (2), Holden says of the prep school he is leaving. By his denial of Pencey Prep's reputation, Holden reveals his own refusal to be molded or to conform to the class hierarchy which the school upholds.
Holden's individualism defies the rules of Mr. Spencer's "game of life." "Some game," Holden thinks, "if you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right--I'll admit that. But if you get on the other side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing" (9). His comments suggest that Holden easily adopts different, sometimes opposite, perspectives of an issue. Holden's insistence on maintaining this uniquely variable perspective causes him to be wary of passing judgments. After his initial revulsion from Mr. Antolini's caresses, Holden relaxes his impression: "I wondered if just maybe I was wrong about thinking he was making a flitty pass at me. I wondered if maybe he just liked to pat guys on the head...I mean how can you tell about that stuff for sure? You can't" (198). Holden's variable perspective does not always supply him with a final truth, but it does free him from the limitations of a rigid codification of experience.

Holden introduces his realist stance early in the novel: "Besides...I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas" (1). He does not get right to the point. Instead, Holden digresses with a few details about D. B. and Hollywood. Mr. Vinson would disapprove, but Holden's digressions contribute to an understanding of Holden much as Richard Kinsella's discussion of his uncle contributed to Holden's appreciation of Richard.
Holden's belief in sincerity is most evident in his criticism of the many falsities of modern life, including Mr. Vinson's opinion of digressing. Of the enforced segregation at Pencey, Holden says: "I like to be somewhere at least where you can see a few girls around once in a while, even if they're only scratching their arms or blowing their noses or even just giggling or something" (3). Holden explains why he "hated the movies like poison" (28). He says, "It's pretty hard to knock a guy out, except in the goddam movies" (45). The "goddam movies" are hateful to Holden because they are not true to life and, worse yet, they contrive to have the Sally Hayeses and Bernices of the world emulate their filmed perfection. In Holden's world, where so few do manage to be sincere, it is only an additional handicap to have the movies creating false illusions.

Holden often utilizes fine intuitive perceptions to overcome the traditional "phoniness" of human interaction. "The way she asked me, I knew right away old Spencer'd told her [Mrs. Spencer] I'd been kicked out" (6) he says of Mrs. Spencer's condolences. In his comment that "people never notice anything" (10) Holden indicates that he considers "noticing" of some importance. He appreciates Jane Gallagher's interest in his dead brother Allie. One was happy with Jane because "she was interested in that kind of stuff" (79), unlike Stradlater and Ackley. Holden scrutinizes every word addressed to him. "I'm pretty sure he yelled 'Good Luck'
to me. I hope not. I hope to hell not. I'd never yell 'Good Luck!' at anybody. It sounds terrible when you think about it" (15). To Holden the offer of good luck suggests that one needs it because of an inherent shortage of skills or strengths. Under Holden's dissection, a greeting or farewell can quickly become a curse if the speaker is not properly sincere. For Holden, language is in general a pretty flimsy tool. Close to a nervous breakdown, Holden resolves to become "one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody" (201). But his desire for seclusion is short-lived, and Holden's first impulse is a desire to speak—to say goodbye to Phoebe. Holden's interest in the emotion and thought behind a person's speech resembles George Willard's curiosity about human emotions. "Noticing things," being interested in the complexity of human responses, renders the world comprehensible and validates linguistic gestures.

Like Huck, Holden constantly acknowledges the insensitivity or kindnesses of other people. He defines himself in terms of the human community so the seeds for both his health and his neuroses are planted in his relationships with other human beings. George Willard allies himself with experienced reality and human contacts. Holden, too, cannot exist independent of human society: "About all I know is, I sort of miss everybody I told about...Even old Stradlater and Ackley for instance...even...that goddam
Maurice" (216). Holden confesses that he misses even those "phonies" with whom he failed to communicate. If Holden's "missing" can be restated as "lacking," then Holden is saying that he requires human complements to be complete. When Holden arrives at Penn Station after leaving Pencey Prep, he "felt like giving somebody a buzz" (60). He considers first the people closest to him: D.B., Phoebe, Jane Gallagher. Then he lists more dubious friends: Sally Hayes, Carl Luce, and finally Faith Cavendish. Faith, Carl, and Sally offer Holden nothing. He cannot meet Faith, Sally disappoints him, and Carl, though he has "the largest vocabulary of any boy at Whooten" (151), cannot communicate even a syllable of meaning to Holden. The person who is most insistent that Holden behave practically and logically is Phoebe--the last person whom Holden contacts and the one who means the most to him. Holden, like George, welcomes contacts with all human types. Like Huck, however, Holden also expresses discontent with cruel, abrasive, inconsiderate personalities.

Holden constantly demands that his observations create a background of knowledge for measuring new events. Holden comments on Ackley's slobbishness: "I don't even think the bastard had a handkerchief, if you want to know the truth. I never saw him use one, anyway" (34). Holden modifies his tentative judgment (Ackley does not have a handkerchief) with his own observation (Holden has never seen him use one). The cruel mother weeping at the movies supports Holden's generalization that "somebody that cries their goddam eyes
out over phony stuff in the movies...nine times out of ten they're mean bastards at heart" (142). His own experience elucidates the phenomena of the Year Book handsome boys at Pencey: "I knew a lot of guys at Pencey I thought were a lot handsomer than Stradlater...they'd look like they had big noses or their ears stuck out. I've had that experience frequently" (27). Holden's observations provide him with criteria for measuring events, but, as the Mr. Antolini episode showed, his criteria are never rigid beyond reformation. Holden's willingness to alter completed judgments and his own behavioral patterns suggests that he, like Huck, has faith in the human capacity to arrive at the truth.
Chapter V

THAT BEST OF RATIOCINATION

Conclusion

The triangular conflict of perceptions in Mark Twain's novel can be traced in any number of modern American novels, and the character types defined by Tom Sawyer, Jim, and Huck Finn can be applied to many more works than are considered here. All of the works treated in this paper are novels of initiation; their protagonists are young men encountering life and confronting America. The fact that these characters are widespread throughout modern literature indicates the seriousness with which the American writer is committed to arriving at an understanding of the power and limitations of human perceptions. Although William Faulkner focuses on Thomas Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom! he clearly illustrates that while certain human minds may be trapped by rigidity, the possibility for achieving understanding is still within human reach. Quentin Compson, whose speculations frame the novel, exerts every imaginative intellectual device possible to come to an understanding of Thomas Sutpen's history. And Nick Carraway, Fitzgerald's narrator, exercises speculation and observation to arrive
at a comprehensive assessment of Jay Gatsby. Mark Twain
certainly disapproved of Tom Sawyer's fixed, unimaginative
point of view. Mark Twain's allegiance lies with Huck who,
in his escape to the Territory, seems to elude all that
is treacherous and conventional in civilization. In Twain's
novel, then, there is an argument for empirically-based,
preconception-free perceptions and knowledge. Huck's
understanding of human beings and human nature is far more
penetrating than Tom or Jim's. Though the novels concerning
Eugene Gant and Augie March end with their heroes still
moving toward undefined fates, they too offer insights into
the dialectic between capitalism and humanism which causes
Eugene and Augie to rebel. Whether the novels argue for
clear perceptions by way of a negative example, as in The
Great Gatsby, or by way of positive examples, as in Winesburg,
Ohio and The Catcher in the Rye, the constant and repeated
concern for assessing human perceptions remains a central
theme of the modern American writer.
1. All textual citations from the novels are identified by page number. The editions to which the pages refer are listed in the bibliography.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


