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## The Continuance of Romance in American Fiction

Oliver James Benham  
*Central Washington University*

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THE CONTINUANCE OF ROMANCE  
IN AMERICAN FICTION

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington State College

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

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by  
Oliver James Benham  
December, 1969

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Master of Arts

Committee in Charge

Dr. Anthony Canedo

Dr. Frank M. Collins

Dr. Donald W. Cummings

Alford Hall

Room 100

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# Courses Included in Graduate Study

English	485	Continental Novel
English	575.5	Mark Twain Pro-Seminar
Humanities	499.1	Humanities Pro-Seminar
English	477	American Poetry II
English	465	Restoration and the 18th Century
English	596.1	Individual Study
English	448	Chaucer
English	545.5	English Literature Pro-Seminar
English	596.2	Individual Study
English	599	English Seminar: Prosody
English	545.7	English Literature Pro-Seminar
English	600	Thesis

# BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Born: [REDACTED]

## Undergraduate Study

Central Washington State College, B. A. (English) 1968.

Central Washington State College, M. A. (English) 1969.

## Professional Experience:

Teaching Assistantship, Central Washington State College,  
Ellensburg, Washington, 1968-1969.

Teacher, Central Washington State College, Ellensburg, Wash-  
ington, 1969-1970.

## Certification:

Provisional Teaching Certificate.

APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

---

Anthony Canedo, COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

---

D. W. Cummings

---

Frank M. Collins

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## CHAPTER I

### THE AMERICAN ROMANCE: FROM DREAM TO PARODY

Critics recognize an important tradition of American romance in the nineteenth century, yet they pay little if any serious attention to the continuing tradition of romance in the literature of this century. Richard Chase in his The American Novel And Its Tradition suggests the continued importance of romance in this age of realism when he notes its modern pattern of employment: "The fact seems to be," Chase tells us, "that the history of the American novel is not only the history of the rise of realism but also the repeated rediscovery of the uses of romance."<sup>1</sup> Although scholars have been quick to notice individual instances of romantic convention in contemporary letters, such as Gatsby as a romantic hero and the mock-romantic structure of Steinbeck's Tortilla Flat, they have apparently failed to see these isolated occurrences as a continuing tradition of American romance. But, in fact, contemporary American literature is marked by such a tradition. Romance in America has moved from an explicit rendering, in the romance of the nineteenth century, to an implicit rendering in the realistic novel.

### NINETEENTH CENTURY ROMANCE AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

It seems to be the fact that many American romances of the nineteenth century, as well as the several realistic novels that have employed romantic convention in the twentieth, are connected with the vision of

the American dream. The American dream can be described as a nurtured hope to regain the blissful and innocent life enjoyed by Adam prior to his temptation. Essentially a religious dream, its end was moral goodness and not mere affluence or self-reliance as it came to be understood in its perverted form. A propensity to dream has been an important element in shaping the contours of American fiction. One casual glance at an essentially romantic Declaration of Independence will show that America was founded on an optimistic note entirely commensurate with a people dreaming the moral dream. Of course America's beginning optimism was tempered by the contrary Weltanschauung of men like James Madison, who fervently argued himself for "checks and balances" since "Angels do not govern men." But the fact is that Jeffersonian sentiment prevailed over skepticism and became the keynote of our intellectual milieu.

The two basic conditions that prompted an optimistic vision are commonplace knowledge: first, the availability of land, and thus freedom and self-reliance, and second, the notion of a second chance without the fettering ties of European history and decadence. These two conditions provided the stuff of wonder. And America was envisioned as the New Eden. Consequently, its image became Adam, and its second chance was to be comparable to the way of life prior to the grand blunder in the garden.

The vision of dream as well as the problems involved in shaping its embodiment had, as Chase tells us, a considerable influence in promoting a romantic tradition in the nineteenth century. For writers like Fenimore Cooper who tendered a wish to make the circumstances of dream true, the properties of romance were a pliable material from which they could

reshape an ever pressing and enslaving reality. Attainment of a moral goodness like Adam's prior to his fall necessitated a symbolic reality that romance could provide. Natty Bumppo comes closest to achieving and imaging America's moral desire, but even he found it necessary to flee from the real social world to find his vision of goodness. So what appears to be true is that even when it was symbolically handled dream proved untenable. Even Bumppo's credibility depended heavily upon "suspension of disbelief" and a certain acquiescence.

Anyone even remotely familiar with the way of the world will pause at the mention of innocence regained or innocence not affected once tempered by experience--even in a land which possessed the magical "capacity for wonder" that Fitzgerald described in ending The Great Gatsby. Indeed, the wonder of much American fiction, of, say, a novel like The Grapes of Wrath is that once innocence is sullenly lost in battle with reality, and evil is daily encountered, that characters like the Joads still stubbornly cling to the notion that goodness will somehow prevail.

Nathaniel Hawthorne would have thought the Joad's tenacity in the face of contradiction to be sad naivete. His story of Hester Prynne opens on the clearly sounded refrain of man's miserable lot and circumstance, even where a Utopia is concerned:

The founders of a new colony, whatever utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison.<sup>2</sup>

His point may not exclude a "land of milk and honey" but it certainly qualifies it: it is, in Madison's words, a place not governed by angels. Hawthorne acknowledges that man can conceive and dream utopian visions but insists that he cannot escape his own fallibility: there is always death and error. John Stuart Mill, who envisioned man capable of acting in the interest of the Greatest Good, certainly a view commensurate with America's dream, spoke to man's heavy dilemma when he said that "nineteen-twentieths" of mankind exist without a thread of happiness. Yet Americans thought all man's laments could be vanquished by change of circumstance. This when a distinguished list of philosophers and writers, perhaps even the preponderance of laymen, have throughout the centuries maintained that the nature of man is aggressive and ego driven, and that only the tightly tied bounds of a coercive social order have forestalled the rage of ruinous anarchy.

Hawthorne in his The Scarlet Letter employs the symbolic properties of romance to refute the contention that dream is tenable in its "pure" form. Refutation is contrary to Cooper, and it is this basic disagreement between vision and reality, exemplified by the novels of Cooper and Hawthorne, that Chase insists was the "inevitable" cause for America's nineteenth century romantic tradition. Surely the nature of their disagreement does not conjure the kind of romance associated with escapism and eighteenth century bourgeois sentiment. And Hawthorne's realistic element became even more explicit during the continuing tradition of romance in the realistic novel.

## ROMANCE AND THE REALISTS

Mark Twain, it is common to note, nursed an abiding hatred for the fanciful reality of romance. The romantics' "literary offenses" were noxious, he thought, yet his greatest book, Huckleberry Finn, attempts to unite romantic desire with the contingencies of the real. Thus Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is one of the first realistic novels belonging to the continuing tradition of implicit romance. The adventures of Huck parallel the structure of romance in respect to quest, preliminary adventures that lead to an encounter with evil, and social personification. Somewhat similar to the medieval knight on a religious quest, Huck is an isolate whose adventures closely resemble the trials that lead to an ultimate contest with evil. But as a result of Twain's realistic control of point of view, this American pattern of romance inverts the legend of quest by having what should be hero or saint become rogue. And concurrently other inversions are made as the social order, of course protector in the original pattern, becomes the dark demonic force that Huck must encounter.

The inversion Twain puts romantic meaning to is only typified by Huck because this pattern becomes part of our initiatory tradition. It conveys the unquenchable desire to attain the same moral dream that the romantics sought, while it recognizes a society that would ostracize those who dare try to reach a higher morality. Thus those who would be saints are classified as rogues in American literature, and are transfixed between the poles of romantic dream and the real.

Twain's Huckleberry Finn marks the embarkation point in the use of romance in the realistic novel, and is, then, the first in the continuing tradition of implicit romance. Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is a later version within the same tradition. In Gatsby, Fitzgerald fashioned an ironic tension between romantic dream and the modern waste land, the real. It is evident to us from the beginning that Jay Gatsby, born on the funeral pyre of James Gatz, is a hero who possesses a singularly romantic vision. But although The Great Gatsby has an unquestionably romantic hero, it is not a romance. It is controlled by a disparity between Gatsby's incredible romanticism and a realistic point of view. We see by this fearful disparity that romance and its vision is totally out of step with the world of waste, just as we see Robert Cohn as an ill-fitting piece in the absurd but real world of Jake Barnes in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises. Yet unlike Hemingway's Cohn, there is unmistakably something about Gatsby that is worth more than "the whole damn bunch" who frequent his parties. That "something" is probably his religious quest for dirty Daisy. Gatsby is that odd mixture. His participation in the system leads to a corruption we do not like, but with this he has the old religious fervor that makes him a little something more than the ashen people of his story. .

Steinbeck's Tortilla Flat is relevant to the continuing tradition of romance because it reveals the same disparity between romantic aspiration and the real that was the controlling tension in The Great Gatsby. Steinbeck's theme in Tortilla Flat is essentially similar to Twain's and Fitzgerald's: to live dream (or to act in accordance with

its tenets of moral goodness) puts one beyond society's pale. The importance of this book, however, is not this common theme so much as it is its introduction of absurdity into the tradition of continuing romance.

The mythos of a Finn or a Gatsby was not absurd, just ironic. What makes Tortilla Flat different is its absurdity, which is largely attained by subjecting the commonplace to the norms of romance without noticing the alarming contradictions that result. There remained nobility in the separate encounters of Huck Finn and Jay Gatsby, and this nobility kept them from absurdity, but this almost tragic sense of life is deflated in Steinbeck's book when the noble and the banal are identified as one. Really, Steinbeck's heroes of the flat can be neither essentially tragic nor comic since the book's absurd sense makes such differentiation a futile exercise.

#### ROMANCE AND ROMANCE PARODY

With dream as an ironic absurdity, it is possible to take the long step to the contemporary American novel and its use of romance. Contemporary here is identified with the novel of the absurd--an obviously loose category but one that can be nominally described as those dark books existential in vision, in favor since the 1950's. As Northrop Frye tells us, the contemporary vision is "best approached as a parody of romance."<sup>3</sup> Romance parody subjects the mythic properties of romance to everyday experience. In its format, romance parody returns to the romance itself. We again get mythic overtones and certainly we have a

return to romantic structure, but all this artifice is ironic and absurd because the modern hero's power to act is like that of a man tied tightly to a firmly pounded stake.

The importance of the continuing tradition of American romance in the twentieth century should begin to reveal itself once romance parody is recognized for what it is. Romance parody owes its basic ingredients to two streams of thought that can be traced to prototype novels. The first is Dostoevsky's Notes From The Underground, published in 1864. From this novel we derive the modern existential pattern where, in Hassan's phrase, "chance and absurdity rule human actions."<sup>4</sup> Existentialism "naturally" joins with the second stream. Its prototype novel is Cervantes' Don Quixote, that marvelous book from which we derive ironic and absurd mythic reversion in a context of self-parody.

The disparity between dream and reality that prompted the use of romance in the nineteenth century and its reuse in the realistic novels of the early twentieth continues in the absurd novel of romance parody. Frequently, however, romance parody is misunderstood, most often when readers are unaware of its romantic pattern, and there exists the imminent possibility that this new but ironic romance will be judged, and condemned, by norms not really applicable to it. For instance, a demand that character be rounded to fit its realistic environment is inconsistent with a mode that is structurally controlled by the dictates of the romance. Character development in the round or full is associative with the novel and its realistic handling of environment. We sometimes think the same demand is valid in romance parody because of the hero's



sense of bondage, but it is not a consistent demand because with this sense of bondage we have the dialectical and episodic structure of the romance. But we should be quick to note that neither is a world of bondage the stuff of romance. Romance parody will force us to say that there is now a need for new norms to judge the ironic fiction of contemporary letters. Distinctions long held between the romances and the novel are simply no longer valid.

J. P. Donleavy's The Ginger Man, published in 1955, may eventually earn fame as a good example of romance parody. Sebastian Dangerfield is its hero and he is a figure best described as a leering consciously ironic copy of America's Adamic archetype. Dangerfield lives in Ireland instead of America but this self-exile does not essentially alter his connection with America's notion of Eden and moral desire. At the contemporary end of the American tradition, this hero flees. But he is always drawn back to his Adamic curse of feminine emasculation and death. He is, in fact, obsessed with death. In the tradition of romance, Dangerfield has his preliminary adventures involving sexual conquests of women, who, in turn, emasculate him. Fulfillment of dream, fulfillment of quest, in Dangerfield's run against the world would encompass a broken pattern of mutability--but this he knows is absurd in a world governed by chance and without a god. The world is absurd, Dangerfield suggests, and what is dream but joke when death is forever at one's heels.

## CHAPTER II

### UNDER THE AEGIS OF DREAM: THE AMERICAN ROMANCE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

"The American myth," R. W. B. Lewis tells us, "saw life and history as just beginning."<sup>1</sup> From today's end of the American experience this proposition seems naive. But we would be wrong to forget that it was a commonly held belief in the early settlements. It was, in fact, such a sentiment that prompted Fenimore Cooper to lament that American authors labored with only "a poverty of materials." This same absence of materials may be regarded as something of a blessing, however, for it encouraged the development of an American literary tradition distinct from the European. Without Europe's elaborate tradition, American novelists of the nineteenth century turned for their materials to the stuff of America's dream.

Tenets of America's dream did not mean solely a new beginning, for life in the new world was "described . . . as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disasterously fumbled in the darkening Old World."<sup>2</sup> A divinely granted second chance may sound like grasping at straws but it is not difficult to imagine the American "capacity for wonder." The new beginning involved much more than just another world created without the old errors. Americans tendered the belief that they were freed from man's nature and his history. Adam's

innocence, prior to the fall, and his place in pre-history made him illustrative of their hope: especially so since they somewhat piously excluded his encounter with Eve, his and Eve's transgression, and their expulsion from the garden. Evils may not be so easily disjoined from the good, but Americans were convinced that they were embarked on a glorious second chance--believing this belated experience could give them Adam's innocence as they avoided his errors. Surely the immensity of their new and unbridled continent was commensurate with the grand events they imagined before them. The history of man, they knew, had been cruelly rendered, and as a bible-reading generation, they generally believed that the first cause for lament had been Adam's fall. This matter of Original Sin they wished to right with their divinely granted second chance.

The early people of America thought, then, that they were given a number of days to rewrite the history of man. This was a task of grave consequence and responsibility. America's dream was probably immediately envisioned when the new continent was first confronted, and hope for its attainment was always marked by a close identification with individual man and primordial wilderness. But the frontier, as Turner would tell us, had a profound and pervasive affect in shaping America and Americans, and many of these shapes and tempers it fostered were not particularly in the sentiment of a moral and Adamic embodiment. Mere existence on the frontier's ragged borders necessitated a life and vision at least stoically committed to a daily portion of violence. What proved true was that the unique and singular conditions of the American experience

were not divinely equal to a broken pattern of man's fallibility. The pressures and nuances of frontier life isolated and made more striking those dismal instances of man's character that the proponents of an Adamic vision thought could be set aside. Change of circumstance was to shatter the violent and nasty pattern. Man's sullen tiger, however, reared when aroused by the violent frontier. Still, as Lewis maintains, from the "1820's onward" Americans were insistently proclaiming that they were crafting a new beginning.<sup>3</sup>

The disparity between the real and vision, Richard Chase believes, compelled our nineteenth century writers to employ the romance for its symbolic properties and gothic mood. Since romance can entertain a fanciful reality it was, obviously, a good mode to render America's out-of-joint Adamic experience. If Chase is correct, the symbolic latitude romance is heir to is specifically the reason for a romantic tradition in American nineteenth century letters.

The romantics were, however, aware of the demonic reality of piously pursuing a moral dream of innocence in a land that looked like it was still under the aegis of Adam's fall. Leslie Fiedler thinks we can experience the "hidden blackness" of the romantics by seeing their artifice as exemplary of a certain blackness:

In our most enduring books, the cheapjack machinery of the gothic novel is called on to represent the hidden blackness of the human soul and human society. No wonder our authors mock themselves as they use such devices; no wonder Mistress Hibbins in The Scarlet Letter and Fedallah in Moby Dick are treated half jocularly, half melodramatically, though each represents in his book the Faustian pact, the bargain with the Devil, which our authors have always felt as the essence of the American experience.<sup>4</sup>

Thus it is not strange that Fiedler should describe the romance in America as "bewilderingly and embarrassingly, a gothic fiction, non-realistic and melodramatic--a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation."<sup>5</sup> If Fiedler is correct in assuming that artifice reveals a dark psyche, and doubt, then our authors were not insensitive to the tender tangibles of simplistic goodness in a land daily violent. Thus it is not strange that many of them sought, like Hawthorne, to employ the romance for its "neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy land, where the actual and the imaginary may meet, and imbue itself with the nature of the other."<sup>6</sup> Of course there are other reasons for what Chase calls the "inevitable" selection of romance. Sir Walter Scott had been widely read, and had popularized the romance as an artistic form. There were also some complementary attributes that milieu and the gothic novel shared. Notably, the wilderness was not entirely benevolent, and many in America envisioned the forests as like the evil castles of Europe, as mysterious, and populated by its own brand of demons. All the "cheapjack machinery of the gothic novel," as Fiedler notes, exemplified particulars of the American encounter.<sup>7</sup>

What Fiedler suggests is a controlling mood of the macabre in the romance--one that is so overwhelming that other artifice seems subservient to its expression. But even if American romance has shown some affinity for dark tones, it is misleading to suggest such a close relationship to the gothic novel of Europe. For a writer like Cooper, blackness was not generally a pervasive or even an important factor in his work. Energy

would be a better metaphor to express his vision of the American continent and its people. What Fiedler overlooks or thinks is not relevant is that certain American romances have been deeply committed to the mythic properties of romance and epic. Conventions that produce patterns of mythic allusion are readily conducive to prompting words like melodramatic and grotesque, but these qualities are only of coincidental importance to conjuring close metaphorical identification with myth itself.

#### COOPER: FROM MYTH TO ROMANCE

"In their flight," as Fiedler remarks, "from the physical data of the actual world" American writers of the romance compiled a tradition that was at "its best non-realistic, even anti-realistic."<sup>8</sup> The "melodramatic" romances of Cooper are at the center of this observation. Cooper was our first important writer and as such has exerted a profound influence in shaping American letters. He belonged to an age that insistently proclaimed a new beginning, so it is not strange to think of him as a writer destined to building dream from the fanciful elements of the romance. Understandably Cooper's explicit influence dwindled in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Romance by this time had been over-thrown by the realism of Twain and James, the naturalism of Crane and Dreiser--and Cooper's stuffy and bloated rhetoric, his genteel pose as narrator, his vision and "literary offenses"--these were generally considered unbearable by a people facing the twentieth century.

Yet his influence, if now hidden or implicit, has continued to be considerable. Realists like Twain thought him incapable of handling reality but they used convention like his to reveal his "inability." Even more importantly, they continued to deal with his themes. They even entertained moments of nostalgia for his scenes of freedom and innocence in the wilderness, as the following excerpt from The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn reveals:

Sometimes we'd have that whole river all to ourselves for the longest time. Yonder was the banks and the islands, across the water; and maybe a spark--which was a candle in a cabin window--and sometimes on the water you could see a spark or two--on a raft or a scow, you know; and maybe you could hear a fiddle or a song coming over from one of them rafts. Its lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, but I allowed they happened.<sup>9</sup>

This idyllic moment from Huckleberry Finn shares Cooper's constant juxtaposition of pastoral with imminent and impending violence. The sights and sounds that at first entertain Huck are of course reminders to us of the violent world he cannot escape.

Cooper's "venerable old trapper" Natty Bumppo--who D. H. Lawrence called the "archetypal American"--has certainly continued to influence American fiction. His kind of embodiment has reappeared with some regularity but particularly in the works of Hemingway. His outline has even been used for parody: the Joe Paradise scene in Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt is only typical. He has even reached the modern novel of the absurd, where disparity between his innocence and the destructive character of his experience are ironically played against one another.

The five novels of the Leatherstocking series are generally considered to be Cooper's best and most significant works. As separate novels these tend to focus on the great events of life, or rites of passage--the property of myth in the novel as Richard Chase has noted.<sup>10</sup> The Deerslayer deals with initiation, The Pathfinder with marriage (or characteristically in the American tradition, with escape from marriage), The Last of the Mohicans with ideal friendship, and The Prairie with the passage of time and death. It is also interesting to note that if one reads the series in the order of their composition, Natty Bumppo is given a rebirth and a return to a young and vigorous life (Natty suffers his death in The Prairie, 1827 and is reclaimed in two later works: The Pathfinder, 1840 and The Deerslayer, 1841).

Beyond focusing on rites of passage as events normally associated with epic literature, Cooper patterned at least two of the novels in his Leatherstocking series on classic epic works (attempting by what Northrop Frye calls displacement to draw to his stories mythic consequence by particular association). The Last of the Mohicans is patterned after The Iliad and nominally at least after Paradise Lost; its theme is inevitable loss juxtaposed with the celebration of "the heroic virtues of individuals." The Prairie, on the other hand, is like The Odyssey. This helps to explain its motif of nautical metaphors. Its theme is concerned with the passage of time as imaged by Bumppo's death, but just as importantly, as this is the time of law giving, it attempts to explain and reconcile certain assumptions and contradictions of American culture.



To give law and to show the arts of life before his passing, Natty issues long speeches that are like proclamations, reveals philosophy and parcels of wisdom in his conversations with others and in musings with himself, and is by act a model of these. Thus it is not strange that Cooper alternates episode with periods of stasis, which gives time and opportunity for reflection and interpretation. Leatherstocking like all heroes of the epic pattern is an isolate. Isolation of course allows him to live without the modification always due in social intercourse. Alone much of the time with the wilderness his maxim is "things according to nature." To Natty this means accepting his place within the chain of being, his responsibilities, his duties and limitations. Ultimately, his maxim means to him that a moral life, lived in communion with the spirit of the wilderness, can afford man dignity and perhaps even immortality. Conversely, "things according to nature" does not mean the nasty and brutal warfare of Hobbes, for this is a confusion of the term "natural;" Cooper would not say that necessity demanded Natty to emulate the beasts of the wood, or that man's nature was innately or "naturally" evil. Indeed, for Cooper, the pressing ties of social circumstance was the prime cause for evil's existence and repetition, and the wilderness alone offered relief. Naturally, then, the venerable old trapper inclined toward natural poet and philosopher as he lived by a code which recognized above all else, a reverence for life.

Leatherstocking dies in The Prairie as Beowulf and Roland die, after a life of great deeds. The purpose of this novel is (1) to sanctify his proclamations and wisdom, and (2) to provide transition from his

incarnation of these principles to the realm of real things. To achieve the first purpose, Cooper relied on word and deed; he also banked heavily on artifice and the romantic struggle between the forces of good and evil. This is represented by Natty's confrontation with Ishmael Bush and his family. Their encounter takes place on the prairie, which is a place void of any institutionalized law or means of sanction. The desirability of the wilderness in Cooper's canon was not to be found in the promotion of goodness, but always in its freeness from social dictates. In its condition, and unfettered by circumstance, Natty attained the desired goodness, but Ishmael's demon was freed. The wilderness could hold both qualities. This is traditionally accurate, for in the older modes nature could reveal sympathy but could not actively take part in the conflict. It was always the neutral middle-ground, the place of contest between the forces of the upper and the lower worlds.

To convey his normative judgments without the contrivance of repetitive straightforward statement and to "influence" his minor characters in their choices, Cooper employed the traditional artifice available to the romantic or epic writer. Nature, for instance, reveals her sympathies. Minor characters make the traditional commitments; three of these, who begin with the Bush family, end with Natty. Inez, who is a non-willing member of Ishmael's entourage, is the first to leave; Ellen Wade, who was as a child "adopted" by the Bush family, chooses Natty's protection and turns to his moral aegis; and of course so does Doctor Bat, who finds Natty's natural philosophical morality at first unscientific, but finally at the end unquestionably sound. All those who remain steadfastly loyal to Ishmael are tied to him by the

blood of kinship. Blood it is suggested--and the bestial acknowledgment of Ishmael's superior power--are forces stronger than opinions on morality: at least this holds true for the Bush family in their process of becoming increasingly more animalistic. Even Indian chiefs and their respective tribes take sides in the encounter, and so are labeled by Cooper's artifice either good or bad.

The greatness of Natty is unassaulted in the book--even the mystery surrounding the killing of Ishmael's son does not really question his integrity--he remains the chosen one; his initial appearance is typical of Cooper's attempt to guarantee this by mingling "his hero with the wilderness:"

The sun had fallen below the crest of the nearest wave of the prairie, leaving the usual rich and glowing train on its track. In the centre of this flood of fiery light a human form appeared, as palpable, as though it would come within the grasp of any extended hand. The figure was colossal; the attitude musing and melancholy . . . imbedded, as it was, in its setting of garish light, it was impossible to distinguish its just proportions or true character.<sup>11</sup>

Cooper's rhetoric blurs distinctions and suggests that this may be a god we are viewing. This kind of mythic allusion is representative of Natty's way to becoming a mythical figure. It would be folly to think that a mere man could wear his epic proportions--even Leatherstocking himself senses this--announcing in The Prairie that his passing would end his great race of men.

We are lead by this to Cooper's second purpose: to provide transition from Natty's incarnation of principles to the world of real things. This is provided by having recipients of his way and word, and

these are Inez and Middleton--who represent the aristocracy--and Ellen Wade and Paul Hover--who are representative of the middle-class. The four are young and strong and through their marriages are to obliterate inconsistencies and give symbolic rebirth to what they have learned from their great Mentor. So with great pathos, Cooper ends The Prairie with the old trapper answering "Here" to his name; Cooper expects his readers to remember, however, that the four recipients are returning to civilization--and that they will craft the new beginning.

But Cooper was not entirely naive. Leslie Fiedler, and Harry Levin in The Power of Blackness, speak insistently about the dark side of America's literary tradition. The fact seems to be that Cooper was not excluded from this. Cooper's blackness was identified with power or energy, a quality that he thought expressed the American experience itself. Moral goodness demanded for him, as Professor Collins has remarked, a personal battle "to keep down the sullen tiger of the aboriginal impulse."<sup>12</sup> This Cooper thought a white man might do--but never a heathen. In consequence the American Indian was excluded from Cooper's dream of moral goodness. They came to represent for Cooper, as Fiedler suggests, the expression in man that dream could not afford:

The Indian represents in Cooper whatever in the American psyche has been starved to death, whatever genteel Anglo-Saxondom has most ferociously repressed, whatever he himself had stifled to be worthy of his wife and daughters.<sup>13</sup>

Although Cooper and his hero Natty could find qualities to respect in personages like Hard-Heart and Chingachgook, they were in his canon scapegoats for the repressed and dark side of American character. Joel

Porte tells us:

It is largely Natty's function in his tales to maintain and demonstrate the absoluteness of the distinction between paleface and redskin, between the "wild man" and the Christian (for it is "Oncreditable," Natty insists, "for a white man not to be a Christian").<sup>14</sup>

"According to nature" heathens were a people dispossessed in the name of God. This suggests Cooper's own dark side and a blackness in his vision; it foreshadows what was to be a certain ambivalence in his later works and life.

Professor Frank M. Collins has argued that Cooper's ambivalence--as revealed by "his minute flourishes and recurring expressions"--shows itself most significantly in his later works. He remarks:

It now appeared that what was "true in the Old World" would, "in the end, be found to be true here." At last persuaded that nations were "no more safe from the influence of temptation than individuals," he was more disposed to appreciate the attractions of an ancient culture, a failing garden. If the European "bourg" was often crumbling, it was at least dominated by a soaring cathedral spire instead of the rickety taven around which the dwellings in an American village were gathered; and the very decay of the European garden now seemed a form of protection against the temptation of quick wealth, the "liability to corruption," to which Americans were increasingly subject.<sup>15</sup>

In his approaching old age it must have occurred to Cooper that to argue change in circumstance as a condition to dream's fulfillment was to overlook the essential human psyche. Cooper himself began to suffer doubts that his Adamic Natty was never obliged to admit. Cooper began believing that depravity of the soul was essentially the result of decadent social conditions and that "nature itself utters the essential truth of its creation." In communion with this truth, he believed, man could drive away the demonic and taste the "truth" of his creation.

## HAWTHORNE: THE REALISTIC EDEN

Unlike Cooper who created his Adamic figure without the fetters of Eve, Nathaniel Hawthorne centered his focus in The Scarlet Letter on the trials and tribulations of a fallen women--presupposing, then, that Cooper's Eden was at least initially a land like any land. Men still died there and committed error there:

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison.<sup>16</sup>

Hawthorne would not believe that a society could be realistically grounded on a notion of innocence. It overlooked the condition of man and its result would be frustrated emotions and a hidden dark psyche. Richard Chase would agree, as he has remarked that Hawthorne thought "no adulthood, no society, no tragic sense of life could exist without the knowledge of evil."<sup>17</sup>

Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is a story about a people, a community, who have denied emotions that they believed were equal to evil; Professor Chase says:

The novel describes the loss or submergence of emotion involved in the abandonment of the Old World cultural heritage which had given human emotions a sanction and a manifold significance.<sup>18</sup>

It is the story of Hester Prynne, a woman who has felt and experienced her sensual desires--and of her long and tedious and token retribution. Allegory, some have called it because of its symbolic and romantic

properties and its didactic control. And it is allegorical in the sense that it encompasses the story of Eve and her fall in the garden, and the dictate to leave. Before the novel begins, Hester has already committed her sin and the suggestion that this makes is simple, complex, and profound. "Before" could reach back to the time of Eve. The point is that man, and woman, suffer from the original fall, so there is little need to re-enact its circumstance. There is only a need to show the continuing retribution that must be paid for sensual emotions when a society denies the existence of these. John Gerber has a remark on this topic:

Hester is certain . . . that she violated no law of her own nature. She is by nature affectionate, even passionate. Her relation with Dimmesdale, consequently, has been the almost inescapable result of her own nature, not a violation of it.<sup>19</sup>

The subject of the book is not sin, that is denied, its subject as Richard Chase notes is "the moral and psychological results of sin--the isolation and morbidity, the distortion and thwarting of the emotional life."<sup>20</sup>

America's literary tradition has not generally sanctioned this evil of passion, or attempted as the European novel has, to fit this fact of human existence into the daylight of consciousness and the normality of human events. It has denied evil as a fact of life--it has even denied knowledge of it--and has hounded (as scapegoats for our hidden black desires) our Eve figures from our sight. It is no wonder, then, that in the twentieth century, after we adjusted fact with realistic norms, that they have returned to emasculate our heroes. For Cooper driving out

Eve, and the Indian psyche of aboriginal impulse, meant that he could blissfully have the image of Eden as it was before her disastrous appearance. Hawthorne did not have Cooper's axe to grind, he was more the impassionate observer, but Hester's emotions are nevertheless denied in The Scarlet Letter. In their separate manners, they expressed the paradox of American experience--its hope by denial, its refusal finally of life itself.

It seems to be the fact of the American experience that the "good" can only be attained by the loss of life, a pact with the Devil--by the creation and rapid growth of a dark psyche and a pious but burlesque world. The Boston that Hester knew is a place where the children have forgotten how to laugh. Hawthorne's morbid and melancholy opening (where he refers to the antiqueness of the prison door and the necessity for a plot for cemetery and prison even in a Utopia) is but the first instance of many dark tones that control the book from beginning to end. The more important scenes take place in the black of night or in the deep shade of the nearby forest. The single color in the book is Hester's scarlet "A"--the color of life and sin: they are inextricably one, but in the burlesque world of Puritan Boston characters are (1) a Mistress Hibbins, who is fascinated and controlled by denial, (2) like Dimmesdale and Hester, who express the human spirit and pay its penance, or (3) like the others in the book, who piously deny the human impulse. All are caricatures. The wild forest that surrounded this little carved-out community and the sea which was the route from Europe should have reminded them that emotions are no easier to cast out than is the heart. The



novel is controlled by blackness: the forest is dark, the community is somber--it recognizes no place to run to, and there is no escape when life is denied as is the Puritan wont to do.

Certainly infidelity is not a virtuous act. Hester has sinned, not against her nature, but like Eve she has sinned against the order of nature. This has brought manifold evil which she is powerless to retract. Hester recognizes this in Dimmesdale's torment, Chillingworth's physical and mental deformity, in her child's impish nature, and in her own thwarted desires. When it appears that an act is entirely controlled by pre-determined circumstance, we are wont to say that this condition is inconsistent with extracting punishment:

Historically, a woman found guilty of adultery would have been condemned to wear the two letters "AD"; but this seems to Hawthorne not abstract enough, and he substitutes the single "A," that represents the beginning of all things, and that, in the primers of New England, stood for Adam's Fall--in which we (quite unspecifically) sinned all.<sup>21</sup>

The comment is from Leslie Fiedler's Love and Death in the American Novel. He suggests that Hester is not only punished for her transgressions, but for Eve's, and for the demon that torments everyman. She is then like Christ, who was a law-breaker and one who suffered death for the inevitable futility of man. One supposition in this novel is clear: if America is the new Eden, it is not Eden before the fall, as Cooper imagined, but the garden that had become absurd after passion had been brought at the price of innocence.

We are left in The Scarlet Letter in the middleground. "If Hester has sinned," as R. W. B. Lewis points out, "she has done so as an

affirmation of life, and her sin is the source of life."<sup>22</sup> This is undeniably true, yet passion justifies nothing. In medieval romance the world was the middleland between the upper-world of saints and the lower-world of demons. The Scarlet Letter reaffirms the existence and the paradox of entertaining both qualities in the middle-ground.

Hawthorne was no more the writer of romance of escapism than was Cooper. His mythic properties differed from Cooper's in that he did not employ Cooper's use of the old patterns and conventions. We see a certain degree of mythic displacement in The Scarlet Letter, but this was fashioned by implicit allusions to the fall in the garden of Eden. Both writers felt compelled to use the romance for its symbolic properties and gothic mood. Their paradox is ours, and is that a dream or moral goodness could not be purely cultural, as its polemic with the nature of man transcended such limited definitions.

If only in a negative sense, America's romantic tradition fixed certain outlines. Its preoccupation with the new beginning, as well as its apparent failure to make the moral dream credible, occasioned rebuttal by the realists who followed. Its exclusion of the life emotions and its Eve figures has influenced the heavy reliance on themes of emasculation and initiation. Realists readjusted romantic and mythic patterns, introduced controlled irony and inverted meaning, but the romantic quest and the "divine" hero has continued to appear in the twentieth century novel. There has even been nostalgic flashbacks to Cooper's idyllic communions with nature: Huck's time on the raft for instance, or the ceremony of incantation in Spain's high mountain country

in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises. Cooper's Adamic figure, or characters who are parodies of him, has also reappeared in our novels and films-- this figure has even drawn the outlines of the "essential" American soul in the world of real things.

### CHAPTER III

#### DREAM UNDER THE AEGIS OF REALISM: ROMANTIC

#### CONVENTION IN THE REALISTIC NOVEL

So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies. I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different. It had all the marks of Sunday school.<sup>1</sup>

Huck of course is referring to Tom Sawyer's romantic ideas--they are no more relevant to what is real, he suggests, than are the wishful notions of a boy's temper made every Sunday under the absolute aegis of God. Although Huck would stocially allow romance and those who would employ its fanciful tenets, he is quick to tell us that he is not so inclined. What we have in this statement is really simultaneous narrative. That is, Twain's view of romance is similar--he also thought romance "had all the marks of Sunday school." So with the coming of realism, and Twain, a dramatic shift in vision occurred in American literature. Realism gained ascendance, but in this chapter we will see how implicit romance has continued to affect the contours of the American novel.

American novelists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have generally employed romance in at least three distinct forms or shapes: (1) romance has been comically reincarnated, as in Steinbeck's Tortilla Flat, (2) a romantic hero has been subjected to the norms of realism, as in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, and (3) structural and thematic patterns like those employed in the romance have been used in the novel, as in Twain's Huckleberry Finn. These several uses

constitute the continuing tradition of romance in the realistic novel.

The first shape we will deal with is comic reincarnation of the mode. Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck tells us, is romance in the manner of an Arthurian cycle:

In Monterey, that old city on the coast of California, these things are well known, and they are repeated and sometimes elaborated. It is well that this cycle be put down on paper so that in a future time scholars, hearing the legends, may not say as they say of Arthur and of Roland and of Robin Hood--"There was no Danny nor any group of Danny's friends, nor any house. Danny is a nature god and his friends primitive symbols of the wind, the sky, the sun." This history is designed now and ever to keep the sneers from the lips of sour scholars.<sup>2</sup>

All the artifice of the oral tradition is included in this romance of mock-heroism. Language is throughout elevated and Steinbeck's tone is always serious in the good epic tradition of high seriousness. But obviously Tortilla Flat is a mock-heroic: thus distance between language and situation is wide and brings remembrances of Chaucer's infamous strutting Chauntecleer. Also each chapter of the book is forwarded by a prefatory poem that briefly explains the substance of the adventure about to be related. The prefatory poems, in the oral tradition, are parody too--a comic incongruity between tone, tradition, and event. In short, all the typical artifice of romance is employed, but ironically rendered.

The story begins in medias res with Danny's return from the first World War. A return from war sounds like romance, but singularly unlike a romantic hero, Danny has not blown the horn of Roland, slain a Grendel,

or even surrounded himself with hundreds of German dead on the battle fields of France. No, Steinbeck tells us that his hero enlisted in a moment of patriotism, while inebriated, and "went to Texas and broke mules for the duration of the war."<sup>3</sup>

Like any isolated group, like the knights of Arthur, the paisanos of Tortilla Flat have their own code and manner of sanction. Their relationship with women is interesting. They recognize at least three distinct types: saint and mother and those with whom they may enjoy all the ritual involved in games of love and play. Adoration and full sexual play may sound like an odd mixture but the medievalists lived with the same odd mixture.

The paisanos of Tortilla Flat intuitively understand that Danny is to them what Arthur was to his knights. And in the same sense, Danny's house is to the paisanos what Arthur's Round-Table was to his knights. House and Danny, like Arthur and his Table, becomes undifferentiated. Thus in Tortilla Flat, Danny and his extension join together into a central and unifying symbol of the paisano's mythic alliance. The parallelism of house and table is, like all the artifice of this novel, ironic and somewhat absurd. Arthur's table conveyed the whole notion of romantic idealism--thus it was a correlative for a grand and inspired idea. Danny's house only suggests a misfit alliance and protection from the responsibilities of American life. Table was conceived, Danny ascended to his position as house owner via a chance inheritance. Like all those who create and embody ideas, Arthur must have desired his table to continue after his death as a token of his immortality. Danny, antitheti-

cally, wishes passionately that the responsibility of the house, and the several paisano lives that are collected because of his ownership, was not his.

Closure of the misadventures of Tortilla Flat is simultaneous with Danny's death and burial. Of course the passing of the hero is in the tradition of romance and epic. So at the time of his burial (as it has been with the passing of great social heroes everywhere and at all times), Danny's memory is sanctified by stories of his "goodness, his courage, his piety."<sup>4</sup> But Danny died of drink. Yet his friends are not deterred from fulfilling the romantic tradition of sanctifying their dead hero--but even the means to this final tribute is accidental:

The little burning stick landed on an old newspaper against the wall. Each man started up to stamp it out; and each man was struck with a celestial thought, and settled back. They found one another's eyes and smiled the wise smiles of the deathless and hopeless ones. In a reverie they watched the flame flicker and nearly die, and sprout to life again. They saw it bloom on the paper. Thus do the gods speak with tiny causes. And the men smiled on as the paper burned and the dry wooden wall caught.<sup>5</sup>

And so ends Tortilla Flat. The house is set on fire as Viking ships were burned with their honored dead. Thus finished the ritual demanded of them, and now disjoined from their alliance, Danny's friends walk away:

They looked at one another strangely, and then back to the burned house. And after a while they turned and walked slowly away, and no two walked together.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously Tortilla Flat belongs to the tradition of continuing romance. The mock-heroic romance allowed Steinbeck to operate at the periphery of the real (between fancy and reality in the manner of Hawthorne and Cooper) to both flaunt and reaffirm America's dream of moral goodness. The structure itself suggests the message. What we have in this book is an ironic and absurd handling of a romantic quest. All the important artifice of romance is used, but with the commonplace. A battle with a vacuum cleaner, that is handled as if it were a fight to the death with a dragon, admits, of course, that the immediate conflict is absurd--but what it simultaneously suggests is that the archetypal quest for a moral end may have had its absurd elements too. Thus because of its form, it is natural that quest should be rendered absurd when the high seriousness of quest, the paisanos token gravity, and their amusing adventures are mixed without apparent regard for glaring dissimilarities.

Dream, in a sense, is reaffirmed by allusion to the patterns of quest and the embodiment of its artifice. The paisanos, we should note, possess something like the coveted and recurring dream. They live according to their nature and attain a goodness that seems marvelous when encompassed as they are by the mores we are familiar with. Steinbeck always revealed a certain affection for a primitivism like theirs and for the romantic fallacy that insisted that freedom from a modern social consciousness would be accompanied by child-like innocence. His view of the primitive vision gives life, no matter what it offers or demands, the same undifferentiated pose of token seriousness. This undifferentiated



pose is a condition that is crucial to the mock-heroic. The actors themselves cannot show an awareness of their own mockery of situation, since comic effect depends upon an undifferentiated sense of condition. The beast fable is funny because beast and man are not differentiated within the story itself. For this separation, Steinbeck banked on dramatic irony--that irony between situation and character's understanding of it, which depends upon the reader's perception to sort incongruities.

Steinbeck's mock reincarnation of mode is not without its simultaneous narrative. The concurrent stream of narrative flaunts dream by reducing the romance to a comic absurdity while it makes its embodiment ridiculous for all but the paisanos. Although it may seem sad to us, the paisanos embody a dream rendered somewhat absurd by American circumstance.

The use of romance in the realistic novel (Tortilla Flat is realistic because its mock narrative is commensurate with realistic norms) has not been confined to reincarnation of mode as exemplified by Steinbeck's tale of Monterey's paisanos. In The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald employs Gatsby as a romantic hero to speak to the matter of dream in an ashen world. This is the second shape romance has been put to in its continuing tradition--convention without apparent alternation that is introduced into a realistic content to create a disparity between the romantic and the real. Here, it is Gatsby himself as a romantic hero.

In The Eccentric Design, Marius Bewely has this to say of Gatsby: "He is an heroic personification of America's romantic hero, the true heir of the American dream."<sup>7</sup> Mr. Bewely's view is commonly held and

only repeats Nick Carraway's own careful observation: he had Carraway said of Gatsby, "committed himself to the following of a grail."<sup>8</sup> As the first-person narrator of the novel, Carraway is in a sense Gatsby's reflector in whom we see the naivete of a romantic vision in a world dominated by the waste land image. Gatsby himself exemplifies the romantic vision of dream for grail frustrated by the hard dictates of reality. As a man who possesses the age old ability to conceive and set out on a religious quest beyond the grasping reach of his own inherent limitations, he is admirable, painfully human, tragically naive--and a man corrupted by his own dream. It is Gatsby's commitment to his quest and his obvious romantic affectations that define him as a romantic hero, as "the true heir of the American dream."

The novel itself is not romance. In the sense of structure, Fitzgerald does not employ romantic convention. It is Gatsby himself who makes the romantic transcendence into the world of controlled realism, for it is he who is single-handedly born Jay Gatsby on the funeral pyre of James Gatz, who thinks Daisy worthy of a grail's commitment, and only he who believes that the past can be revived. Other than Gatsby himself, the novel is controlled by characters who are a fair representation of the real, or what we would expect of the real. Mrs. Wilson begins romantically, but as we would suppose, after a black-eye and an affair with nauseous Tom Buchanan, she begins to put aside her romantic illusions. Even Carraway showed some romantic optimism but certainly he learns to alter his boyish naivete after his encounter with the world of naked events. Only Gatsby remains outlandishly a romantic when accosted by the world--perhaps until his death, although watching Daisy and Tom

calmly munching chicken on the night of Mrs. Wilson's death must have affected him seriously--even propelled him into the briars of reality.

Fitzgerald employs the disparity between Gatsby's romanticism and the world to build a tension in the novel between character and the world that ultimately begins to lose its rigidity as we learn that Gatsby is both religious dream and the world's corruption. Others could avoid Gatsby's kind of corruption by admitting the squalor of the world and man's lot, but Gatsby, condemned to his image of romanticism, slowly had to entertain corruption in order to remain the pure-hearted romantic. He could not admit that Daisy might have great faults. He could not admit to himself that the past could not be re-enacted, or that his boyhood impression that man could create his own romantic world was false. One such commitment and his dream would have come tumbling down. If these elements cannot be separated, if Gatsby cannot separate them, cannot personally achieve America's social idealism, then the novel suggests that quest or moral dream cannot exist. Romantic vision is unable to endure when it is subjected to a framework of reality. Fitzgerald said of Gatsby that he had a "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life," but he might have added that this allowed him no sense of irony concerning his own condition. In The Sense of Life In The Modern Novel, Arthur Mizener has this to say in respect to Gatsby's connection with dream: "Fitzgerald tried to identify Gatsby's personal idealism explicitly with the social idealism that had been the origin--and still was to him the only endurable purpose--of American society."<sup>9</sup>

Professor Mizener also recognizes certain "evident" affinities between Jay Gatsby and Leatherstocking:

The fundamental situation of the hero of the American novel has not changed in the twentieth century. Indeed, he can, without any great refinement of ingenuity, be traced all the way back to Cooper; there is an evident resemblance between Jay Gatsby standing in a formal pose of farewell before the house that only his colossal illusion has made into his ancestral home and Natty Bumppo--that image of "a perpetual possibility of perfection to the American imagination" as Marius Bewely has called him--outline on the crest of a hill against "the fiery light" of the setting sun, a "colossal" figure, "musing and melancholy," whose "just proportions and true character . . . it was impossible to distinguish."<sup>10</sup>

Gatsby, contrary to Professor Mizener's otherwise fine contribution, is fundamentally different from Natty; he displays his same outline, that cannot be refuted, but like the paisanos who are subjected to a framework of reality, Gatsby is a mythic hero only in outline since he is without Natty's promise of myth. A realistic framework was necessary to show his irony, since he does not sense it himself and would have appeared mad if he had narrated his own story. But this same framework also eliminates the artifice that myth must have to be credible. His view of fundamental change is grounded on a misconception of the power that realism, and a lack of supporting romantic artifice, has on an otherwise naked convention of romance. Remember that Cooper invoked all the important artifice of romance and attempted to provide a setting free of irony to buttress the power of his hero; Professor Mizener has this remark:

For all The Great Gatsby's brilliant surface realism, it remains a romance, almost a fairy story, in which not only the hero but mankind becomes the unappreciated younger son, the male cinderella, whose essential fineness is destroyed by an impersonal and indifferent world.<sup>11</sup>

What the Professor forgets is that Cinderella ended happily, and romance is never subjected to "an impersonal and indifferent world." The Great Gatsby is not romance. It is a book of simile, in which we have the story of a romantic's destructive encounter with dictates he had never been subjected to before.

There has been traditionally something like an Oedipus pattern in romance, where a son is able to achieve the holiness required of a quest that his father could not attain: Lancelot we remember was kept from holiness by his sinful love for Guinevere, but his son, Sir Galahad the Pure, achieved the quest of the Holy Grail; this conjures the event of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of everyman and perhaps The Great Gatsby makes a peripheral allusion to this old pattern.

If Gatsby cannot entertain quest, Carraway might after experiencing Gatsby's encounter with destructive experience; he will not be compelled to create an entirely new existence as James Gatz was, and he has learned why Gatsby was worth "more than the whole damn bunch." Nor is he condemned to Gatsby's romantic conception of himself, and when he says that the whole world should stand at "moral attention," he reveals a sensitivity that is commensurate with America's "capacity for wonder."

Fitzgerald has been accused of collapsing the American dream in this novel. He does destroy a romantic quest fought on romantic terms. Gatsby, who dies as the leaves yellow, serves as the dying King--one epoch passes into another. Wright Morris describes the ending of The Great Gatsby as "incantation," and certainly a reader is led to believe that America's promise will not be set aside because Carraway will be

there to pursue its moral tenets:

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in the vast obscurity beyond the city, where dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter--tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther . . . And one fine morning---12

The salient point is that Gatsby was absolutely committed to a religious quest. His affectations and his childish world view only points to the incredibility of romanticism in an indifferent world. But if only because it has been decided that the world is empty and indifferent, quest becomes worthwhile--all that is left to man. As a lingering image from the past, from what was another world in another time, Gatsby's image serves to remind us that we had initially believed that we could craft a new morality for man.

For the best example of the third shape it is necessary to return to a work produced in the nineteenth century--to Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Twain's best novel includes not only a suffering, damned picaresque who is victimized by a world that appears to be less than moral (an image that would reoccur redundantly in the new century) but also many remembrances of the immediate literary past. There are some overtones from Hawthorne--blackness, melancholy, an inability to escape one's molded shape--in Twain's story. There are even remembrances of Cooper's vision of the importance of nature in the expression of the

"essential truth." The open road of Whitman is here in its motif of journey and in its adventurous sentiment, as is a figurative retreat to Walden Pond. In short, Huckleberry Finn is something like a pivotal point between the nineteenth century and the twentieth. It includes some nostalgic flashback to Cooper and Hawthorne and to their artifice and to their themes. But these it subjects to realism, inverts and transfigures, and thus opens the door to the twentieth century.

Twain would have no part of the romance of course, and Huckleberry Finn is as explicitly satirical of romantic affectation, best portrayed by Tom, as it is of what can be called a romantic life style--best visioned by the episodes of sociological satire that begin with the Grangerford incident. This book is not placed in the tradition of romantic circumstance in the realistic novel because of the satire which is directed at Tom, the Grangerfords, Colonel Sheburn, what they image, the killing of Boggs, ad nauseam. No, it belongs in this tradition because it is typical of novels which have employed certain archetypal patterns that are like those found in the romance of quest. The very simple matter of movement, journey, is characteristic of romantic quest and certainly Huck fulfills this pattern, as he does many others traditionally associated with seekers of the grail. These patterns make up the literal or surface event--the real adventures of Huck--and we can only call them "transfigured" because we are lead by Twain to recognize what Huck does not: that he unknowingly is like a grail seeker, but is always subjected to the hard dictates of realism, and so ironically suffers indignities and ironies not asked of romantic counterparts. A

romantic hero enjoyed all the artifice of romantic convention: particulars like superior power, sympathy of nature, identification with the norms of his social order, an evil clearly delineated and external to his body and psyche, as well as all other properties of a congruent rhetorical condition. Huck, if we can say that he is an unknowing quest seeker, has none of these. Within the confines of his novel holiness and society are at odds if not mutually exclusive. The world that borders the river, and St. Petersburg is a foreshadowing of this, is violent, ominous, dangerous, destructive, and almost nationally decided on a motif of killing and revenge. The chance, then, for social identification and holiness is altogether absent: to gain something like goodness one must be rebel, and victim, and Huck is both of these.

The peculiarity of transfigured romantic pattern shows itself when we see Huck accepting damnation at his greatest moment "All right, then, I'll go to hell," he tells us in Chapter 31. "It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said."<sup>13</sup> This is a moral accomplishment that reminds us of one who has found the Holy Grail. His triumph of damnation, except for the obvious irony it involves, differs little from the defeat of a monstrous dragon. And yet, there is an obvious difference: in the romance the demonic was identified as external to its hero and the social world he personified. In Spenser's The Faerie Queene we can see this in the dragon that the Red-Crossed Knight faces: the beast is symbolic of the fallen world but Eden still co-exists with this evil--and the battle between beast and knight is viewed from its sanctified but captive ramparts. To have evil and innocence



concurrently is metaphorically like the notion behind the biblical leviathan who figuratively swallows the world at the time of fall, entrapping it in evil, as the whale swallows Jonah. We are lead to believe that Christ's crucifixion freed man from the leviathan; romance carried on this theme and Spenser's Knight only repeats this pattern. Huck's "Dragon" is metaphorically correct, even if his is respectability, his social psyche, and his contest is with himself. Huck's process of quest is involved in chipping away at illusions until truth appears. Chipping away does not just involve outward manifestations, the social world, but his own psyche too. Huck encounters the world, yes, learns of its sham and hypocrisy, but in his quest he also encounters his demon, and it is these social particulars in himself that he must put aside before he expresses his "essential soul" in saying "I'll go to hell."

"To light out for the territory" is a silent denial of life and self. It recognizes no possibility for triumph or escape, but only a fragile and fearful postponement before the eventual acquiescence to the societal trap. Surely civilization will reach the territory, and there is some doubt, and especially after his part in the "evasion," that Huck could muster the power to say again "I'll go to hell." If there is not what we call a moment of clear epiphany in the novel, at least Huck remembers the idyllic interlude on the raft and its insulated joy and pleasure. Escape into the territory is an attempt to have this again, but this is romantic fallacy, a desire we tender when shocked by the world and the ugly, grimacing picture of our own demon. Accepting this without happiness, but accepting it, Huck "romantically" remembers a time and a

place secure as a womb. Jim was with him in this experience, loved him, and so really was not a replacement for Huck's "Pap," as some have suggested, but for his "mythical" mother (an anonymous woman never mentioned). Their relationship thus implies another birth, but this does not change the events of the world or their inevitable victimization. The illusion of escape is thus but another delusion in a novel of delusions, but a magical one, and one that has inspired many of our writers to seek their own "territories." In his The Reign of Wonder Tony Tanner captures this sentiment while showing some wonder himself by the manner of his prose:

Hemingway wanted to follow Huck into unspoiled mythical territories, but for the race as a whole that is no longer possible: as Clemens had felt before him. But Nick Adams, like Huck, has moments when he reaches that fading rapport with nature, and then the prose of their creators sheds all complexity of thought and follows the naive, wondering eye as it enters into a reverent communion with the earth that abideth forever.<sup>14</sup>

Huck's soul, and he is always at his best when he speaks directly from his soul or heart, is one with nature and its metaphor in the novel, the river. As Professor Tanner suggests, onomatopoeia occurs at lyrical moments when Huck's fancy for life sounds like the river's strong and excited movement. The identification with nature expresses Huck's heart and soul, the voice that speaks for damnation.

Yet there are implications in the story that demand serious discussion concerning Huck's moral development. Huck's part in the "evasion" for instance indicates inconsistency with his earlier decision for damnation. Chase thinks there is an absence of development: "There is

no real change in Huck Finn during the course of the book, except that he comes to adopt, as he reflects on his duty to Jim, a morality based on the New Testament ethic rather than the convention of his time and place."<sup>15</sup> It seems equally clear that Huck, from beginning to end, is a stoic and practical boy and one who delivers early his condemnation of Tom's style as just so much "Sunday school." His rhetoric and sentiment throughout the novel is clear and open, and most importantly, honest, and this suggests that development not only does not occur but is not necessary. Nor is Huck the kind of boy who would seek change, since there is much evidence to suggest that he would rather "lazy" (Huck himself uses "lazy" as a verb) his way in a syndrome of "continuous Sabbath"--as Tanner calls Huck's wished-for-style.<sup>16</sup> By this he means, Huck means, a place or condition where "reverent communion" with nature is as possible as it was in another time, that time before Adam brought work to man's lot and disharmony to his relationship with nature.

Because Huck seems entirely credible to us he is something of a rarity in literature. Not for his credibility but because he has this while being a personification. Chase calls the book "melodrama" and it has its melodramatic elements. Huck is like spontaneous good--what Leslie Fiedler calls the "Good Bad boy"--and the wonder arrives when we see and feel how real he is in his concrete embodiment. For this we must give credit to Twain and to his sensitive handling of Huck and his event. It is important to remember, however, that when Huck Finn speaks from the heart it is always with sadness for the misery he sees and with a kind of empathy that only a saint could possess. But even saints can be a

tattered coat upon a stick, unless/ Soul clap its hands  
and sing, and louder sing/ For every tatter in its moral  
dress.<sup>17</sup>

Huck's "tattered" things are his social affectations, his social and holy abstractions, which are not as easily shed as are his clothes on the raft. These social affectations interfere with his soul, his spontaneous goodness, and it is these that Huck is asked to overcome in his quest.

In his famous ending statement Huck ascribes his civilizing influence to Aunt Sally but he might have pointed with greater precision to Tom Sawyer. Tom Sawyer. He is the real civilizing culprit. It is obvious to us that Huck's "natural" inclination is to run, to run "trackless" away from society--even in the beginning he has left Aunt Sally, but:

But Tom Sawyer, he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. So I went back.<sup>18</sup>

They are both boys with the usual boyish mistrust when eyeing the intentions of grown-ups, yet they are at least nominally trustful of one another, and so Tom is extremely important to the story, for it is he, and he alone until Jim has his ascendance of influence, who has privileged communion with the would-be-outcast. Only Tom knew where to find Huck, and it is Tom who demands "respectability"--so his function is to bridge the metaphysical gap between the reluctant Huck and society. What he brings by this "bridge" is not pleasant, for Tom is a disguised carrier of social disease, he is a portent of days to come, and his "style" is indicative of this.

The story is framed by Tom. He is there in the beginning and again at the end--he plays a joke on Jim at the beginning and masterminds the "evasion" at closure. The question is simply this: has the time of the middle, the hours of Jim's ascendance, the time of their love and communion with nature, even the time of violence in the chapters under the aegis of the Duke and the King--have these changed Huck's reliance on Tom as the absolute expression of boyish "style?" Has Huck overcome society? With fearful astonishment we see him going through with the "evasion."

This is a difficult question to answer. Clearly we understand that Tom's "playful" style is identical to the murderous forms in the burlesque world of revenge and hate that Huck encounters when he leaves the raft. And this holds true regardless of intent, illusion, or embellishment: the Grangerfords may kill with honorable intentions and with a certain gentlemanly aesthetic--"Colonel Grangerford," Huck attempts to explain to Jim, "was a gentleman, you see"--but their play of death differs not a whit from the brutal and insane killing of Boggs. And the same is true for the games that the Duke and the King play for they are merely grown-up versions of Tom Sawyerish pranks.

Play is the natural world of boyhood, composed of empty but patterned forms in which death, violence, and despair are reversible. Forgotten after the day is over. Or so we imagine boyhood to be, but in Huckleberry Finn there appears to be a certain sustained rush to see real blood and to hear real cries of anguish. Huck quits Tom's "band of robbers" when he must admit to himself that it is only another of Tom's "romantic" adventures. Of course Huck is practical, and if he is promised elephants

and they fail to appear he is likely to disappear, but he and the other boys seem disappointed by ritual without blood. This does not rest easily with "saint" or with one who personifies "spontaneous good" but this may be his illusion in a novel weaved together by countless illusions. Huck undergoes a peculiar kind of initiation or a peculiar kind of quest. He learns on the river what we always understand--that Tom's style is dangerous and has a similarity to the world of grown-ups where death is not reversible and despair is not put away at bed-time. His quest and initiation is actually a purification, a washing away of his social self, and the river serves as the protective vehicle for this, and of course as its metaphor and symbol.

For a brief moment on the river Huck and Jim enjoy an absolute communion with nature. Their idyllic interlude on the raft, because they are insulated from danger but can still see and hear the world of violence, is reminiscent of Cooper and his importance of communion in realizing moral goodness. There are even other similarities between Huck's condition and Leatherstocking's as they possess some similar attributes and some likeness of condition. Both are stoic, practical, highly moral, and at least ultimately capable of expressing nature's "essential truth." Both have a dark companion who is like the demon of aboriginal impulse but who is himself an affirmation of life. Natty is a "reverent" killer and so gathers to himself his companion's "darkness." But in Huckleberry Finn the boy hero is really incapable of killing and Jim is anything but violent. Yet they are surrounded by violence and talk of violence--and violent play. Together they form a moral alliance against this established

convention and without any loss of self. They are brought together from two different worlds, yet they are alike because they both are "naturally" moral. If their properties could be combined, rather than separated as is the convention of romance and melodrama, they could express the perfect unity. This they do for a blissful moment, but it is a moment of masquerade, a condition that is separated on shore by their own volition. "Good gracious," Mrs. Phelps remarks late in the story when Huck tells her of an accident caused by a "blowed" cylinder head, "anybody hurt?" "No'm," replies Huck, "killed a Nigger."<sup>19</sup> As Professor Fiedler remarks: "The very essence of life on a raft is unreality."<sup>20</sup>

But this is not a world that Huck likes, it is not even one that he can tolerate. The world of the river and the world of the shore cannot exist together. And it has been Huck's misfortune to begin in hell, travel through delight, and return to hell. What else can we call the land on shore but hell after we have witnessed what it would make of Huck for feeling empathy and sympathy for another man. Huck and Jim together have created a moral rebirth, the American dream, but it has changed nothing. After the ultimate act has failed, escape is the only answer. Leslie Fiedler has this to say:

In his relationship to his lot, his final resolve to accept what is called these days his "terrible freedom," Huck seems the first Existentialist hero, the improbable ancestor of Camus's "stranger," or the protagonists of Jean-Paul Sartre, or the negative characters of the early Hemingway. But how contrived, literary, and abstract the others seem beside Huck! He is the product of no metaphysics, but of a terrible break-through of the undermind of America itself. In him, the obsessive American theme of loneliness reaches an ultimate level of expression, being accepted at last not as a blessing to be sought or a curse to be flaunted or fled, but quite

simply as man's fate. They are mythic qualities in Ahab and even Dimmesdale; but Huck is a myth: not invented but discovered by one close enough to the popular mind to let it, this once at least, speak through him. Twain sometimes merely pandered to that popular mind, played the buffoon for it, but he was unalienated from it; and when he let it possess him, instead of pretending to condescend to it, he and the American people dreamed Huck--dreamed, that is to say, the anti-American American dream.<sup>21</sup>

"Huck is a myth" Professor Fiedler tells us. Allusion to the patterns of romantic quest, even a cloudy and distant allusion to rebirth through Christ's crucifixion, seem clear. Huck is always morally superior. He is only tainted by his acquiescence to Tom's style (or to the holy and social abstractions of his order and milieu). These, through a series of minor tests, he is able to put aside during his river voyage.

In romance each minor adventure was like a stepping stone and as each was confronted, and vanquished, the hero reaffirmed his position as the chosen one and moved one step closer to holiness and grail. The same pattern occurs here but in a negative sense. The rattlesnake incident on Jackson's Island is one of these minor encounters and is exemplary of Huck playing a Tom Sawyerish joke and finding it harmful.

"I made up my mind," Huck tells us after he is assured of Jim's safety, "that I wouldn't ever take ahold of a snake-skin again."<sup>22</sup> This is not a rejection of Tom's style, it does not even show an awareness of its impropriety, but is an absolutely concrete negation by a boy concerned specifically with snake-skins. But then we do not expect Huck to be an abstract philosopher. Nor do we expect him to recognize the gravity of this act as emblematic of a style, if only because the island, as Kenneth Lynn has noted, is to the boys something like "Tom Sawyer's halfway-house



of rebellion where all irrevocable decisions are magically held in abeyance."<sup>23</sup> So we can forgive Huck for not understanding that as a social outcast he is not allowed the pleasure of a never-never-land. He is but a boy and the irony of this book is derived from his continued misreading of his own initiation and quest. The matter of seriousness does not occur to him until much later in the book (after they have bypassed Cairo) but from the moment of his alliance with Jim, Huck is involved in a pattern of events as serious as the sustained seriousness of quest. His outlook of play is a necessary element in the story for it is obvious that he could never begin a serious flight with a Negro if he thought they were seriously fleeing a moral aegis. He is trapped by play and learns within its confines the humanity of Jim. "As it gradually dawns on Huck," Mr. Lynn has remarked, "--and the gradualness of his realization is very delicately controlled by Twain--that Jim loves him the psychological battle within Huck's mind intensifies accordingly."<sup>24</sup> Certainly, but this is concurrent with retreat from Sawyer.

The first major event in this series of purification is the snake-skin incident. Folk-belief and ritual or magic are integrally involved in the episode on Jackson's Island. Snakes we know are not really attracted by discarded skins so it is wrong for Huck to think that the skin caused Jim's hurt or that an abeyance of skins will resolve similar and not so similar catastrophes. Professor Tanner believes that their reliance on magic (for instance, Jim's magic "saved" him from the snake bite) reveals their affinity with nature. But this is an erroneous reading. Reliance on magic to control malevolent forces reveals a fear

of nature that is irrelevant with its benevolence (with its "continuous Sabbath"). What Jim and Huck must learn before they can have communion is that barriers between them and nature, barriers like magic, are not necessary.

Twain "delicately" handles Huck's gradual purification. The snake-skin is the first chip chipped away, and as we have seen, this encounter in itself proves insufficient to reveal the danger and nastiness of "style." Huck's determination to board the wrecked "Sir Walter Scott" provides another learning experience and this adventure, like the snake-skin, is Sawyer inspired. Jim recognizes the implicit and menacing danger that Huck will create by boarding the ship. He pleads caution but Huck retorts to this by appealing to Tom as the master authority on adventures: "Do you reckon Tom Sawyer would ever by this thing thing? Not for pie, he wouldn't. He call it an adventure."<sup>25</sup> Of course he would call it an adventure, for this is the style of nasty Tom, the boy conformist. But Huck is inherently a different kind of boy. Sometime after they have escaped Jim explains to Huck the seriousness of the dilemma he put him in. Huck indirectly quotes his companion:

For if he didn't get saved he would get drowned; and if he did get saved, whoever saved him would send him back so as to get the reward, and then Miss Watson would sell him South, sure.<sup>26</sup>

Considering the importance of this, and its seriousness, the boy makes this comment: "Well, he was right; he was almost always right; he had an uncommon head, for a Nigger."<sup>27</sup> The qualifying phrase that Huck adds at the end ("for a Nigger") is totally inconsistent with the sentiment of his sentence. It is a tag phrase from shore, one that Huck has learned,

and espouses, but one that he continually refutes when he speaks from experience.

Some minor incidents occur in this process too. The discussion that the two have concerning the morality of stealing chickens is but one minute particular in reaching Huck's unfettered soul. So is the "battle of philosophies" when they argue the relevance of languages and "book-learning." Huck begins this latter discussion as Tom would "But hang it Jim, you've clean missed the point--blame it, you've missed it a thousand mile," but ends unable to deny the ~~slave~~ his logic.<sup>28</sup>

Separation in the fog and the joke that Huck plays after they are reunited is the last major incident before moral acceptance and triumph. Henry Nash Smith identifies the fog as "an eternalization of his (Huck's) impulse to deceive Jim by a Tom Sawyerish practical joke."<sup>29</sup> "Trash" Jim calls Huck and his joke, which finally forces Huck to acknowledge his wrong:

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a Nigger--but I don't do it, and I warn't sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that if I'd knowed it would make him feel that way.<sup>30</sup>

Humbling himself before Jim opens the door to Huck's word "White" in answer to the slave-hunters and to the great idyllic scene that follows.

"White"--one word--is a moral triumph at least equal to those who have found the grail. It implies a recognition of Huck's own demon as well as the futility of banking on color to define feelings and man. It also prepares the way to the ultimate trap of the future. Huck knows that Tom's pranks are harmful if only because they make Jim "feel that

way." He will also understand, after experiencing the events of sociological satire that follow, that grown-ups play similar games. This will be his future if he remains on shore. For he is moral and practical and cannot help saying "No'm, killed a Nigger." His heart does not think in abstractions but in the particular--it is Jim he would save and not Negroes in general--color does not occur to his heart-felt sympathy. As Chase remarks on Huck's return to shore "His life simply continues its pattern of unresolved contradictions."<sup>31</sup>

In romance, heroes were strangely done away with after they had finished their quests. They disappeared, usually after conceiving law and leaving a new canon of law, but they vanished. Perhaps personifications could not live in the world of mundane events. Huck's ending is like this when he disappears into the territory. Twain was never able to contrive another event, another story, for his greatest hero.

The importance of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in understanding the shape and scope of American letters is well established. Some may refute the contention that this book includes "transfigured" romantic patterns. But if they would tender this denial, they cannot deny the surface satire of romance, its vision, its affectation--and its pervasive influence in shaping the South that Mark Twain remembered. The patterns of romance are archetypal, however, and it is relevant to remember that a book grounded on such patterns--if with irony--encompasses the tradition of romance. Huck has an eye that sees through illusion to truth and this makes him both saint and outcast, rogue, when a society like Twain's South is handled realistically:

On the table in the middle of the room was a kind of a lovely crockery basket that had apples and oranges and peaches piled up in it, which was much redder and yellower than real ones is, but they warn't real because you could see where pieces had got chipped off and showed the white chalk or whatever it was, underneath.<sup>32</sup>

We need no more than The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn to tell us that Twain thought the vision of romance was like the fruit on the table. As a mode "prettier" than real life he thought it dangerous, since it created and then perpetuated pretty illusions by holding in abeyance the stuff of life: stuff like the "chalk or whatever it was" that Huck's eye sees. Then romance is not encounter with experience leading to truth as it has claimed to be, but contrivance of fanciful elements sweetly and gently placed by a benevolent hand. What difference Twain might ask is there between it and toy soliders lined in battle formations in anticipation of playful wars. Where asks Huck after a "bloody massacre" in Huck Finn And Tom Sawyer Among The Indians, where did you learn about Indians--"How noble they was and all that?" We have silence from Tom on this occasion before he gulps out: "In Cooper's books."<sup>33</sup> Yes, of course this would be Twain's answer. He might also insist that in the books of Sir Walter Scott we could find similar silly notions fed to us as if they were particulars of the world we know.

After all the details of romantic satire in Huck Finn's book, we are compelled, forced, to assume that Twain meant to "set things straight." Huck may think he is only an observer of the world that lies shoreward, but his piercing eye identifies him as society's arch enemy. So there is battle, vision against vision, "old rags" contesting "Them new clothes

again," and Twain's single command is encounter, Huck, encounter. And of course he does again and again and without suffering utter disillusion. Perhaps it was really Twain that needed the regenerative river, and so it is easy to imagine him saying when accosted and sadden by fact, when seriously afflicted by what you see, return to the serenity of the river. This, however, is have and have not. This is only half realism. But then we wonder just how much phenomena can be stripped of its "pretty" illusion if sanity is to remain. Surely the regenerative power of the river is necessary after an ugly day on shore, but having it is fancy or a kind of shaky realism employed to handle the miraculous, which we remember as "rightly" belonging to the romance.

How can we say that Huck is real? He feels sorry for the Duke and the King. He would feel sorry for the Devil himself, and would only forego that allegiance of empathy if and when he was forced to make a choice between him and someone, anyone, "less evil." He is not "real" but personification, perhaps even our dream or our desire invisibly visiting (for he always goes in disguise) the land or moral dream. And then, after he has seen enough and the condition shoreward is clear, he "lights out" and leaves us behind fumbling with our stupid illusions, speaking our sullen hypocrisy. "All modern American literature," Hemingway said, "comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn."<sup>34</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SUBTLE AND NOT SO SUBTLE MIX-UP: DREAM UNDER

#### THE AEGIS OF IRONIC MYTH

The preceding chapter attempted to focus a continuing tradition of implicit romance by showing instance of romantic convention and pattern in the realistic novel. To decide for romantic convention in a dissimilar content rather than for a synthesis of artifice and point of view reveals a heavy reliance on idealized formula. Obviously, without a literary tradition to pursue and compare differences, it would be impossible to argue for an incongruity between kind of mode and convention. But we have a rich tradition, and the modes that we are dealing with here tend to operate within certain defined frameworks. The outlines of these frameworks we have roughly established by isolation of crucial attributes. Very simply, a purusal of these attributes suggest, as Scholes notes, that realism attempts to represent the real, romance tends to represent an idea.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, then, we say a disharmony exists when we notice a transfer or mix of a crucial attribute or attributes. Disharmony becomes overt when the native properties of a convention or pattern retains at least associative meanings after transfer into dissimilar environments. Associative carry-over thus produces this disharmony, and this "ill-fitting" condition, in turn, usually manifests itself as irony.

In the last chapter we dealt with a distinction representative of producing irony by dissimilar convention and mode. You will remember that we suggested that Gatsby and Huck shared certain mythic overtones because both labored at archetypal tasks. But at the same time we insisted that they were in disharmony with the condition of mythos due to their otherwise mythic nakedness. What we should recognize is that almost all realism employs some mythic pattern. In The Great Gatsby and Huckleberry Finn this is only clearer to us because there has been a focus on archetypal circumstance. Usually in the novel we do not have this focus but find instead a muting of affinities. In fact, we have generally thought of the novel as something like an anti-romance--completely void of mythic or archetypal pattern. In his The Nature of Narrative, Scholes cites an excerpt, especially interesting for its date of publication, which shows how old our propensity is for assuming that the two modes are antithetical. The following is from Clara Reeve's The Progress of Romance Through Times, Countries, and Manners, 1785:

I will attempt this distinction, and I presume if it is properly done it will be followed,--if not, you are but where you were before. The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it was written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses of the persons in the story, as if they were our own.<sup>2</sup>



Clara Reeve's "distinction" is interesting because it is still with us--even today we might hear the novel described "as a slice of life"--but it is important because it assumes a complete absence of commonality between the two modes. We can agree that the "fabulous" and the "real" are unlikely bed-fellows, but this should not blind us from recognizing the common outline that operates in both the romance and the novel. This commonality nominally involves the rites of passage. Although their structural embodiment is dissimilar, both modes deal with birth, initiation, and death. There also exists between them the commonality of desire. Romance we remember is the mode of successful wish fulfillment. Desire, however, occurs in the novel too, and even if this is a desire of character, and is often thwarted, there remains this commonality to make the world in some agreeable shape. The motive out of which desire grows in the novel is psychological instead of social, however, and so is usually "baser," and if realized is often "distasteful." Thus even when character in the novel fulfills his desire, he is usually asked to pay penance of some kind.

In The Great Gatsby and Huckleberry Finn we found an ironic lamplighting of commonalities between the romance and the novel. In Huckleberry Finn this focus was achieved by evoking remembrances of romantic structural embodiment and purpose. In The Great Gatsby, this was achieved by the continuing romanticism of Gatsby in a matrix that would seem to necessitate realistic compliance. Focusing on the mythic patterns the novel is heir to seems to be a peculiarity of the American tradition. In European letters just the opposite has occurred, and instead of focusing on

affinities, we have had a muting of them. The European novel has thus seemed dedicated to romantic obliteration, and they, and not the Americans, should write the novel's epithet: Here, Readers, find the anti-romance.

Maurice Shroder calls the process of taking myth out of the novel "demythification."<sup>3</sup> As he suggests, demythification has involved frustrating wish fulfillment by subjecting a romantic sensibility to a world controlled by realistic norms. Concurrent with this shift in point of view, we have witnessed the hero's power to act descend in the movement from romance to the novel. Thus the novel has focused on the "real," and understandably, then, has purged from its aegis all other artifice that might suggest mythic overtones. The novel is essentially a mode of initiation, and normally its pattern of event begins in enchanted lands, we call it innocence, and then moves steadily and tenaciously towards compliance with its point of view. Thus the structure of the novel is formed to merge character with the world. Romance avoided a movement like this by sustaining all parts in a congruent relationship. That is, its world was as fanciful as was its character. The novel, in short, has taken the romantic representation of idea--has clothed it in innocence--and has shattered it against its representation of fact.

Innocence and destructive experience implies an ultimate clash, and the working toward this clash is the stuff of the novel. We could select almost any European novel and see this pattern in action, but perhaps Flaubert's Madame Bovary is the prototype example. The formula of romantic sensibility shattered against fact certainly fits, we know that Emma's vision is incurably romantic and that her story ends with loud destruction

as the "real" world finally imposes its fact. Ennui is her daily fare, but Emma's Southern days of summer do not suggest her victimization so much as her romanticism does. Of course she is not the only character in the novel who is romantically inclined, but she is the one character who is the antithesis of Homais. Homais, other than being nasty and ugly, is the novel's realistic touchstone. The general reaction is to hate him, but dislike is not so important as is the fact that he is like the world he lives in and is therefore not heir to destruction by compliance to realistic norms. Emma is heir, however, because her vision is romantic--and character and the world merge in the novel.

As we know she eventually swallows white and tasteless arsenic, thinking that to drink poison is the romantic way to exit. Believing in a glorious death she suffers horribly as Flaubert continues his grinding and realistic handling of circumstance and point of view--as the poison overcomes her, she screams. The process of merging world and character is finished. Homais, of course, survives and is victor because he is like the world.

Those who "survive" in the realistic world of demythification usually attempt to complement a "realistic" vision of outward reality. Vautrin of Balzac's Pere Goriot designs himself after the world, as does Bazarov of Turgenev's Fathers And Sons and Julien Sorel of Stendhal's The Red and The Black. The pattern in the above novels, however, is not exactly like Flaubert's prototype. We cannot call their characters romantic since they have a pessimism that seems a priori to experience. But if we get the sense of a priori vision or not, their pessimism seems contrary to their

real character. And their tragedy blooms, as in the case of Bazarov, when their self-manacled romantic sensibility creeps to the surface. Thus even in the novels that show complicity we will find romantic sentiment blunting against the world. Sometimes we find a character who is so much like the outward world that he finds it difficult to make differentiation, and so little understands his motives. In Crime And Punishment, this is Raskolnikov's dilemma. Thus his belated penance becomes universal and is penance in the name of the world.

When we have the sense that authorial control is complete, then, we can say the process of demythification is realized. A passage from Balzac's Pere Goriot will be helpful here:

Her round, elderly face, in which the salient feature is a nose, shaped like the beak of a parrot, her little fat hands, her person plump as a partridge, and her gown that hangs loosely about her, are all in harmony with the room reeking with squalor and infected with the love of sordid gain, the close, warm air which she can breathe without disgust . . . in short, her whole personality explains the boardinghouse, as the boardinghouse suggests her personality. The jail cannot exist without the jailer; you cannot imagine one without the other. The little woman's unwholesome plumpness is the product of her life, just as typhus is consequent upon exhalations of a hospital. Her knitted wool underpetticoat hangs below the outer one that is made from the stuff of an old gown, and through the rents of which the wadding is protruding; it sums up the parlor, dining room, and garden, announces the kitchen, and prepares us for the boarders. When Madame Vauquer is present, the spectacle is complete.<sup>4</sup>

If anything this passage indicates a world without choice--Madame Vauquer is secure only because she has found a place that is complementary--a place in which she fits as well as any piece in a jig-saw puzzle. We cannot say that she is a maker in the sense of romantic wish fulfillment. No, this is not the sense at all, she only "completes" the "spectacle."

This passage, of course, foreshadows the novel's condition, and thus we are lead to believe that Rastignac's "challenge" to the world on the ending page is intended by Balzac to be like a child's whimper in the dark. This boy-hero cannot shape Balzac's world, that power is missing, and the boy simply fails to learn the lesson of the novel.

Those who succeed in the European novel are not compelled to unite the poles of self and world. Homais is like the world. He is also like his store's facade, which we remember is filled with prescriptive remedies for every human folly. Like the aging politician who gives the patriotic speech, Homais is a giver of platitudes--out of step with a romantic sensibility but certainly in step with the world. His "salvation" is his ability to be the cruel flow of events, which gives him the world's power, and saves him from mutation and destruction. Thus, because he is like the world, he is not forced to make the movement of compliance.

Certainly the American novel has shared in this process of demythification, but never to the extent that its European counterpart has. Characters of both traditions have simultaneously shared in a descending power to act, and just as often as his European bother, the American hero has suffered ignominy and defeat. But if there has been a certain similarity, there has also been a basic difference in the degree of demythification between the two traditions. This difference is available for our scrutiny when we note that American letters has lamp-lighted certain mythic overtones. Under the light of this focus, the relationship between myth and mimesis has been essentially ironic, but the endeavor to rescue a certain mythic mystique nevertheless endures as

an important element in the American tradition. Quest is an obvious particular in evoking overtones of mythos, and who can deny the American pattern of movement into the "territory ahead." To explain our propensity for myth we are almost always compelled to peruse America's Adamic image, its dream, its desire to create and contend with the Newman in the New Eden. Of our myraid of Characters perhaps Babbitt is our most unlikely candidate for the perilous trials of quest, for certainly he has a warm complacent place like Homais, but even he attempts to break contact with the world as shaper of ultimate and final realities. How many of our books entertain quest!--we just do not have, as commonplace, the stasis and press of the European tradition.

Although the American novel has never completely lost touch with mythic circumstance, the fact seems to be that lately it has refurbished its relationship with the stuff of mythos. Maurice Shroder ends his essay "The Novel As A Genre" on this note:

But genres do change, and as the novel grew out of romance through the ironic attitude and manner that we call realism, so--as our views of reality have changed, and as the ironic fiction that depicted the contrast of appearance and reality had made its point--something new has grown out of the novel.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, Shroder does not tell us what this "something new" is. Perhaps part of it is comic-romance parody--the last form in our continuing tradition of romance.

As Northrop Frye tells us, the structural embodiment of romance parody involves "the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic environment which fits them in unexpected ways."<sup>6</sup> What he means by this is that we have a return to the romantic format, but continue,

as in the novel with a realistic environment. Constance Denniston notes in her study "The American Romance-Parody: A Study of Purdy's Malcolm and Heller's Catch-22" the general tendency to not understand that this form is a romance.<sup>7</sup> Obviously a misreading of this much importance leads to difficulties, the most important perhaps being the demand that romance parody should operate by the norms of the novel. We remember that Hawthorne asked for a "certain latitude" in his preface to The House of Seven Gables because he was writing a romance:

When a writer calls his work a romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a novel.<sup>8</sup>

The obvious implication is that it is still unfair to judge a romance, even if it is a romance parody, by the norms of the novel. If we do, we will spend all our time complaining about the flat characters and the lack of organic and psychological development--it is better to accept these, and recognize that we are dealing with an ironic romance.

Romance parody is literally a rebirth of romantic structure and artifice. It comes complete with quest, a beginning in medias res, conflicts, masked identities, numerous events, archetypal and stylized characters, dialectical opposition of good and evil, sympathy of nature, and so on. But all this artifice is ironically handled. What is new in this contemporary romance is the hero's lack of power to act and his relationship to the world. The hero of traditional romance, as Frye tells us, had a power to act "superior in degree to other men and to his environment."<sup>9</sup> The hero of the new romance does not belong to this mode,

but to the ironic, where his power to act is seemingly inferior to ours-- "so that we have a sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity."<sup>10</sup> Traditional romance showed life to be more glorious and meaningful than the experiences of ordinary men. Parody of romance shows life to be more hideous and less meaningful than the experiences of ordinary men. This sense of bondage is a step down from realism where the canons of probability suggested no more than experiences like our own. Romance parody joins a scene of bondage with a high degree of what Frye calls metaphorical displacement: "Displacement's central principle is that what can be metaphorically identified in a myth can only be linked in romance by some form of simile; analogy, significant association, incidental accompanying imagery, and the like."<sup>11</sup> The result of introducing a high degree of mythic displacement to a scene of bondage is alarming. The huge disparity is evident. Perhaps so is the fate of the hero carrying out meaningless ritual in a world without meaning and governed by pure chance. What we have in this ironic content, in Hassan's phrase, is a "mythic figure without benefit of a myth."<sup>12</sup> We are left with a hero who is neither tragic nor comic, but is struggling in the "middleland, imaged by the grotesque, which is capable of holding both the sublime and the ridiculous."<sup>13</sup> "The hero of tradition," Lord Raglan tells us, "normally ends his career by being driven from his kingdom and put to death in mysterious circumstances."<sup>14</sup> To recall the hero of tradition, then, is to remember that he was king and scapegoat. Romance parody makes gestures to the notion of king via its displacement, but because the power of its hero is without force, he is a scapegoat to



to the dictates of the world.

J. P. Donleavy's The Ginger Man, published in 1955, is in the tradition of comic-romance parody. Hassan:

The world of The Ginger Man confirms the ancient bond between cruelty and humor. It is full of gusto, seething with life, but its energy may be the energy of negation, and its vitality has a nasty edge. The adjectives applied most often to it are "riotous" and "wild." But do not the same adjectives apply to chaos itself? Even the exuberance which attends the old ceremonies of food, drink, and sex appears touched by morbid desperation; even a prank may become a criminal act. In The Ginger Man, the catharsis of comedy depends on a recognition of human absurdity, the futility of all social endeavors. The primary value which the novel asserts is the value of courage, the ability to stare into the void.<sup>15</sup>

Hassan is correct, the pervading mood of The Ginger Man is one in accord with gazing "into the void." All the piled artifice of man's knowledge cannot replace or buttress the desperate emptiness of this novel's world. Signs of death--dying plants, dying vegetation, men and women with rotting teeth, with rickets and the blank stare of dire poverty--surround the novel's hero, Sebastian Dangerfield:

Mockery and self-mockery inform all his speeches, and the zest with which he sometimes humiliates himself betrays the ferocity of his vision. The vision can be full of poetry and hope. Dangerfield in a certain sense, can never hold enough of life; the sun--a recurrent symbol for him--will always rise again. Like Joyce's Bloom, he feeds on kidneys and brains, and the sight of a pretty ankle sends the blood trilling in his veins. But Dangerfield is no Rabelaisian sensualist. He is essentially an outsider, "a straight dark figure and stranger" whose final vision is of wild horses "running out to death which is with some soul and their eyes are mad and teeth out." His grip on life, as he says, is cloacal.<sup>16</sup>

Like the Gingerbread Man of fable, Dangerfield's vision is focused on that last moment of death. Since death, he thinks, is but a matter of absurd

chance, he goes much of the time in disguise. Wishing, we suppose, that "They"--if they exist, will be unable to find him when the fancy overcomes them that this would be a fine day to get Dangerfield. Not literal disguise--he is much too sophisticated--but in disguises of affectation and, even, frustration. The strange and interesting point of view of the novel actually aids Dangerfield in his many and elaborate plays to escape death. Point of view is a mixture of third person omniscient, first person, and stream of consciousness-with "abrupt transitions from past memories to current scenes, disconnected or fragmentary sentences and dangling present participles intended to convey with some immediacy the states of Dangerfield's mind, his acute isolation."<sup>17</sup>

Sebastian with votive eyes, their loyalist words tender drops of balm. I am deeply delighted to be dealing with these people of Protestant stock. Their spinster eyes glistening with honesty.<sup>18</sup>

The abrupt shift from third to first person in the above passage suggests the effect of the novel's point of view--which is, that Sebastian and the narrative voice are not distinguishable, in a sense, are in league. Thus Dangerfield's invisible description, the only narrative description we are given, allows him to hide even from the reader:

Within the doorway, smiles, wearing white golfing shoes and tan trousers suspended with bits of wire.<sup>19</sup>

Hassan spoke of the "mockery and self-mockery" that "inform" all his speeches. An affected speech is one of Dangerfield's more important shields. Pompous describes it, as the following conversation with Kenneth O'Keefe reveals:

Kenneth, is this not a fine country?  
 Look at that woman.  
 I say, Kenneth, is this not a fine country?  
 Size of watermelons.  
 Kenneth, you poor bastard.<sup>20</sup>

Dangerfield's buffoon friend, Kenneth O'Keefe, whose most lasting phrase is "All I want is my first piece of arse,"<sup>21</sup> is something like an honest Dangerfield, and functions to show how pagan, biological, and concrete Sebastian really is under his imposed affectations. His vernacular and earthy speech patterns, for instance, provide a touchstone for the stupidity of a life in which diction is all important: "Jesus, if I had your accent I'd be set here. That's the whole thing, accent."<sup>22</sup> In the tradition of the romance, O'Keefe is like Roland's Oliver, Prince Hal's Falstaff, and Quixote's Sancho, although this traditional relationship is at all times comically handled:

Take care of yourself, Kenneth, and wear armour.  
 I want nothing between me and flesh the first time.<sup>23</sup>

It is also through O'Keefe that we begin to understand the nature of Dangerfield's self-imposed exile. O'Keefe:

But, Jesus, when you don't have any money, the problem is food. When you have money, it's sex. When you have both it's health, you worry about getting rupture or something. If everything is simply jake then you're frightened of death. And look at these faces, all stuck with the first problem and will be for the rest of their days.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike the people of Ireland, who are concerned with the first problem, food, Dangerfield is from affluent America, and as O'Keefe explains, has thus been forced to a preoccupation with death. We learn that he is from a rich family, and that he has, in his wife's phrase, lived a "chromium plated life."<sup>25</sup> But we also know that he has come to Ireland to live in less than genteel poverty until his father dies and leaves him his fortune.

Dangerfield, we suspect, hopes Ireland, "A morass of black coats, coughing and spitting,"<sup>26</sup> will allow him to turn from visions of death-- as it forces him to contend with the first problem. The danger to him in Ireland is its real and ever evident rotting decay, which is best imaged in the novel by rotting teeth, a sign to Dangerfield of imminent and approaching death. Thus is not strange that although Dangerfield goes long periods without bathing--

Sebastian, I wish you'd take a bath.  
Kills the personality.  
You were so clean when I first knew you.  
Given up cleanliness for a life of the spirit.<sup>27</sup>

--he never forgets to brush and inspect his teeth.

Dangerfield's quest is to avoid death, and such a quest is, of course, forced on him by circumstance. As Hassan suggests this is the quest of all contemporary fiction:

The paradigm of form in contemporary fiction, it is suggested, may be the pattern of encounter: the shifting, straining encounter of the rebel-victim with destructive experience.<sup>28</sup>

To stop death, even to see it as honorable and without irony, is an impossibility in a world governed, like the world of The Ginger Man is, by chance and absurdity. Realizing the utter futility of his ultimate encounter with death, Dangerfield attempts to frustrate his minor trials-- encounters with women, poverty, satisfaction, dignity, and responsibility-- so that he can at least postpone his meeting with death. The implicit danger to him is the real possibility of a chance death during his process of self-frustration. But self-punishment is the only path available to him, so he continues this pattern, avoiding success by drinking constantly,

stealing the milk money for his baby's milk, refusing to go to work or to study for his law exams at Trinity College, pounding nails into the plumbing so that a flood of his fecal matter showers his wife, and so on.

"Men tempt the hero to realize their dreams," Hassan tells us, "then punish him for his daring credulousness."<sup>29</sup> All our heroes, Hassan suggests, eventually become scapegoats: Oedipus is banished, Faust is self-damned, and Christ is crucified. Thus the continued success of Dangerfield's non-quest depends upon his anonymity. An important theme in the novel deals with Dangerfield's attempt to avoid identification:

Just tell me where my sun glasses are, that's all.  
I didn't have them last.  
I must have them. I absolutely refuse to go out of this house without them.  
Well look.  
Do you want me to be recognized? Do you?  
Yes, I do.<sup>30</sup>

Women, all women in his life, attempt to "aid" him in his minor encounters. And such aid is traditional with women--Marion, Sebastian's wife, for instance, asks him: "Why won't you take some responsibility?"<sup>31</sup> A triumph over responsibility, Marion does not understand, would put Sebastian that much closer to peering into the face of death.

Sebastian is also compelled to seek non-identity because he is not unlike the "rough beast" of Yeats' "The Second Coming:"

And me. I think I am their father. Roaming the laneways, giving comfort, telling them to lead better lives, and not to let the children see the bull serving the cow. I anoint their silver streams, sing laments from the round towers. I bring seed from Iowa and reblood their pastures. I am . . . I tell you, you silly bunch of bastards, that I'm the father who sweetens the hay and lays the moist earth and potash to the roots and storyteller of all the mouths. I am out of the Viking ships. I am the fertilizer of royalty everywhere. And Tinker King who dances the goat dance on

the Sugar loaf and fox-trots in the streets of Chirciveen.  
 Sebastian, the eternal tourist, Dangerfield.<sup>32</sup>

This second Christ, of course, is an antichrist

Down in Dingle  
 Where the men are single  
 Pigwidgeon in the closest  
 Banshee in the bed  
 An antichrist is suffering  
 While the Gombeen man's dead  
 Down in Dingle.<sup>33</sup>

not one who has arrived to revitalize the sterile land, but one who has  
 come to assist its downward spin into decay:

Across the Butt Bridge. Covered with torn newspapers and  
 hulking toothless old men watching out the last years. They're  
 bored. I know you've been in apprenticeships and that there  
 was a moment when you were briefly respected for an opinion.  
 Be in the sight of God soon. He'll be shocked. But there's  
 happiness up there, gentleman. All white and gold. Acetylene  
 lighted sky. And when you go, go third class. You damn  
 bastards.<sup>34</sup>

Thus Dangerfield, who is himself surrounded by dying vegetation, must  
 keep his identity underwraps, or he will suffer the fate of heroes--will  
 be selected and become himself a scapegoat for the dying and rotting land.  
 The importance of avoiding exposure, then, allows a reader to understand  
 the gravity of the scene in which Dangerfield inadvertently exposes him-  
 self while riding in a public car:

Avoiding the red, pinched, insistent, maniacal face. Look out  
 the window. There's the park and where I first saw dear Chris  
 to speak to me. O deliverance. That laughing monster in the  
 corner, I'll drag him out of the car and belt him from one  
 end of the station to the other. What's he doing. Pointing  
 into his lap. Me? Lap? Good Christ. It's out. Every inch  
 of it.<sup>35</sup>

In a private musing immediately following this incident we hear:

"I've tried to reason over this. It's not a matter of courage or grief or what, but I find it impossible to come to grips with that dreadful embarrassing situation. If only I'd buttoned my fly. If only that."<sup>36</sup>

We find the same kind of reaction from Dangerfield in another scene of exposure. This time Marion has written to Sebastian's father, telling him how low and nasty Dangerfield has been to her and their child. And his reaction is surprisingly violent:

You've done the one thing for which I would kill any man.  
You're a scheming slut. Did you hear what I said. I  
said you were a scheming slut.<sup>37</sup>

Again, in a later musing over this incident: "The father will be upon me."<sup>38</sup> "Explain to the father."<sup>39</sup>

There are suggestion in this novel of Dangerfield as Christ revisiting, sent by "the father" to redeem the sterile land. All the mythical overtones suggest a notion like thing, Dangerfield brings "seed from Iowa and reblood," but he is a mythical figure without the benefit of a myth. Instead of giving redemption, he adds to the waste. What he fears is punishment for this transgression. Reduced to fact or the literal embodiment, the transgression is the human condition, and death, as we know, is the punishment for life. So it is that any incident of undue punishment is suggestive of the ultimate absurdity, death, for a life lived. Understanding that this is operating in the novel we can enjoy the scene in which Dangerfield, at this time "stone sober" for one of the few moments in the novel, is accused of drunkenness and is refused service. His reaction, at first, is unbelief:

So I'm drunk. Strangled Christ. Drunk. Nothing to do but suffer this insult as I have suffered so many others. It will die away in a few years, no worry about that.<sup>40</sup>

And:

And the mortification of being treated like a damn drunkard is dreadful for me as stark and stone sober as I am.<sup>41</sup>

This is Dangerfield's first reaction, but that night he returns to the same bar, this time drunk, to this:

No trouble now, no trouble.

Shut up. Am I drunk? Am I drunk?

No.

Why you Geltic lout. I am. I'm drunk, Hear me, I'm drunk and I'm going to level this kip, level it to the ground, and anyone who doesn't want his neck broken get out.<sup>42</sup>

Dangerfield's return to the bar and his assertion of self shows one of the very few instances in which he actually moves ahead in the tradition of romantic encounter. And this is an important scene because, as we have suggested, it is emblematic of the human condition. A payment of death for life is as absurd and undue as was the insistence that Dangerfield was drunk when he was, in fact, for one of the few times in his life, completely sober. Dangerfield, by literally becoming drunk, makes the accusation fit the fact. In a sense, if this is emblematic, he also makes death a punishment that is at least congruent--a punishment that is at least non-ironic. For this action we cannot but feel empathy. But for this act Dangerfield is driven out of the bar, chased down the street--is driven out of town in the fashion of scapegoats everywhere.

After this incident, Dangerfield can no longer hide his identity. He goes literally underground, and while under, meets and conquers two more women: Miss Frost and Mary. We should mention that Christine occurs



prior to the bar incident, and that his first reaction to her was "What lips across what white teeth."<sup>43</sup> Although his encounter with Miss Frost is interesting, it is not as crucial to his story as his relationship with Mary seems to be.

The incident at the bar forced Dangerfield to accept human nature. Like the rest of humanity, now, he has committed himself to rolling the stone to the top of the hill, and then, rolling it up the hill again. Mary is involved in this acceptance since she is the first woman he meets who has less scruples than he has, which forces him to acceptance of responsibility. He rescues her from a labyrinth of evil, the catacombs apartment of his friend Percy Clockland, and saves her once again--when they are in London--from movie contracts and her own innate sense of depravity:

She can't get enough. And I can't say I'm capable of much more. Got to ask the Doon for advice. They say if you don't give them enough they go looking elsewhere. Send me apples from New England and a few spices from the East as well. Keep me supplied with juice.<sup>44</sup>

Accepting the human condition, and death, is cause for celebration, and in London Dangerfield joins with two of his friends in a wild celebration of joy in the streets and in the bars. Money, we remember, was a luxury that prompted a look into death. The immediate source for Dangerfield's London celebration is his father's death, and as Dangerfield thinks, the resulting inheritance, but this condition is frustrated when Dangerfield learns that he must wait twenty years to receive a "sum held in trust."<sup>45</sup> But chance intervenes, and concurrent with his acceptance of his position in the world, and his responsibility for Mary, Dangerfield

is showered with money on Christmas day. On this day Percy Clocklan returns from the dead (Dangerfield thought Percy had committed suicide) with amassed riches and showers wealth on unsuspecting Dangerfield. Accepting money and Mary (both chance gatherings), Dangerfield is compelled to face the ultimate test of his quest. And the novel ends with Dangerfield's vision of horses running with teeth out:

I knew they were running away and would be crossing the fields  
where the pounding would come up into my ears. And I said  
they are running out to death which is with some soul and  
their eyes are mad and teeth out.

God's mercy  
On the wild  
Ginger Man.<sup>46</sup>

Mary and Sebastian begin a new beginning at the novel's ending, and in a sense they are our reblood like the savage of The Brave New World. Essentially primordial and pagan, they exhibit qualities best called creation and destruction, which conjures their correlatives--life and death. They are representative of man in a world too much with him, characters of bondage, who encounter and see what we are unable to contend with ourselves--failure is, in fact, implicit in their quest to mediate life and death. The beautiful poetics of the novel, ironic because of their bondage, evokes a tone reminiscent of elegiac romance. But their elegy is not without its irony--all celebrations and all small acts of life exist under the doom of horses running with teeth out. Our newblood is doomed to the same failure of dying images surrounding us, the Gingerbread Man, we remember, ran through a series of gratuitous acts, but ended as a meal for the munching fox with reflective eyes.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Romance in American letters has, in a sense, turned full circle. We began with romance per se in the nineteenth century, with a writer like Cooper, who envisioned himself a myth-maker in the tradition of Homer. After movement through the demythifying aegis of the realistic novel, we now find ourselves confronted with romance parody, a form, if ironic, that harkens again overtones of mythic circumstance. Romance, usually implicit in the realistic novel, has thus become overt or explicit again.

Mythic embellishment and romantic artifice in the traditional sense, a totally congruent rhetorical situation, was provided by Cooper to buttress the mythical outline of his figure, Leatherstocking, and thus we found little irony in his canon. Although the realists thought Cooper incapable of handling reality, they, in turn, were influenced by his vision of the Newman in the New Garden. Cooper's influence, or the influence of his major theme, shows in the implicit tradition of romance that carries into the age of realism--and into the contemporary novel of the absurd. Dream remained an important theme, and to envision this desire of moral promise, while showing that frustration appeared inevitable, the realists subjected a substructure of romance to their vision. Such a play caused drastic changes--our heroes became, in general, picaresques, holy fools to trudge against such odds. But we asked them

to continue the quest, or condemned them if they failed to at least attempt to be shapers of a moral reality. Romantic substructure, seen in our patterns of quest, initiation, continued hope and desire in the face of dire circumstance, has thus been a traditional element in much of our fiction.

As we have suggested, the form and, as it seems, the intent of the novel has been one of demythification--a process which attempts to exclude from the aegis of the novel all mythical overtones. In a sense, demythification was never realized in the American tradition due to its play with implicit romance. Joyce began the process of remythification in the novel--essentially by sustained allusion, the American novel shares in remythification through its development of a new but ironic romance. What seems clear after novels like Ulysses and The Ginger Man is that our old distinctions between the novel and the romance are inadequate for the critical task at hand. We have become metaphorical in our vision, perhaps in self-mockery, but clumsy distinctions between fancy and reality have been destroyed by current ironic literature.

What appears close at hand is a literature that rejects a realistic control of the world. The new literature of irony focuses on the irony, frustration, and self-mockery of sophisticated man attempting to release himself from the world by finding a primordial grounding. Violence and creation, ironically mixed, the desires of life and death, will more than likely continue to form the fabric of the novel tomorrow. The task of the critic is to find a new criticism capable of handling the synthesis of the novel and the romance.

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