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CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, PH.D., 1978

HORIZONS OF THE SELF:

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE IN EARLY AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

REGINA SACKMARY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1978

TO ELYE

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 15, 1978
date

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I think the idea for a dissertation begins long before we recognize it--I know in my own case I could draw now a vertical line through the myriad and seemingly unrelated events that finally led me to write on American literature. But whatever its origins, the process of writing a dissertation becomes more than an individual effort. People enter and leave one's life, but some trace of their presence influences what is written. And there are those who were there from the beginning, who have in sometimes crucial ways determined the course of the work. My debt to these years, to the people who have been a part of it all, cannot be adequately expressed. But there are some to whom I owe more than others.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IMPULSE

"These novels will give way, by and by, to diaries or autobiographies;--captivating books, if only a man knew how to choose among what he calls his experiences that which is really his experience, and how to record truth truly!"
--Emerson, JOURNALS, Jan. 31, 1841

"My primary conviction," wrote Joseph Conrad in the preface to Under Western Eyes, is "that truth alone is the justification of any fiction which makes the least claim to the quality of art."[1] In another introduction he observed that "art itself may be defined as a singleminded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect."[2] But in "Heart of Darkness," Conrad has Marlow ask about Kurtz:

> Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence--that which makes its truth, its meaning--its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream--alone.[3]

What Conrad, as an essentially modern author, is ascertaining in these comments could as easily be a paradigm for the contradictory impulses that inspired American literature in its earliest stages: the search for the ideal, and the alternating perception of that search as both possibility and despair. Further, in Marlow's questioning we are presented with the ambiguity of knowledge when it is derived from the insight of one individual, the elusiveness of truth when its source lies in the solitary perceiver--an intangible element that affects both the character described and the process of

description. It was such an uncertainty that controlled a great deal of the thematic focus of American literature, and which contributed in significant ways to the surprising structural dominance of the first-person narrative in the formative stages of American literary expression.

In the epigraph to this introduction, Ralph Waldo Emerson implies that the reality of truth lies in the inward dimension of the individual's apprehension of experience. Insofar as one dares to explore beyond the surfaces of day-to-day life, the recognition achieved will bring about a regeneration of the self--what Thoreau called "the morning of the soul." Emerson's idea was a transcendentalist conception that saw self-discovery as the essential agent of "the ascending effort." But it was a theme intimately tied to the American historical tradition, a tradition that had not always viewed introspection as a positive force, but which had emphasized its necessity. His concern with truth had its origins in the Puritan heritage that shaped and directed the American imagination. It was a heritage that rejected interpretations of reality that did not depend upon authentic personal experience for their expression. In the Puritans' apocalyptic conception of the settlement in America as the final stage in redemptive history, they laid emphasis upon the role of the individual in effecting the establishment of the New Jerusalem. American writers, from William Bradford to Herman Melville, were continually recapitulating that first vision in varying dimensions through their literature; they did so in the single voice.

One of the most salient features of American literature from the colonial period up until the Civil War--when the issue of slavery destroyed some measure of the idealism that had till then been dominant in the republic--was the desire to articulate the degree of responsibility that the individual had towards him or herself and towards society. It was a theme that derived from absolute assumptions in the Protestant ethic, aligned with the age-old mythology of America as the final incarnation of utopian promise--the last frontier. From the earliest spiritual autobiographies of the Puritans, into the political statements of the eighteenth century, through the transcendentalist vision of Thoreau, and in the fiction of Hawthorne, Poe and Melville, these elements predominated. Again, the significant feature of that literature is that it was, to a degree unmatched by any alternative form, written in the first person. Puritan introspection, frontier isolation, ideological speculation, transcendental apprehensions, and symbolic realizations--all these devolved upon the "I" as the narrative voice.

"Know Thyself" is inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi. For the Puritans such words were a mandate for salvation. That knowledge of the self they sought, however, was one which would bring about a dissolution of the self into total submission to God. Their diaries and journals describe a passionate desire to reform and perfect their performance of divine laws. But the result of their preoccupation with obliterating the individual will became a

concentration upon the very self-interest they wished to deny, and it was that preoccupation which set the pattern for the future.

The Puritan emphasis was converted in the enlightened thought of eighteenth-century deism and its concomitant political idealism into an interest in discovering the unique features of the individual and the limits of human potentiality. The thrust of the Revolution of 1776 lay in the assumption that ideals were possibilities--more, were probabilities. Frontier exploration, economic expansion, and egalitarian credos all combined to convince the average man that he too could participate in the progressive achievements of the New World. The literature of this period is primarily personal narratives of expeditions into western and southern territories, and autobiographical records of the manner by which socially or economically deprived individuals attained a reasonable status and self-reliance in the society through the exploitation of the unlimited opportunities that the growing continent supplied.

Both the Puritan and eighteenth-century perspectives were united in the philosophy of Emerson, where the primacy of the individual was asserted together with the concept of the ascending effort to fuse the self with the soul--or God--and thereby achieve the true fulfillment of the democratic vision. Emerson's essays were the catalyst to the symbolic interpretation of American thought and experience. Thoreau's Walden became a synthesis of the more positive--yet ambiguous--

features in the historical literature that preceded it. Thoreau, like Emerson, assimilated the opposing tendencies of individualism and social responsibility, despite his perception of those tendencies from the vantage point of the solitary observer.

The symbolic element came to its fullest expression, however, in the early and mid-nineteenth-century fiction that was produced. There, in the writings of Hawthorne, Poe and Melville, the paradoxes inherent in the multi-dimensional worlds of romance they explored placed the focus upon the uncertain and incomplete nature of self-knowledge, and implicitly, the knowledge of the American destiny. Puritan themes of guilt, renunciation, of original depravity, and the dual aspects of the personality, influenced the route by which such writings attempted to explain, with the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, "the evil that I have seen under the sun," which "is common among men." (6, i).[4] Again with the preacher, they sought to find out "that which is far off and exceeding deep." (7, xxiv).[5] Each writer endeavored to seek out answers to fundamental questions through a journey into the interior--into the heart of darkness. The average man and woman were the subjects of their tales: "Passion," wrote Melville in Billy Budd, "does not need a palatial stage on which to play its part," nor "to measure its power." These writers dealt with the enigmatic quality of democratic aspiration; in its attached danger they realized what Karl Mannheim has stated: "For the life of a democratic society always skirts chaos owing to the free scope it gives to the

vital energies of all individuals."[6] The shadows of truth carried prospects of manipulation and the voyage of discovery was a spiritual experiment. The "I" of their narratives became a subject and object of interest--it was a referent for Everyman.

The use of a first-person narrator is a problematic event. In Marlow's description of Kurtz quoted at the beginning, there is an implicit question about the nature of art: is it ever possible to convey reality through the constrictions of form that the artistic effort demands? As Nancy Milford writes in her biography Zelda, the individual narrative voice is difficult "because it is so deeply autobiographical, [that] the transmutation of reality into art is incomplete. We read it against the life, or as a gesture of release from life."[7] For American writers, the consistent choice of a first-person narrator has contributed to a degree of formlessness in the development of the literature. The parameters of truth are uneasily defined; the narrative voice itself insures an open-ended form in which the events described cannot be completed so long as the narrator lives to tell the tale. And the point of view is both a limitation and an extension; the presentation of experience accorded by a single observer increases the ambiguity of what is really happening, and at the same time conjoins the reader as a participant in the process of interpreting the hidden and unknown regions beyond that point of view. The content presumes, and focuses upon, the difficulties

attending the effort to decipher reality when identity itself is indeterminate.

One of the principal assumptions of this thesis is that the use of the first-person narrative in American literature, both in true autobiography and in the autobiographical novel or short story, represents an essential and indigenous perspective which derives its primary impetus from a crisis of self-definition, a crisis that engaged the psychology of the individual with the emergence of the new American republic. One of the preliminary conclusions is that the personal narrative is often utilized to both provide, assert--and discover--the confidence of identity which is necessary before a transcendence of that identity to a more universal statement is possible. A further conclusion is that rather than viewing the lack of form implicit in the autobiographical narrative as a deficiency, it can actually be seen as an organic artistic achievement in the creative formation of a viable American literature.

> We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience and verify them here. All history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history, only biography. Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself--must go over the whole ground.[8]

Perception in any dimension is based upon personal experience and memory. In autobiographical writing, the selective shaping of experience and memory forms a "present" that is actually an imaginative re-creation of the past,

and therefore, of the self. We look at the past and the present together.

For the individual who attempts to provide a resolution for the chaos of everyday events, to formalize and make public the imaginative perception of reality, that awareness can often be both the subject and object of exploration. It is that element which, it is suggested in this study, operates particularly in first-person autobiographical writing in America. Inherent in the form in its unfinished nature is the potential endlessness of the process of discovery. It is a literature of questions only, where, for author and reader alike, to place the ephemera of time, memory and experience into the abstractions of language is to remove the possibility of absolutes, the certainty of revelation. The whole remains elusive.

When, as has been the case from the beginning for American writers, the cultural context is not a stable environment, or more significantly, cannot provide or encourage the maintenance of traditional values, it will not control the measure individuals take of themselves within that context, and may become the very reason a person chooses to attempt self-definition at all. The attempt is the more complicated, and original, when it involves molding a sense of a past that is nearly simultaneous with the present and future.

The American cultural perspective has enclosed a generalized dilemma that has affected all writers who have

endeavored to describe, or resist, the enigmatic pragmatism of its goals. The pluralist nature of the society has meant a diversity of point of view that cannot be easily compared to the literature of other nations nor indeed necessarily encased within the confines of specific literary standards.

W. E. B. DuBois once observed in his Autobiography that without a literature a people is bereft not only of the prestige and acceptance of other societies, but of themselves as well. Art, an organic, native art, may very well always be the final resource of entrance into "civilization." A writer unsure what his or her experience has meant privately, finds nevertheless in that experience, whether it is born out of confession, protest or an inner quest, a compulsion to give example of what is vital and viable against the odds of racism, poverty, materialism, loneliness, complacency or alienation. American literature as a whole, as well as the groups and interests that have comprised it, has been the literature of a people coming to terms with their own existence.

It is not surprising that American writing with its emphasis on the personal narrative, should originate in the spiritual autobiographies of the Puritans, exiles of seventeenth-century England, who saw a cosmological and religious system beginning to disintegrate. Coinciding with the American movement, moreover, was an upsurge of British autobiographical memoirs greater than in any prior period.[9] In The Eloquent 'I': Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century

Prose, Joan Webber describes this period as one of a disturbing sense of discontinuity, which created the feeling that "man is not the same person from moment to moment . . . he finds himself confronted by the problem of identity just because his personality is no longer stable but, rather, needs to be continuously redefined."[10] A lost coherence had to be acknowledged and values had to be restructured. Self-analysis was not only acceptable but required. Autobiography was not only, as it had heretofore been, a spiritual exercise in religious devotion, on the model of the Augustinian Confessions, but also the product of intensive introspection wherein the outcome was to prove to the individual as well as to God that divinity of the self was actual. The ambivalence concerning the nature of the self had been well nurtured by the Reformation, when

> Englishmen, in particular, began to adopt a habit of introspection and to speak about what they discovered when Calvinist theology suggested to them that the clue to their own eternal destination lay in the furthest recesses of their own hearts. In the seventeenth century, in both Old and New England, great numbers of Protestants were probing the darkness in their hearts for the gleaming nugget of grace and shouting 'Eureka!' in a variety of communicative modes, at a sunny doorway, from a prison cell, and out of a savage wilderness.[11]

The ambivalence concerning the "I" was inevitable. England, largely perhaps because of its class separatism, eventually managed to reassert a basic credibility (credulity) in the endurance of declared absolutes (royalism, Anglicanism,

and imperialism) that assuaged the insecurities of dissociation, even when they were promulgated anew by the onset of the industrial revolution. The American Puritan, however, facing an unknown wilderness and abrupt separation from the "past," both physically and ideologically, found the crisis prolonged. In fact, it has never ended, and to this prolongation of crisis one can attribute the specific nature of American literature.

What is the current flowing through the best of American writing that identifies it unfailingly as American? The newness of form? The style of language? The introduction of regional features of the New World? The alienation of the artist? These things matter, but it is something else. It includes a restlessness, a dissatisfaction, an unwillingness to settle for less than perfection--wholeness--the apprehension of God as perceived in the self. It is the conviction, often absolutist, that the ideal can be achieved. And it is a fear, sometimes valid, that the effort has failed before it has ended, a consequent disillusionment, even rejection, of the pursuit. The dissatisfaction is integral: the imagination of a democratic citizen engages the concept of work--and art--with the concept of perfection: the democratic impulse--a fusion of individualism and social responsibility, an impulse certainly capable of extremes and not easily controlled--is one of positive change. The conflicting forces of democracy continually fuse in new ways in each individual and his work at different stages of growth, each

stage an effort for the future, for the unknown truth of what can become.

The thrust of the idea of moral perfection has never really departed from our literature, nor has the impetus to prescribe for everyman.

> Amongst a democratic people poetry will not be fed with legendary lays or the memorials of old traditions. . . . but Man remains and the poet needs no more. The destinies of mankind,--man himself, taken aloof from his age and his country, and standing in the presence of Nature and of God, with his passions, his doubts, his rare prosperities and inconceivable wretchedness,--will become the chief, if not the sole theme of poetry amongst these nations. [12]

When Karl Mannheim described the democratic spirit in the New World as one singularly amenable to introspection and to "an awareness of the chaos lurking in the depths of the personality"[13] he was echoing predictions of De Toqueville, who observed with profound insight that "I am persuaded in the end democracy diverts the imagination from all that is external to man, and fixes it on man alone. Democratic nations may amuse themselves with considering the productions of nature; but they are only excited in reality by a survey of themselves. Here, and here alone, the true sources of poetry amongst such nations are to be found." [14] And he continues, in a lyrical tone reminiscent of Rousseau's Confessions, that the poets of a democracy will be forced

> constantly to search below the external surface which is palpable to the senses, in order to read the inner soul: and nothing lends itself more to the delineation of the Ideal than the

> scrutiny of the hidden depths in the immaterial nature of man. I need not ramble over earth and sky to discover a wondrous object woven of contrasts, of greatness and littleness infinite, of intense gloom and of amazing brightness --capable at once of exciting pity, admiration, terror, contempt. I find that object in myself. Man springs out of nothing, crosses Time, and disappears for ever in the bosom of God; he is seen but for a moment, staggering on the verge of the two abysses, and there he is lost. [15]

This emphasis had permeated the Puritan consciousness, drawn as it was out of the Reformation; it was reinforced by the secular tenets of the Enlightenment that were formative in the new republic--the idea of one's own perfectibility, the concept of civil and religious liberties, the reliance on the social philosophies of Locke and Rousseau; and it placed a high value upon the imagination, gaining a strong romantic vision adapted, in somewhat modified form, from nineteenth-century Europe, wherein the search for the ideal in the self became an emotive translation of the Puritan search for God. The exercise of individual understanding throughout was born out of the necessity to define oneself and the desire to transcend that definition.

Another theme sustained this inward turning: the hidden depths and forbidding vast nature of the land encountered--a reality that existed as the physical extension of man's inner search. The literature from the Puritans to Crèvecoeur, from Cooper to Melville and Whitman, to Dreiser and beyond, involved a preoccupation with the idea of space and expansion as forces operating with as much terror and hope for the

individual as did the threat of Calvinist damnation upon those who searched their souls for Divine Grace. It meant an attitude that had to accommodate a sense of the unknown that was beyond the imagination of a settled and age-old Europe, but was an autochthonous element in the psychology and experience of American authors. One Cornelius Matthews observed in the early 1840's that the "very nakedness of our new condition . . . might be reasonably expected to drive us upon a profounder delineation of the inner life."[16] (The condition left that inner life no less uncertain and ambiguous, however.) The idea is readily available in the "darkness" of romantic writers, in Hawthorne and Melville, or in the Transcendentalists who agreed with Thoreau that America was needed to utter the "wild strain" which English literature lacked. But it is an idea also available in Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation, and in the considerable epistolary and journal literature of the Puritans, as well as in their diaries and spiritual autobiographies, attesting the benevolence of God that allowed them to survive the supreme loneliness of unlimited Nature:

> What could they see but a hidious and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and willd men? . . . The whole countrie, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage heiw. If they looked behind them, ther was the mighty ocean which they had passd, and was now a maine barr and goulfe to seperate them from all the civill parts of the world . . . What could now sustaine them but the spirite of God and his grace?[17]

The frontier in its fecund but indifferent nature at first reduced the individual to a feeling of powerlessness

and eroded the initial religious fervor that had sustained and motivated the Puritan Christian. The sheer immensity of the task to be done--conquering New Canaan--particularly for second and third generation colonists, often led them, according to Perry Miller, to address "every effort, no matter how brief . . . to the persistent question: what is the meaning of this society in the wilderness? If it does not mean what Winthrop said it must mean, what under Heaven is it? Who, they are forever asking themselves, who are we? and sometimes they are on the verge of saying, who the Devil are we, anyway?"[18] And "Thereupon, these citizens found that they had no other place to search but within themselves. . . . they were left alone with America."

But all this was also a liberating concept. America, in its writers, never has quite abandoned the image of the "wild strain" or the "frontier," only it gradually became an abstraction, though one which held influence even when the land was settled and the heritage of capitalism had in turn eroded the prospect of a religious utopia. The questions have not yet really been answered, but rather re-formulated by those who ventured here at different stages--perpetuating the belief of unlimited horizons and possibility, succumbing to the reality of opportunism and materialism, and even so remaining certain somehow that the metamorphic vision holds true, that the individual is both shaped by and a shaper of an energy and movement distinctly American. The frontier was part of the essential adventure and quest, concentrated

upon the individual--and here we mean the writer--as a metaphor of the unending shifts of consciousness that the seeker of truth, of true meaning, encountered. And its impact was inescapable, for in the words of Frederick Turner:

> From the conditions of frontier life came intellectual traits of profound importance. The works of travelers along each frontier from colonial days onward describe certain common traits, and these traits have, while softening down, still persisted as survivals in the place of their origin, even when a higher social organization succeeded. The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect or dream great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that bouyancy and exuberance that comes with freedom.[19]

Such aspects held that core of optimism to which so often is attributed the naive element in American writing. Even Poe had his Eureka! and the last lines of Moby-Dick are an affirmation of life and its continuity and strength as much as a statement of man's insufficiency in the compulsions of his individual psyche against the power of Nature. The writers accepted the unspoken challenge of declaring the ideal possible whether they found it or not.

When Emerson visited Stonehenge he was asked by doubting Englishmen if any man had really an American vision of the future, to which he answered "Certainly, yes--but those who hold it are fanatics of a dream which I should hardly care

to relate to your English ears, to which it might only be called ridiculous--and yet it is only true."[20] And when Melville writes of "man in the ideal," he prefigures those writers who later chose the realism of each segment of American life to explain its variegated and consuming purpose:

> Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!
>
> If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased, among them all, shall at times lift himself to the exalted mounts; if I shall touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind! Bear me out in it, thou great democratic God![21]

The literature was a song of the self long before Whitman wrote his panegyric to democracy. The challenge to American writers lay in the effort to unite the self-directed impulse with the democratic energy in order to discover the true creative base for their imaginations, to fuse the IDEA of a universal expanding I AM with the isolation of the soul confronted by a consciousness expanding inward. Repeatedly we find the voices speak in the first person.

Three primary autobiographical approaches were made that have persisted to the present, although it is the last one with which we may most identify now. One was to accept

the American dream at face value as a pragmatic reality and to ignore or overcome by a positive opportunism, united with a program of moral edification, the tendency of self-doubt. This was the choice of the first Puritan communities and later Benjamin Franklin, followed by some of the realists and Henry Adams. Theirs was an ordered, systematic introspection. The second route was that of the Transcendentalists, for whom the immanence of God in nature was a correspondence of the individual and the Oversoul, implying the unique freedom of man or woman to proceed and succeed through the powers of his or her intuition.

The third alternative was to face the new land and new society as analogues of the inner self, to probe the darkness that fascinated and repelled as well as the light in search of the American dream, only it was a search more uncertain of the result. The antinomies of light (the idealism and optimism) and darkness held a tension of possibility described earlier by De Toqueville, challenged by what Melville described as finding out

> the heart of a man; descending into which is as descending a spiral stair in a shaft, without any end . . . where the endlessness is concealed by the spiralness of the stair and the blackness of the shaft. [22]

This last imaginative perception drew upon, even wrought, the disunities the culture demanded: change, radicalism, isolation, chaos--progress. The process of articulating the tensions fostered a skepticism and disillusion in the

literature, which increased the writer's sense of dissociation from the social milieu and promoted his or her resistance to being defined from without. The revelations of the inner psyche were projected upon the world in the process of their being realized, often with defiance, with a tone of urgency, awareness or alienation from what is seen as the failure of the ideal. This we find in the later Puritans, certainly in Melville, Hawthorne and Poe, reaching beyond them into twentieth-century writers and poets like Hart Crane, Malcolm Lowry, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller, William Carlos Williams, Jean Toomer, William Styron, Carson McCullers, Dahlberg, Faulkner, Cather, Frost, Agee, Strasberg, Donato, Henry Roth, Claude Brown, Richard Wright, Malcolm X, and even, we may say, Norman Mailer.*

However, the three directions are not unalike. In an introduction to Roland Barthes' Writing Degree Zero, Susan Sontag gives an interesting definition of alienation as the failure of self-transcendence. To a degree, perhaps. Yet the process of alienation, or at least some form of estrangement in literature may provide the risk, not the necessity of failure. Temporary alienation and disillusion can be intensely creative, if it is part of an on-going discovery

*Henry Miller wrote: "The autobiographical novel, which Emerson predicted would grow in importance with time, has replaced the great confessions. It is not a mixture of truth and fiction, this genre of literature, but an expansion and deepening of truth. It is more authentic, more veridical, than the diary. It is not the flimsy truth of facts which the authors of these autobiographical novels offer, but the truth of emotion, reflection and understanding, truth digested and assimilated. The being revealing himself does so on all levels simultaneously."

and enlightenment; it can give double-vision. American autobiographical literature, as a literature of exploration, has sustained this distancing, this marginality, in the various groups of writers that have participated in its development. The initial specific and local pattern of "estrangement" that appeared with the Puritans has reappeared in one form or another in every writer in whose work we sense an original impulse.

Self-consciousness need not, like some dark star, implode; it need not have that quality of rootless self-indulgence apparent in some contemporary American writing, writing which is static and often meaningless in any fully human sense. The displacement of values, the isolation and indifference that promote the static quality, may exist because the writer is not a participant of the specific dichotomies and influences such as those previously described, that served as the true creative impulse in our early literature. It may be that he or she has succumbed to the immensity of a bureaucratic century that has institutionalized genocide, and without hope has met a cul-de-sac of spirit. For this reason it is not difficult to see why some of the best writing in the twentieth century in America has come from minority and oppressed groups who still have plenty to challenge, who have fewer reasons to give up, and who are not occupied by whatever critical or societal traditions that have crystallized.

The quantity of books in such marginal groups that utilize the autobiographical approach far outnumber any other

form. And for us, the audience, we tend to read it most intensely. We still tend to look, as Whitman did a hundred years ago in Democratic Vistas, for the growth of the self, for something real, something new and changing to perpetually feed the inherent dynamic of our literary drive. We need, perhaps, to rediscover our ideas and metaphysics--those abstractions which De Toqueville declared a democratic people love, abstractions which unsettle reason but inspire, and which, most important of all, perpetuate the linking of the self to the larger cultural realm.

The concentrated narrowness of point of view in the autobiographical narrative directs the focus within, making it far more exploratory and tentative than that of an omniscient narrator, yet creating a greater effect of distancing and ambiguity. The attempt to understand the self can be seen as a process of continual preparation which leads indefinitely inward and thus forward. And most particularly, it allows an open-ended form that conceivably promoted those features of a native literature which, above all, required a freedom and spontaneity not necessarily available or even desirable in other narrative forms.

In a work written in the third person, the omniscient observations of the author control the narrative and circumscribe its closure; this is one means by which such a novel's structural success is measured. It presumes the existence of a stabilized universe of perception and values which belong not only to the characters of the novel but to its intended audience.

Such assumptions, however, cannot so easily support an organic relationship to an omnipresent situation of change, if that is the cultural condition. Another pattern of development is more likely. The viability of a literary form is intimately associated with the authenticity of experience. In first-person autobiographical narrative, a certain control may be suspended. The narrative operates with more ambivalence in the subjective atmosphere of the narrator's monologues, and the idea of truth is not a priori. It is more difficult to make judgments--the "I" is our pronoun as well, drawing us and the reality of the work closer. A writer who desires to make contact with an audience that is in process of explaining the uncertainty of its comprehensions can do so more effectively by speaking directly in the first person. We cannot be easy spectators then; the yes or no we give the tale we also give to ourselves, and objective conclusions are the least significant element. In American literature the writer's choice of first-person narrative may very well also be a choice of genre actuated and sustained by the demands of the audience for the content of what must be said, as well as the demands of the author. Georg Lukàcs, in Writer and Critic, sees that

> The writer who ponders over his content does not simply take it as he finds it in his immediate experience or as it is presented in immediate reality. Instead, he probes for the essential content in this experience, in this aspect of reality. . . . In investigating the artistic problems of his material, the artist discovers the sutitability or unsuitability of certain forms for the particular content. . . . The exploration of the laws of individual genres leads to objectivity not only aesthetically (revealing

> the principles governing the dialectic between content and form, a dialectic which determines the success or failure of a work of art independently of an artist's conscious effort) but also in the personal and social sense: the deeper the artist probes, the more clearly he exposes the social and human premises on which individual genres are based. [23]
>
> (italics mine)

In order to understand the process and implications of utilizing the autobiographical approach as it developed in American literature, I have chosen representative writers from several periods prior to the Civil War, since after 1860 the shape and direction of autobiographical writing develop in new (though not entirely disparate) ways. The writers to be discussed include: the Puritan autobiographies and the journals of William Bradford, Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, Thomas Shepard, Samuel Sewall and Jonathan Edwards; William Byrd's History of the Dividing Line, Crèvecoeur's Letters of an American Farmer, the Journal of John Woolman, the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin; Thoreau's Walden, with reference to Emerson; Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance and the stories of Poe, with emphasis on the Narrative of A. Gordon Pym; and finally the six first-person novels of Melville. (The limits of the study at this point preclude an analysis of the Gothic novelists, the poets, Cooper, and the slave narratives, as well as specific frontier histories, but all these are part of the same tradition.)

The writers will be examined in terms of: the kind of autobiographical literature they wrote and the Puritan influences upon it; the value the writers attached to the

autobiographical form (particularly as it related to the nature of "experience"); and the various ways in which the writers used the pronoun "I" as subject and object of their works, as well as the problems of intention and point of view that this usage generated. Further, there will be some discussion concerning the nature of and reasons for the transitions from "pure" autobiography to the symbolic first-person narrative genres of the novel and romance that occur at the end of the eighteenth century. By exploring the limits of the autobiographical mode within the genre of the novel, I hope to derive conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the "I" as persona in fiction, compared to that in non-fictional autobiographies, and to define the connections between autobiography and the novel in terms of the emphasis each gives to the authenticity of the narrative voice. Finally, there will be reference to those historical themes and influences mentioned earlier, that played a significant role in the emergence of the autobiographical form; namely, the preoccupation with introspection and moral questions derived from Puritan and frontier themes, the emphasis on the supremacy of the individual over the collective experience that is inherent in democratic thinking, and the social realities of democratic humanism.

Despite the emphasis of the present analysis, however, it is not my contention that the autobiographical narrative is the only form viable in a truly American literature, but the following study proposes that it may very well be, for reasons briefly surveyed in this introduction, the principal form by

which the content of American literature comes into its own and perhaps the most successful expression of democratic themes.

Certainly English and Continental writers, beginning with Defoe[24] and Sterne and continuing into the nineteenth century, produced a significant number of autobiographical works, and the first true autobiographers were, after all, Cellini, Cardano, Edward Herbert-Lord Cherbury, Rousseau and Montaigne, for whom

> The universe is but a perennial see-saw. In it all things are ceaselessly rocking: the earth, the Caucasian peaks, the pyramids of Egypt--each with the general motion and its own. Fixity itself is nothing but a slower rocking. If my mind could find a foothold, I should no longer experiment. I would conclude. But it is bound to apprenticeship and forever stands on trial. . . . As for me, I study myself more than any other subject: it is my physics and metaphysics.[25]

But in no culture do we find the first-person used from the outset with such regularity as by the Americans. It implies a causal factor: the American aesthetic is shaped by an individual's consciousness, not standards of form; the subject matter is central.

Literature in a democracy is made notable as much by what it leaves out as by what it puts in. What appear as defects are not defects of the form, necessarily, but of the form as it was established when placed in a democratic environment. In this respect seeking the great American novel is a misnomer--the novel of a Dickens, a Tolstoy, Balzac or Zola, a Mann or Joyce cannot be the measure of what distinct American form is produced. Again, it is the subject matter--

generally, America, specifically, the individual quest for self-definition and transcendence--that is primary. This is not a matter for comparison, but rather one of understanding the complexity and sincerity genius shares, whatever private vision brings it to fruition. More than one of our writers demonstrates this, though one in particular still stands out:

> As we have seen, God came upon him in the whale, and swallowed him down to the living gulfs of doom. . . . and Jonah did the Almighty's bidding. And what was that, shipmates? To preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood! That was it.
>
> . . . Woe to him who seeks to please rather than to appal! Woe to him whose good name is more to him than goodness! Woe to him who, in this world, courts not dishonor! Woe to him who would not be true, even though to be false were salvation!
>
> . . . But oh! shipmates! on the starboard hand of every woe, there is a sure delight; and higher the top of that delight than the bottom of woe is deep. Is not the maintruck higher than the kelson is low? Delight is to him--a far, far upward, and inward delight--who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self.

The central focus upon subject matter over form is something we find apparent in other artistic areas. While this is not relevant to the present study, it is interesting to note correspondences that seem to emphasize the dominant themes of literary expression.

According to James Flexner in his study of colonial artists such as Copley, West, Peale and Robert Feke, "Indeed, the genius of social change, the angel of democracy, who scudded over the American fields whispered in the workman's [artisan's] ear that he, too, might set his feet on that

promised land."[26] There is the reiterated idea that inspiration came from "the very expansiveness of the North American continent--its limitless reaches, its wild storms, its endless opportunities . . ." In the Romantic period of American painting another historian describes the impulse of artists like Thomas Cole as

> a turning to nature inwardly, an exploration of the self, the feelings, the emotional and imaginative depths of the inner life to discover "the craft with which the world is made," in the words of Emerson, "the power which does not respect quantity, which makes the whole and particle its equal channel, delegates its smile to the morning, and distills its essence in every drop of rain." Thus the expression of Romanticism in the arts in America represented a reaffirmation of that individualism which had been forged by experience of the environment of the New World. . . . In painting, as in literature, the conscious emphasis was on the subject. . . .[27]

For many artists, it was the subject matter of America--ideal and individual--which determined the forms of expression, however crudely in the beginning, that were shaped.

We find similar interests in music as well, in the attachment of composers to hymnal motifs, local images, tone poems in the folk idiom, and the use of out-of-tune melodies from various regional areas, with an emphasis on the unique qualities of these elements. It was to capture the discordant cacaphony of New England church bells that the unknown Charles Ives utilized a twelve-tone scale before Schönberg and Stravinsky experimented with it. MacDowell, Douglas Moore, and later Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson, William Schumann, Elie Siegmeister and Roy Harris sought in the concepts of early America the inspiration for their music. In Copland's

music we find an expansion on individual expression:

> Our concern was not with the quotable hymn or spiritual; we wanted to write music that would speak of universal things in a vernacular of American speech rhythms. We wanted to write music on a level that left popular music far behind--music with a largeness of utterance wholly representative of the country that Whitman had envisaged. [28]

These composers chose deliberately to accept the chauvinism of creating something American, and at the same time to discover their own authentic voice, to respond to the need to seek form in the material given by the land and the people, in all its diversity . . . the blades of grass.

In its failures and successes, American literature, and its art, are manifestations of an intense individualism and idealism that has continued to hold us in its thrall, despite our critical cynicism, and as the autobiographical literature that dominated so much of our literary tradition shows, all of it in mystery, loneliness and expectation is an adventure not yet concluded. American writers sought answers in the individual imagination. They also realized that in some way they must bring what they learned to civilization, discover some means to integrate their vision with God, nature, society. For some writers such an integration became impossible, but the challenge of the attempt did not.

Without knowledge, without the fear that comes from learning, we are nothing. Recognition comes only through the perceived truth of the experience of the individual, and the affirmation of being that engenders.

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INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER I:

PERSONAL NARRATIVE AND

THE

PURITAN OUTLOOK

But I don't want comfort. I want God,
I want poetry, I want real danger,
I want freedom, I want goodness.
I want sin . . .
I claim them all.
--Brave New World

The puritans who first stepped on the New England shores were an extremely self-conscious community of pilgrims, perceiving themselves as prophetic agents fulfilling a divine covenant and embodying the true faith by which God's purpose could be revealed in the New World. The ostensible object of their extensive personal literature was to declare and describe the "Wonder-Working of Providence," and to make public for the benefit of all in those tiny communities and for posterity the nature and inspiration of a true servant of God. Their early literature maintained a tension and control thematically that was indicative of the sincerity and conviction with which they earnestly viewed their enterprise, the divine sanction of which they deemed as a surety of its success.

In every action and event the Puritans saw the manifestation of the Word, the Scriptura sacra which illuminated their understanding of the soul's journey upon earth. They considered the record of individual experience important primarily as a means of moral instruction and improvement, and, as in the case of conversion narratives, as a necessary testament of Election, but it also served as a literal transcription of the beauty of God and the mercy He showed to His chosen people. Narrative and diary both continually called upon the ancient exile of Moses and the Israelites into Egypt and made frequent references to the colony leaders as Old Testament prophets; these analogies were not used for comparison but for evidence that the final

destiny of mankind was incarnated in the yeomen and ministers of austere Boston and Plymouth.

In History of Plymouth Plantation William Bradford recites the preparations of the pilgrims in Holland wherein they saw themselves as David against the Philistines, according to a text in Samuel, and later he compares William Brewster to Daniel and to the life of Jacob, heroes who died in old age after a lifetime of devotion to the Lord. Upon the landing in Cape Cod he praises the Lord, for "Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, shew how he hath delivered them from the hand of the opressour. When they wandered in the deserte willdernes out of the way, and found no citie to dwell in, both hungrie, and thirstie, their sowle was overwhelmed in them."[1] In 1646, upon the ousting of the English bishops, Bradford declares

> Doe you not now see the fruits of your labours, O all ye servants of the Lord that have suffered for his truth, and have been faithfull witnesses of the same, and ye litle handfull amongst the rest, the least among the thousands of Israll?. . . . Are not those Jebusites overcome that have vexed the people of Israll so long, even holding Jerusalem till Davids days, and been as thorns in their sids, so many ages; . . . but those proud Anakimes are throwne downe, and their glory laid in the dust.[2]

Edward Johnson in a similar history describes the venture as one in which "I am now prest for the service of our Lord Christ, to re-build the most glorious Edifice of Mount Sion in a Wildernesse, and as John Baptist, I must cry prepare yee the way of the Lord . . . for behold hee

is comming againe," and Johnson continues that "for this their great enterprise counted as so many crackt-braines, but Christ will make all the earth know the wisdome he hath induced them with, shall over-top all the humane policy in the World. . . ."[3]

It was this absolutism of faith that in part influenced the Puritan emphasis on the personal record of experience and lent authority to the stricture against imaginative writing. Their inherent distrust of fiction that made itself evident in the selection of histories, journals and diaries that proliferated in the seventeenth century had its roots in centuries of theological debates in Europe over the excesses of interpreting biblical history; they did not avoid the use of symbol and type--indeed, their central affinity for correspondences is generally considered to have anticipated and influenced the symbolic character of the writings of Melville, Hawthorne, Poe and the Transcendentalists--but they asserted with Calvin that the users should "not rest their attention on the visible tabernacle, but with the understanding of faith should penetrate to heaven, and direct their minds to the spiritual pattern the shadows and types of which they behold."[4] The primary means of ascertaining the "spiritual pattern" rested with the individual, since one pilgrim's progress was but a natural statement of that which must be experienced by all the others, and the truest knowledge of God and heaven lay in a solitary meditation of His purpose for each soul.

Such considerations are apparent in the writings of conversion particularly. The Elect among them were generally considered to be known by both an appreciation of their own wretchedness and unworthiness, and by the regeneration they experienced upon a justified apprehension of conversion. For the Puritan, as with Luther and Calvin, "No Devil, no God." The retrospective narratives therefore devote a significant space to recording the individual's life of sin, waste and slothful behavior united with an absence of religious spirit, and upon entertaining the "sweet and holy light" of God, they describe for the remainder of the account how the new-found grace affected and directed their actions thenceforth. Thus, Thomas Shepard, minister at Cambridge on the Charles River, writes of his college days filled with drinking and recreations that brought him from his faith, while, he declares, "yet the Lord left me not" but entreated him to return to himself and his devotions until

> I dranke so much on day that I was dead drunke & that vpon a saturday night & so was carryed from the place I had drinke at & did feast at, vnto a Schollers chamber on Basset of Christs Colledge; & knew not where I was vntill I awakened late on that sabboth & sick with my beastly carriage; & when I awakened I went from him in shame and confusion, & went out into the feelds & there spent that sabboth lying hid in the corne feelds where the Lord who might justly haue cut me off in the mids of my sin; did meet me with much sadnes of hart & troubled my soule for this & other my sins which then I had cause & laysure to thinke of: & now when I was woorst he began to be best vnto me & made me resolue to set vpon a course of

> dayly meditation about the euill of sin & my own wayes. . . .[5]

This form of self-abnegation pervaded the literature; Anne Bradstreet in her short autobiography for her children and Cotton Mather in his diary offered testimony of their early estrangement from God, and the powerful force of regeneration. The language is that of the Psalms: "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me . . . Deliver me from my transgressions . . . O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more."[6] And also:

> I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
> He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.
> And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.[7]

A good deal of what interest and force linger in these Puritan statements often appears to come from their resemblance to the submissive and devout repetitions of the songs of David. In the Personal Narrative of the last true Calvinist, Jonathan Edwards, a more mystical tone filters the account, but his sense of fervent awakening carries the same biblical tenor:

> [God] brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell. And yet, it was not

> long after my recovery, before I fell again into my old ways of sin. But God would not suffer me to go on in my quietness; I had great and violent inward struggles, till, after many conflicts, with wicked inclinations, repeated resolutions, and bonds that I laid myself under by a kind of vows to God, I was brought wholly to break off all former wicked ways, and all ways of known outward sin; and to apply myself to seek salvation. . . . My concern now wrought more by inward struggles and conflicts, and self-reflections, I made seeking my salvation the main business of my life. . . . The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden kindle up, as it were, a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of soul, that I knew not how to express.[8]

These spiritual confessions were a requisite articulation of the divine favor bestowed upon the individual sinner, releasing them forever from the terrible doubt of election that Calvinism forced upon them, as well as from the eternal and certain damnation that awaited the unregenerate. At the same time, the contrast such accounts provided between an errant past and a present humility, thankfulness and surrender to holiness held more value precisely because it confirmed the commonality of original sin and thereby could serve rightly as a warning and an example of potential redemption to their children and fellow churchmen. Increase Mather exhorted the ungodly to righteous behavior on the premise that the record of good actions and thoughts may reveal the state of grace: "Once more, Serious thinking & Consideration on Spiritual and Eternal things is oftentimes blessed unto Conversion. This is what God has given men power to do, if they will use that power. They ought

seriously to think what they have done, and what they are, and what their end is like to be."[9]

It is a paradox, though a logically inevitable one, that in the course of reciting God's history, in which the individual was merely an agent of larger forces and perceptions, the Puritan writers found themselves continually discussing the difficulties of the personal process of attaining a state of holy compensation. The route towards the perfection of grace and the eschatalogical and typological justification for their self-imposed exile was often beset by doubts, questionings and bewilderment. "O sacred bond," writes Bradford much later, "whilst inviollably preserved! how sweete and precious were the fruits that flowed from the same, but when this fidelity decayed, then their ruine approached . . . that subtill serpente hath slylie wound in himselfe . . . to untwiste these sacred bonds and ties."[10] Usually the recourse of these early writers was to view the personal and communal failures of faith as evidence of their sinfulness in an innate and despicable tendency to direct attention away from the promise of spiritual fulfillment and to focus instead on the individual:

> Calvin sets out the Reformed position when he requires us to "rid ourselves of all selfe-trust," and his words resound throughout Puritan literature. "Not what the Selfe will, but what the Lord will," thundered Thomas Hooker. The self was "the great snare," "the false Christ," "a spider's webbe [spun] out of our bowels," the very "figure or type of Hell." To "lay down God-self," to root out "the Devils poison and venome or infectione

> of Self," was at once "to kill the old Adam" in us, to defeat the infernal "rebels against the commone good, [all of them] private respects of mens selves," and to strike a blow against [Shepard] "Antichrist, that is, the SELFE in all." "Lord," pleaded the German pietist Jacob Boehme, "cast me down I pray thee to the ground in my received self, (. . . . I that which is called I, or myself) and kill this self of mine through they death"; "do thou overcome in me self (. . . or I, or ihood, or iness, that which we mean when we say 'tis I) . . . cast my whole self down to the ground in thy death.[11]

"The very 'figure or type of Hell'"--such words are a long way from the self-reliance fundamental to Emerson, or even the Yankee tradition that would develop fifty years later. In effect, the Puritans equated the self, and self-contemplation, with evil and evil discovered. Their literature was cluttered with attempts to persuade themselves as much as anyone else that by learning through suffering, they would experience the desired state, that through the terror of self-knowledge they would thereby abandon the self and surrender to God alone. Again, paradoxically this could not be accomplished without considerable inner soul-searching, the effect of which was to perpetuate energy and attention upon themselves: ". . . in Puritan autobiography, attempted and realized arguments diverge so frequently for the evident reason that autobiographers were forced to seek answers to the questions of grace, not in the system [the orderly ways of God], but in the heart."[12]

These "sons and daughters of Abraham by faith," as John Robinson maintained them to be, could not wholly re-

linquish their subjectivism. The introspection endemic to the Calvinist would have to extend itself in varying degrees, although it is interesting that the most extreme orthodox forms appeared in Edwards and Mather, at a time when the premises of the theocratic state had begun to disintegrate. Certainly for the first two generations of colonists any self-scrutiny can not be viewed in retrospect as egocentric. But neither is it unrevealing. Their preoccupation with the self, despite a certain patterned religious response, entered every facet of their writing and laid the foundation for the literature that would follow.

The conversion narratives, the sermons, the microscopic detailing of spiritual progress, and the conception of New England as the New Jerusalem suggest, or may have been a part of, a reflection of, the emphasis on the theme of transformation that engaged much seventeenth-century writing in Britain. The single-minded religiosity of the Puritans appears as a variant of the more secular interests in personality and identity that began to occupy fellow English authors, themselves legatees of the societal and ideological changes wrought by the Reformation. The Puritans were cast upon a wilderness with the cold comfort of a faith Weber described as offering "an unprecedented inner loneliness,"[13] and which transformed the medieval unity and closed system of Dante into the reeling infinite abyss of Milton's Paradise Lost:

> In what was for the man of the age of the Reformation the most important thing in life, his eternal salvation, he was forced to follow his path alone to meet a destiny which had been decreed for him from eternity. No one could help him. No priest . . . No sacraments . . . No Church . . . Finally, even no God.[14]

> [He] was at bottom . . . the born Protestant: full of the true Protestant's passionate, relentless sense of personal responsibility. No, in the ultimate things there was, there could be, no help from outside, no mediation, no absolution, no soothing-syrup, no panacea. Each one of us, alone, unaided, of his own powers, must unravel the riddle before it was too late, must wring for himself a pious readiness before the hour of death, or else part in despair.[15]

The Puritans thus spent a great deal of time endeavoring to secure an elusive identity by eliminating it in a personal but theological metamorphosis. For the Puritan writers, the search for wholeness was through a capitulation to God that erased private motive and effort while, as Kenneth Murdock explains, "each man's terrifying closeness to God, with no ecclesiastical or priestly intermediary to hide behind, made 'personal literature' precious to them."[16] But more often they discovered that the benefit of grace did not end the battle of their soul against their predilection to sinfulness and the ambiguities of human emotions.

It is partly the antagonistic forces of isolation (both literal and spiritual) and religious commitment that impelled them, along with considerations previously mentioned, to abstain from and condemn fiction or writing that hinted of expressing emotion for its own sake. They concurred with

Sir Thomas Browne in his Christian Morals to "fly not upon the wings of Imagination," lest speculation and fantasy should bring them too near a preferment of themselves. Their arguments favoring a "new true stile" were interested endeavors to solicit a literature that would be accessible as an instrument of instruction to everyone, and that would avoid unnecessary vanity or indulgence in material that could be of no use to a developing frontier community of God (as well as avoiding the scorned imitation of aristocratic belletrists). But the plain style also was a major means by which the individual could trust his perceptions of events that otherwise might extend and obscure the boundaries of Truth. The crises engendered by both Antinomian and Arminian ideas made them all too conscious of the ease with which extension of their narrow literalness could corrupt the authoritarian administration of a theocracy. The result could only prefigure the dissolution of New Zion, and thence, the psychological safety that rested in public surrender to the holy ideal. Howevermuch personalism invaded their writing, it was intended to be protected by its formal purpose.

Every attempt, however, to explain life in religious terms is an effort to discover the inner self that lies beyond the weaknesses of human existence. In one of the infrequent productive insights in his study-satire of American literature, D. H. Lawrence observes that the "Pilgrim Fathers"

> came largely to get away--that most simple of motives. To get away. Away from what? In the long run, away from themselves . . . That's why most people have come to America, and still do come. To get away from everything they are and have been. . . . [beginning with] a minority of earnest, self-tortured people.[17]

For Lawrence the effect was a half individual, an idealist unlikely to become significant until some "whole self" should be discovered. His favored conception of a primitive deep self was the antithesis of the Puritan ambition, but in many ways, this search for the whole self, for a definition of the self--a theme that has occupied a great deal of American writing--belonged to the formative literature of the New England colonists. It was to ward off the human and permanent quality of weakness that the Puritans had recourse to the concept of perfecting a godly state of mind and heart which was their only means of surviving their faith and the wilderness. Yet, their fascination with the act of writing about themselves, in the end, contradicted and eroded the formal impulse.

"My pilgrim's book . . . 'Tis in New England," wrote John Bunyan in the Second Part of Pilgrim's Progress,

> under such advance,
> Receives there so much loving countenance,
> As to be trimmed, new clothed and decked
> with gems,
> That it might show its features and its limbs
> Yet more. So comely doth my pilgrim walk
> That of him thousands daily sing and talk.[18]

None of the works written in the Puritan period in America compare in immediacy of narrative and dramatic power with Bunyan's allegory, despite its contemporary popularity. Few writings possess the homely warmth and essential purity of tone which invest his book, or deliberately attempt to create, except in treatises, the "types, shadows and metaphors" by which Bunyan projects his characterizations. The "dark figures, allegories" were to remain latent until the early nineteenth century, while the colonial mind chose rather to keep such configurations within the bounds of limited actual experience. There was virtually no use of dialogue in their literature, and the principal poetic achievement belonged only to the metaphysical poetry of Edward Taylor. The exigencies of religious intoleration prevented any flexibility, and no one seriously attempted to construct anything resembling a didactic tale on the level of the English classic. It would seem the cislantic transfer of Calvinist thought had forcibly placed the creative impulse in stasis.

One causal factor certainly lay in that propensity of the colonists to insist upon their visionary engagement in the business of securing America for the millenia, and their interest in deflecting any activity that contributed to retarding that process. Personal narratives that restricted attention to internalized conflict and quickly verified the legitimacy of spiritual order would be of greater utility in bringing the flock to a rapid preparedness for their

mission. In like manner, the sermons and diaries, as well as being substantive records of providential operation, could serve in unornamented fashion to proscribe behavior that interfered, not with man's journey to heaven as in Bunyan, but with the practical necessity involved in the spiritual and physical progress of New England.

Yet, the literature of early New England is compelling. Despite satiric pieces like Morton's New English Canaan, Ward's The Simple Cobbler of Aggawam, or Cook's The Sot-Weed Factor, until Cotton Mather the writing contains a deep honesty and sincerity that carries its own force of inspiration. While they wished to create a better world for themselves and not for everyone, and while democratic themes are solidly absent from all but the works of Roger Williams, their wish to turn personal experience into the fulfillment of a biblical mandate provided an idealism that cannot be underestimated. That they chose predominantly to explain and express their thoughts in the first person is an indication of the intensity with which they lived their lives against the obstacles that faced them on every hand. The significance of their personal literature, however, can best be discerned in the transformations that occurred in their use of the pronoun "I" as the century progressed. For it is the role of the self, and their perception of that role, finally, that supplies the indices of how a Calvinist state could have developed into Yankee capitalism and into a moral and aesthetic consciousness centered on the individual alone.

In this respect, we are viewing the "I" in the dynamic of experience relived, and we find that the recollection of early events gradually led the writers to an increasing emphasis on their reactions to experience. There develops a greater concern for resolution, and a concomitant realization that it does not lie in the ambiguities of Election. The use of the first person in Puritan literature reveals the curious, entirely fascinating ambivalence in American thought between democratic humanism and the pull of individual psychic necessity, an abstract form of the battle of reformist ideology and pragmatic interests which developed in the eighteenth century.

The first major work of the colonial period, Bradford's History, is a first-person narration which is the single text to offer some slight similitude to Bunyan. The resemblance rests upon the partially involuntary mythic format that Bradford's story sustains in the first two chapters, up to the landing at Plymouth. The journeymen of the Mayflower had by the end of the second chapter already confronted calumny, ridicule and harassment, at times the forced abandonment of wives and children on English shores and violent North Sea storms during the exile to Holland, and above all they had arrived with little but the clothes they wore to a barren rock-lined coast in the middle of winter. The account continues with the pilgrims seen as continually shouldering incredible burdens of betrayals, losses, dealings with the Dutch, business corruption by adventurers or

emissaries--Weston, Morton, John Allerton--but at few points during the proper history are their prayers to God diminished, nor does Bradford describe until his notes of 1650 any disillusionment with the sense of mission that informed their voyage.

The effect is to give one the sensation of witnessing the enactment of profound events, which in microcosm are intended to suggest the empire expansion that actually occurred. Bradford adds one obstruction after another presented to the pilgrims, until the collective impression becomes one in which the elements of chance that repeatedly protect the venture take on the aspect of an agency above the human which is manipulating the whole.

This effect is increased by the narrative technique. He brings the past vividly into the present, his authority to do so clearly encompassed in his role as a first arrival and the first governor, and he writes with an understatement that nevertheless vibrates with the serious drama of what is being accomplished. There is an interplay between his "I" and the "they" which refers to his fellow colonists. He views himself merely as a chronicler of the final route towards the perfection of man's state on earth, one who wants "to manefest in a plaine stile, with singular regard unto the simple trueth in all things, at least as near as my slender judgmente can attaine the same."[19] The "they" are a collective figure of righteousness whose patience, forbearance and courage incline to the temper of steel.

The first person provides a degree of immediacy and power to the narrative that holds considerable contrast in its effect with the more prosaic and distanced third-person history-journal of John Winthrop in the Bay Colony.

At the same time, the History is weighted by its letters of commerce and transactions--a catalogue of business enterprise and, from the very first months, Indian slave trading--the compilation of which contributes both the effect of practical interference and an undevout individual opportunism. Such material is allied, of course, with the familiar idea that profitable undertakings were but a just extension of religious commitment to do well, and also allied with the conviction that whatever hindered their progress could be seen only as a scourge against the divine mandate. Thus, even Bradford, whose humility and dignity make his brief History one of the more moving documents left to us from the period, views the brutal extinction of the Pequot tribe by the new English as merciful, and approves the slave trade.

The History, however, was meant as an example of and praise for those with whom it was concerned. In his "trueth" Bradford does not hesitate to recount dissension and corruption on the part of the settlers, but they take on the aegis of demonstrations of God's testing and strengthening the will of His people. When he tells how profitable and beneficial it became to allow private ownership of land, he only hints that this departure from

communal welfare and cooperation was an unfortunate necessity. In the same way, the estrangements and disagreements constantly introduced by the steady influx of newcomers only provided that much greater means of organizing and attaining the original destiny.

Some of the vatic authority of Bradford asserted itself in another form of first-person account, the famous captivity narratives of Mary Rowlandson and John Williams, among others. Their records of hardship, starvation, of witnessing the murder of their children and the loss of all their possessions and livelihood are written with a moving humility and devotion for the direct purpose of informing their audience that what they suffered was only evidence of God's merciful justice and a testing of their faith. John Williams wrote in the opening to The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion:

> The history I am going to write, proves, that days of fasting and prayer, without reformation, will not avail to turn away the anger of God from a professing people; and yet witnesseth, how very advantageous, gracious supplications are, to prepare particular Christians, patiently to suffer the will of God, in very trying publick calamities. . . .
>
> Not long after, the holy and righteous God brought us under great trials, which put us under a necessity of spreading before him, in a wilderness, the distressing dangers and calamities of our relations; . . . Jacob, in wrestling, has the hollow of his thigh put out of joint; and it is said to him, Let me go; yet he is rather animated to an heroical, Christian resolution to continue earnest for the blessing, than discouraged from asking.[20]

Rowlandson's "Captured by Indians" is a particularly dramatic statement, reminiscent in its apostolic tone of the first two chapters of Bradford's History. The succession of "removes" which tabulate the retreat of the Indians into the wilderness are parallel with the author's spiritual development. For Mrs. Rowlandson, the "I" is always an obstacle; in the Bible she has managed to obtain she finds the answers to her grief and disillusion, and observes that with each gift of divine response she has been acquainted anew with the knowledge that her troubles increased because she had placed herself and her own misery above the service of her heart to God.

Among Indian tribesmen, "musing on things past, I should suddenly leap up and run out as if I had been at home, forgetting where I was, and what my condition was; but when I was without, and saw nothing but wilderness and woods, and a company of barbarous heathen, my mind quickly returned to me, which made me think of that spoken concerning Samson, who said, 'I will go out and shake myself as at other times, but he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.'"[21] But with all hope of being redeemed to the English gone, her faith faltered in her trials, until she began to "examine all my ways . . . I saw how in my walk with God I had been a careless sinner."[21] In her earlier recollections she saw "how many Sabbaths I had lost and misspent, and how evilly I had walked in God's sight; which lay so close unto my spirit, that it was easy for me to see

how righteous it was with God to cut off the thread of my life and cast me out of his presence for ever."[22] In the eighth remove, having left her six-year old daughter, who had died in her arms, in a shallow grave on an unknown hillside, her other two children sold to other tribes, sure of her own imminent death, she "fell a-weeping" for the first time: ". . . now may I say: . . . By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion."[23] After this she scorns pipe-smoking, a "bewitching" habit, for it could only be "a bait the Devil lays to make men lose their precious time,"[24] and was another evidence of her departure from devotion.

The journey of Mrs. Rowlandson becomes an exemplum of strength and of supplication to God's merciful power. While others are mutilated and tortured around her, yet her faith was a buoy sustaining her by a total submission to the grace of God. The "I" in the narrative is not the author alone, but a typification of the regenerate soul. Like the spiritual pilgrimage of the conversion narratives, "Captured by Indians" uses autobiography as a means of bringing the errant past into present focus to demonstrate what others must expect if they desire full communion with God. The biblical quotations act as a form of punctuation denoting the stages of recovery from self-knowledge. An intrinsic part of the narrative, however, is its record of trials accorded to one already converted. It reflects the conflict that engaged spiritual autobiographies like that

of Jonathan Edwards many years later, when he experiences conversion only to find his sense of sinfulness does not decrease, but multiplies.

But the narrative makes it clear to the reader that without that faith her experiences would have been unbearable to her:

> Now have I seen that Scripture also fulfilled, Deuteronomy 30: 4,7: If any of thine be driven out to the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will be the Lord thy God gather them . . . And the Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.
>
> Thus hath the Lord brought me and mine out of that horrible pit, and hath set us in the midst of tenderhearted and compassionate Christians. It is the desire of my soul that we may walk worthy of the mercies received, and which we are receiving.[25]

The constant references to the Old Testament that infuse this narrative and all others brings to mind an aspect of Puritan writing that distinguishes it from so much else produced in the period in Europe, where even for the Anglican the New Testament had more impact. It is an aspect related of course to the Puritan's concept of him or herself as a chosen vessel, but it also relates to the literal phrasing of the Old Testament that is largely couched in the first person, whether it be God, the prophets or the Preacher who speaks. As Erich Auerbach writes in his splendid provocative essay "Odysseus' Scar," on the silence and fragmentary nature of biblical narrative,

> . . . they [Old Testament characters] are not so entirely immersed in the present that they do not remain continually conscious of what has happened to them earlier and elsewhere; their thoughts and feelings have more layers, are more entangled. Abraham's actions are not explained only by what is happening to him at the moment, nor yet only by his character . . . but by his previous history; he remembers, he is constantly conscious of, what God has promised him . . . his soul is torn between desperate rebellion and hopeful expectation; his silent obedience is multilayered, has background. . . .
> The reader clearly feels how the extent of the pendulum's swing is connected with the intensity of the personal history--precisely the most extreme circumstances, in which we are immeasurably forsaken and in despair, or immeasurably joyous and exalted, give us, if we survive them, a personal stamp which is recognized as the product of a rich existence, a rich development.[26]

The Puritan reliance on the Old Testament, with its elements of universal history and prophecy, may have received increased value because the essential isolation of the Jewish heroes, together with their absolute faith, was so closely aligned with the problematic uncertainty attached to Calvinism. Their penchant for the first person may not be simply a salving of conscience or a demand for the best means of recording literal truth. It may also derive from a sympathetic statement for the psychological complexity that Auerbach points up in his essay. This,too, may account for the greater informality, in part, of their writing. Its spontaneity, and more colloquial tone, would then contain the same artistic indifference that is manifest in the ancient records.

That the Puritan narratives do not sustain the immensity

and power of the biblical legends is obvious, although we see much later in Melville an Old Testament depth that implies dimensions as infinite as the prophets, wherein as much is conveyed by what is not said as by the action that occurs. The Puritans did not manage the complexity inherent in the form they adopted, but they left it as a legacy.

If the Puritans denied, however, the dynamic consequences and artistic potential of introspection, nevertheless there was visible in what they wrote down--and this appears in Bradford and Rowlandson as well--the idea that the revelation presented in the world of experience was a form of discovering an inward truth, and that this truth rested on the soul's innate a priori knowledge of its eternal essence. Such a concept was not only derived from the typology mentioned earlier that filters their writing, but from the logic of Petrus Ramus, a logic that allowed the Puritans to accept a rational order of conclusions centered on intuition. According to Perry Miller, the Platonic implications of Ramean philosophy provided a dichotomy of items (night/day; things/ideas, etc.) that would supply a method of reasoning without precluding the religious authority of God. Since the knowledge gained was that of received truth only, the individual remained an instrument of God, merely discerning the inherent patterns of a divine blueprint. Thus, reason was "natural."[27] It was a method of thinking that permitted the self-assertive and self-reflective act of using one's own experience in

literary measure, while yet allowing the "self" to be viewed as an enemy of the very truth they explored.

Their fierce rejection of Anne Hutchinson, a rejection of what became the Kantian intuitions of imagination that shaped the creative impulse two centuries later, was born not out of their unfamiliarity with intuitive thought, but from Hutchinson's support of an infused personal revelation. Their objections to Antinomian ideas held within them the seeds of religious reform that began to tell on the established dogma. By the end of the seventeenth century, the definition of limitation in this respect had undergone considerable transformation. The early Puritans would hardly have approved the self-love apparent in the writings of that tynastic Puritan, Cotton Mather, nor would they have well understood the "submissions" to God that went on in his Study:

> I found a strange Impression on my mind, intimating to me, that Heaven was willing to converse with mee, after a very familiar Manner, if I would now look and wait in a suitable Posture for it. It was q. said unto me, Go into your great Chamber and I will speak with you.[28]

The paroxysm that follows this diary extract results in the assurance that his wife will recover from her illness. Later assurances appear to the effect that his wicked brothers-in-law will be punished. In an even less orthodox revelation:

> On this Lord's-day at Noon, in my Study, I was in the spirit. I cast myself prostrate in the Dust, on my Study-floor, to lift up a Cry from thence, for Zion in the Dust. The Spirit of the Lord came near unto mee; doubtless, the Angel of the Lord made mee sensible of his Approaches. I was wondrously irradiated. My Lord Jesus Christ, shall yett bee more known, in the vast Regions of America; and by the means of poor, vile, sinful mee, Hee shall bee so. Great Britain shall undergo a strange Revolution and Reformation; and sinful I shall bee concerned in it. . . . Nor was this all, that was then told mee from Heaven: but I forbear the rest.[29]

Mather's spiritual testaments to the grace of God serve as a reminder that as early as 1621, there must have been intimations of a preoccupation such as his with the self, in Robert Cushman's sermon at Plymouth, "Wherein is Shewed the danger of self love, and the sweetnesse of true friendship." There, Cushman called his audience "'belly gods' who sought riches, ease, 'new doctrines and devices,' outward honor, and their own wills."[30]

The early Puritans were ready and willing to listen to such exhortations. But Mather's writings--prolific, ornate, illogical and spurious as they were--propounded a moral position that was a distinct departure from the early concept concerning the essential passivity of the individual of his or her own affairs. While his Biblia Americana, Bonifacius and Magnalia were huge efforts to rebuild and confirm Calvinist supremacy, his Diary projects a self-containment that is absent from the humility and devotion of previous records.

The Diary of Cotton Mather, however, is in considerable contrast with the Personal Narrative of his somewhat contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, who also desired the re-establishment of the old faith. There are similarities: both intended their material for publication, thereby utilizing a selectivity and self-consciousness that infuse the works; both represent, in different ways, the final decline of spiritual emphasis in their predilection to mysticism, excessive emotion and experiential perception; for both, self-abnegation becomes more strained and less comprehensible; and both rely heavily on dogmatic assertion and typological revelation. But, with Edwards, the sense of the old Puritanism is more prevalent and sincere, while the writing, in narrative form, develops an analytic tone that no longer wholly diminishes the role and responsibility of the author in the telling of events.

Edwards found that writing his narrative in the first person was more valuable, as it thereby carried greater certainty and honesty (truthfulness); the "impercipient" narrator, claimed Edwards, could not adduce what passed in the individual's "own heart."[31] Written in 1743, it concerns Edwards' conversion in two stages: in one he describes his delight as a boy in nature and his feelings of joy in his religious devotions; in the other he maintains that his childish visions were preliminaries to and a deception of the true conversion he experienced as an adult. According to Daniel Shea in his study of early autobiography, although

Edwards used his diary to embellish the narrative, he edited out any reference specifically tending to the moods of melancholy in the conversion experience, merely indicating that difficult times existed.[32] This clearly represented the Calvinist's fear that edification might, by the transcription of doubt and self-involvement, lead intended listeners to paths of error.

While Mather's unstable prostrations and prideful exhortations in his Diary carry a pathetic and obsessive note, there is an agreeable restraint along with a coincident passion in Edwards, an effect which is shaped by the selective narrative form. At the same time, one does observe in the account a contrast between Edwards' impersonal reminiscence, and the deep sensitivity and painful emotion of his reactions, even as he objectively records them. The work displays a sense of curiosity about the inner process, producing a dynamic in which the recorder and the self recorded intertwine. While he is in the midst of reciting the glorification of God, he regrets that "the inward ardor of my soul seemed to be hindered and pent up." The child in him becomes a self-righteous evocation of delusion; it is the adult who perceives the true divine sweetness and "the excellent fulness of Christ," in which "the appearance of everything was altered."[33] Then God's "righteousness sweet . . . was always accompanied with ardency of spirit; and inward strugglings and groanings that cannot be uttered, to be emptied of myself, and swallowed up in Christ." And

"it seems at such times a loss I cannot bear, to take off my eye from the glorious pleasant object I behold without me, to turn my eye in upon myself, and my own good estate."[34]

Yet, contrasted with every statement of intuition of God's soverignty and the divine justice and beauty of his World, Edwards remonstrates against the weakness that prevents him from holding the holy state before him, at times supplying an expression of grief at his wickedness with a passionate humility and ardency approaching fanaticism which bely the rational tone with which the tells of it. In a diary excerpt of 1723, he desires to "act as one who had no right to himself, in any respect."[35] He wanted to be "emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust. . . ."[36] The potential and endless extensions of the mind were not cause for celebration of conscious self, but rather an indication of the limitless capacity of man, of him himself, for evil:

> My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and swallowing all thought and imagination; like an infinite deluge, or mountains over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite. . . . When I look into my heart, and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell.[37]

At one point, he shuts himself up in his study, consumed by loud weeping at his wickedness. Yet the next page concludes in the same study with a similar outpouring of tears because he apprehends the sweetness and holiness he has

obtained by walking in the way of duty and acting agreeably to the "holy mind of God."

The opposition of submission and exultation that is interwoven in the recollections and contemplations appears in the narrative to such a degree that while his faith cannot be questioned, yet the sense is given of a systematic undermining of its absolute value. It is the record of a brilliant mind engaged upon personal analysis that can finally achieve no consistent resolution, because the formal premises of the analysis do not support the actuality of its revelation about the man himself. There is, too, a peculiar contradiction inherent in his attempts to convey utter dissolution into the rule of God. Frequently, in the very act of denying the self, a sentence appears that asserts it all the more with an unconscious pride: "It seems to me, that though their degrees of humility may be suitable for them [other Christians], yet it would be a vile self-exaltation to me, not to be in the lowest humility of all mankind."[38]

The narrative holds a careful exclusion of specific detail, relying mainly on bastract reflections of his approach to godliness, his worship of a heavenly vision (Vernon Parrington called him "The Puritan Mystic"), and the mire and defilement that exists by comparison on earth. To withdraw from the distressing engagement with the fellow mortals around him was an unfulfilled dream. Unlike even the first Puritans, who were late Renaissance men and women, Edwards was not part of the humanist tradition.

As he intended, the narrative must be seen in the context of the typical conversion, but its central focus provides a shift from the preoccupations of such narratives in the colonial period. For Edwards, inclined to the sensationalism of Locke and premising his narrative on a theological construct that the visible world--his audience--was less willing to sustain, had recourse to an effect of disordered perceptions that anticipate the revivalist tradition he awakened in the 1730's. God may not tell him to go to his "Chamber," as He did Cotton Mather, but neither does faith provide peace of mind once the desired state of grace has been obtained. Unlike the earlier narratives, which also describe the difficult process of living well in God, Edwards' narrative enlists the first person as a device which ultimately gives the effect of psychological conflict, not religious. The adult "I" is separate from the unregenerate "I" of his boyhood, but it is also divided itself into two kinds of points of view that carry equal weight. And thought the "I" of the author, which appears most clearly towards the end, ends on a note of joy, it leaves open the likelihood of further unrest. The alternate "I" of the converted Edwards, who undergoes the experiences and alternations of conflict, operates as a touchstone for the serious questioning and doubt that persist.

Edwards' Personal Narrative is not a great piece of literature--his theological works express better his brilliant mind--but it is a work indicative of a new

consciousness in spite of his ostensible project of edification and example. Its restraint is imposed precariously, and the understatement attending his testaments of submission is contradicted by the obsessive quality of his desire to prove he is "annihilated." By the end of the document, it is evident, rather, that he is a complex and rational man who cannot deny the assertion of his identity or inward power, cannot make a final judgment of it. In many ways, it is the characteristics of earlier conversion statements that, present as they are in Edwards, point up more directly his deviance from those statements, and lend through his mysticism, confusion and terrible honesty an insight into why his self-tortured statement is the single conversion narrative to still sustain an interest for the modern viewpoint.

The route from Plymouth Plantation to the spiritual autobiography of Jonathan Edwards reveals the steady increase of a conceptual point of view of the self more allied with the secular vision of America as a redeemer nation, with a correspondent decrease in the power of Calvinism to declare that redemption as the province of God alone. It is not God that is the subject of Edwards' work, but the man himself. He is, to a degree, an eighteenth-century individual. These works show in part the passage from an idea of passive reception to that of active perception that would shortly hold a positive note in the quest for the self that occupied, thereby, the quest for America.

Edwards' single-handed attempt to rebuild the kingdom of an angry Jehovah owed its failure to the early inroads made upon his Puritan forbears by the necessities of economic development. By 1692 the English charter granting suffrage to the colonists did so in terms of private property, not, as had been the case of the previous one, church membership. As the wealth of the people and land resources turned into profit for New England, the character of the people became more closely aligned with the Yankee business ethic manifest in works like the Diary of Samuel Sewall, from 1673-1729.

In describing the diarist Samuel Sewall, Parrington writes that he was "the embodiment of Defoe's merchant ideal; an example of the man who rises to civic honors by simple business virtues."[39] Parrington observes at some length that Sewall was of average intelligence and unimaginative powers, thereby differing from his later renowned counterpart, Benjamin Franklin. Increase Mather stated that "If I am a servant of Jesus Christ, some great judgment will fall on Captain Sewall or his family."[40]

Sewall can be seen clearly as a transitional figure, even though he pre-dates Edwards. He was one of the emerging Yankee ethic who retained a dogmatic Calvinism, but was capable of placing devotion apart from the exigencies of daily living. He wrote his famous diary as a good Puritan interested in reforming himself and placating his conscience. In his role as a judge, in his business practicality and active morality--apparent in his support of merchant interests

(he was the first colonial publisher of Bunyan, in 1681) and his opposition to slavery in The Selling of Joseph--he is reminiscent of a liberalism that was to be the forerunner of democratic ideas. The puritan idea that it was each man's responsibility to improve himself (an aspect Weber discusses as one reason for their Christianization of every facet of life) was the impetus for the listing of good deeds and for his formal retraction and apology for his role in the Salem witchcraft trials.

Unlike Cotton Mather, or Benjamin Franklin for that matter, he sets up no moral program for self-examination, but his diary, intended for his eyes alone, is an example of the moral Puritan who has accepted a secularized version of ultimate human purpose. Conversion, the state of grace, and spiritual progress are no longer omnipresent themes. There is a world of difference between Sewall's observations in a typical entry:

> Apr. 20th 1691. Being pressed with the sense of my doing much harm and little good, and breach of Vows at my return from New York this time twelvemonth, that is, not heedfully regarding to go at God's Call, I kept a Fast to pray that God would not take away but uphold me by his free Spirit.
>
> Feb. 22. 1695/6. Betty comes into me almost as soon as I was up and tells me the disquiet she had when waked; told me was afraid should go to Hell, was like Spira, not Elected. Ask'd her what I should pray for, she said, that God should pardon her Sin and give her a new heart. I answer'd her Fears as well as I could, and pray'd with many Tears on either part; hope God heard us. I gave her solemnly to God.[41]

and the observations of Michael Wigglesworth mid-century in his Diary:

> Munday at night being the preparation to the fast I set myself to pray, but for confusion and distraction of spirit could make nothing of it. Finding my stomack very weak and my body was faint I was bold to eat a hearty supper; afterward the Lord shewed me I had done evil . . . and that I had been too much tainted with that too much indulgency to my appetite . . .
>
> My soul groans my body faints o Lord whilest I pray and cry to the for pardon and redemption. Is there no baulm in Gilead? . . . Behold I am vile, when thou showest me my face I abhor myself. who can bring a clean thing out of filthiness. . . . O redeem from these devouring Lyons the hopeless shiftless soul that thou hast purchased! . . . O lift up the light of thy countenance upon me and hear my prayer; shut it not out for ever.[42]

Ultimately, with writings like Sewall's, there came a shift in emphasis from Richard Baxter's opprobrium that "the very names of Self and Own, should sound in the watchful Christian's ears as very terrible, wakening words, that are next to the names of sin and satan" to a more rational philosophy in which self-analysis was given a more adaptive, positive, and less lugubrious, stance. The import of the New England destiny began to lie in what individuals did to bring about fulfillment. As the eighteenth century approached, prophecy became a metaphor for self-reliance.

But a comment must be made on the effect of Puritan thought as it was concentrated on the personal record. In his essay on "Sweetness and Light" Matthew Arnold states

that culture--his humanist's ideal of culture--must be free from fanaticism. Thence he condemns the narrow and inadequate language of the Puritans (with whom Shakespeare and Vergil would find poor company, had they been on the Mayflower), as the parallel to their narrow vision of perfection --right language requires right ideas. Arnold's point of view, out of a humanism some of us still hold dear, is similar to a large share of the critical attitude toward colonial writing: either it is too prosaic for grand statement, or it is tempered overmuch by theological constraints. The severity of its ideology becomes the index of the insufficiency of its literary genius.

Yet, this Puritan sensibility is no small item. "Original Sin" as a thematic prescription gave the legacy of ambiguity and struggle for growth--demonstrated in its first-person literature--"from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. For, in certain moods, no man can weigh this world without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance."[43] In the works of Edwards and the earlier Puritans, the sense of contrast, the visible apprehended sense of evil as self or as humanity, anticipates Melville's grand voyage as much as it does the careful art of Hawthorne. And it brings with its restrictions a release, a freedom of inner questioning that lends at times a brilliance to their prosaic literalness. For them, to live easily was to live by halves--the gift of life and the

peace it brings must always come as a reward for the individual's travail, not instead of it.

Within such a religious tenet, when it is subverted by a more secular ideology, lies the idealism that has never quite left, and which holds at its center the concept of the self striving toward a perfection which finds its analogy in the equally dominating idea of America as a utopia in potential. Whatever has occurred to erode the basic atmosphere of such thinking, and whatever complex political and economic structures have controlled or eliminated its force, the strains of that idealism and its concomitant developing individualism remain in evidence in the literature of the centuries that follow.

* * *

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CHAPTER I

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[6]Psalm 39, i, viii, xiii.

[7]Psalm 40, i-iii.

[8]Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," American Literature for Colleges, ed. Kingsbury Badger (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Stackpole Company, 1952), I, pp. 249, 251.

[9]Increase Mather, "Predestination and Human Exertions," The Puritans, ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), I, p. 339.

[10]Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation, p. 55.

[11]Sacvan Bercovitch, The Puritan Origins of the American Self (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 18-19.

[12]Daniel B. Shea, Jr., Spiritual Autobiography in Early America (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 241.

[13]Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1958), p. 104.

[14]The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, p. 104.

[15]Thomas Mann, Buddenbrooks, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 509.

[16]Kenneth B. Murdock, Literature and Theology in Colonial New England (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 134.

[17]D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), pp. 3, 5.

[18]John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 155.

[19]Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation, p. 23.

[20]John Williams, The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion (1908; rpt. from 6th ed. New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), pp. 7, 9.

[21]Mary Rowlandson, "Captured by Indians," (also called The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson), The Colonial Image: Origins of American Culture, selected and ed. with introd. John C. Miller (New York: George Braziller, 1962), pp. 273, 274.

[22]"Captured by Indians," pp. 261-62.

[23]Ibid., p. 269. The quotation is taken from Psalm 137, i. The lines are taken from the sixth-century lament. It is a prayer for vengeance. In the Rowlandson narration, she cites it on the occasion of her captors forcing her into their festivities. Verse iii from the Psalm reads: "For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they wasted us, required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion." But as the Israelites refused to sing their sacred songs on foreign soil, so Mrs. Rowlandson refuses, and for the first time since the captivity, breaks into weeping at her estrangement from her own familiar land.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., p. 289.

[26]Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 12, 18.

[27]Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., in the Introd. to The Puritans (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), I, pp. 28-41, passim.

[28]Cotton Mather, The Diary of Cotton Mather (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1911), I, pp. 437-38.

[29]Mather, Diary, I, p. 234.

[30]Jesper Rosenmeier, "'With My Owne Eyes': William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation," Typology and Early American Literature, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), pp. 18-19.

[31]Daniel B. Shea, Jr., "The Art and Instruction of Jonathan Edwards' Personal Narrative," American Literature, XXXVII (1965), 19.

[32]Ibid., p. 21.

[33]Jonathan Edwards, Personal Narrative, p. 251.

[34]Personal Narrative, p. 257.

[35]Ibid., p. 254.

[36]Ibid., p. 258.

[37]Ibid., pp. 258-59.

[38]Ibid., p. 259.

[39]Vernon Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), I, 91.

[40]Quoted by Sewall in The Diary of Samuel Sewall, ed. and abridged with introd. by Harvey Wish (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), p. 97.

[41]Sewall, Diary, pp. 71, 78.

[42]Michael Wigglesworth, The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth, 1653-1657: The Conscience of a Puritan, ed. Edmund S. Morgan (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), pp. 57-8, 53.

[43]Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," The Shock of Recognition, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1955), p. 192.

CHAPTER II:

SELF AND SOCIETY:

PERSPECTIVES ON

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

And so the Princes fade from earth,
scarce seen by souls of men,
But tho' obscur'd, this is the form
of the Angelic land.
--William Blake,
[Fragment] for America

Two works appeared in eighteenth-century England that were a fundamental contribution to the development of the novel: Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Lawrence Sterne's Tristam Shandy. In the same period in France appeared a work that was to become one of the models for the romanticism of the early nineteenth century and which held as its central theme the desire "to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself. I alone. I know my heart, and I know men." Thus opens the Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Each of these writings was finally and thoroughly concerned with the experience and perceptions of the individual (in documentary detail) and was written in the first person. Their origins are evident as part of the enlightened vision that in large controlled the point of view of that century in Europe. It was an age of revolution based on rational principles that above all declared, in theory at least, the legitimacy of the self as a measure of moral, political and social behavior and progress. Truth became a matter of self-interest, or more exactly, of one's commitment to the actualization of a potential that everyone was believed to possess. It was a position that would grow to its extreme in the period of romanticism that ensued. For the eighteenth-century individual, this apprehension was a representation and evidence of the general

equality and freedom to be allotted humanity. Philosophically, its essence was utopian.

Robinson Crusoe was not necessarily an exploration of a libertarian credo, but it was a unique description of an individual who could survive on his own resources without the superego of a social and economic hierarchy limiting his activities and ambitions. Tristam Shandy upset the linear unity of typical narrative and provided a multiplicity of perspective that attempted to discover the inner complexities and motivations of the past as an inward journey, albeit comic, toward the articulation of the self, and by implication, of one's interrelation with the external world. Finally, Rousseau's Confessions evoked a depth and complexity of psychic revelation that undermined the rigid formulas of previous conceptions of the individual, the fatalism of place, and existing repressive political and religious bonds. In each of these early works, autobiography, interestingly, became the most accessible demonstration of the content. Together, these works (and we can include as well Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther) figured prominently in the expanding self-consciousness of the century, a process which transformed the private and public man.

As a genre, the development of autobiography coincided with a period of flux which fostered an individualism previously unacknowledged. Georges Gusdorf has provided some of the clearest insights we have on the "necessity" of the autobiographical method of narrative:

> L'apparition de l'autobiographie suppose une nouvelle révolution spirituelle: l'artiste et le modèle coïncident, l'historien se prend lui-même comme objet. . . .
>
> L'autobiographie ne devient possible que sous la condition de certaines présuppositions métaphysiques. Il faut d'abord que l'humanité soit sortie, au prix d'une révolution culturelle, du cadre mythique des sagesses traditionelles, pour entrer dans le règne périlleux de l'histoire. L'homme que prend la peine de se raconter sait que le présent diffère du passé, et qu'il ne se répètera pas dans l'avenir; il est devenu sensible aux différences plutôt qu'aux resemblances; dans le renouvellement constant, dans l'incertitude des événements et des hommes; il croit que c'est chose utile et valable de fixer sa propre image, vouée sans cela à disparaître commes toutes choses en ce monde. . . . Chaque homme importe au monde, chaque vie et chaque mort; le témoignage de chacun sur soi enrichit le patrimonie commun de la culture.[1]

The significance of the eighteenth-century autobiographical prose lay in its emphasis on the fluid nature of reality, and its alignment of inner uncertainties with the position of the community of individuals seeking a better world. It was, as Roy Pascal has pointed out, bound by no literary conventions, and thus could become a medium for new insights into the pattern of life as a dynamic state in which the past always resounds into the present:

> Only through the uninhibited description of the concrete situations through which the 'hero' passes can the great variety of his impulses, affections, moods, thoughts, be made evident. Things speak of the soul, often more clearly than thoughts, and sometimes they speak of spiritual regions almost inaccessible to thought. The debt of the realistic novel to the autobiography [of the eighteenth century] is unmistakable, especially in its appreciation of the historical moment--and one can add, in

> the style, too. For a style had to be invented, as Rousseau was acutely aware, that would do justice to this concrete world in its detail, its pettiness, and at the same time to its spiritual meanings, exaltations, tortures.[2]

The literature that was produced in America in the same period offers several interesting contrasts to European developments, however, that indicate both a somewhat different priority of attention and a continued, though temporary, retardation of artistic productivity. Until 1789, with Power of Sympathy, no notable work of fiction appeared. What nonfiction was produced held two principal features: the detailed exposition of frontier exploration and a gradual political emphasis derived from the colonial opposition to British rule.

Unlike Defoe, no American author chose to record imaginary island adventures that asserted the primacy of self-sufficiency; the realities of exploring the forests of Pennsylvania, the marshes and rivers of the South, the vast undiscovered plains of the Mid-west, or the search for routes to the Pacific through the Canadian Northwest made travel narratives--Fontaine's Journal of Spotswood's expedition in Appalachia, the travels of Alexander Henry, Samuel Hearne and Jonathan Carver, the annals of John Bartram, the Florida expeditions of the Putnam brothers and William Stork, Arthur Dobbs' controversial efforts in the Northwest, the "autobiography" of Daniel Boone, or even the early journey of Sarah Knight--more convincing and desirable evidences of an individual's ability to confront and strengthen aspirations.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, some principal obstacles to novelistic concerns have been succinctly stated by Moses Coit Tyler in his study of the literature of the Revolution: "The literature which we are thus to inspect is not, then, a literature of tranquillity, but chiefly a literature of strife. . . . The literature of our Revolution has almost everywhere the combative note; its habitual method is argumentative, persuasive, appealing, rasping, retaliatory . . . we must not expect to find art used for art's sake."[3] Tyler discusses the period from 1763 to 1783 only, but the effects of the growing antagonism between Britain and the Colonies penetrated the literature both before and after that time. It was a factor that contributed to the proliferation of pamphlets, essays, letters and political sermons and satires. When Philip Freneau writes that "An age employed in edging steel/can no poetic rapture feel," he is embodying the difficulty that makes our poetry of that time so limited. The point is further extended by Bernard Bailyn in a discussion of pamphlets that compare unfavorably to the invective of a Swift or Voltaire:

> The communication of understanding, therefore, lay at the heart of the Revolutionary movement, and its great expressions, embodied in the best of the pamphlets, are consequently expository and explanatory: didactic, systematic, and direct, rather than imaginative and metaphoric. They take the form most naturally of treatises and sermons, not poems; of descriptions, not allegories; of explanations, not burlesques. The reader is led through arguments, not images. The pamphlets aim to persuade.[4]

The true ideological force of this literature could not be adequately characterized through aesthetic forms.

Finally, the evolution of the romantic idealism in literature that was the inheritance of that century of change appeared in the American novel-romance only a generation after its appearance, and even partial demise, in Europe. And such works seem to have developed less from ideas of the enlightenment than as a throwback to the introspective night of Puritan thought.

One significant aspect, however, emerges that is co-incident with the literary events in Europe, an aspect which entered all areas of nonfiction that were generated. That was the perpetuation of the autobiographical and journal tradition of the Puritans which was converted from a parochial introspection to the distinctly socially-oriented and actively promoted emphasis on the process of "becoming." This was combined with the constant of a religious background that had left Calvinism far behind but which held to the theoretical premise of democratization inherent in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, a premise to which John Adams addressed himself when he wrote that "America was designed by Providence for the theatre on which man was to make his true figure, on which science, virtue, liberty, happiness, and glory were to exist in peace."[5] It was such a vision that penetrated the great journals and autobiographies of the period.

Indeed, to the same premise John Quincy Adams lent a similar truth in his claim that "The highest transcendent

glory of the American Revolution was this--it connected, in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with the precepts of Christianity."[6] And as literature in any given period reflects a zeitgeist and at the same time responds to the latent power of language not to shape, but to accommodate, the future, so self-discovery in an artistic form could not remain an end point, but was bound up in the sense of the unfolding nature of the growing nation. The idea of perfecting the present state of being was linked spiritually and ethically with the expectation and vision of America into an even larger frame than its European counterparts. To this, withal, belonged as well the concept that each one, citizen and writer, had an obligation to assist the rest, that one's own happiness could be identified with that of human nature itself. In the eighteenth century, we encounter a literature that is deeply interested in a revision of the Puritan covenant--in which "the peculiarities of American life became the marks of a chosen people,"[7] instead of a chosen few.

Four major works of the period, all couched in an autobiographical narrative, reveal those influences--political and exploratory--that pervaded much of the writing that appeared in America, and each one can be said to have in some degree an operative momentum. While this momentum can hardly be called complex, it nevertheless demonstrates a definite shift in the nature of individual perception of experience, a shift which also leads away from the Puritan

rejection of imaginative perception that had previously been dominant. Thus, an analysis of these works should give evidence of that shift and should reveal at the same time more precisely some of the indigenous causes for the continued use of the "I" as narrator, a use that here begins to have the contours of a national aesthetic. The works to be considered are the documentary Histories of William Byrd, Crèvecoeur's American romance, Letters from an American Farmer, the Journal of the Quaker preacher John Woolman, and the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin.

America was a land eminently suited to the working-man, who, in large, settled it in the eighteenth century. Despite Defoe's certainty in Moll Flanders that it was the thieves and rogues of Newgate "that half peoples this colony,"[8] the resources, material and psychological, made the land a natural base for social mobility for individuals who were otherwise condemned to the static atmosphere of English class distinctions. The industrial revolution in England would serve for a long time to insure for that country that poverty would become a hallmark of progress, but in eighteenth-century America the horizons that opened in every direction promised instead the elimination of such regressive politics. For the increasing rush of settlers, there were no limits to prosperity but those that the individual imposed upon him or herself. Even the South, with its aristocratic and autocratic pretensions, could perceive the dynamic of opportunity

and, at first, experienced the same restless excitement possessed by the Northern colonies.

Howard Mumford Jones describes William Byrd, II, Esq., as one of the last typifications of the Renaissance man.[9] To an editor of his Diaries, Byrd "represents a society that produced Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Marshall, and a great galaxy of leaders who helped shape a new nation. Byrd's career is a revealing example of the rise of that influential agrarian aristocracy."[10] By the age of twenty-two, Byrd was a member of the prestigious Royal Society,[11] would later receive a place in the Inns of Court, and through the offices of his family position during his early years in London experienced in full the cosmopolitan atmosphere of coffee-house conversation and upper-class society. On his return at last from England to America, he inherited and supervised a vast estate in Virginia, which became the center of a political and social activity undiminished until his death in 1744. The combined activities of plantation owner, botanist, Virginia statesman, doctor, businessman, and frontier explorer were maintained together with the cultivation of the arts and literature. (He amassed a library of nearly 4,000 volumes in several languages.) His several principal writings give us one of the most detailed portraits of colonial life available, as well as offering one of the first examples of sophisticated and witty narrative. Despite having a large number of slaves, he wrote a tract against slavery, and was a partisan of Indian affairs.

This proto-Jeffersonian figure is in great contrast to the Calvinist and Yankee leaders of New England. His Church of England sympathies and broad range of interests are, of course, closer to those of the British society that educated him. The driving personalism of Puritan writings is absent from his work, as is the emphasis on themes of guilt and renunciation that typify the northern literature. And beside Byrd's frank diaries, Samuel Sewall must retire into obscurity.

In his writings exists a familiar tone, however, one which in theme occupied the Plymouth colony, but which for Byrd did not rest upon biblical injunctions: the restless energy exposed and initiated by an unfolding frontier. The observations and realizations attached to the experience of exploration and settlement reveal in Byrd's writing (all of which is in the first person) an externalization of self-interest that accomplishes in fact what the Puritans had desired but not actually achieved. In works like the History of the Dividing Line, Progress to the Mines, Journey to the Land of Eden, and the Secret History, Byrd demonstrates an ability to consider his individual point of view as the most expedient and sufficient means of recording events, while at the same time displaying an objectivity and lack of fanaticism that enabled him to extend himself physically and mentally further than the New Englanders dared. (It is curious to note that the major continental exploration narratives of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

were completed by non-New Englanders, Francis Parkman being one major exception.)

His is a prose of eighteenth-century vision: for Byrd there existed an inspired confidence and conviction in the alignment of his personal development with that of the country. Like many who would follow from the middle colonies (Franklin, Washington, Paine), he held at once a sense of personal ambition that perforce included, required, social commitment. He saw in his own economic improvement a secularized advantage for the general good. It was to express this attitude and intent that he chose to write his first-person narratives.

"All Nations of men have the same Natural Dignity, and we all know that very bright Talents may be lodg'd under a very dark skin. The principal Difference between one People and another proceeds only from the Different Opportunities of Improvement."[12] Byrd wrote these prescient words in a discussion concerning intermarriage with Indian tribes in the History of the Dividing Line, composed during the years 1736-1742. Throughout the volume, a detailed exposition of the 1728 border settlement between Virginia and North Carolina, he enlarges upon a number of ethical points that demonstrate an inclusive, if practically motivated, liberalism toward others and a shrewd eye for persuasive argument. On the barbarisms of certain Indian customs such as scalping, Byrd notes the relative nature of the extermination of the Pequot tribe in New England and also that Indian methods were hardly different from those

of "the ancient Scythians"; they compare with the Greeks in war, or Alexander with the Tyrians, whom he "crucified in cold blood."[13] His extensive classical quotations usually dealt in some manner with the desire for eliminating conflicts.

The History is based upon a journal kept by Byrd for the Virginia expedition, of which he was in command. It is a wealth of information on botanical species, hurricane devastation, terrain formations and the rural inhabitants encountered in the Southeastern area. Byrd itemizes the wildlife discovered, conditions of the soil, sources and routes of rivers, and supplies the first detailed description of the Dismal Swamp through which the line was drawn. The material is typical of his approach to the narrative in its tone and reflection:

> Since the Surveyors had enter'd the Dismal Swamp they had laid Eyes on no living Creature: neither Bird nor Beast, Insect nor Reptile came in view. Doubtless the Eternal Shade that broods over this mighty Bog, and hinders the sun-beams from blessing the Ground, makes it an uncomfortable Habitation for anything that has life. Not so much as a Zeeland Frog cou'd endure so Aguish a Situation.
>
> It had one Beauty, however, that delighted the Eye, tho' at the expense of all the other Senses: the Moisture of the Soil preserves a continual Verdure, and makes every Plant an Evergreen, but at the same time, the foul Damps ascend without ceasing, corrupt the Air, and render it unfit for Respiration. Not even a Turkey-Buzzard will venture to fly over it, no more than the Italian vultures will over the filthy Lake Avernus, or the Birds in the Holy-Land over the Salt Sea, where Sodom and Gomorrah formerly stood.[14]

The rugged and unpredictable condition of the wilderness enchanted him; camping out in the fields under the stars he wonders how he had ever desired a soft bed, for "The truth of it is, we took so much pleasure in that natural kind of lodging that I think at the foot of the account mankind are great losers by the luxury of feather beds and warm apartments."[15] His positive reception to physical hardship and as well to the isolation of the backwoods embodies later narratives of Crockett and Boone, the frontier becoming a challenge that stimulated his whole being.

Here in this history, too, are rich descriptions of local inhabitants, many living in wretched poverty and lacking the minimum of "civilized hospitality." Particularly, Byrd finds the settlers in North Carolina territory lazy and useless, and found time passed heavily, "where we were quite cloy'd with the Carolina felicity of having nothing to do."[16] Such a passage reflects the contradictions of the environment and Byrd's own ambivalence, for his dismay at the "types" who settled the outlying regions belongs to an aristocratic perspective that permeated all his ventures. His efforts to solicit the attentions of German, Scottish and Swiss immigrants was an attempt to discourage the influx of lower-class groups, automatically viewed as poor risks for development.

The History of the Dividing Line, however, cannot really be appreciated without recourse to the Secret History, a draft of the official report, first published in 1929. Read

together, these two volumes provide a juxtaposition of narrative style that includes an interesting alternation of tone and voice.

The History proper contains a stylistic reticence that is absent from the Secret History, which is more anecdotal and satirical, less objective about primitive conditions encountered, and is more autobiographical in its use of Byrd's private impressions and reactions (often acerbic and irreverent) toward the North Carolina commission and toward two members of the Virginia party. Its informality bears a greater resemblance to the later annals of exploration like the Lewis and Clark expedition, or that of William Bartram.

The colloquial quality of the Secret History is evident when it is compared to a corresponding account in the History concerning the advance of the line beyond Roanoke River. In a disagreement between the two commissions, the Carolina party wished to halt the expedition short of the mountains. In the Secret History we find that

> Honest Meanwell [William Dandridge], hearing this and, I suppose, not giving entire credit to it, immediately lugged out his pencil, saying in a comical tone that since he was for minutes, egad, he would take a minute of that. The other took fire at this and without any preface or ceremony seized a limb of our table, big enough to knock down an ox, and lifted it up at Meanwell while he was scratching out his minutes. I, happening to see him brandishing this dangerous weapon, darted toward him in a moment to stop his hand, by which the blow was prevented; but while I hindered one mischief, I had like to have done another, for the swiftness of my motion overset the table

> and Shoebrush fell under it, to the great hazard of his gouty limbs. So soon as Meanwell came to know the favor that Firebrand intended him, he saluted him with the title he had a good right to, namely, son of a w---e, telling him if they had been alone he durst as well be damned as lift that club at him. To this the other replied with much vigor that he might remember, if he please, that he had now lifted a club at him.[17]

In the History, however, the same event is rendered thus:

> Early in the afternoon, to our very great surprise, the commissioners of Carolina acquainted us with their resolution to return home. This declaration of theirs seemed the more abrupt because they had not been so kind as to prepare us by the least hint of their intention to desert us. We therefore let them understand they appeared to us to abandon the business they came about with too much precipitation, this being but the fifteenth day since we came out the last time. But although we were so unhappy as to lose the assistance of their great abilities, yet we, who were concerned for Virginia, determined, by the Grace of God, not to do our work by halves, but, all deserted as we were like to be, should think it our duty to push the line quite to the mountains.[18]

The formality and restraint of the official account has a function beyond mere discretion, in that by avoiding certain material Byrd constructs a narrative that suits the idea of what should comprise a statement of worthy exploration, as well as of civilized attitudes. It is used as deliberately to promote a unity of endeavor as to protect the individuals who participated in the march. The force of the expedition, its eventual effect on further efforts, is largely relaxed in the Secret History, which serves a different purpose.

But the volumes convey in their totality a social history not only encompassing the Southern experience but one also marking distinctly American perspective. The account in the Histories is hardly poetic, but the recorded organization of the American landscape features an enthusiasm and attraction to its panorama that was to be heard again and again countless times as the western borders advanced, in writings like those of Thomas Jefferson on viewing the Shenandoah in Notes on Virginia, in the journals of Alexander Henry, in Washington Irving on the Hudson Valley and his Tour of the Prairies, and Cooper on the west, on up to the overwhelming expanse of the Mississippi in Mark Twain.

Further, in the Histories, except for the condensation in the second version, Byrd offers no conscious art, though his style often bears resemblance to the contemporary essayists of the Spectator papers. Rather, it appears with a peculiar American idiom superimposed on the finesse of its statement. This is caused partly by the very nature of his subject matter, in which encounters with rustics and peddlars, squatters and backwoodsmen have their part in revealing the individualist aspects of the American milieu. Byrd himself, even in the formal History, is more than likely to respond to events with something akin to an early manifestation of what Constance Rourke discerned as a distinctive American humor. His use of aphorism and occasional tall-tales about the Indians and frontier types, his laconic attitude toward the Carolinians, the use of

caricature in describing "Firebrand" and "Orion" of the Virginia company, his own penchant for herbal medicine miracles, and his overall adaptability and wanderlust in his "Land of Eden," all give a different presence to an otherwise composed style. In this respect his narratives differ widely from earlier frontier accounts more inland by French and Spanish, and Dutch, explorers like Pedro de Castaneda, Sieur de LaSalle or Louis Joliet, whose equal attention to detail was less evidently inspired by individual motive. Byrd has another purpose in mind.

Neither in his manuscripts nor in his diaries does Byrd inquire into his own psychological motivations, nor of those around him. They record observations without particular piety or interest. There is not the clear tone of optimism or idealism invested in an analysis of frontier communities such as we later find in Crèvecoeur. Nor does Byrd's writing carry the pragmatic surety and controlled narration of the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. For his principal object was to explain why the acquisition of land should be the central agency and source of social and political power for the colonies.

But why then did he choose, even in the official History, the medium of an autobiographical narrative? And why in his opening lines does he write that "Before I enter upon the Journal of the Line Between Virginia and North Carolina, it will be necessary to clear the way to it, by shewing how the other British colonies on the Main have, one after the other,

been carved out of Virginia, by Grants from his Majesty's Royal Predecessors"[19]? Two elements are at work here, neither explicit in the first encounter. For the opening pages proceed with a full, if casually stated, account of the first landings and settlements on the east coast. In his own way, Byrd, like Bradford and Mather, was attempting to formulate a portion of national history that would maintain the force of a durable reality despite the nonexistence of tradition. Blended withthis is the attraction for the unusual frontier landscape.

For America was a landscape that remained accessible only through the first-hand report. A history so immediate in its origins necessitated a reliance on what was personally seen and experienced for its focus. Man was still an observer in the new world--how many journals and books of the Puritans and Pennsylvanians open with a preface of origins. So, too, Byrd goes back to the "beginning," the thin shadow that it is, attempting to affirm the stability of a developing culture by establishing its character. The individual <u>was</u> history, then. There were so many experiencing it, yet each one could describe some new facet of this ever-extending territory. The terms of the description perforce remained personal, still exploratory, indeed the infancy of grand explorations to come. And only once, of course, that those were completed, could the personal voice afford abstraction, and in the nineteenth century take on, as it did, the explorations of the mind.

In his work there is an incipient nationalism despite his aristocratic leanings that links his autobiographical writing with a distinctive American approach. Although it cannot be said that such writing possesses the thematic force of what Sacvan Bercovitch calls auto-American-biography,[20] and although he does not subject the novice culture to analysis in abstraction, Byrd's work does reflect through self-representation in the personal narrative the possibility of national representation. His writings sustain their value as more than a source-book of customs and travel by focusing attention on the image of an individual taming a wilderness, by promoting the conception of material and political fulfillment through settlement, and by offering a first-hand description of the success of his own achievements, a success that beckoned to newcomers. And his manuscripts contained the prosaic embryo of what was to become the overwhelming American adventure--going west.

A much more explicit expression, however, of the double alignment of personal biography and national history is developed in the second major descriptive text of the period, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer.

Letters from an American Farmer prefigures with considerable thoroughness the subject matter of the authentic American literature that would appear after it. Crèvecoeur, in the persona of a humble Pennsylvanian farmer, takes the

reader on a tour of the colonies in a series of epistolary commentaries that offer more than documentation. He conveys, in the words of an admiring Hazlitt, "not only the objects, but the feelings, of a new country."[21] Each chapter celebrates some aspect of American life not only as it is lived but as it is to be lived in the generations to come, while the book as a whole contains a shrewd judgment that frequently anticipates the analysis of De Toqueville.

It is all there: Melville's Nantucketers, the pastoral seclusion of Thoreau, the Emersonian "I AM," the frontiersman of Cooper, Whitman's celebration of democracy, the seeds of the Civil War and the discontent of the slave narratives, and the rich detail of the travel and exploration journals. Thematically also similarities to past writings exist--everything is seen through the eyes of a narrator for whom the fundamental truth rests upon his own perceptions, united with a basic trust in God, and the mutual conjoining of God and the New World politic to the advancement of the individual.

The emphasis in the Letters rests upon a prophetic tone which presumes the evolution of America as the perfect society. The principles of democracy that allow it to accommodate change offer a transcendental focus, and to Crèvecoeur it is that flexibility that seems the true organic feature of the "new American" way of life. Only near the end of the volume, when disorder through war becomes the rule, does the ambivalence of democratic and individual outlooks become a concern, when the "farmer" acknowledges,

with the realization of democratic ideals, the hazards incumbent on their actuality.

In format, Letters from an American Farmer contains several features that distinguish it significantly from the style and intentions of William Byrd's journals. Perhaps of central importance is Crèvecoeur's effort to provide his semi-fictional narration with a thorough semblance of reality. He assumes a psuedonym, and the title page of the first edition emphasizes the "factual" nature of the reports "Describing Certain Provincial Situations, Manners and Customs, Not Generally Known, and Conveying Some Idea of the Late and Present Interior Circumstances of the British Colonies in North America." The claim is reinforced in an advertisement for the same edition (1782) which begins "The following Letters are the genuine production of the American Farmer whose name they bear." The advertisement goes on to explain that the informality of the writing in style and manner is only what can be expected from the effusions of personal communications. It is an informality that Crèvecoeur reiterates frequently, explaining in the Preface that it is the best he can do as "an Humble American Planter, a simple cultivator of the Earth."

Further, the use of epistolary commentaries, not an unfamiliar technique in the eighteenth century, increases the "presence" of the narrator and of the observations recorded, lending to them validity and scope. Crèvecoeur is deliberately shaping a narrative that almost approaches

the literary pattern of a novel. While it is not wholly fictionalized, and its historical and descriptive materials are grounded on fact, the artificial structure of the book allows Crèvecoeur a greater dramatic focus, especially with regard to his gradually developing portrait of the "new American." It also allows him a particular means for developing certain primary themes that require, because of their abstraction, a down-to-earth persona as narrator who lends credibility to the enthusiasm Crèvecoeur cannot subdue. The Letters appear as a harbinger of the literary direction that would shortly begin to develop, a half-way mark in which the prosaic quality of previous autobiographical writings is exchanged for a more dynamic and multi-dimensional appraisal of the individual and the society.

In the Letters we encounter for the first time the deliberate use of several characters used as thinly disguised projections of an author's ideas. The primary persona of the narrator is that of the intelligent agrarian along the lines of a Jeffersonian who finds the cultivation of bees, observing animal life, or tilling the soil part of the true substance of the American way. Each additional character is a type representing a particular local feature of the society; even the naturalist Bartram is carefully portrayed through selective conversations as one of a variety of agrarian types, a "farmer" of plant life.

Such characterizations reflect the habitual early images of America as a new Eden, a vast garden for humanity,

within which the individual could encounter a tranquility and self-sustaining existence close to Nature. Crèvecoeur's emphatic preference for the rural life lies primarily in the protection it provides against the inroads of power and wanton ambition, and economic inequities. As Thoreau would insist seventy years later, happiness was to be found to the degree one was free from the luxuries of civilization. The plainspoken statements of "J. Hector St. John, Planter" affirm one basic premise of the good life as that which allows each man and woman to cultivate some small part of the prosperous land in privacy and peace.*

As he describes the general behavior and personality of those he encounters, the narrator's tone shifts slowly from hesitant speculation and quiet observation to a different sureness of voice. As the gallery grows larger, the farmer/narrator assumes the role of interpreter as well as observer, with a concomitant internalization of the peculiar American qualities that gradually assert themselves.

Thus, in the description of the Nantucketers in Letter IV, we find a eulogy to those values of independence and purposiveness that brought the islanders to their life on

*The theme of the new land as a refuge and seclusion from external trial can be linked to the long English tradition of the image of the "garden" as a restorative agency. It is the kind of exposition we find in the seventeenth century in Sir Thomas Browne and John Milton, in Sir William Temple's Upon the Gardens of Epicurus, or especially in Marvell and Traherne. Leo Marx in The Machine in the Garden discusses the transformations out of this thematic centering which began to occur in the nineteenth century with the construction of the railroad, but for Crèvecoeur in eighteenth-century America the land and the man possess a special containment that suggests true contentment.

the sea, and a statement that Nantucket is an example of what the construction of a happy existence can mean when it is divorced from oppressive circumstances. For these people are immigrants who have chosen through industry and sobriety to build a different form of life from that which they had left: "Are not the great rulers of the earth afraid of losing, by degrees, their most useful subjects? This country, providentially intended for the general asylum of the world, will flourish by the oppression of their people."[22] As well, the role of the immigrant plays a large part in the crucial third letter, "What Is An American?", wherein Crèvecoeur introduces Andrew, man of the Hebrides, and escorts us through the various tribulations and efforts he makes to successfully achieve the independence of tilling his own land--one of the early versions of the American Dream: "It is astonishing how quick men will learn when they work for themselves."[23] For the narrator, as he contemplates Andrew's progress, there is a visible idealism that is intimately tied to the economic self-sufficiency of the individual. The new land is the last opportunity.

The chapters on Nantucket and the Vineyard occupy Letters IV through VIII. We are given in surprising detail an extensive caetology of the whale and the methods of capturing it, and even introduced to the habits and origins of the harpooneers, along with the customs and manners of the whole whaling industry. The sea fascinates the farmer, who in these chapters forgoes his bias against poetry and ruminates on the power of its immensity:

> the ever-raging ocean. . . . Who can see the storms of wind, blowing sometimes with an impetuosity sufficiently strong even to move the earth, without feeling himself affected beyond the sphere of common ideas? . . . How diminutive does a man appear to himself when filled with these thoughts, and standing as I did on the very verge. . . .[24]

The atmosphere of the Quaker-Presbyterian society on the islands has a simplicity and integrity that he defines as integral to the American idea of the good life. And more specifically, it is in these five letters on the New England seafarers that Crèvecoeur affirms through the narrator another strong feature of the American perspective, the anti-intellectual attitude: "Shining talents and University knowledge would be entirely useless here, nay, would be dangerous; it would pervert their plain judgment, it would lead them out of that useful path which is so well adapted to their situation: it would make them more adventurous, more presumptuous, much less cautious, and therefore less successful."[25] It is an attitude reiterated often (and reminiscent of Melville's idea of the Pequod as his university, or John Woolman's reflections on board ship with the sailors en route to England, or even in tenor of Emerson's dictum to be done with books and to turn to life). In learning, writes the farmer, has lain much of the distress of societies, as he explains that "Books tell me so much that they inform me of nothing."[26] Far better, he declares, to live and trust to the "infallibility of instinct,"[27] to have freedom rather than culture.

It is the concept of freedom that infuses most of Letter III, "What Is An American." "We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be."[28] The description of America in this letter is weighted by the utopian vision of the farmer, for whom "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cuase great changes in the world."[29] The men and women who arrive begin to feel the effects of a "sort of resurrection; hitherto he had not lived, but simply vegetated; he now feels himself a man, because he is treated as such; the laws of his own country had overlooked him in his insignificancy; the laws of this cover him with their mantle."[30] The tone echoes in "By Blue Ontario's Shore," when Walt Whitman proclaims "Democracy . . ./I saw you serenely give birth to immortal children, saw in dreams your dilating form,/Saw you with spreading mantel covering the world."

The element of freedom is closely linked with the expanse of the country--the space serves as an analogy to the growth of the mind:

> An European, when he first arrives, seems limited in his intentions, as well as in his views, but he very suddenly alters his scale; two hundred miles formerly appeared a very great distance, it is now but a trifle; he no sooner breathes our air than he forms schemes, and embarks in designs he never would have thought of in his own country. There the plenitude of society confined many

> useful ideas, and often extinguishes the most laudable schemes which here ripen into maturity. Thus Europeans become Americans.[31]

The result of this metamorphosis is a future-oriented impulse to build the prosperity the land promises, to actualize its potential.

Another aspect of the "new American" lies in the dispersed character of religion, which means for the narrator that persecution, pride and dogmatism cannot hold sway over the liberating ideology that has developed. Each individual can choose his or her own mode of worship without the fear of interference, but the very contours of the country prevent strong religious sentiments from emerging. This in turn becomes the hallmark of the free thinker, though, considering the origins of American culture, Crèvecoeur has his narrator conveniently forget the rigid Puritanism of New England.

One of the key descriptions in the whole book, however, occurs in the same letter when the farmer elaborates upon the woodsman, which he typifies as the lawless individual living at or beyond the borders of civilization, who of necessity becomes the pioneer, the forger of the new world. Exposed to the wilderness, he becomes anarchistic and hostile; his dominant behavior is violent. Here we encounter another "type," an extreme of individual isolation and freedom that departs altogether from the democratic unity of the settlements, but who is nevertheless a vital factor

in America's development: "Thus are our first steps trod, thus are our first trees felled, in general, by the most vicious of our people."[32] In this we find the analysis of the origins of the violence of the West, the code of solitariness that is a configuration of the American hero. Here, too, is a resemblance to Melville (and in a way, Byrd), who more cynically derides and excuses the backwoodsman in The Confidence Man:

> The backwoodsman is a lonely man. . . . Impulsive, he is what some might call unprincipled. At any rate he is self-willed; being one who hearkened less to what others say about things, than looks for himself, to see what things are in themselves . . . Hence self-reliance, to the degree of standing by his own judgment, though it stand alone. . . . Though held as a sort of a barbarian, the backwoodsman would seem to America what Alexander was to Asia--captain in the vanguard of conquering civilization. Pathfinder, provider of security to those who come after him, for himself he asks nothing but hardship. Worthy to be compared with Moses in the Exodus, or the Emperor Julian in Gaul. . . . he commits himself to the forest primeval; there, so long as life shall be his, to act upon a calm, cloistered scheme of strategical, implacable, and lonesome vengeance. Ever on the noiseless trail; cool, collected, patient; less seen than felt; snuffling, smelling--a Leatherstocking Nemesis.[33]

In the letter "The Description of Charlestown," the farmer addresses himself to the insidious issue of southern ethics. The tenor of the chapter is impassioned and unrestrained--slavery is an unpardonable sin against humanity, a canker that will destroy the South, that undermines the

utopian promise of the New World. His related experience upon encountering a slave in the woods, left in a cage to be eaten alive by birds and insects, is dramatic and powerful: "my mind is, and always has been, oppressed since I became a witness to it. . . . I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror; my nerves were convulsed; I trembled, I stood motionless, involuntarily contemplating the fate of this negro, in all its dismal latitude."[34] For the narrator it is the beginning of a general shift in thought, a disquiet that enters more entirely into each letter. He has his first inference that his Eden is not altogether unsullied:

> Strange order of things! Oh, Nature, where art thou?--Are not these blacks thy children as well as we?[35]

The subservience of the African is determined only by the threat of violence, a violence similar in its usurpation of natural rights to that of the frontiersmen who lived so close to the borders of the Southern towns. The chapter is a curious one. Included rather abruptly are passages that contain reflections of the apparent futility of reforming the behavior of mankind, prescribing a pessimism that contrasts highly with the earlier hopeful, positive tone:

> The history of the earth! Doth it present anything but crimes of the most heinous nature, committed from one end of the world to the other? . . . We certainly are not that class of beings which we vainly

> think ourselves to be; man an animal of prey, seems to have rapine and the love of bloodshed implanted in his heart; nay, to hold it the most honorable occupation in society: we never speak of a hero of mathematics, a hero of knowledge of humanity; no, this illustrious appelation is reserved for the most successful butchers of the world.[36]

Within the protest is the sense of impending and radical change; at one point he wonders whether settlement life can offer the individual a happy existence ever, whether retreat to the woods can be seen as preferable, if civilized laws protected tyranny and accommodated power and force. And as we discover in the last chapter (Letter), the forests beyond the frontier become his choice.

"Distresses of a Frontier Man," Letter XII, brings the harbinger of the revolution that was to achieve the romantic vision of democracy the farmer had held so dear in previous letters. But to him the actual state of war reveals the ambiguity of ideals. The rewards of war belong to rulers and leaders who do not fight or endure its ravages.

> I am a lover of peace, what must I do? . . . Great source of wisdom! inspire me with light sufficient to guide my benighted steps out of this intricate maze! . . . Our fate, the fate of thousands, is then necessarily involved in the dark wheel of fortune. Why then so many useless reasonings; we are the sport of fate. . . . I bring that cup to my lips, of which I soon must taste, and shudder at its bitterness.[37]

The glory of political maxims and the metropolis vanishes,

is reduced, simply, to the preservation of the home. He cannot fight, he cannot endure war. He chooses to escape to the Indians. The letter that closes the volume is a contrast to the former optimism but to a degree was anticipated during the visit by the Russian emigré to Bartram, at which time the Russian tells the naturalist that America is the seed of future nations, to which the "good man" replies: "But doth thee not imagine, that the great will, in the course of the years, come over here also; for it is the misfortune of all societies everywhere to hear of great men, great rulers, and great tyrants."[38]

The American in Letters from an American Farmer is representative, a composite portrait drawn from the various occupations and roles provided by the farmer's narration. Through the types, Crèvecoeur does write an autobiography of a nation. Yet, as the last letter demonstrates, the individual is part of a combined journey, the private one juxtaposed with the practical consequences of his political ideology. The dynamic nature of the culture he loves makes him participant in a history that accepts war as a process of change. And the chimera--"those demons of war"--had arrived.

With this final chapter we are left with his cry of spiritual pain at the loss of the earlier idyll, and as readers we are also left with a sense of something unfinished and unresolved, a sense of a disorder of aesthetic as well as fact. In many ways, Crèvecoeur has carried his

narrator, and us, more deeply into the disruptive and indefinite character of autobiographical writing than did the Puritans. The material of the Letters is informed by contradictions inherent in the disparities of concepts like self-reliance and the democratic state, between individual welfare and the survival of a growing society. Two-thirds of the book is a song of the self as America, motivated by a broad humanistic rationalism, but the disintegration of the political status quo is catalyst to a chaos of the mind: "When, oppressed by painful recollection, I revolve all these scattered ideas in my mind, when I contemplate my situation, and the thousand streams of evil with which I am surrounded; when I descend into the particular tendency even of the remedy I have proposed, I am convulsed--. . . and my mind . . . is ready sometimes to lead me to dangerous extremes of violence."[39]

The farmer/narrator--and for Crèvecoeur the American of revolution--seeks a haven in a primitive Indian tribe, worshipping God upon "the broad scale of nature," laying his hope now for stability and freedom not on the future but upon regression and retirement to part of the frontier he had once analyzed. By going to the wilderness he would be away from civilization which for him had held such attraction and expectation. In the very last pages he offers an exhortation to God to preserve what is thus far created. But for him, the matter is not truly resolved. For the narrator, "I, as a man seeking refuge from the

desolation of war. . . . I, to conform to them, whatever they are. . . . I, as a sojourner,"[40] the promise is unfulfilled.

"In the difficulties attending us in this life, nothing is more precious than the mind of truth inwardly manifested." So meditated the Quaker preacher John Woolman in his Journal in 1758, a volume about which Emerson wrote the following on the back of a gift copy from Whittier: "I find more wisdom in these pages than in any other book written since the days of the Apostles. There is a true philosophy--a clear insight--a right estimate of things."

Woolman wrote his work according to the duty of a Friend, in order to plainly describe the drawing power of the missionary life and to give a testimony of God's benevolence as it is revealed through the Inner Light of each human being. We are reminded of the praise given to the Quaker attitude in Crèvecoeur's letters on the Nantucketers and John Bartram. Within the pages of the Journal is a sweetness of narrative, an embracing spirit of universal love that reaches out directly to us, with little thought toward stylistic ordering or technique. Woolman desires less to make the reader see what he has perceived than to give that reader the experience itself.

In the various journeys he undertakes around the colonies he reiterates his basic philosophy, that the deep-rooted source of creation lies in love alone. His

is a selfless activity that lacks the didacticism of Puritan self-denial; his private anguish at his shortcomings is an emotion derived as much from the knowledge that he thereby has lost some measure of effectiveness among the people as it is from a personal caveat of religious surrender. The quiet stillness at Quaker meetings is given in plain statement:

> We were taught by renewed experience to labor for an inward stillness; at no time to seek for words, but to live in the spirit of truth, and utter that to the people which truth opened in us.[41]

Such words are often repeated as a refrain of devotion; the silent counsel of the inner Voice lent a simplicity and grace to Woolman's humble request for resignation to God's will. The inward call, for him, concerned the issue that would ultimately decide the most crucial event in American history: slavery:

> I saw in these southern provinces so many vices and corruptions, increased by this trade and this way of life, that it appeared to me as a dark gloominess hanging over the land; and though now many willingly run into it, yet in the future the consequence will be grievous to posterity. I express it as it hath appeared to me, not once, nor twice, but as a matter fixed on my mind. . . . I felt in that which is immutable that the seeds of great calamity and desolation are sown and growing fast on this continent.[42]

Because he was a Quaker, his sense of individual responsibility came from the message that the Society of

Friends sought to give by requiring each man, woman and child to live the gospel, each one to hold the belief within that by faith in humanity lay the route to a finer world. And like Crèvecoeur there is a prophetic element in his attempt through autobiography to explain and perform the quest toward that visionary credo: "For the Quaker, for John Woolman especially, autobiography was a place of vision as well as a means of conveying it. The endless journeying of the public Friend can be seen as the physical counterpart of his search for illumination and of the moral effort to conform his will to the divine."[43] Subjected as they had been to severe prejudice by the Puritans, the Quakers understood oppression differently from the older religious groups. Hawthorne's "The Gentle Boy" is a sensitive and accurate portrait of the sufferings they endured. The combined effects of experience and faith made them particularly conscious of their role as nonviolent reformers. Thus Woolman's perseverance on behalf of the slaves can be seen as predictable as it was politically and socially advanced.

Such specific features of Quaker thought are probably what led the literary historian Vernon Parrington to contrast the Quakers to the "Infamous" Puritans, for he observes that

> In the sincerity of their equalitarian fellowship the Quakers were the friends of humanity, of the poor and the outcast of this world. Their religion was

> one of the weekday as well as the Sabbath. With its mystical doctrine of the inner light--of the Holy Spirit that speaks directly to the soul without the intermediation of priest or church--it unconsciously spread the doctrine of democracy in an autocratic world.[44]

To dissent with recognized injustice, in this event with the subjugation of other human beings, was not an option but a natural obligation and desire.

It was natural to express the full nature of this obligation in autobiographical form. If it is the inner voice that directs one's behavior, then that behavior is best and most reliably described by the individual who experiences it. And when the issue is as large and complex as slavery, it is only through the first-person that the full measure of its horror can be transmitted. Faith, tradition and material all directed his reflections inward and the manifestation of truth belonged to what Woolman could project of that truth from his own understanding. As William Penn wrote of the typical Quakers: "Some seek truth in books, some in learned men, but what they seek for is in themselves."[45]

Theologically, as with the Puritans, it was the example of a life well-lived that gave authority to a Quaker's conversion, but the initial perception of grace was not the central focus. Woolman makes this clear by devoting a major portion of his journal to his missionary work rather than to his wayward youth. Nevertheless, he desires to explain the constant attention to inward

development that true faith demands, for human nature obscures spiritual realities. It is an endless task. In his Journal we repeatedly find him in a lonely room or in meditation during a tour, in tears for hours, wrought up over some indecisive action, some mistake or pretension, some impulse overdone or withdrawn. In mystical revelation, over and over, he is brought back to perception of the Divine force. One such experience involves a dream-vision of rather unusual descriptive intensity and is worth quoting at length:

> In a time of sickness, a little more than two years and a half ago, I was brought so near the gates of death that I forgot my name. Being then desirous to know who I was, I saw a mass of matter of a dull gloomy color between the south and the east, and was informed that this mass was human beings in as great misery as they could be, and live, and that I was mixed in with them, and that henceforth I might not consider myself as a distinct or separate being. In this state I remained several hours. I then heard a soft, melodious voice, more pure and harmonious than any I had heard with my ears before; I believed it was the voice of an angel who spake to other angels; and the words were, "John Woolman is dead." I soon remembered that I was once John Woolman, and being assured that I was alive in the body, I greatly wondered what that heavenly voice could mean. I believed beyond doubting that it was the voice of an holy angel, but as yet it was a mystery to me.
>
> I was then carried in spirit to the mines where poor oppressed people were digging rich treasures for those called Christians, and heard them blaspheme the name of Christ, at which I was grieved, for his name was to me precious. I was then informed that these heathens were

> told that those who oppressed them were the followers of Christ, and they said among themselves, "If Christ directed them to use us in this sort, then Christ is a cruel tyrant."
>
> All this time the song of the angel remained a mystery; and in the morning my dear wife and some others coming to my bedside, I asked them if they knew who I was, and they telling me I was John Woolman, thought I was light-headed, for I told them not what the angel said, nor was I disposed to talk much to anyone, but was very desirous to get so deep that I might understand this mystery.
>
> My tongue was often so dry that I could not speak till I had moved it about and gathered some moisture, and as I lay still for a time I at length felt a Divine power prepare my mouth that I could speak, and I then said, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Then the mystery was opened and I perceived there was joy in heaven over a sinner who had repented, and that the language "John Woolman is dead," meant no more than the death of my own will.[46]

There is a deep internalization of the "I" in the Journal through which emanates his trauma over the conflicting periods of surrender and resistance. But each experience receives validity in the impulse to action. His success is attuned to the fusing of perception and religious devotion or spontaneous good works:

> The poverty of spirit and inward weakness, with which I was much tried the fore part of this journey, has of late appeared to me a dispensation of kindness. Appointing meetings never appeared more weighty to me, and I was led into a deep search, whether in all things my mind was resigned to the

> will of God, often querying with myself what should be the cause of such inward poverty, and greatly desiring that no secret reserve in my heart might hinder my access to the Divine fountain.[47]

Each event serves as a test of his faith as he seeks through divine illumination the requisite path. It is not an elimination of self that he wants, but the conversion of self into an ALL, a One-ness. Each individual, he realizes, must act according to the specific call of God, each one has a different role to play according to his or her abilities, and each one must endeavor to discover and project the full power of that activity, because it illumines the shared spirit of humanity. As in the journals of Foxe and Penn, Woolman provides himself as an example of faith, selecting those events which most directly reveal the inward necessity, and the virtue attached to right feeling. As the dream-vision exemplifies the intensity with which he approached his calling and the psychological effort to communicate his realizations with his readers, it also demonstrates that the guiding principle is that the gift of love is pure when "the self is kept out." But the process is ongoing and unfinished. In precise language, Daniel Shea notes that

> Autobiography in the illuminist-antinomian tradition . . . whether written by Quakers or Transcendentalists, cannot exhaust the dimension it explores. Because in its relation to spirit the self is finally unsourced and unspeakable, autobiography cannot be content to describe a finished

> history in a rationalized pattern. Rather, autobiography is present at the act by which the spirit realizes itself, and must conclude arbitrarily, since the well of truth, like Walden Pond, has no bottom and the appetite for infinity no satisfaction.[48]

Many Quakers that Woolman met owned slaves. The Journal records his efforts at meetings and in the homes of Friends to passively challenge their behavior. He found no utility in attacking or decrying. Rather, he chose the method of quiet protest, by paying for his meals en route if the Friend as host was also a slave-owner, to stop eating sugar because it was produced by slave labor, and by proselytizing in New England, Maryland, among the Nantucketers, in Pennsylvania, and even in England.

At Cedar Creek in Virginia in 1757, he answers the argument that the black races are a sign of Cain:

> I was troubled to perceive the darkness of their imagination, and in some pressure of spirit said, "The love of ease and gain are the motives in general of keeping slaves, and men are wont to take hold of weak arguments to support a cause which is unreasonable. I have no interest on either side, save only the interest I desire to have in the truth. I believe liberty is their right, and as I see it they are not only deprived of it, but treated in other respects with inhumanity in other places, I believe He who is a refuge for the oppressed will, in his own time, plead their cause, and happy will it be for such as walk in uprighteousness before him.[49]

To Friends in North Carolina he directs a letter which he quotes in the Journal, beckoning them to heed and be "inwardly acquainted with the way of true peace," thus

leaving the vain shadow of worldly aims. He warns them to shun slavery, for "To rational creatures bondage is uneasy, and frequently occasions sourness and discontent in them; which affects the family and such as claim mastery over them."[50] And he adds:

> And now, dear friends and brethren, as you are improving a wilderness, and may be numbered amongst the first planters in one part of a Province, I beseech you, in the love of Jesus Christ, wisely consider the force of your examples, and think how much your successors may be thereby affected.[51]

The wilderness, the theme of the new land, was not far from his consideration, any more than it had been for all the writers before. He saw in slavery the dissolution of a country that held the greatest potential, and felt as well that there had to be an intimate tie between the national interests and Christian philosophy. Like those writing before him, and with him, Woolman believed

> Our own real good, and the good our our posterity, in some measure depends on the part we act, and it nearly concerns us to try our foundations impartially. . . . We shall thus clearly see and consider that the dealings of God with mankind, in a national capacity, as recorded in Holy Writ, do sufficiently evidence the truth of that saying, "It is righteousness which exalteth a nation"; . . . and as a proud, selfish spirit prevails and spreads among a people, so partial judgment, oppression, discord, envy, and confusions increase, and provinces and kingdoms are made to drink the cup of adversity as a reward of their own doings.[52]

The price of slavery is too high; for the wealth it promises, writes Woolman, holds within itself the immutable reality of collapse. In his A Plea for the Poor, published in 1793, he repeats a similar warning, placing the root of inevitable crisis in a continuation of concentration on the self:

> The rising up of a desire to obtain wealth is the beginning; and riches thus gotten please self; and while self has a life in them it desires to have them defended. Wealth is attended with power, by which bargains and proceedings contrary to universal righteousness are supported; and hence oppression, carried on with worldly policy and order, clothes itself with the name of justice and becomes like seeds of discord in the soul. And as a spirit which wanders from the pure habitation prevails, so the seeds of war swell and sprout and grow and become strong until much fruit is ripened. Then cometh the harvest spoken of by the prophet, which "is a heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrows."[53]

In the same pamphlet, Woolman expands on the idea that America belongs to the oppressed, and that it has a responsibility to insure their welfare. Plain living in an unselfish spirit is the sole path to peace and to prosperity: "To press forward to perfection is our duty."[54] This phrase reiterates the omnipresent theme in American writing that coincident with the future of the commonwealth is the development of inner spiritual strivings. The new world has to contain a new way of perceiving the immensities of human potential. It cannot and should not return to the traditions and conditions it has been created to change.

Woolman's Journal as a personal narrative uses the individual voice as an agent of transformation. Witness what one man has envisioned, he says, that it may become the hope and path of all who await and seek out enlightenment.

Approaching the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin after a consideration of previous works, especially John Woolman's Journal, is rather like encountering Alice's rabbit in Wonderland. The evolution of one of our truest statesmen, a Machiavel with good intentions, could provide no greater contrast to the various spiritual or idealistic works that preceded his. Articulate, confident, determined, pragmatic, Franklin is the seeming antithesis of utopian conceptions. Morality is for him useful and correct, and tied to the exigencies of economic and political aspirations. Time is money; the aphorisms of Poor Richard's Almanac serve as the fundamental and structural premises of his Autobiography, which though written for the edification of his family in solid Puritan fashion, was nevertheless clearly devised with the expectation that it would become public. The cautious, and at times creative, manipulation of the self-portrait he offers can be viewed as a deliberate attempt to personify the "bootstraps" American dream of self-fulfillment.

Benjamin Franklin began his Autobiography in 1771, a few years before the outbreak of the Revolution, and shortly after his triumph in the House of Commons that

caused the repeal of the Stamp Act. These facts are important for the emphasis we find in the Autobiography. Benjamin Vaughn, upon hearing of Franklin's autobiographical manuscript, observed that "All that has happened to you is also connected with the detail of the manners and situation of a rising people."[55] The philosophical justification of the Autobiography was indeed a matter deeply associated with the development of the Republic. The creative impulse to recite his life story derived from a specific quantity; literature was a product of ordinary people, all of whom existed at once as the dominant group--an egalitarian credo suffused the imagination. This, Franklin repeatedly emphasizes; his carefully drawn-up plan for self-examination was intended as a demonstration of the best means for every individual to provide and secure the utmost benefit from what should become the future prosperity. His autobiography would be of interest because "where everyone's life was as good as the next man's, where no one needed to feel constrained by tradition, or by traditional forms, in that state every man's life was of potential interest."[56]

The most obvious origins of the Autobiography lie, of course, in his Puritan heritage. Franklin once observed that the Essays to Do Good of Cotton Mather lay out the path for his life. The Pilgrim's Progress of John Bunyan was his favorite text: "Honest John was the first that I know of who mixes narration and dialogue, a method of writing very engaging to the reader, who in the most

interesting parts finds himself, as it were, admitted into the company and present at the conversation. Defoe has imitated him successfully in his Robinson Crusoe, in his Moll Flanders, and other pieces; and Richardson has done the same in his Pamela, etc."[57] The desire to instruct his readers and to program moral development and particularly the introspective urge to contemplate his past and himself, all derive from the legacy of Puritan theology. But in Franklin the Calvinist tenets are abandoned in favor of what he terms a "Practical Theology": "Namely, I think vital Religion has always suffer'd, when Orthodoxy is more regarded than Virtue. And the Scripture assures me, that at the last Day, we shall not be exam'd what we thought, but what we did; and our Recommendation will not be that we said Lord, Lord, but that we did Good to our Fellow creatures. See Matth. 2,5."[58] Out of this attitude he was able to promote the secular advantages to be obtained by living the good life; Providence helped the man who helped himself.

A contemporary, and frequent antagonist of Franklin, John Adams, also wrote an autobiography, which is for its detail an engrossing account of political debates, Voltaire and French customs, American attitudes, descriptive sea-voyages, and general republican sentiment, but its intention is very different. Adams cannot presume to influence his readers in quite the same way; though a strong-minded personage and exemplum of American stamina,

he makes little attempt to universalize his image. The difference is the key to the success of Franklin's Autobiography. The various personae he gives, indicating the stages of his actual life and the stages of the desirable life, manage to convey a humanist outlook that excludes only the reader who "chooses not to read" his book. His self-reliance and celebrity are models of possibility for anyone who seeks them. His advice is benevolent and constructive, and above all diplomatic. The best method of pursuing the ends he prescribes requires only that one deal truthfully with others; a long-lived success cannot be maintained if it is founded on ambition alone. And neither can the progress of a nation be achieved under any other means.

The first image of Franklin that is presented to us is that of an elderly, sophisticated and wise adviser, who desires to inform his family of those events that may serve by his example as binding principles for a worthy life:

> From the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and in which I passed my earliest years, I have raised myself to a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world. As constant good fortune has accompanied me even to an advanced period of life, my posterity will perhaps be desirous of hearing the means, which I employed, and which, thanks to Providence, so well succeeded with me.[59]

This view of himself Franklin projects by intruding

a tone of humility as well. After giving a history of his English roots, he observes that he has been too discursive: "By my rambling digressions I perceive myself to be grown old. I used to write more methodically. But one does not dress for private company as for a public ball. Perhaps 'tis only negligence."[60] It isn't, of course, for the previous accounts have already given the reader a sense of both the strong and hardy nature of his parents and its influence, and his only early induction into hardship as a child of ten when put to work in a tallow shop. We are made aware that his background offered few cultural or social advantages. And we have therefore been shown that at a formative age Franklin was for all intents and purposes a nonentity, one of ten children in a poor family. It was out of such an insignificance, then, that he became a giant in American affairs; the humility he expresses is an ostensible attempt to understate the measure of his achievement, but at the same time it insures that that success remains at the forefront of the reader's mind.

In resuming the narrative, Franklin discusses his efforts to educate himself, and the constant reading he undertook. From the beginning, he was interested in the manner by which knowledge and argument could be used to effect one's goals, and therefore, with a precocity he continues to understate, he entered upon a plan to train himself in disputation, by improving his style of writing. Contradiction, dogma and altercation were inadequate

materials, "sowing and spoiling the conversation. . . . Persons of good sense, I have since observed, seldom fall into it, except lawyers, university men, and men of all sorts who have been bred at Edinburgh."[61]

This independent education carried him by the age of sixteen into the works of Locke and into studies of the Socratic method. The art of persuasion already interested him greatly. As the narrative progresses, the persona of the adviser continually injects his present meditations on his youthful efforts, usually to favor their diligence by observing that their effect remained with him all his life, and remains as well the surest route for others to follow:

> And as the chief ends of conversation are to inform, or to be informed, to please or to persuade, I wish well-meaning and sensible men would not lessen their power of doing good by a positive, assuming manner that seldom fails to disgust, tends to create opposition, and to defeat every one of those purposes for which speech was given to us.[62]

This passage reflects some of the "public" Franklin; the speaker here is the educator and diplomat whose inspired self-confidence overcame tremendous political obstacles. His life has been legitimate evidence for the confident tone of his maxims and instruction.

Franklin as a child, or as he reveals himself to be as a child, is a curious creation. There is in what we are given an objectivity and deliberation that force

(and are meant to force) admiration. We do not, even when he chooses to record his unhappiness or various difficulties and mistakes, find him indulging in self-pity or any psychological distress. The closest thing to dreaming we encounter is his expressed wish to go to sea, which he judiciously revises. The boy is a decided personality, whose set-backs do not defeat him--circumstances of all sorts merely afford him the greater opportunity for knowledge, observation and improvement.

Even his eventual sea voyage to England is used in this manner, despite a number of problems, particularly that of money and his friendship with Ralph. But he kept a journal of that voyage, and it is devoted to weather reports, types of marine animals, the structure of the ship, the navigational system. The detail brings to mind the pages of Darwin's journal on the voyage of the Beagle--the tone interestingly similar, despite a ten-year difference in age. The boy is embryo of the scientist, as well as of the diplomat. The adolescent turmoil of the Puritans and Quakers before him is entirely absent.

Much of this effect, of course, is imposed upon the child by the persona of the narrator. If Franklin's purpose is to instruct it is not to demonstrate the folly of turning aside from God, but of turning aside from responsibility and self-development. His selection of events to describe his early life is a deliberate attempt to portray those qualities that must be nurtured in the

formative period if they are to remain viable. His famous arrival at the Market Street wharf in Philadelphia illustrates the importance such a characterization held for him:

> I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, and shall be so of my first entry into that city, that you may in your mind compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there. I was in my working dress. . . . I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuffed out with shirts and stockings; I knew no soul, nor where to look for lodging. Fatigued with walking, rowing and want of sleep, I was very hungry, and my whole stock of cash consisted of a Dutch dollar and about a shilling in copper coin, which I gave to the boatman for my passage.[63]

Within a day of his arrival he received the assistance of fairly well-established people. The Governor, Sir William Keith, visited him and proposed that he set up his own printing business. Shortly afterward, he was introduced by request to the Governor of New York, of which he writes, "This was the second governor who had done me the honor to take notice of me, and for a poor boy like me was very pleasing."[64] There had to have been, despite his self-effacement, something unusual in the boy of seventeen indeed to have provoked such attention.

Philadelphia was the background for Franklin's practical development. There he met and experienced a variety of associations. Through his Junto and the printing business grew the means of his ascendancy to

power and influence. Almanacs like Poor Richard's, written and published first when he was in his mid-twenties, and the printing press in general contributed through the wide dissemination of information to the secularization of American thought and lifestyle. Franklin's involvement in a metropolitan community was particularly significant because of these factors. In the Autobiography he describes this period as one in which he began to develop the Yankee shrewdness that would be as useful in politics as it was in business. His role had to serve as clear evidence to the city that he was a man to be reckoned with, a reliable success:

> I began now gradually to pay off the debt I was under for the printing house. In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman, I took care not only to be in reality industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances of the contrary. I dressed plain and was seen at no places of idle diversion. I never went out fishing or shooting; a book, indeed, sometimes debauched me from my work, but that was seldom, snug, and gave no scandal; and to show I was not above my business, I sometimes brought home the paper I purchased at the stores, thro' the streets on a wheelbarrow. Thus being esteemed an industrious, thriving, young man, and paying duly for what I bought, the merchants who imported stationery solicited my custom; others proposed supplying me with books, and I went on swimmingly.[65]

He becomes a public man during this period, constructing fire houses and defending paper currency, making efforts to improve the city government. The library he

established by subscription was widely imitated, and Franklin's comment on its success reveals the administrator in him whose desire is distinctly directed toward affecting those far beyond the borders of the province, not for self-aggrandisement so much as because the pragmatic utility his ideas provided were likely to insure social benefit:

> This was the mother of all the North American subscription libraries, now so numerous. It is become a great thing itself and is continually increasing. These libraries have improved the general conversation of the Americans, made common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the Colonies in defence of their privileges.[66]

The first part of the Autobiography ends here. The revelation of the inventor, the statesman, the diplomat, await. It was stopped by the outbreak of the Revolution. He does not resume the second part until encouraged by the exhortations of friends that he make public his humane and benevolent personality whose account would "promote a greater spirit of industry and early attention to business, frugality, and temperance with the American youth." The world should not be deprived of "so pleasing and profitable work, a work which would be useful and entertaining not only to a few but to millions."[67]

Thus, he begins again in 1784 in Passy, France. We find his greatest emphasis becomes reflections on the

Philadelphia period in which he first conceived "the bold and arduous project of aiming at moral perfection."[68] The list of virtues was more than a theoretical endeavor. A daily sheet was used to check the errors he committed, the virtues he ignored. And to this table of examination he addressed a prayer to God for daily use, "conceiving God to be the fountain of wisdom, I thought it right and necessary to solicit his assistance for obtaining it."[69]

Order, method, purpose, industry, frugality, temperance and sincerity were some of the qualities by which he judged himself. Here the image of Franklin shifts again, for in the self-control and strict habits he demands of himself resounds the clearest echo of Puritan thinking. He is intensely dedicated to this plan and equally certain of its rightness. Sloth and idleness, a complacent existence, these were the antipodes of reasonable activity. The impulse is not theological, but it is psychological, using the literary model the Puritan autobiographies had given. The wise advisory tone of the narrator usually, and persuasively, <u>suggests</u> and recommends a type of behavior to the reader. The side of himself presented here is for Franklin somewhat more emphatic. Out of the Puritan morality he had constructed a discipline of life.[70]

The last characterization Franklin offers covers his increasing involvement in political and military affairs. The personality conveyed is astute and popular, incisive and vigorous--a planner and negotiator with the French, receiver of a colonelship, adjudicating internal disputes.

He carries the record only up to 1757, unfortunately, but not before we are given solid insight into those qualities of humor, irony and confidence, as well as brilliant intellect, that would later bring him international fame.

It is often enough repeated that Benjamin Franklin was a true man of the Enlightenment. In the Autobiography he subscribes to Deism, and in the second section to a rational humanism. Like Charles Chauncey, he believed that redemption was a state of moral perfection into which man can develop himself. In Chauncey's words,

> It is by the intervention of ourselves, in great measure, that we come to the enjoyment of that happiness our implanted capacities tend to. The good we are originally formed for is put very much into our own power; in so much that we are more or less happy, in consequence of our own conduct . . . the increase, especially of our mental and moral capacities is also put into our own power, that it is, in a great measure dependent on ourselves, whether they attain any considerable degrees either of perfection or happiness. . . . Redemption coincides with moral self-realization, which is something man can achieve by his own efforts.[71]

With so many of his contemporaries, he believed that man is born imperfect but capable of a potential for perfection. Further, in a comparison of the Autobiography with Bunyan, Charles Sanford observes that Franklin understood that his personal history was a symbol of that potential in relation to the country--the new land was the same promise, stripped of its religious conservatism, that had inspired

his predecessors: "Franklin's whole moral fiber was geared to raising a new man and a new society in the world of nations." For him, "In the spiritual drama of a chosen people lay the source of that economic romanticism, so frequently confused with materialism, by which so many Americans have assumed the God-given right to the fruits of an Edenic tree."[72] The words "We hold these truths to be self-evident" in the Declaration of Independence contain the original impulse of Franklin's ethic of enlightened self-interest as the determining agency of progress--a practical idealism.

The choice of autobiography for his writing form is explained in the beginning by Franklin. But it is more complex than the desire to instruct or to recount experience. He is attempting to make experience. It is the autobiographical genre which is the principal means of proving evidentially that reliance upon oneself is a critical factor in development. The shifting tones and voices of age, irony, humor and didacticism, however, are utilized to protect the images he so carefully constructs. Also, his choice is inevitably affected and "may be traced from the Puritan's interest in biography written with an emphasis on the portrayal of character rather than on mere events. They accented the 'inner life' and in so doing he helped to develop and popularize new techniques for analyzing and depicting character."[73]

The use of several characterizations gives a structure

to his writing that reflects his instrumental philosophy and the deliberation succeeds. His transformation is not internalized completely, but it does explain and create the present persona out of recollections of past forms that contributed, in the form of stylized and selective memory, to the present self. What he did, out of what circumstances he becomes what he is, these are given for us to recognize and acknowledge.

His self-awareness is apparent throughout the volume, which is not to say the real Franklin is necessarily available to the reader. He manipulates the images to produce an impression, but he finally uses his Autobiography as a tool of national inspiration. He is unusual, yet he is like other men. With the proper vision--material and moral--anyone can achieve, the same way.

One of the implications of a democratic outlook concerns the inherent necessity of change. Despite a levelling process that must occur both politically and socially, each period of democratic development is a renewed attempt to accommodate the progressive and practical realization of ideals. It is utopian in its premise. Progress is viewed as a positive concept--"order" is not a given, and chaos is not necessarily a dis-advantage. The success of the venture, however, must be determined through the various shifts in perspectives and goals that take place, and their relation to the

aspirations of the individuals that make up a democratic society. The opposition of collective and individual necessity contributes to the ambivalent and elusive character of such a society, and demands a constant reinterpretation.

From its earliest days, American literary effort had emphasized the idea that somehow the development of America was synonomous with the spiritual improvement of the individual. In the eighteenth century this point of view was translated into an early model of the American dream, in which personal achievement was aligned with the relation of social forces to the evolution of the self. The redemptive religious emphasis of the seventeenth century became converted to the idea of moral self-realization as a product of individual effort, rather than divine agency. The dynamic nature of the culture lent viability to the attempt to describe the process of change that was occurring within the individual. The growing sense that the new land could prevail was a parallel to the increasing recognition that the individual could define him or herself. Such a mode of thought became an organic part of the literature.

Three relevant aspects are held in common by the four works here discussed. In varying degrees each is concerned with the successful development of the individual, with the promise of America, and with the expression of

hope and example through the autobiographical medium. Each is a major product of eighteenth-century American literature.

The effort to interpret experience in the personal narrative requires a roughness of prose rhythms as well as a flexible perception. The process of interpretation even in a more factual narrative such as that written by Byrd enlists, to borrow the fustian terminology of the structuralists, a synchronic as well as diachronic level of communication. Even in these early works we perceive the sense of a propelled moment; the individual perception is contained, limited if unfinished, but is also submitting an idealized projection of the future. We apprehend in omniscient echo an Emersonian phrase that all history is, must become, biography. The personal narrative in the eighteenth century, the single enduring form used, was particularly suited to the notion of the uncertain and unconditioned nature of humanity and the individual. It was equally suited to the idealism of the century, for the idea of perfecting the self through a selective record (and justification) of experience could find an analogue in the idea of perfecting the commonwealth.

Identifying the true American was the source of the hope and energy of the serious writer. The idea was a prophetic one, its endurance was speculative but intensely desired. America had been the physical and spiritual Edenic vision for centuries. The transformation of a

wilderness into a prosperous land of universal freedom received its main impetus in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Such activity and purpose was continually reflected in the literary attempts of individuals to both program and create the values and identity that each person should inculcate. The use of the first person gave credence to the individualism that marked a successful democracy.

From 1789 onward the literature takes on a new direction--fiction. The novels of Brown and Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and the short stories of Irving and Poe, begin to occupy critical attention. One feature remains, however, with a curious tenacity--the use of a first-person narrator. Two of our first novels, Wieland and Edgar Huntley, Gothic romances, utilize the form. Irving and Cooper, who tended to adopt European literary styles, used it less frequently, but Hawthorne chose it for some of his stories and for The Blithedale Romance. In all but three of the tales of Edgar Allen Poe the word "I" appears in the first line or the first paragraph, and his Narrative of A. Gordon Pym and Eureka! follow the model. The first six books of Herman Melville, including and ending with Moby-Dick, and many of his short stories, particularly "Bartleby the Scrivener," are written in the first person. Indeed, up until the onset of the Civil War, it is safe to say no other narrative mode was so generally assumed. Also, the effect of eighteenth-century

trends converge in the early nineteenth-century literature, but they are most apparent in the writings of the Transcendentalists. And with rare exceptions, the work of Emerson and Thoreau in essays, prose-narratives and journals, emphasizes, like the novels and stories above, the first person.

How is it indeed that so much of our national literary legacy should seek expression in this manner? The enlightened thought of Europe, converted into native literary inspiration, served to convince many that "American literature seemed destined to become the autochthonous voice of a nation which for the first time in history had manifestly embraced a belief in both God and Reason."[74] When Crèvecoeur conceived of the men and women who settled the land as planters, not only of the landscape but of the nation, he voiced Chauncy's belief that the "implanted capacities" of the individual were only waiting to emerge, to be expressed. It was the confidence of that belief that directed attention to autobiographical revelation.

And past influences contributed as well to the choice of literary forms that were pursued in the romantic period. Puritan mysticism, self-consciousness, introspection, public and private conflicts and problems of identity, the journeying and quest for adventure represented by the mythology of the frontier, the vast undiscovered wilderness--all served as motive or as analogue for the profound inner

discoveries that awaited. The single most accessible means of uniting these myriad themes and impressions lay in the autobiographical narrative. As Robert Sayre writes at the conclusion of his study on colonial autobiographies:

> The "founding" of autobiography as a designated and conscious genre fell within the early years of the Republic, and its growth, coinciding with the spread of the romantic movement, has also coincided with the growth of the United States. . . . The loneliness [of the American wilderness] and the need for new forms really go together. They are consequences of one another and serve jointly as inducements and as difficulties to autobiography. . . . the continued interest in self displayed by Franklin and with added energy by Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and their contemporaries is not just a lingering of a Puritan tradition but the perpetuation of an American tradition.[75]

The next sections will endeavor to give evidence that such a conclusion is inevitable.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER II

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[3]Moses Coit Tyler, The Literary History of the American Revolution: Vol. I: 1763-1776 (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), p. 6.

[4]Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1967), p. 19.

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[6]John Quincy Adams, quoted in Benjamin T. Spencer, The Quest for Nationality: An American Literary Campaign (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1957), p. 123.

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[8]Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders, ed. with introd. by James Sutherland (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 77.

[9]Howard Mumford Jones, O Strange New World: American Culture: The Formative Years (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 119.

[10]William Byrd, The London Diary (1717-1721) and Other Writings, ed. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tirling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 45-46.

[11]Byrd was accepted into the Society largely on the strength of a tract he wrote in December of 1697: "An Account of a Negro Boy that is dappled in several places of his Body with White Spots."

[12]William Byrd, Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina, with introd. and notes by William K. Boyd (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), pp. 120, 122. This edition, one of two used here, utilizes a format in which the official History and the Secret History appear on facing pages for comparison, accounting for the page numbering. This passage is from the History.

[13]William Byrd, "History," in Histories of the Dividing Line, p. 220.

[14]Ibid., p. 70.

[15]William Byrd, "The History of the Dividing Line," The Prose Works of William Byrd of Westover: Narratives of a Colonial Virginian, ed. Louis B. Wright (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1966), p. 187.

[16]Ibid., p. 208.

[17]William Byrd, "The Secret History of the Dividing Line," The Prose Works of William Byrd of Westover: Narratives of a Colonial Virginian, pp. 106-107.

[18]Byrd, "History," The Prose Works of William Byrd, pp. 236-237.

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[20]Sacvan Bercovitch, The Puritan Origins of the American Self (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), passim.

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[22]J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957), p. 83.

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[24]Ibid., pp. 148-49.

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[28]Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[29]Ibid., p. 39.

[30]Ibid., p. 54.

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[35]Ibid., p. 156.

[36]Ibid., p. 162.

[37]Ibid., p. 203.

[38]Ibid., p. 184.

[39]Ibid., p. 203.

[40]Ibid., p. 223.

[41]John Woolman, The Journal of John Woolman and A Plea for the Poor, the John Greenleaf Whittier edition text (New York: Corinth Books, 1961), p. 26.

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[43]Daniel B. Shea, Jr., Spiritual Autobiography in Early American Literature (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 249.

[44]Vernon Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), II, 362.

[45]William Penn, quoted in Frederick B. Tolles, "Emerson and Quakerism," American Literature (May, 1938), 144.

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[47]Ibid., p. 124.

[48]Shea, p. 251.

[49]Woolman, Journal, p. 56.

[50]Ibid., p. 65.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid., p. 97.

[53]John Woolman, "A Plea for the Poor," The Journal of John Woolman and a Plea for the Poor, the John Greenleaf Whittier edition text (New York: Corinth Books, 1961), p. 241.

[54]Woolman, "A Plea for the Poor," p. 245.

[55]Benjamin Vaughn, quoted by Franklin in Benjamin Franklin: The Autobiography and Other Writings, selected and ed. with an introd. by L. Jesse Lemisch (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 85.

[56]Robert F. Sayre, The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry James (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 41.

[57]Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography, p. 36.

[58]Ibid., p. 320.

[59]Ibid., p. 16.

[60]Ibid., p. 25.

[61]Ibid., p. 28.

[62]Ibid., p. 31.

[63]Ibid., p. 38.

[64]Ibid., p. 46.

[65]Ibid., pp. 78-9.

[66]Ibid., p. 82.

[67]Ibid., p. 84, 83.

[68]Ibid., p. 94.

[69]Ibid., p. 99.

[70]It is this plan that has been most typically satirized by Americans as well as others. Along with D. H. Lawrence's dissection of Franklin, Herman Melville, after writing Israel Potter, observed in a letter in 1857 that a "good" topic for a lecture would be the "Daily Progress of Man Towards a State of Intellectual and Moral Perfection." It was also derided by Mark Twain and H. L. Mencken.

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Synthesis: New England Puritanism before the Great Awakening. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 179, 178.

[72]Charles Sanford, "An American Pilgrim's Progress," Benjamin Franklin and the American Character, ed. with an introd. by Charles Sanford (New York: D. C. Heath and Company, 1955), pp. 71, 73.

[73]Kenneth Murdock, Literature and Theology in Colonial New England (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 184.

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CHAPTER III

THOREAU: WALDEN AND

THE REPRESENTATIVE SELF

We see, as artists, as scientists, each in his own way, through the inexorable lens we cannot alter. In a nature that Thoreau recognized as unfixed and lawless anything might happen. The artist's endeavor is to make it happen--the unlawful, the oncoming world, whether endurable or mad, but shaped always by the harsh angles of truth--the truth as glimpsed through the terrible crystal of genius. This is the one sure rule of that other civilization, which we have come to know is greater than our own. Thoreau called it, from the first, "unfinished business," when he turned and walked away from his hut at Walden Pond.

--Loren Eiseley,
The Star Thrower

I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.

--Thoreau, Walden

The energizing idea of eighteenth-century thought--that the individual potential was only waiting to emerge from the chrysallis of dormant being--was brought into focus most directly with the actualization of transcendentalist philosophy as it was demonstrated in Thoreau's Walden. By the concentrated attention upon the self, a meditation that slowly began to develop towards spiritual analogies, Thoreau shaped a new world of experience for the untried observer. With considerable persuasive power, though his narrative voice is often understated and his information often devoted to the mundane features of his life in the woods, Thoreau presents an alternative to the current confusion of affairs. For him that life was lived best which responded to a self-reliance that depended on the purity of inner convictions and its correspondent affinity with Natural forces, and that offered a resilient spirit which could then make the whole larger sphere of human actions the material of truth.

It was just as well, Thoreau declared, that reality should be discovered on the shores of a pond as upon distant empires and exotic dreams. The democratic voice that had for so long affected the American attitude spoke again in Walden, and through it Thoreau dared original minds to embark upon an adventure inward that promised a

deeply personal, yet universal, knowledge of essential things. The judgment of the experience would rest, as he writes in "Thursday" in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, not on "any external standard, but by our own attitude towards it. . . ."[1] Perception would depend upon the fusion of past and present, of subject and object and the direction that fusion leads: "the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one."[2] History, Thoreau writes, holds "but the shadows of our private experiences."[3]

Out of the sequence of private events Thoreau reaches towards the spiritual in a manner reminiscent of Emerson's image in Nature, wherein the analogies of the one and the general "are constant, and pervade nature. . . . Throw a stone into the stream, and the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence."[4] The act is an imaginative one, and in the context of American literature, a transitional one. For with Walden, metaphorical expression enters the literature within the framework of strict autobiography for the first time. The language of symbol assumes an indigenous form.

"I ask to be melted. You can only ask of the metals that they be tender to the fire that melts them."[5] These austere words of Henry David Thoreau, quoted by Emerson in his memorial address, reflect the uncompromising nature of his philosophy. Their implication is sustained in the

two themes that dominate Thoreau's finest work, Walden: the simplification of experience, and the central motif of "awakening." Walden, he writes, is a "journey of the mind,"[6] a preparation and process that he presents to us as the "unfinished business" of discovering, in transcendentalist terms, the higher laws of the soul. Nothing but total commitment to the truth, a commitment achieved by the economy of non essentials and the progressive dynamic of inner enlightenment, can justify the experience of living:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. . . . I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.[7]

Walden is an experiment in self-reliance, but its particular emphasis lies in ascertaining the degree to which the independent individual can perceive the correspondence between a free spirit and the intuitive knowledge of God--or, in Emerson's wording, the "Oversoul."

Thoreau made himself the subject of the adventure as well as its observer; he recognized, as Emerson did in "Experience," that "the true romance which the world exists to realize will be the transformation of genius into practical power."[8] Behind Walden lies the brilliance and the optimism of Emerson's essays; the experiment is a positive suggestion that the utopian idealism, so long present in the American cultural perspective and reaching its most absolute expression in Emerson, can become part of reality. The significant feature of Walden is that the revelations are conveyed in the first-person; the individual mind is the informing character.

The choice of narrative voice is inevitable when viewed in the context of transcendentalist thought. Emerson was Thoreau's mentor and, despite an eventual estrangement of the two, it is Emerson's ideas that provide that primary organic impulse that is manifest in Thoreau's writing. For Emerson, with his theory of the immanance of God in Nature and man, the perception of truth is possible for anyone who desires it, and the essential fact of such truth is that it is intuitive; it cannot be received second-hand. Therefore, the communication of reality is most valid when it comes from the one who has experienced the intuitions. It is the same impulse that shapes Whitman's verse, as when he exhorts his readers in "Song of Myself" to

> Stop this day and night with me and you shall
> possess the origin of all poems,
> You shall possess the good of the earth and sun,
> (there are millions of suns left,)
> You shall no longer take things at second or
> third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead,
> nor feed on the spectres in books
> You shall not look through my eyes either,
> nor take things from me,
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them
> from your self.[9]

Another determinant in the selection of persona appears when Thoreau declares at the outset that

> In most books, the I, or first person,
> is omitted; in this it will be retained;
> that, in respect to egotism, is the
> main difference. We commonly do not
> remember that it is, after all, always
> the first person that is speaking. I
> should not talk so much about myself
> if there were anybody else whom I knew
> as well.[10]

Such an approach is justified by the transcendentalist premise that each event and each individual holds within the essential features of the whole--past, present and future--"a lifetime burning in every moment/And not the lifetime of one man only."[11] Walden is a journey towards identity--and each chapter increases the dimensions of perception and self-awareness until what is finally and significantly achieved is a universalizing of the "I" that informs the work. For Thoreau, the perception of experience requires a continual growth through the renewal and rebirth, within which in a spiraling motion

the individual encounters himself again and again at the same point, but that point marks another step forward into a clarity transformed by the very indefiniteness of the original insights:

> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time . . .[12]

In Walden, Thoreau places himself in the vortex and explains that his private statement is but a pattern for all those who acknowledge the necessity of creative living. The autobiography becomes a hieroglyphic of the soul.

In "The Bean-Field," Thoreau describes his earliest memory of Walden--this "fabulous landscape of my infant dreams."[13] In another chapter he compares his crude hut to a remote corner of the universe, so far was he from the "civilization" he had left behind. The sound of bells through the woods he inhabited was that of a "universal lyre." In "The Ponds," White Pond and Walden are "great crystals on the surface of the earth, Lakes of Light."[14] His description of Spring explains that the new season "is like the creation of Cosmos out of Chaos and the realization of the Golden Age."[15] Be a Columbus, he writes, "to the unexplored and uncultivated continents within."[16] The passages multiply, like the ripples of Walden Pond; Thoreau writes about Walden, a small area situated near a provincial Yankee village, in a language that repeatedly inclines toward symbolic representation.

What and who he is, what and where Walden is are only a catalogue for the metaphor of existence. Reality is transcendental.

This approach has a dramatic effect upon our perception of his experience. We cannot forget that the volume is a record of ever-widening horizons of spiritual development, nor can we overlook the basic underlying motivation for the journal--the attempt to demonstrate that all the circumstances which surround and shape the days and hours at Walden have the substance of cosmic events:

> I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. . . . Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these things and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more Divine in the lapse of all the ages.[17]

In Walden Pond Thoreau sees a universe, not a microcosm of some larger sphere, but the center of Things itself, "earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature."[18] The plant and animal life that border the pond, and the mundane routines of men, have direct correspondences in the encompasing oneness of Nature. The pond is a symbol not only of the depths of self that await recognition but also of the breadth of

imagination that meets those depths at their most extreme level. And as the pond changes with the eternal cycle of the seasons, so does the nature of ideas and activities that seem apposite or random reflect the changes within the individual, and the constant and unceasing potential for that process to reveal an ultimate quest:

> What I have observed of the pond is no less true in ethics. It is the law of average. Such a rule of the two diameters not only guides us toward the sun in the system and the heart in man, but draw [sic] lines through the length and breadth of the aggregate of a man's particular daily behavior and waves of life into his coves and inlets; where they intersect will be the height or depth of his character.[19]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> What if all ponds were shallow? Would it not react on the minds of men? I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless.[20]

"Experience" is the bridge between the physical and the spiritual reality; it is what the solitary perceiver undergoes that determines the degree of transformation. The bridge implies crossing over some unknown boundary to a subjective apprehension of the objective, physical realm. Natural law is an analogue for the Oversoul; through contact with Nature, the separate, isolated individual self is united with a universal and creative spirit. Conveying the relational aspects of such correspondences remains the obligation and necessity of

the individual artist, and the process increasingly demands a symbolic structure. It is this which Thoreau supplies to us in Walden, using himself, the representative man, as a stepping-off point. An observation by Charles Feidelson lends insight into how this structural emphasis reflects the pantheistic attitude of Emerson:

> Emerson asserts, in effect, the identity of "I mean" and "it means"; he maintains that there is no distinction between the poet's act of "meaning," the poet himself, and the "meaning of things." According to him, "a man is a methodical progressive arrangement, a selecting principle." To symbolize is man's function, but to symbolize is to become a symbol, into which, as a monetary mold, "the world is poured like melted wax."[21]

Apprehending the truth of experience, however, is an elusive effort; it requires a constant re-formation, and its dimensions are revealed in parts which he, Thoreau, must continually recombine: "The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little Star-Dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched."[22] Each chapter of Walden, then, is an attempt to explain the degrees by which the receptive mind can engage the close, intuitive sensation of contact with universal forms; each section is concerned, again, with narrowing the distance between the individual self and the transcendental impression of God. In "The Village," Thoreau includes a passage that explains the attempt; it brings to mind Emerson's dictum

that every man must go over the whole ground himself, and recollects the words of T. S. Eliot quoted earlier:

> Every man has to learn the points of the compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost; in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.[23]

Walden is structured deliberately on several thematic levels, but for narrative purposes Thoreau utilizes two separate approaches. There is a juxtaposition in voice of the "I" and the "we" that becomes immediately apparent as a controlling device. The "I" is used primarily to relate the practical events that occur, to explain his habits, customs and attitudes, that which describes what and who he is. Such materials give credence, as he intends, to the more poetic and profound references to a democratic "we." As the first-person account continues, we discover an identification with the narrator, and we recognize what is his alone. Particularly, we begin to admire his objectivity about the person he is describing, himself. He acknowledges a double role: "I" as spectator, "I" as subject. The former is intimately aware of the subject as object. The two invite our attention--create not an ambivalence, but an emotional apprehension that the narrator seeks to discover a special truth. The "I" is the means, through introspective observation, by which he

can lead us, and himself, toward revelation. In "Solitude" he writes:

> I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but a spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you.[24]

The plural "we" is used in complimentary consecutive passages that are intended as commentary. In the above excerpt, he opens with the words, "We may be beside ourselves in a sane sense," and in conclusion records that "This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes." The first-person reference is a literal image that appears between the two general sentences, but the implication of the passage is that the condition described belongs to us all. The "we" and "us" are used as inclusive and suggestive references to the fundamentally common basis of experience that is shared by humanity. There is scarcely a page of Walden in which this counterpoint of correspondence is not given to the audience. Further, the language of such remarks is frequently exhortative--the words appear as extended metaphors that are drawn out of daily life and direct the thought toward a broader spiritual or ethical contemplation. Thoreau's tone becomes more that of the preacher and resembles the sermon tradi-

tion endemic to his environs, but carried into a pantheistic symbolism. It is, in fact, in such passages that we find most strongly the effects and synthesis of Emerson's philosophical thought.

Thus Thoreau becomes a planter of transcendentalist ideas as well as of beans. He begins as a neophyte in the exploration of the soul, and intends that his readers should participate in the process of discovery. Yet, Walden is not intended as a demonstration of the final solution, either for him or for others. Thoreau makes the experience of his sojourn at Walden an introduction to life, life in its essence, and the emphasis of his exhortations is to direct each individual toward the apprehension of his or her own path of knowledge. With regard to this, we find again the inclusive tone as he universalizes the subject "I" and his experience incorporates Everyman.

> I would not have any one adopt my mode of living on any account; for, beside [sic] that before he has fairly learned it I may have found out another for myself. I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead. The youth may build or plant or sail, only let him not be hindered from doing that which he tells me he would like to do. It is by a mathematical point only that we are wise, as the sailor or the fugitive slave keeps the polestar in his eye; but that is sufficient guidance for all our life. We may not arrive at our port within a calculable period, but we would preserve the true course.[25]

Walden is a window into that perception. Each route chosen, if it be done according to the inner "soundings" of truth, is as valid as the next: "Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity."[26] Thoreau affirms the eighteenth-century conviction, seeded through Emerson, that Nature and man were compliments in their divinity and endowed with infinite possibility. In words that reveal a strangely contemporary poetic tone he admonishes us to

> Start now on that farthest western way, which does not pause at the Mississippi or the Pacific, nor conduct toward a worn-out China or Japan, but leads on direct, a tangent to this sphere, summer and winter, day and night, sun down, moon down, and at last earth down too.[27]

Thoreau searches out the secrets within that will yield those without. The chapters of Walden each weigh some crucial theme in the balance, and he approaches his experience with an unrelenting purpose. His writing develops out of the crystalline beauty of Emerson's thought, but it contains an additional element--a certain fanaticism for truth that forced him to live through the horizons he sought, and thus maintain a solitude few others could understand or have access to. The book itself never departs from the assumption that what happens to him and what he learns are representative of experience available to anyone. His personal account is but the record of a pathfinder.

One theme already mentioned appears in nearly every chapter of Walden, and coalesces the various meanings and intentions discussed above. That is the idea of awakening. "We are sound asleep nearly half our Time,"[28] he writes near the end of the volume. To this twilight state of being, Thoreau addresses his most lyrical thought. The torpid condition, he observes in "Economy," will forever keep humanity in a primitive stage, but if they should feel "the influence of the spring of springs arousing them, they would of necessity rise to a higher and more ethereal light."[29]

The rural environment of Walden becomes Thoreau's catalyst for physical awakening. Close to nature, in an isolated area for which the sounds of civilization are muffled, he is able to sustain himself with only the barest necessities. He pares away the extraneous, discarding anything which interferes with the concentrated existence he desires to lead. A rock placed for aesthetic appreciation in his homemade cabin has to be thrown out because it requires dusting. Only the activity which supports and reinforces the honing process can be admitted. Food and shelter are kept at their simplest level, and thus fuse the more entirely with Nature. "The winds which passed over my dwelling were such as sweep over the ridges of mountains, bearing the broken strains, or celestial parts only, of terrestrial music."[30] Thoreau strives for a state of physical perfection in which his

perceptions may be the more attuned to the eternal rhythms of the day:

> The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it. Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere.[31]

His house, a mere frame "so slightly clad," was "a sort of crystallization around me, and reacted on the builder. It was suggestive somewhat of a picture in outlines."[32] These lines give us, perhaps, the key to the structure of Walden. Within the natural landscape of Concord, Thoreau circumscribes the "fabulous landscape" of his childhood dreams; the physical environment provides the outline for the larger adventure of the evolving spirit. Time and space are relative features of a visionary attitude that need not entertain exotic places or philosophies to justify itself. The center remains individual--again, all the horizons that await discovery are present in the single act of being aware, the morning of the soul. Like the alternation of voice from "I" to "we," the physical reality, once it is simplified, reaches into and shapes the mental and spiritual awakening.

This extension affects the chapters that follow "Economy." Along with the elimination of physical non-essentials, Thoreau begins to weed out, as he does with the fields he plants, those features of social custom that inhibit the mind by covering, suffocating it, with rules and habits that make the surface of things the most important.

It was not antagonism toward people that led him toward the solitude which pervades the book, but the realization that he would be able to ascertain fundamentals only by ignoring traditions imposed upon him. "I have a great deal of company in my house, especially in the morning, when nobody calls."[33] Company, he writes in "Solitude," is dissipating. People seem to require not friendship and communion, but hospitalality. This whole earth, Thoreau declares,

> is but a point in space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant inhabitants of yonder star, the breadth of whose disk cannot be appreciated by our instruments? Why should I feel lonely? Is not our planet in the Milky Way? This which you put seems to me not to be the most important question. What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another. What do we want most to dwell near to? Not to many men surely, the depot, the post-office, the bar-room, the meeting-house, the school-house, the grocery, Beacon Hill or the Five Points, where men most congregate, but to the perennial source of our life, whence in all our experience we have found that to issue, as the willow stands near the water and sends out its roots in that direction. . . . For the most part we allow only outlying and transient circumstances to make our occasions. They are, in fact, the cause of our distraction.[34]

Being alone forces the engagement with basic experience, and becomes a threshold upon which he can begin to decipher the transcendental meaning present in physical symbols.

Interestingly, the effect of the experience as he conveys it has a static quality:

> I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once, and that was a few weeks after I came to the woods, when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighborhood of man was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.--[35]

The apprehensions exist all at once, physical and beyond physical, a fusing of Nature, man, God omnipresent--a silence. The configuration suggests the powerful influence upon Thoreau of eastern mysticism, and as well his deep interest in poets like Carew and Donne and the conversion experiences of the Puritans. The perception is a closed circle, a universe all in ONE,--Emerson's "Brahma"--and in such passages it is as if time had ceased and eternity was at once the whole substance.

Walden, however, is not a stasis. The journal illuminates the profound quality of such moments, but they have a transitory element--they remain elusive. The driving momentum of Walden exists in the dynamic effort required before awareness can occur. The endless changing of the seasons is a signifier that the route toward truth has many dimensions, and experience many forms. The objective is not to reach the end, but to accept the manifold variations of the attempt, to recognize that truth, intuitively perceived, is not the goal but the inevitable result of the awakened consciousness. "I would not wish to discover that I had not lived," Thoreau wrote. He left Walden because what it had to teach him was concluded. Some other path was indicated--"I have several more lives to live." The whole physical and spiritual event, the selective record of his two years at Walden, the exhortation that every man and woman be seekers of the continents within,--all of it is a daring investigation of the self in which Thoreau the subject observes Thoreau the representative individual and verifies the existence of possibility.

The continual dynamic in the narrative from personal account to spiritual revelation makes the journal much more, however, than the autobiography of one man. Philosophically it becomes the record of humanity but ideologically it can be seen as the "biography" of America. In the context both of time and place, Walden

becomes a creative text of democracy; because of its context, the journal synthesizes the myriad intellectual influences of the preceding two centuries, and at the same time manifests their contradictions. In this respect, it is a singular document.

In his essay "The Democratization of Culture," Karl Mannheim explains that pantheism is an inevitable metaphysical formulation in a society which has begun to emphasize egalitarian concerns:

> In this philosophy, God is wholly immanent in Nature, and every existing thing acquires a particle of the divine essence. From a certain point of view, this represents the culminating point of the democratizing tendency, for it is here that the "vital selfhood" of all elements receives its fullest recognition.[36]

He also states that "there is an intrinsic correlation between the increasing abstractness of symbols used in communication and the democratic character of the culture."[37] This, Mannheim claims, is due to the necessity of making a concept available to a diversity of perceptions and experiences; it is a matter of accommodation. In his essay, Mannheim observes that the specifically modern concept of "organism" can be traced to Kant, and suggests that society entered the stage of self-steering "organic life" only in the age of democracy. The democratic thinker sees in human "greatness" a "manifestation of that human perfectability which is the universal heritage of man."[38]

The democratic feature engendered a transcendental conception of "universally shareable and communicable knowledge."[39] Kantian idealism encouraged more and more individuals to interpret reality from their own personal point of view. Out of Kantian metaphysics, writes Mannheim, the democratic mind "rejects all alleged knowledge that must be gained through special channels, open to a chosen few only. It accepts as truth only that which can be ascertained by everybody in ordinary experience."[40] The individual is related to all others and all things, and in the dynamic transformations of a changing society, more and more individuals become "capable of exercising autonomy, and it was this process which made the new conception of knowledge as a spontaneous and creative act possible."[41]

Such ideas are provocative if they are considered in light of the motivating impulses dominating the work of Emerson and Thoreau. For both men, the essential democratic nature of the American scene was of deep interest. Further, the contradictions inherent in the political and social realities are visible in their writing, and these elements were shaping forces not only in the ideas they presented, but in the organic and symbolic evolution of their presentation. This aspect has particular significance in any discussion of Walden. The existence of democratic themes in American literature is by now hardly a novel feature; in Walden, however, it enters the realm of imagination as a distinct creative inspiration. If it is when

an idea filters through the dimension of artistic creativity that we most clearly recognize its validity, then Walden can be seen perhaps as the testament as well as the inevitable consequence of the democratic mindset. The "inevitable" feature exists in that the expression of democratic ideas will be most fully manifest in the individual voice. It begins with Emerson.

"It is one soul that animates all men," Emerson declares in "The American Scholar." The subject of literature, he writes, is the ordinary man: "I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low." Yet he continues:

> If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience,--patience; with the shades of all the good and great for company; and for solace the perspective of your own infinite life; and for work the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world. Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be a unit;--not to be reckoned one character;--not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, in which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south? Not so, brothers and friends--please God, ours shall not be so. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our hands; we will speak our own minds. . . . A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.[42]
>
> (italics mine)

Simultaneously in his essay Emerson affirms the spiritual unity and commonality of all people and the necessity for opposing any collective perception that obstructs the unique characteristics of a single human being. The American scholar, Man Thinking, is an actor in the events of life, one who through his participation will convert the world, but he is also an individualist who must live by asserting his right to follow a separate, private path. His obligation is to the humanity of which he is a part, but it is an obligation that can be fulfilled only after he has discovered himself. It is then that the correspondences become self-evident:

> The poet, in utter solitude, remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that which men in crowded cities find true for them also. The orator . . . finds that he is the complement of his hearers;--that they drink his words because he fulfills for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds this is the most acceptable, most public, most universally true. The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels, This is my music; this is myself.[43]

Emerson's emphasis on self-reliance and individualism controls this essay, as it does all his others, and it is the driving principle of self-reliance that inspired Thoreau's Walden. But despite that emphasis Emerson views the larger social sphere in terms that combine an ideological concern with the spiritual. His voice is distinctly

American when on the issue of slavery in 1834 he writes in his Journal that

> Democracy, Freedom, has its roots in the sacred truth that every man hath in him the divine Reason, or that, though few men since the creation of the world live according to the dictates of Reason, yet all men are created equal of so doing. That is the equality and the only equality of all men. To this truth we look when we say, Reverence thyself; Be true to thyself.[44]

Here runs the influence of Kant that is so apparent in Emerson's ideas, and which he himself acknowledged. And in "The Fortune of the Republic" he declares

> The continent we inhabit is to be physic and food for our mind as well as our body . . .; the native but hidden graces of the landscape . . . [are] intruding a new and continental element into the national mind. . . . The Genius or Destiny of America is . . . a man incessantly advancing, as the shadow on the dial's face, or the heavenly body by whose light it is marked. . . . Let us realize that this country, the last found, is the great charity of God to the human race.[45]

Such passages, but particularly the words, "a man incessantly advancing," dramatically convey a philosophy that had been part of the American attitude since the first settlers began to extend their physical horizons. The "shadow on the dial's face" is an organic image in which the natural movement of the sun is analogized with the development of the individual self, or as Emerson and Margaret Fuller wrote in their introduction to the first

edition of Dial magazine, it is an image (drawn from the poet Andrew Marvell) of

> such a Dial as the Garden itself, in whose leaves and flowers and fruits the suddenly awakened sleeper is instantly apprised not what part of dead time but what state of life and growth is now arrived and arriving.[46]

Emerson carries the theme of progress at once into the social entity and toward the inner self: "The only sin is limitation," he writes in "Circles."[47] "Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. . . . No truth so sublime but it may be trivial tomorrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled; only so far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them."[48] In "Self-Reliance" the "soul becomes."[49] The forward movement of the individual and his or her spiritual extension into every facet of life parallel the dynamic unfolding of the nation. Life is an "Ideal Journeying," in "Experience," and

> what a future it opens! I feel a new heart beating with the love of the new beauty. I am ready to die out of nature and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the west. . . .[50]

And in his Journal Emerson writes that "Metamorphosis is the law of the universe."[51]

Nature, man and nation are knit together in the premises of Emerson's thought in an ideal form that presumes through

an inward development the perfectability of the whole:

> Emerson interpreted the self through the medium of American nature; his model of spiritual growth reflected a teleology that eliminated the tension between process and fulfillment. It gathered meaning by its proleptic identification with the destiny of the New World, of which American nature was a symbol.[52]

The pattern emerges as a movement from the particular to the general; the individual is an icon for the oversoul--the spirit of American ideals reinforces the a priori assumption that by being true to oneself, the whole world can be revolutionized. The whole process involves, then, a progression which yields to the optimism inherent in the romantic principles of the period.

Emerson was a moral philosopher. None of his ideas can be considered apart from the influence of his Puritan heritage and Unitarian theology. But within that influence lies more than a rigorous conception of "Truth." The direction of his thought toward the organic development of everything the individual perceives and experiences is a uniquely American vision because it draws its substance as much from the Puritans as it does from romanticism, German philosophy or eastern mysticism. The substance, as Emerson used it and Thoreau lived it, was democratic in essence:

> While Transcendentalists escaped most of the dogma and theology of Calvinism, they shared its emotional qualities. Much of the zeal, introspection, soul-searching,

> journal-keeping, industry, distrust of fiction, and moral restraint of the Puritan tradition left its mark and set the limits which prevented the Transcendentalists from imitating the less disciplined conduct of the European romantics. While retaining the intensity and exaltation of earlier New England, the Transcendentalists cast off the sense of sin and inadequacy and the error of eternal damnation wherever they could do so. . . . It has been well said of the Transcendentalists that <u>they gave to all men what the Calvinists had reserved to the elect</u>.[53]
>
> (italics mine)

For the transcendentalist the fusion of the individual, Nature and God was an appeal to the ideal and a refusal to accept boundaries. The strength of their convictions had its roots in the absolute and single-minded conceptions of the Calvinists. For the Puritan, self-knowledge was viewed as an approach to God; Emerson converted the principle into the pantheistic idea that self-knowledge <u>was</u> God. The Puritans saw the regenerate individual as someone who had suddenly received intuitive knowledge of divine Grace; Emerson considered the experience of being "reborn" into the world as the apprehension of a Divine Idea that was the indwelling spirit of self, omnipresent, continually transforming the awareness and perception of reality. And mystical Puritans like Jonathan Edwards conceived of the New Land as the final stage in the redemptive history of the world;[54] Emerson saw in the American landscape the possibility of a nation of self-reliant individuals who could create an ideal world in transcendentalist terms, a

utopian idea free from the shackles of static historical tradition. "The land," writes Emerson, "is the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our culture. . . . the land with its . . . senative influences is to repair the errors of a scholastic and traditional education."[55]

The effect of Puritan thought on Emerson is described by Perry Miller as the discovery of a "Calvinism transcendentalized." When the Calvinist's passionate search for soul and for nature is released from dogma, its mystical tone reappears in the assertion of a freedom to celebrate the presence of God in the self.[56] The extension of the concept of self-reliance into the mind and soul is infinite; the idea then becomes a metaphor for the nation, for the perfectability of the commonwealth. Emerson recognizes and derides the dangers of uniformity, conformity, and practical utopias like Brook Farm in the development of a democratic society. But he affirms in all his writing the vast power to be received, a power as large as the land and as absolute as that of the Puritans, when a free society should realize its premises. He is the first, perhaps the only, philosopher of democracy.

His desire to see the link established between the individual and the societal development made Emerson call for a national poet, for a literature that would express the contradictions and the true nature of the land and the people. The form was already determined. It must, writes Emerson, be a mirror of the age; it must speak to

each member, and offer renewal and reconciliation; its form must be autobiography, however transformed: "Dante's praise is that he dared to write his autobiography in colossal cipher, or into universality."[57] For the "experience of each new age requires a new confession."[58] Poets, as liberating gods, "are free, and they make free."[59] And a poet of America would describe the "value of our incomparable materials, and . . . [see] in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he admires in Homer. . . ."[60] For "America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for meters."[61]

Emerson did not perceive the presence of the representative artist in Thoreau. But in his essay on "The Poet" he writes that

> The poet's habit of living should be set on a key so low that the common influences should delight him. His cheerfulness should be the gift of the sunlight; the air should suffice for his inspiration, and he should be tipsy with water. . . .[62]

At another point he observes that

> The world being thus put under the mind for verb and noun, the poet is he who can articulate it. . . . We are symbols and inhabit symbols; workmen, work, and tools, words and things, birth and death, all are emblems; but we sympathize with the symbols, and being infatuated with the economical uses of things, we do not know that they are thoughts. The poet, by an ulterior intellectual perception, gives

> them a power . . . and puts eyes and a tongue into every dumb and inanimate object. . . . For through that better perception he stands one step nearer to things, and sees the flowing or metamorphosis; perceives that thought is multiform; that within the form of every creature is a force impelling it to ascend into a higher form; and following with his eyes his life, uses the forms which express that life, and so his speech flows with the flowing of nature. . . . He uses forms according to the life, and not according to the form. . . . He knows why the plain or meadow of space was strown [sic] with these flowers we call suns and moons and stars; why the great deep is adorned with animals, with men, with gods; for in every word he speaks he rides on them as the horses of thought.[63]

Such words describe the poet at Walden. He lived in the heart of things and invested Nature with symbols that had their analogies in the imagination of the soul:

> I drifted in the gentle night breeze, now and then feeling a slight vibration along it, indicative of some life prowling about its extremity, of dull uncertain blundering purpose there, and slow to make up its mind. At length you slowly raise, pulling hand over hand, some horned pout squeaking and squirming to the upper air. It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonal themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element, which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook.[64]

The contact with Nature as it is given in Walden is a lyrical effort to strive towards the ideal--"Every nail

driven should be as another rivet in the machine of the universe." More than love, more than fame, give me truth, Thoreau declares.[65]

At Walden, Thoreau lived on the border. The theme of the wilderness that captured the imagination and energies of the two previous centuries is as present in Walden. But Thoreau provides a transition from the physical reality to the spiritual infinity of purpose. This movement he places in the context of the American landscape. America was needed, he wrote, "to utter the 'wild strain' which English literature lacked."[66] The wilderness was the place of recovery and the beginning of the adventure of living; its existence was the substance of the American experience. Away from civilization, a new civilization might arise--here we hear the echo of Crèvecoeur. The experience of Walden was, like his bean fields, a "connecting link between the wild and the cultivated."[67]

> We need the tonic of wildness. . . . At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder-cloud, and the rain. . . .[68]

To witness our limits transgressed--this, writes Thoreau, is our necessity. Face the future, as individual

and united as individuals, and say, he asks, that "I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet."[69] At the end of "Visitors" he welcomes the "pilgrims" that leave the shackles of "ought" and "must" for the sake of freedom, a liberation that begins with the knowledge that as yet nothing is understood. Everything is waiting to be discovered, the "vast and undeveloped nature," of hoot-owls and loons, images of stars, and the road not taken. The situation of such a liberty is "the only true America."[70] Its expression must come from the single point of view, but that same expression, as Whitman would promise in Democratic Vistas, will enlighten all. The impulse toward moral freedom is the only security, and for Thoreau, it is within that principle that America will experience itself most fully:

> Some are dinning in our ears that we Americans . . . are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or even the Elizabethan man. But what is that to the purpose? A living dog is better than a dead lion. . . . Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made.[71]
>
> Who knows what beautiful and winged life . . . may unexpectedly come forth amidst society's most trivial and handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last![72]

The world of Walden is the particular experience out of which comes a universal "connection" with everything else.

It is a levelling of experience, an equalizer, something anyone can have access to. Its reality is fragile--a horizon one moves toward while the grasp is delicate, tenuous. In "Brute Neighbors" Thoreau opens with the fact that a meditation he is having is interrupted by some surface necessity--he laments that the essence of things had slipped away from him, the opportunity for discovery was gone then. This clarifies for him the need for solitude, the difficulty of reaching a union with vital things while necessity intervenes. But he desires that each person find in meditation some inner space that for a time can be a private frontier of understanding. No one is beyond the opportunity. The surface reality impinges on us all; therein lies the fragile quality--but it can be overcome.

For a transcendentalist thinker like Thoreau, the real event is the whole key to the universe. Its record can only be given as the narrative of a real life, a life in which "only that day dawns to which we are awake." As Emerson wrote, "If the whole of history is in one man, it is all to be explained from individual experience."[73]

Walden is a visionary book. By the end of the volume one involuntarily thinks of Walden Pond in capital letters. It has assumed a mythological proportion; its pure water is "mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges." It has become the emblem of Truth. Thoreau's individualism is a symbol of the freedom and aspiration that is a distinct part of the American imagination. By dealing with Nature,

with the "terrible simplicity" of life,[74] men would find the shams and delusions they had esteemed for soundest truth were but the shadow of reality. But through a confrontation with inner processes and possibilities, they would each alone and then together discover that life, compared with ordinary perception, "would be a fairy tale and the Arabian Nights. . . ."[75]

> I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.[76]

Emerson regretted that Thoreau chose to be the "captain of a huckleberry party." But though Thoreau's physical boundaries seldom left Concord, by his faith in and extensions of Emerson's philosophy he crossed an "invisible boundary," and "new, universal and more liberal laws" established themselves around him.[77]

Thoreau was an indigenous prophet. He offered the journey to other men, admonishing only that they simplify life, put the foundations under their dreams, in order to "live with the license of a higher order of things."[78] Nature and imagination together would reveal the Truth he asserted, would give the chance of rediscovery that was imperative.

The vision Thoreau inspires is supported through the personal account. The ongoing process of revelation is offered through "the medium of . . . I, the one who sees,"

by whom "the reader's capacity for sight may be radically altered."[79] Thoreau would hold on, as Crèvecoeur and Woolman and others had before him, to the sense of awakening consciousness--"I am afoot with my vision," he says.[80] As with Emerson, and the Coleridgean tinge in Emerson's thought, Thoreau sought in his listeners what Channing had earnestly called for, to pierce "beneath the exterior of life to the depths of the soul," and lay open "its mysterious working, borrowing from the whole outward creation fresh images and correspondences, with which to illuminate the secrets of the world within us."[81]

The conception was meant to insure a national consciousness as well as a private one. "Like 'Song of Myself' and the Leatherstocking cycle, Walden is an attempt to achieve an American epic--a poem whose images and sequence will recapitulate the experiential and spiritual history of the New World as myth and as personal narrative."[82] It was the assertion of the self, in Walden, that was intended to convey not only the spiritual Truth, but the expectation of a national one.

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CHAPTER IV

IDENTITY AND TRANSFORMATION: THE FIRST-PERSON NARRATOR IN THE FICTION OF HAWTHORNE, POE AND MELVILLE

As every man is haunted by his own daemon, vexed by his own disease, this checks all his activity.

--Emerson, Fate

But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists!

--Melville, "The Mast-Head," Moby-Dick

For ages we, the Columbuses, have sailed and sailed; we have circled the entire earth. And at long last, hurrah! The burst of a salute, and everyone aloft the masts: before us is a different, hitherto unknown side of Zero Crag, illumined by the northern lights of the One State--a pale blue mass, sparks, rainbows, suns, hundreds of suns, billions of rainbows. . . .

What if we are but a knife's breadth away from the other, the black side of the Crag? . . . The knife is the universal means of solving all knots; along the knife's edge is the road of paradoxes--the only road worthy of a fearless mind.

--Zamyatin, WE

The autobiographical literature in America from the colonial period through transcendentalism had one consistent feature: for the Puritan, for the eighteenth-century landowner, and for Thoreau, the exercise of self-revelation was intended as a representative act. The personal narratives used the "I" as a means of providing access for all to experiences that were meant to explain and realize religious or ideological fundamentals. The democratic feeling inherent in the writing rested upon the determined effort to make such experiences part of a shared and communicable knowledge. The American landscape provided common themes and motifs through which the writers could both express and formulate their understanding of the new continent and the creative potential of the new culture. The general tone of this early literature was optimistic, exhortative and persuasive. It was directed toward a listening audience--the "we" of Thoreau--and its inclusive nature usually precluded the selection of any literary form that did not utilize a strictly autobiographical intention.

A transformation of literary genres occurred, however, with the appearance of the romance-novels of Hawthorne and Melville, and the short stories of Edgar Allen Poe. In a period of little more than a decade, from Poe's publication of Arthur Gordon Pym in 1838 to Melville's publication of

Moby-Dick in 1851, American writing underwent a radical shift in its development. Not only the form was changed; there became evident a concomitant degree of psychological complexity hitherto lacking in the literature. One new (and renewed) element contributing to this, of course, was the recognition and presentation of evil and guilt as internalized agencies of motivation. Another, equally significant, was the desire to explore the intricacies of experience through the mind and to deal with the ambiguities of perception from a more distanced point of view than true autobiography could admit. These authors chose, however, in many of their works--too many for it to be regarded as a coincidence--to proceed not with autobiography, but with the autobiographical voice; they wrote fiction, but they wrote a great deal of that fiction in the first-person.

Historically, there are several reasons that can be considered as influential in leading Hawthorne, Poe and Melville toward a use of the "I" as narrator. Particularly for Poe and Melville, who used it the most frequently, but also for Hawthorne, the choice of narration certainly derived from some of the cultural ideas previously discussed: a remnant of the Puritan idea that the personal narrative was the most reliable and effective mode of communication, an attitude that had been pervasive for two centuries; the eighteenth-century assumption that particular experience was the key to understanding the general; and the transcendentalist demonstration that the individual's symbolic

evocation of truth was possible and preferable--for it could reduce experience to its fundamental nature. Also to be considered is what became the growing emphasis on novelistic techniques arising out of the first-person Gothic romances of Charles Brockden Brown and the regional and frontier narrative tales of Irving and Cooper.

Filtered through these influences is a dominant quest. Out of the earliest literary ambitions, grounded as they were on literal reality as a reflection of the spiritual, came an obsession with Truth--and the intense desire to find, or define, answers to ultimate questions in the creative act. Not until the impulse of romanticism entered the scene, however, was this effort fully translated into the fictional terms. Once it was, the process of ascertaining truth through the individual's experience became multi-dimensional, sustained by paradox and ambiguity; the author and the narrator were more clearly separated, yet not so entirely divided that there did not remain some fusion of identity. But to discuss life through a projected narrator meant that the effort to order experience required a greater distance than time or memory alone.

In the situation of the American novelists under discussion here, the choice of narrator also reflected an alienation from the encompassing representative attitude so present in earlier, and contemporary, writing. The narrative voice was not a rejection of democratic sentiment,

but an emphasis on a facet of its ideology--individualism. In every respect the fictional form in the first person responded to an authentic American perspective and tone, but it sought discovery in symbols that found their most viable form in the unbounded and unknown avenues of the self alone. It was, to varying degrees, the unique aspects of people that attracted these writers--and democracy therefore was a collection of unique individuals attempting the difficult task of reconciling their own identities with the levelling force of public and social pressures.

In the absence of literal realities that they could wholly accommodate, they sought reality in the metaphysical realm of metaphor, allegory and symbol. They would not, like so many writers before them, provide a past for the new country, or the citizen. Rather, these writers--Hawthorne, Poe, Melville--would shape out of the morality and the native themes mythologies of their own. If it called for a new literary form, it would not depart entirely from the old; it would carry the visionary qualities of the old, but in a different sense. For them, the first person was the center, because it was the ambiguous figure. By the method of symbolic form, they would explore the labyrinth of psychological processes, and through that try to understand the needs that men and women ought to have, as well as those by which they are possessed.

The literature of American romanticism as it is manifest in these three principal authors assumes the

familiar dynamic premise that change is the mark of reality, and each writer in his own way, successfully or otherwise, seeks to discover how that change occurs. Because of the use of the first-person as a narrative voice, each of the works to be discussed contains an inherently unfinished quality; there is the eternal prospect of rediscovery, and the tale is never wholly completed. This open-ended structure provides a link to the literature that already existed; there are analogies to the primitive, developing culture, and to the idealism that infused so much of what had been written. Even in its fiction, American literature continued to move toward the future--and the future, because it was unknown, required symbols for its configuration.

Finally, it is the presence of the narrator and the self-revelations or deceptions he undergoes that sustain the complex thematic structure of the works; without the first-person, the tenor of American fiction would have largely resembled, as in Cooper and Irving, the imitations of Sir Walter Scott and other transatlantic authors whose stylistic methods hung awkwardly on native productions. Historical romances and elegant essays could not satisfactorily incorporate the uneven and chaotic horizons, physical and psychological, that formed the fabric of the expanding continent. The transformations of and into identity still required explication first-hand. The fact that the personal narrative entered the realm of fiction meant only that reality could not any longer be wholly

contained in literal terms; the American creative voice was awakening to other experiences, on other levels--on the frontiers of the mind. It is this different awareness--an intensely personal awareness--that is revealed in the works to be considered.

Of all the writers, Hawthorne is the most restrained in the use of the first person. His stories and novels are beautifully structured, with that organic "architecture" Henry James admired, that so carefully welds form and content into the precision of a work like The Scarlet Letter or "The Artist of the Beautiful." The use of "I" as narrator actually occurs only in a few stories, most of them from "Legends of Province House" and the first selection of Twice-Told Tales, in the impressionistic prefaces to his novels, and in The Blithedale Romance. A number of other short stories begin with the "I," but Hawthorne is merely intruding his own voice briefly before the narrative develops, a liberty that has implications but which cannot be viewed as a first-person emphasis. What is interesting is that the intrusions parallel structurally his personal introductions to the longer works.

In "The Custom House," Hawthorne circumscribes the limits of autobiographical revelation with a statement that may give insight into why his use of the first person is so controlled:

> It is scarcely decorous . . . to speak all, even where we speak impersonally. But, as thoughts are frozen and utterance benumbed, unless the speaker stand in some true relation with his audience, it may be pardonable to imagine that a friend, a kind and apprehensive, though not the closest friend, is listening to one talk; and then, a native reserve being thawed by this genial consciousness, we may prate of the circumstances that lie around us, and even of ourself, but still keep the inmost ME behind its veil. To this extent, and within these limits, an author, methinks, may be autobiographical, without violating either the reader's rights or his own.[1]

His choice of the romance as the vehicle for his narratives would seem to extend the reservations of this passage, for as he observes in the preface to The House of Seven Gables, romances work through "a far more subtile process" than the realism of a novel.[2] By tinging fact with "the Marvellous," the narrative becomes "more difficult of attainment."[3] Again, in "The Custom House," he continues with an image of obscured reality, as fantasy mingles with the concrete features of a firelit room. Moonbeams are converted from snow-images into men and women, and

> Glancing at the looking-glass, we behold--deep within its haunted verge--the smouldering glow of the half-extinguished anthracite, the white moonbeams on the floor, and a repetition of all the gleam and shadow of the picture, with one remove further from the actual, and nearer to the imaginative.[4]

What is apparent here is a resistance to ordinary perceptions of experience. The causes for Hawthorne's use of romance is frequently attributed to the paucity of

background materials available in the American milieu, and also to his alienation from many of the practical realities of American economic and social development. These, together with an introspection derived from his Puritan heritage, and from romanticism in general, led him toward the abstract representation of events. His reticence in the use of the first person, at first glance, would seem to support the preference for removing experience into a hazier realm, and limiting the possibility of direct communication.

There is, however, an ambivalence attached to this careful intention. Controlling all Hawthorne's writing is the deep preoccupation with the psychological effects of sin and guilt. Within the allegorical and symbolic levels through which he writes, the exploration of moral aberations rebounds upon the individual who must confront him or herself. The distance achieved by romance is countered by a desire to dramatically realize the internal conflicts that possess his characters. The themes of isolation and solitude that haunt his tales provoke a subjective point of view that dwells upon the "unpardonable sin" of detaching oneself from the reality of human kinship, for as he writes in "Wakefield," "by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever."[5]

The shadowed worlds he creates are set against an uneasy, implicit recognition that their substance is a moral caveat--they contain the hidden or disintegrating features of personality and carry a tone of inexorability.

The ambivalence lies in Hawthorne's attempt to convey this psychic drama without capitulating to the total subjectivity that would be likely to occur if he wrote in the first person. There is a consequent guarded tension in his stories; a tension that is only truly relaxed in The Blithedale Romance. Ironically, or perhaps predictably, it is there that we find one of his least successful creations.

In strict autobiography the writer's emphasis is a selective narration of real events that allow him or her to provide--like Bradford, Woolman, Crèvecoeur, Franklin, Thoreau--a somewhat idealized portrait of the life that has been lived. Whatever the secondary impulses to record a personal history may be, the primary motive rests upon the desire to decipher and communicate the present and past experience from a newly ordered and usually positive framework. The process becomes more complex, if not more profound, when the writer chooses to formulate that experience in fictional terms while retaining the narrative voice "I." The fusion of memory and imagination, particularly imagination when it is combined with moral overtones and placed in an unreal setting, produces less a new order of things than a sense of disorder; the very nature of the point of view utilized distorts and scatters perceptions in crucial ways that contribute to the uneven structure of the work. Unlike true autobiography, the "I" in the fictional piece is being created for the first time as a character

while the story is being told, and so are the events. It is not selective narration of a real life, but the invention of one that is intended to give a semblance of reality. The ambiguity of the process of recollecting and synthesizing experience is increased, as is the possibility that the attempt may dissolve into failure. In many ways, that is just what happens in Hawthorne's imaginative exposition of the experiment at Brook Farm.

In The American Novel, Richard Chase notes two main sources of American romance: pastoral nostalgia and the moral melodrama.[6] These elements are certainly evident in The Blithedale Romance. Set in an "Arcadia" of woodland and fields and devoted to tilling the soil and a homely primitivism, the "Illustrious Society of Blithedale," as Miles Coverdale calls the reformers, gradually devolves into as melodramatic a play of emotional conflicts as did the characters of the "scribbling women" Hawthorne deplored, though in Hawthorne's romance it is done with infinitely greater artistry by the man D. H. Lawrence deigned to call a "blue-eyed darling."

"In writing a romance," Hawthorne declares, "a man is always--or always ought to be--careening on the utmost verge of a precipitous absurdity, and the skill lies in coming as close as possible, without actually tumbling over."[7] Hawthorne takes the pastoral and melodramatic attitudes and imposes them upon the narrative through the character of Miles Coverdale. The result, both structurally

and thematically, is to close the distance "behind the veil" he had so carefully maintained in The Scarlet Letter and the stories and by doing that to "tumble" over into improbability. The romantic elements do not blend easily with the hesitant Coverdale, and in the end his character remains half-formed. There is an insubstantiality about him, as about the others in the tale, that does not support the directness of the narrative mode. This is not to suggest that the book is not effective in many ways, but to point up the strained quality of Hawthorne's use of the first-person. For despite the intensity of his psychological portraits of Zenobia and Hollingsworth through the eyes of Coverdale, we are left without the sense of an assured hand effecting the course of events. This appears in great contrast to the craftsmanship of his other novels.

The first encounter with Miles Coverdale is in his bachelor rooms, and his narrative voice resembles that which Hawthorne provides in "The Custom House" preface. It is a comfortable, informal introduction to the experiment, with a contemplative tone, more mature in its reflections than the body of the relation will disclose. He is recollecting the first night at Blithedale, and "vividly does that fireside recreate itself, as I take away the ashes from the embers in my memory,"[8] while seeing the whole venture as one "deluding a benighted wanderer through a forest. Around such chill mockery some few of us might sit on the withered leaves, spreading out each a palm

towards the imaginary warmth, and talk over our exploded scheme for beginning the life of paradise anew."[9] Here the tone is melancholy, the sense of isolation dominates, and a hint of what the future was to bring is given. The voice is not an intrusion, but a natural projection. There is--ought to be, from this--a strong persona in the character of Coverdale. His half-mocking disillusionment over the adventure carries with it a passion and regret from which we infer he still holds the premises of the experiment in value.

> The better life! . . . The greatest obstacle to being heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove oneself a fool; [yet] whatever else I may repent of . . . Let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor follies that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny,--Yes!--And to do what in me lay for their accomplishment.[10]

But Coverdale approaches the venture with some doubt that it will be other than a "cold Arcadia." The unseasonable bitter storm that accompanies his ride to Brook Farm brings with it an illness that debilitates him the first two weeks. Although the recovery is seen by him as restorative metaphorically--a way of being reborn into the new utopia, sloughing away the clinging sentiments of civilization--the illness itself marks a weak opening to the experiment. This, in conjunction with the festive atmosphere of the whole group the first night, lends a

quality to the drama that will persist. Instead of a dedicated ideological commitment, we are given the sense that it is more a dream than fact, a game that will have consequences that the players do not determine.

The entire setting is continually brought up as if it were a stage play. Coverdale himself--in his tree-house, in the fields, or witnessing a masquerade frolic--perceives an unreality about the days. He views himself as a subordinate spectator of the action, a role

> which resembled that of the chorus in a classic play, which seems to be set aloof from the possibility of personal concernment, and bestows the whole measure of its hope or fear, its expectation or sorrow, on the fortune of others, between whom and itself this sympathy is the only bond. Destiny, it may be--the most skilful of stage managers,--seldom chooses to arrange its scenes, and carry forward its drama, without securing the presence of at least one calm observer. It is his office to give applause when due . . . to detect the final fitness of incident to character, and distil in his long-brooding thought the whole morality of the performance.[11]

The "spectacle" exists in a gray realm; the events are half-declared, the characters at times seem to invent their own lines, for there is an inconsistency in the progress of their private dramas--much is left untold. When Coverdale leaves Blithedale, it rapidly assumes the atmosphere of a fantasy to him, a situation that existed a brief time but could not endure. Whatever its initial inspiration, the actual life at Brook Farm had been too fragmentary and

undirected to withstand the variables of time and space: "No summer ever came back," he told Priscilla, "and no two summers ever were alike."[12]

Coverdale assumes his role as observer with an ambivalence that affects the coherence of the narrative. As he reflects on his reservations or describes the participants, he communicates the sense that he is in some way protecting himself from the start, the "fear of being a fool," perhaps, or apprehension for the reader's criticism. The narrative is presented hesitantly through his eyes and emotions, and we already expect the dénouement. He remains on the defensive. And he resists the danger of seeing too much:

> It is not, I apprehend, a healthy kind of mental occupation, to devote ourselves too exclusively to the study of individual men and women. If the person under examination be one's self, the result is pretty certain to be diseased action of the heart, almost before we can snatch a second glance.[13]

This aspect and tone at once set up in him an aloofness and a precarious involvement. In distancing himself from the material he narrates, he retains perhaps that privacy "behind the Veil" that Hawthorne preferred, a guardedness he tries to support with half-mocking speculations and judgments. But the first person voice prevents complete dissociation. Like the narrator in Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," Coverdale desires in some way to have an effect upon those he encounters, even to be loved by them.

There is a subtle urgency in his need "to live in other lives, . . . --to learn the secret which was hidden even from themselves."[14]

There is in this respect the effect that Hawthorne is struggling with the implications of his choice of narrative form. When he has Hollingsworth abruptly tell Zenobia that "Miles is not in earnest," he is questioning the very role he has assigned to Coverdale. The observer has to retain an isolation from events, but that isolation is both a virtue and a regret. It implies a failure to accept the challenge of communication, to participate in the vitality that is partly criticized and partly envied when seen in Zenobia, Hollingsworth, or even old Moodie. Coverdale's name reinforces this--a Puritan name, reminiscent of "Dimmesdale"--the figure of hiding self from self, unwilling or unable to confront the responsibility of reacting to what occurs dramatically. Since it is individual responsibility that Hawthorne most thoroughly recognizes in his other novels, it is curious that in his adoption of a first-person narration this quality is perceived as inadequate. It corresponds to the general insufficiency of the experiment--one which is dissolved because the unique characteristics of the members present corrode the viability of the prospect that first motivates them--the personal obsessions of pride, monomania, greed all combine to disperse their idealism.

Coverdale's alternating desires to be dispassionate

and to be committed emphasize the ambivalence of both the thematic intention and structural focus. It is Coverdale's lack of involvement that often seems the source of the irregular and collapsing nature of the socialist program. If he sees what is going on, his refusal to direct the action or various behaviors and attitudes partly assures the negative results. The most striking example of this occurs when he witnesses the conclusion of Zenobia's "trial" before Hollingsworth and Priscilla near the end. His observation of her wracking grief, of the wild, tragic aspect she assumes, does not provoke him to follow her into the forest. Though aware that Zenobia's passionate outlook greatly increases her tendency to magnify emotional events, Coverdale himself lies down upon dry leaves and falls into a restless sleep. He awakens and senses that something is wrong, but it is too late--Zenobia has incurred a useless death. This strange reticence of Coverdale's is badly timed--as is the case throughout, his confused conception of his role produces real compassion but it does not supply the reflex to help.

Yet, again, despite his choice of inaction, Coverdale continually contemplates the loneliness of his position. He feels an outsider and half-resents it. He has set the stage but is not the center, nor even a particularly acknowledged or appreciated actor. The characters he describes take precedence not only as he presents them, but as he feels they involuntarily present themselves. The

rejection causes him to view human relationships with a false detachment. When Hollingsworth turns aside after Coverdale has refused to succumb to his absolutism, the latter finds that Brook Farm was the illusion of community, all derived from a principal circumstance that had nothing to do with social reform. His response indicates the longing to belong to that breed of men and women who simply dare to follow a truth, even if it incurs pain and defeat:

> I stood on other terms than before, not only with Hollingsworth but with Zenobia and Priscilla. As regarded the two latter, it was that dream-like and miserable sort of change that denies you the privilege to complain, because you can assert no positive injury, nor lay your finger on anything tangible. It is a matter which you do not see, but feel, and which when you try to analyze it, seems to lose its very existence, and resolve itself into a sickly humor of your own. Your understanding, possibly, may put faith in this denial. But your heart will not so easily rest satisfied. It incessantly remonstrates, though, most of the time, in a bass-note, which you do not separately distinguish; but now and then, with a sharp cry, importunate to be heard, and resolute to claim belief. "Things are not as they were!" it keeps saying. "You shall not impose upon me! I will never be quiet! I will throb painfully! I will be heavy, and desolate, and shiver with cold! For I, your deep heart, know when to be miserable, as once I knew when to be happy! All is changed for us! You are beloved no more!" And were my life to be spent over again, I would invariably lend my ear to this Cassandra of the inward depths, however clamorous the music and the merriment of a more superficial region.[15]

Life, repeats Coverdale at the very end of the novel, has passed him by. It cannot be lived over again; the chances are lost--and he cannot remember anything without knowing that he let them go.

Memory is the perception of the unknown, in truth. The past has a routine that through recollection is infused with present anguish, or release. What actually happens to us is seldom apparent at the incident; only the place is substance. What really occurs cannot be known until the future. The daily presence of experience cannot have meaning until it has become past; the past is unrecognized without the present. In The Blithedale Romance Hawthorne explores tentatively the process of memory; Coverdale's evaluations shift with changing moods, usually at the entrance of different characters, for some produce stronger impressions and bring him again face to face with the unsolved problems that knowing them had engendered within him. To this Hawthorne adds the ambiguity of recollection--how insignificant details become signposts of the most critical events, details which have no apparent connection. And knit together with this feature, the vacillations of Coverdale's observations contribute toward the evocation of a dream-like uncertainty.

One passage especially conveys this tenor, when after having left Blithedale for a while, Coverdale is walking back; shortly ahead lies the suicide of Zenobia. Half-expecting to find the place nothing but fantasy and

enchantment, he encounters a masquerade in the woods, which "seemed as full of jollity as if Comus and his crew were holding their revels in one of its usually lonesome glades. . . . They appeared, and vanished, and came again, confusedly with the streaks of sunlight glimmering down upon them."[16] At one point

> The whole fantastic rabble forthwith streamed off in pursuit of me, so that I was like a mad poet hunted by chimeras. Having fairly the start of them, however, I succeeded in making my escape, and soon left their merriment and riot at a good distance in the rear. Its fainter tones assumed a kind of mournfulness, and were finally lost in the hush and solemnity of the wood. In my haste, I stumbled over a heap of logs and sticks that had been cut for fire-wood, a great while ago by some former possessor of the soil. . . . But, being forgotten, they had lain there perhaps fifty years, and possibly much longer; until, by the accumulation of moss, and the leaves falling over them, and decaying there, from autumn to autumn, a green mound was formed, in which the softened outline of the wood-pile was still perceptible. In the fitful mood that then swayed my mind, I found something strangely affecting in this circumstance. . . .
>
> From this spot I strayed onward, quite lost in reverie, and neither knew nor cared whither I was going. . . .[17]

There is the sense of something impending in this recital, blended with the revellers--the dark glass of romance that holds a hysterical note; the symbolism is a unity of mood, not meaning, brought out by the details recalled that cannot be shelved or quieted. The scene is essential Hawthorne, the laughter mingled with fore-

boding, carrying the action into the psychological sphere. Coverdale's walk, in his memory of it, takes on an inexorable quality that is confirmed when he arrives at "Eliot's Pulpit" to find the three principals engaged in the "trial." The irony lies in the knowledge we are given that the fatal interview was inexorable only insofar as Coverdale did not participate in it. The result for Zenobia was less necessary than the immunity from self that Coverdale preserved, even in his recollection.

The whole scheme of Blithedale is described at one point by Coverdale as an enterprise like that of the pilgrims, whom "as we sometimes flattered ourselves, we had taken up, and were carrying it onward and aloft, to a point which they had never dreamed of attaining."[18] But it was an enterprise that could not accommodate the complex relationships for long. The community too quickly undergoes a sea-change. The ideological passion that promoted the idea of a perfected society could not be easily sustained when superseded by the personalism of moral concerns. Hawthorne's emphasis shifts toward a less transcendental experience. The inevitability of this structural movement is keenly described by Irving Howe when he writes that

> Ideology is sometimes treated by the American novelists as if it were merely a form of private experience. . . .
> The Americans . . . could not focus upon politics long and steadily enough to allow it to develop according to its

> inner rhythms, for it bored or repelled them even as it tempted them. Personalizing everything, they could not quite do justice to the life of politics in its own right. . . . Personalizing everything, they could brilliantly observe how social and individual experience melt into one another so that the deformations of the one soon become the deformations of the other.[19]

The "Illustrious Blithedale Society," the "Community," is for Coverdale a kind of Bedlam full of "innumerable schemes of what it might or ought to be." The fluid nature of the reformers' existence bewilders him--and through his voice we hear Hawthorne's restraint, the preference for "periodically returning into the settled system of things," to control the protean flux of the great globe which otherwise "floated in the atmosphere of infinite space like an unsubstantial bubble."[20] He concentrates on the characters because the consuming "idea" is of little interest to him--indeed, is of little real interest to anyone, except perhaps Silas. It is the vagaries and symptoms of human frailty that become much more significant.

The utopian promise itself is seen in tenuous terms. Coverdale retreats to his tree-house bower as a symbol of his individuality--where he gently satirizes the transcendental theories of Emerson and "The Dial" that initiated the experiment in the first place.

He writes of "tuning the rhythm [of verses] to the breezy symphony that stirred among the vine-leaves; . . .

in which the many tongues of Nature whispered mysteries, and seemed to ask only a little stronger puff of wind to speak out the solution of its riddle."[21] Hawthorne's skepticism here is the same that more indirectly pervades the book in the voice of Coverdale, and it makes an interesting parallel to D. H. Lawrence's estimate of The Blithedale Romance, though Lawrence seems to have misjudged Hawthorne's intention:

> There the famous idealists and transcendentalists of America met to till the soil and hew the timber in the sweat of their own brows, thinking high thoughts the while, and breathing an atmosphere of communal love, and tingling in tune with the Oversoul, like so many strings of a super-celestial harp. An old twang of the Crèvecoeur instrument.[22]

The venture was not one of sacrifice. The participants were free, in all ways by the end, to leave Blithedale because they had never been committed to it beyond the level of wish-fulfillment. "More and more I feel that we had struck upon what ought to be a truth,"[23] says Coverdale on the last page, but by then the "beautiful scheme of a noble and unselfish life" had lapsed again into theory, transformed back into the area of romance and hope--the failure covered by sentiment. The bonds that had really held him to Blithedale had been Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla. The edenic garden was from its inception tenanted by intimations of evil--in the first mention of "The Veiled Lady" who is, of course, Priscilla, and her

"oriental" Westervelt, and in the brutal single-mindedness of Hollingsworth. But these, to Coverdale, rapidly enter the dream with which he began.

From the point of his first leave-taking of Blithedale, listening to the familiar/unfamiliar sounds of a Boston street, Coverdale sustains the image of Blithedale as an inherently doomed program--it could not hold him in thrall, nor exact the pledge its success required: "My sensations were those of a traveller, long sojourning in remote regions. . . ."[24] The unreality persists. He hovers for a while in both worlds--observer still, but the ideal and pragmatic intertwine. The sojourning aspect recalls an earlier use--the theme of regeneration by a withdrawal from society has already been a frequent one in the literature of Woolman, Crèvecoeur, Thoreau. But for each of those writers the sojourn was in civilized life--they each sought eternal reality in other, more spiritual realms. Coverdale chooses the opposite route. Blithedale is the temporary state, the one he could not believe in.

For Hawthorne, ideals existed in allegorical terms. In his stories and novels, that is the focus. In The Blithedale Romance, the first-person narration of Miles Coverdale obscures both the symbolic and allegorical material Hawthorne customarily uses. It does not allow him to treat romance as a ritual, a system imposed upon and drawn out of a specific set of principles, the way he could do in The Scarlet Letter or The House of Seven Gables

when he relied upon Puritan absolutes. In these works, despite a sensitive psychological portrayal of the characters, the "types" mattered more. His penchant for this structural emphasis could not be sustained in a first-person narrator of transcendentalist theory about which he had many reservations. His symbolic patterns could fit no schema; there could be no sound dramatic device.

And the evidence finally lies in Coverdale himself. The successful use of the first-person does not depend upon the systematic development of a work, nor upon its closure. It depends upon the degree of growth of the self that occurs. In Coverdale, there is no sense of purpose, no driving commitment--even as a spectator he is weak--his observations are incomplete. At the end of the tale we encounter the same man we met at the beginning. He regrets the course of events--but his life remains superficial. Nothing makes this more apparent than the last lines in which he declares in capital letters that he loves Priscilla, the least significant characterization in the narrative. Coverdale has not reached any new understanding--his introspection has not brought him closer to fundamental truths. He has seen them, even recorded them, but he has not lived them. He chose--and perhaps therefore Hawthorne chose--to stay behind the veil of life.

The "I" of the narration is displaced and its effect negated. The transcendentalist theory that requires an individual interpretation of reality is diluted and

unconvincing. Hawthorne has used the right combinations--but has not desired to decipher its implications. He comes closest to revelation in those passages where he contemplates to what degree an individual should seek out the heart of things, the depths that are too intricate for resolution. But the course of such reflections is static. The fuller development of the first-person voice will demand less distance and a willingness to confront the double division of subject and object in perspectives of the self. For Hawthorne, the subjective elements of romance are present, but he contains them by placing emphasis on the spectator, and withdrawing into the security of inaction.

When Hawthorne introduces himself as a narrator in his stories and prefaces, he offers a direct communication with the reader. His narration presumes a mutual interest in the events about to be described, and the tone of the descriptive statements is informal and discursive. This aspect reinforces the emphasis Hawthorne gives to the role of the spectator--a listener, a witness, perhaps, but little more. The essential restraint, in all but The Blithedale Romance, is ever-present. When, however, the same narrative structure is introduced into the tales of Edgar Allen Poe, it becomes a more complex entity; in Poe, the narrator neither desires nor really attempts to communicate with the reader. Further, his emphasis is not

only that of the observer, but that of the observer repeatedly failing to realize that he is an integral part of the events to be witnessed. For Poe, the "I" is an "other," and stands against the dreary, malign, or even the ratiocinative atmospheres of the tales as in a one-dimensional landscape. Poe and Hawthorne were each obsessed with the negative features of the dark regions of the soul, but Poe, even in his Eureka, perceived the darkness as the sole possibility.

The question frequently asked about Poe's work is why such a pessimistic view of humanity should have arisen during a period that otherwise emphasized the positive growth of the American point of view. What was he applying himself to, that the universe should be held as the image of a precipice, over which the natural inclination--the "imp of the perverse"--was to hurl oneself into oblivion. While Emerson and Thoreau saw in the course of daily events a cosmic significance, Poe saw a cosmic fear. His tales speak to destruction, to loss, to an unnatural emptiness. Instead of appealing to the unifying one-ness of transcendentalism, or to the optimism of westward expansion, he sought answers in the disintegration of personality with an apparent narcissicism that seemed to avoid representative concerns. The source of truth for Poe lay in the self, as it always had for American writers--but the self was a nadir.

> Amer savoir, celui qu'on tire du voyage!
> Le monde, monotone et petit, aujourd'hui,
> Hier, demain, toujours, nous fait voir notre image:
> Une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui![25]

But Poe, though he did not use the material of typical American themes in his writing, did respond to the rarified atmosphere of contemporary American philosophy in his ideality of beauty and form. While his approach was not organic--the "House of Usher" is a prime example--yet he was interested in fathoming the secret universe within, and in discovering in the dream worlds he created an ideal of that universe that transcended the fetters of mundane reality:

> If I could dwell
> Where Israfel
> Hath dwelt, and he where I,
> He might not sing so wildly well
> A mortal melody,
> While a bolder note than this might swell
> From my lyre within the sky.[26]

Poe also responded to the suggestive romanticism of the period with his concentration on the inevitable isolation of the individual, on the supernatural, on the morbid and melancholy--on emotions and sensations for their own sake. He carried these themes to an extreme degree, but their appearance in his work is closely aligned with the world of romance Hawthorne envisioned, a world that indicated the subjective alienation of the individual from reality. A passage of Hawthorne's from "The Haunted Mind" is a verbal portrait of the landscape Poe inhabited in his tales of the grotesque and arabesque:

> In the depths of every heart there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or the prisoners whom they hide. But sometimes, and oftenest at midnight, these dark receptacles are flung wide open. In an hour like this, when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; when the imagination is a mirror, imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them; then pray that your griefs may slumber, and the brotherhood of remorse not break their chain. It is too late! A funeral train comes gliding by your bed, in which Passion and Feeling assume bodily shape, and things of the mind become dim spectres to the eye.[27]

Along with these features, one abiding element in American writing affected Poe's attitude. It is an element found in his first major work, the Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, in his Journal of Julius Rodman, in "The City in the Sea," where "Death looked gigantically down," in Eureka! and in the gloomy setting of Usher, as well as in the myriad images of titanic and twisted "Nature" in the tales and poems. That element is the wilderness--the enduring paradigm for psychological disorientation:

> The unpredictable, the abnormal, the inhuman, the cruel, the savage, and the strange . . . were from the beginning part of the image of a land that was ours before we were the land's. The New World was filled with monsters animal and monsters human; it was a region of terrifying natural forces, of gigantic catastrophes, of unbearable heat and cold, an area where the laws of nature tidily governing Europe were transmogrified into something new and strange. Terror and gigantism have their attractions . . . We inherit the image, and its elements haunt us still.[27]

Against the backdrop of untamed nature the individual is alone. In Poe, the extreme psychic disturbances of his narrator, or the particular hero of a tale, are a product of uncontrollable impulses--part of the inexorable movement into annihilation described at the end of Eureka! Within the isolation, his narrator becomes a victim or passive agent of subconscious drives that parallel the unknown wilderness and circumscribe the inevitable doom. The physical details of the tales--like the doppelgänger in "William Wilson"--are externalizations of the inner state of mind.

The concern with self in Poe's stories, however, is not a chaotic presentation. While so many tales confront the fragmentations of perception and utilize the seldomly subtle idea of the double, they are finely attuned to the need for precision of form. The step-by-step process with which Poe builds the suspense can be equated with his philosophy of composition, which insists upon an almost architectural development. Despite the emotional excesses of his characters (all of whom have a distinct similarity with one another) he manages to create, as Daniel Hoffman notes, "real terror, real love, real hatred, real guilt."[28] The form of the tales is applied to the same principles as the form of his poetry. He was the first writer of the short story (he criticized Hawthorne for becoming too muddled in allegory to write good short tales) to adjust the content to the specific necessity of conveying one

primary idea, making every word a thread in the fabric of that theme. "The Tell-Tale Heart," "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Pit and the Pendulum,"--each builds the details of the narrative into a psychic projection of horror that is undeniable and masterful. The motive for the plot is secondary--the capitulation of the narrator or hero to his inner obsession, the "demon in my view,"[29] is primary.

The process suggests that art is a recourse to an order that reality does not possess; even when the resolution is discovered in death, the tales in their concentrated focus offer an escape from one form of uncertainty. Whether Poe takes us on a journey to the ends of the earth, or as in "Mesmeric Revelation" into the nether world, or into the deductive logic of Monsieur Dupin, he defines the parameters of the conclusions that can be drawn. His inventiveness--as the first formal writer of the genres of science fiction, the detective story, the psychological tour de force, literary criticism--is as much a desire to construct an ideal form as it is to create an effect. The ideal rests in an area that supersedes ordinary experience, that provides an escape into something better--better not because it is truth, but because it is new. Uncertainty in ordinary experience is unbearable; in the imagination, the unknown can possess "beauty." As Poe's French admirer Baudelaire wrote in "Le Voyage,"

> Ce pays nous ennuie, o Mort! Appareillons!
> Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
> Nos coeurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons!
>
> Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte!
> Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brulé le cerveau,
> Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?
> Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau![30]

In "Al Araaf" Poe seeks "some happier star"; in "Dreamland" the land of Thule is "out of Space, out of Time." In the preface to Eureka! Poe writes

> To the few who love me and whom I love, to those who feel rather than to those who think, to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities, I offer this book of truths, not in its character of truth-teller, but for the beauty that abounds in its truth, constituting it true. . . . it cannot die; or if by any means it be now trodden down so it die, it will "rise again to the Life Everlasting."[31]

"The human brain," he continues in the credo, "has obviously a leaning to the 'infinite,' and fondles the phantom of the idea."[32] The opposing rhythms of the universe have their center at "The Heart Divine," which belongs to every one, a sublime truth discovered through "that deep tranquility of self-inspection." The self, amid the destiny of worldly existence, is "encompassed by dim and ever present memories of a destiny more vast, very distant in the bygone time, and infinitely awful."[33] The memories that haunt youth will eventually merge, identity will be transformed into a general consciousness. In Eureka, as in the tales themselves when seen collectively, the desire above all is to realize

the "infinitely awful" by exploring the labyrinth of inner compulsion. Evil is not a denial of beauty, nor of form, but an extension out of both--a force of truth that brings to reality a dark, hysterical enchantment.

In seeking an ideal of form, however, Poe has chosen a narrative voice that carries with it implications of an arbitrary and incomplete reality. The first-person narrative excludes the possibility of closure. Someone must live to tell the tale, or as in the case of Arthur Gordon Pym, an "editor" must describe the reasons a story has come to be told. Because the first-person presents one point of view, the tale is open to a more ambiguous interpretation; when this point of view is juxtaposed by the exploration of inner conflicts, the possibility for the reader to recognize or to reach one central conclusion is diminished. Poe's obvious desire to manipulate the reactions of his audience is interrupted by the fact that the narrative voice takes over--the familiar and repetitious characterizations of the protagonist in his tales imply a degree of preoccupation with and emphasis upon the personality that overrides the desire to control.

When De Toqueville observed that in America the democratic temperament would induce a contempt for form, he predicted that the singular voice--as a demonstration of that contempt--would be the most audible. Form was an aristocratic preference--a rejection of any artistic levelling influence; in an aristocracy it was not desirable

to make art accessible to everyone.[34] But the first-person narrative, as has already been shown, emphasizes the commonal ty of perception. Such ideas, when applied to Poe's writing, bring out the contradiction inherent between his aesthetic and practical efforts. For though he does not attempt to make his narrator speak to the reader--does not inspire informal communication or immediate sympathy--yet without question the material of his stories is intended for a large reception. The assumption is made clear that the emotions and extremes of what he describes are likely to be recognized as an essential part in some way of everyone who encounters the work. He was, after all, an editor and a contributor to periodicals. He did acknowledge a mass audience, and his writing has been disseminated on a larger scale than most other early American authors.

Perhaps it can be inferred that while Poe desired form--and while his aristocratic Southern pretensions concentrated his attention on non-American areas--yet he managed to combine the need for an ordering principle with the open-ended democratic approach through his use of the first person in the short story. The length of the tale controlled its development, curtailed the chance that the effort would dissolve into over-extension and confusion, while the first-person narration insured the interest and response of the general reader by focusing on the inner mind, touching a responsive chord at a subconscious level--

because the distortions of emotions he explored belonged to everyone. After all, Poe wrote his work in a society that was literate to a degree unknown in Europe, and for a diversity of people whose attention to literature did not depend upon their economic or social position.

"William Wilson," among other tales, demonstrates the success of this approach. The whispering intonations of the narrator's "rival" of the same name offer a seductive, horrifying image of schizophrenic compulsion. The brevity of the narrative accelerates the suspense and the sense of inevitable psychosis that ensues. At the same time, the unrestrained self-destructive tendencies of the narrator, counterposed by the voice of the "conscience," circumscribe an emotional disturbance that touches a chord of familiarity--the reader recognizes, as Poe suggests one must in "Imp of the Perverse," the complexity of a self-deception that is latent in every individual. The dream-like quality of the tale corresponds to the fluid nature of thought. Memory becomes a part of the narrative in which vague sensations of early childhood filter through the narrator's mind; Wilson dimly apprehends a point of unity long ago when he and the double were one, before the psychic distortions began:

> I discovered, or fancied I discovered, in his accent, in his air, and general appearance, a something which first startled and then deeply interested me, by bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy--wild, confused, and

> thronging memories of a time when memory herself was yet unborn. . . . I could with difficulty shake off the belief of my having been acquainted with the being who stood before me at some epoch very long ago, some point of the past infinitely remote.[35]

Wilson calls the vision a delusion, but then goes on to describe the mansion where he attended school as an infinite maze of corridors and rooms that endless exploration did not resolve. The image parallels the intricacy of split perception which is externalized through the double. A withdrawal occurs--everything he does is blamed finally upon the projection, a displacement that points up the gradual disintegration of personality. Yet within this, Wilson describes a feeling of liking for his rival, a protective sensation. These elements reinforce the psychological impact, particularly insofar as they are accessible to the reader, for they manifest the dualism of mind--and a degree of narcissism--that belongs to all. The tone is apprehensive because Wilson is confronting himself; at the end before a mirror he violently destroys himself. The entire tale leads structurally and thematically as one unit toward a demonstration of the knife's edge of sanity, and the compulsion that exists in the human mind to cross over into madness. It is an excellent example of the way in which Poe utilized formal control and a novel theme to produce his effect.

In his essay on Hawthorne there is evidence not only that Poe was aware of these features in his own writing,

but that he approved of them. It makes the tendency to assume that the alienation in Poe's stories parallels that of the author a less convincing idea. In the essay, he indicates that Hawthorne is a "natural" writer, not an original one. And it is originality that is necessary for good literature, not the least because it engages popular interest: "The fact is that, if Mr. Hawthorne were really original, he could not fail of making himself felt by the public." And, "it is clear that the element of the literary originality is novelty."[36] The discussion continues with an opposition to the pervasive idea that the best writing would naturally receive a limited reception with these words:

> But the true originality, true in respect of its purposes, is that which, in bringing out the half-formed, reluctant, or the unexpressed fancies of mankind, or in exciting the more delicate pulses of the heart's passion, or in giving birth to some universal sentiment or instinct in embryo, thus combines with the pleasurable effect of apparent novelty a real egotistic delight . . . [the reader] feels and intensely enjoys the seeming novelty of the thought, enjoys it as really novel, as absolutely original with the writer--and himself.[37]

The style of such writing, Poe explains, "is but the result of writing with the understanding, or with the instinct, that the tone, in composition, should be that which, at any given point or upon any given topic, would be the tone of the great mass of humanity."[38] Poe's

condemnation of Hawthorne's use of allegory is based in this essay upon the distance his allegorical material keeps the writing--"that point which, having the least concern with nature, is the farthest removed from the popular intellect, from the popular sentiment, and from the popular taste."[39]

The tales that Poe wrote are original--and perhaps therefore popular--in all the respects he considers important. One of the more significant ingredients of his work, as mentioned before, lies in the absolute novelty of his form and subject matter. Further, despite his castle dungeons and English and Italian terrains, there is nothing in his stories that can be considered beyond the ken of the average reader. The settings are an atmosphere that, again, partakes of the American wilderness as much as, perhaps more than, the European forests. In his remarkable "Silence--A Fable," the place is allegedly Libya, but the images are those of the unknown physical vastness of early America, like a painting by Thomas Cole:

> But there is a boundary to their realm--the boundary of the dark, horrible, lofty forest. There, like the waves about the Hebrides, the low underwood is agitated continually. But there is no wind throughout the heaven. And the tall primeval trees rock eternally hither and thither with a crashing and mighty sound. And from their high summits, one by one, drops everlasting dews. And at the roots strange poisonous flowers lie writing in perturbed slumber. And overhead, with a rustling and loud noise, the gray clouds rush westwardly forever, until they roll, a cataract, over the fiery wall of the horizon.[40]

Poe objected to the chauvinism of American attitudes that promoted the worst or most casual literature as superior in order to counteract the continuing dominance of European literary models. He denounced the failure of American arts and letters to create legitimate standards--but he did not thereby assume that whatever standards were achieved should be exclusive. If his essays are any indication, his principal desire was to form an indigenous literature that could compete with Europe--but it would be a literature that raised the expectations of popular appreciation; it would not exist "in spite of" the public. Even in the negative implications of Eureka, Poe asserts the a priori intuitions of truth; in Coleridgean terms he praises the unity and ONE-ness in diversity. His principal writing intends in part that there be a common route towards understanding, even if that apprehension is provided by the excessive isolation of an individual confronting the unknown, the region Thomas Carlyle would call, in his autobiography Sartor Resartus, the "Gehennna . . . within."

Poe's first major work, Narrative of A. Gordon Pym, foreshadows all the types and themes that will ensue in his tales--the science fiction, the grotesque, the deductive faculty, and the psychological distortion. It is a novella, intended as the autobiography of a young man who has rather exotic adventures and undergoes some bizarre experiences. The work is interesting, for in the preface--an attempt to establish verisimilitude--the choice of

narrative voice is explained as a necessity, for the "marvellous" incidents to be described would in no other way be believed except through a first-hand account. It is furthermore an interesting work, because both in theme and development it invites comparison with the novels of Melville, who would begin writing his tales of the sea nearly ten years later. Because of these features, some discussion of this novella is crucial.

On the surface, the Narrative is pure adventure. A Nantucketer, Pym and his friend Augustus go to sea, where Pym is a stowaway and suffers exhaustion and fear in the hold of the ship. He, Augustus and a half-breed Indian named Dirk Peters reverse a mutiny and gain control. The ship is then caught in a huge gale and they endure extreme hunger and privation, ultimately cannibalizing one of their group chosen by lottery in order to survive. A ship of death passes, full of bloated, dead bodies--a ghost-ship reminiscent of "The Ancient Mariner." Augustus dies of injuries that develop gangrene and Pym and Peters are picked up by another ship, in the last stages of despair. The Jane Guy signs them on as crew and they head for Antarctica via the South Seas and Galapagos Islands.

At this point the journey takes on an inner dimension, though the symbolic passage is subtly conveyed. On the voyage to unexplored lands, they encounter natives on an island who deceive them with friendliness and entomb them in an avalanche. They escape the island with a native as

hostage and head South. The sea grows warmer, even hot, and becomes milky in color; a gray cloud is growing ahead. The narrative develops a sense of oppressiveness, of mystery. The native keeps crying out "Tekeli-li," meaning "whiteness," in terror. The "whiteness" appears--huge, enveloping, a great cataract of cloud--until a gigantic disembodied form emerges above them. The tale ends as the ship is entering the infinite wall of whiteness. We are told by the "editor" (Poe uses his own name) that Pym died in New Bedford before completing the tale.

The ending is frustrating, and some of the narrative seems unnecessarily obtrusive or digressive, but imaginatively it contains some of Poe's best work. It utilizes one theme that is to appear again and again in American literature--the innocent youth encountering evil and the unregenerative forces of society, a theme Melville will use in Typee, and in Redburn and Whitejacket, and in "Billy Budd."

The strangeness and foreboding of the end is a powerful dramatic presentation, tracing as it does the gradually increasing peculiarity of the polar seas, one recalled by Jules Verne in 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, where

> I had the impression that night and day . . . no longer followed their natural course. I felt as if I were being led into an eerie world, where the overwrought imagination of Edgar Allen Poe would feel at ease. Any moment I expected to see, like the fabulous Gordon Pym, "a shrouded human figure, much, much larger in its proportions than any dweller among men, lying athwart that water-fall that bars access to the Pole!"[41]

There is little introspection on Pym's part--but inner analytic monologue never became a strong feature of Poe's writing, for his characters are usually portrayed through an externalization of compulsion, hysteria, fear or victimization. Yet, in the Narrative, we receive a definite impression of psychological struggle. The events and places contribute to the perception that on some level Poe is describing an apocalyptic trauma. The tale itself, an early work that is roughly formed, does not structurally sustain the impression--but it is present, and it is in that area that the similarities exist to themes that preoccupy Melville.

The initial scene--a journey aboard a ship setting out from Nantucket for the South Seas--establishes a mood not dissimilar to that Melville uses in his first two novels, Typee and Omoo. The cannibalism of the island natives, preceded by friendliness and curiosity, the ghost-ship, the storms at sea, the mutiny, the navigational detail and the log reports, the half-breed compan ion--all these bring to mind the adventurous atmosphere that pervaded so much of Melville's writing.

Then, too, especially before the mutiny, and on the island before the crisis, Poe's narrative reveals a humorous tone. The dry wit of his detective stories, or of "The Gold Bug," "Predicament," "Three Sundays," and "Some Words with a Mummy" is reflected in the Narrative. Pym is not a hysterical persona, though he experiences terror at the skeleton ship, at the death of Augustus, and at the final

scene; the narrative is in this respect less keyed and intense than the short stories. There are also a number of pages devoted to deciphering engraved letters on the rocks of chasms in the island, and the description of the analysis prefigures the intricate ratiocination of his Monsieur Dupin.

The letters, along with the events that take place near Antarctica, however, serve as the most revealing correspondence with Melville--the theme of "whiteness." Black and white become obsessive concerns once the party lands on the South Sea island. Their whiteness is an anathema to the natives--an evil force. On the rocks, one group of letters is interpreted to mean "to be shady"; the other means "to be white." Beneath these another group record "the region of the south." For the story, the letters merely serve as notice of the journey to Antartica and the white vision at the end. Symbolically, however, they seem to represent something more profound. The whiteness swallows up the voyagers; the ash and heat that precede the vision imply a conflagration of some sort. While on the island itself the black natives are described with condescending remarks, yet Poe does not emphasize whiteness as a virtue. There is an ambivalence that increases the foreboding. The tale ends with a biblical quotation: "I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock."[42]

These images invite analogy with "Benito Cereno" and Moby Dick. There are intimations of the impending American

conflict and racial themes. Poe was scarcely inclined to view the black man with conciliation, but the Narrative reveals perhaps a subconscious recognition of a central American dilemma. Nothing is adequately developed in this respect, but it is fascinating to observe the connotations of evil that exist there in the concept of whiteness, from the time a terrifying white animal of unusual proportions is killed during the journey and hauled aboard ship, until the monolithic wall of whiteness shrouds the horizon. Poe is an American writer in essential ways. The thematic concentration on the self and its confrontation with the unknown are typically American motifs. His use of the first person dominates the perspective of the tales and illustrates a willingness to accept an open-ended point of view--to explore the inner dynamics of change and experimentation, process and delusion. The one-dimensional aspect contained in his emphasis on evil does not limit the extent of his outlook; it serves to shape and develop a vital aspect of psychological truth. His vision of evil will be enlarged, however, and its complexity more comprehensively described and ascertained, when it is encountered in the symbolic voyages of Herman Melville.

> Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down? . . . Will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant forever? . . . Behold, the hope of him is in vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him? None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me? . . . He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment. He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary. Upon earth there is not his

> like, who is made without fear. He beholdeth all high things: he is king over all the children of pride.
>
> (Job 41: 1, 4, 9, 31-34)[43]

So spoke the Lord to Job, who dared to defy the powers of heaven. The biblical verses, with which Melville was well familiar, circumscribe the grand scale of Moby-Dick. Whether the white whale is a neutral force or the face of evil, as Ahab thinks, it becomes in the course of the novel a summary of all the images of God--denied or triumphant. A god of the self, god as self, as deception, as real, as fate, as innocence, as inscrutable. "Whales in the sea, God's voice obey," quotes Melville from the New England Primer in the "Extracts." As Ahab seeks to kill the leviathan, so he seeks to erase the natural laws that direct life; he dares to question the existence of any superior agency, to deny the presence of ambiguities. Like the image of Narcissus falling into his reflection in the water that Melville cites in "Loomings," Ahab is locked within himself. The hunt of the whale is a symbolic search for that point at which the divided self--the one demanding absolutes, the other, "humanities"--can be reconciled. The ultimate meaning of the whale does not matter; it is Ahab's conception of it, and Ishmael's, that makes its presence a matter of cosmic significance. The center lies in the mind.

It is this focus which in part makes Melville's choice of a first-person narrator inevitable. The full power of Moby-Dick has its source in the process of self-discovery

that is the *éngagement* of Ishmael. Such a process, writes Octavio Paz in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, is "above all the realization that we are alone; it is the opening of an impalpable, transparent wall--that of our consciousness--between the world and ourselves."[44] Ishmael is an isolato--as are the whole band of thirty men who sail the *Pequod*, a ship named after the tribe "now extinct as the ancient Medes."[45] His solitude is representative, and it brings with it a danger; as Melville would write in a preface to a poetic fragment, "Rammon": "The more spiritual, wide-seeing, conscientious and sympathetic the nature, so much more the spiritually isolated, and isolation is the mother of illusion."[46] Discovering the extensions and boundaries of solitude demands the personal voice. It is a modern voice; *Moby-Dick* is, as Alfred Kazin describes it,

> peculiarly personal, like so many twentieth-century novels, in its significant emphasis on the subjective individual consciousness. The book grows out of a single word, "I," and expands until the soul's voyage of this "I" comes to include a great many things that are unseen and unsuspected by most of us. And this material is always tied to Ishmael, who is not merely a witness to the story--someone who happens to be on board the *Pequod*--but the living and germinating mind who grasps the world in the tentacles of his thought.[47]

The novel, like those of Hawthorne, is a romance. The events occur in a realm that insists upon symbolism, whose parameters cannot be determined easily because time and space are arbitrary. The momentum of *Moby-Dick* is an inner

dynamic juxtaposed against the mythology of the whale; it is full of signs "for the mind's eye alone," in the tradition of romantic art, one which Erich Heller explained as preoccupied

> with words, words, words. . . . it has swarmed with spirits alienated from the world and worlds alienated from the spirit; and it has shown processions of authors vainly in search of their "real" person; of land surveyors without land to survey; of strangers, strangers, strangers; and they all could swear, if they felt like swearing, by the name of Hamlet who had "that within him which passes show."[48]

The quest of the white whale is one which carries the "whole history of humanity," but that history is sustained and interpreted by one man alone. To the degree that he sees at all into reality, he must accept the consequences of seeing tragically; this is what Melville tells to us. The message is vast and complex because it deals with the center of things, a center that is usually unknown and unrecognized. In a letter to his friend Reynolds, the arch romantic John Keats describes the result of his own passionate inspection of life, and the words parallel the voyage of Ishmael:

> . . . but I saw
> Too far into the sea; where every maw
> The greater or the less feeds evermore:--
> But I saw too distinct into the core
> Of an eternal fierce destruction,
> And so from happiness I far was gone.[49]

In the course of writing Moby-Dick, Melville first

began to read Shakespeare. The effect of that reading was considerable:

> Dolt and ass that I am . . . I have lived more than twenty-nine years, and until a few days ago, never made close acquaintance with the divine William. Ah, he is full of sermons-on-the-mount, and gentle, ay, almost as Jesus. I take such men to be inspired. I fancy this Mons. Shakespeare in heaven ranks with Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael. And if another Messiah ever comes he will be in Shakespeare's person.[50]

In his essay on Hawthorne, Melville compared him to Shakespeare, whose insight was "at the very axis of reality." For Melville the characters of Iago, Lear, and Hamlet were dramatic statements of universal significance--their questions were the essential questions. It was at the same time that he read heavily in the Bible, underscoring passages like this one from Job: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" These two influences, Shakespeare and the Bible, also play a part in the selection of persona for the novel. It was the tragedies Melville admired most of Shakespeare--and the isolation of the characters who brought their own destiny upon themselves. And the Old Testament, with its focus upon the personal dialogue of man with God, its ambiguous suggestions of invisible authority and the silence of its voice, with the palpable symbolic nature of the unknown that infused the writings of the prophets--these things held implications that could only be delved into by the individual heart. The readings Melville engaged in

that year gave him the broad metaphysical spectrum and universal scope for themes that his previous novels had only partially begun to decipher. They brought the individual point of view to the "knife's edge" in Moby-Dick.

Melville's first six books are written in the first person. In Mardi the use of "I" is alternated with "we," but the other four--Typee, Omoo, Redburn, Whitejacket--follow the model of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe: they are ostensibly first-hand accounts of the adventures of a young man in foreign places. Moby-Dick is also a tale of adventure, of induction into new experience that requires some form of insight on the part of the hero-narrator. But Melville's last first-person novel takes the journey much further. There is an interesting development structurally, in which the features of the first five novels are combined in Moby-Dick; the narration undergoes various shifts of persona, despite the underlying presence of Ishmael. This aspect is reminiscent of the allegorical elements in Mardi. And in terms of the narrator's personal account the process of interpreting experience has become infinitely more complex, though it carries on a progression that has been present in the first works; an increasing cynicism and dismay filters through the material that becomes a vital theme in Moby-Dick.

"For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow," meditates Job. The first-person emphasis in Melville reflects a deepening

concern with ultimate questions. Time is perceived in the context of perception, not in the passage of the days. The events of his narratives are landscapes of memory, attempts to ascertain what is shadow and what is real. An omniscient narrator for Melville would obstruct the fluid character of introspection and reduce the impact of discovery. His narrative intention is directed towards the ambiguity of knowing anything--an all-knowing and impersonal narrative voice would not adequately support the journey to "the vast recesses, the hidden and unsearchable caverns, of memory," that "inward place, which yet is no place."

The selection of a first-person point of view has particular meaning when viewed in terms of the success of Melville's artistic expression. For, once he leaves such a narrative voice and resorts to the third person, as he does in Pierre and the Ambiguities, there is a concomitant disintegration of structural order and thematic continuity. While Melville's first six novels rely to a great extent on his own experiences, Pierre is entirely a product of invention, and both in language and purpose its turgid quality demonstrates his uneasiness in dealing with grand themes when they have no factual basis in his own life. For Melville, the function of memory is to reinvestigate and reassert an involvement with life, while at the same time it allows the exigencies of time and space to be diminished. The process requires a personal interpretation:

> With the exception of Mardi, the novels from Typee through Moby-Dick demonstrate that to turn personal experience into a story is to assert man's ability to stand outside the stream of time, to escape the "eternal tides of time and fate" . . . Melville's fictional first-person narrators indicate both the possibility and the necessity of separating his books from their "ostensible author," and the author-hero method itself reaffirms this goal by dramatizing the narrator's escape from his experience. It is precisely these assumptions which are denied by Pierre's narrative form as well as by the career of its hero.[51]

There is a further possibility for the first-person emphasis. "Truth will always have its ragged edges," he writes in Billy Budd. The "I" constricts perception in a novel, but it does not confine it. Rather, the narrator's effort to create order out of chaos accentuates the difficulty of the attempt; it infuses a sense of the indeterminate nature of recognizing what is truth. The uncertain boundaries of imagination and reality are more directly realized through the first-person account, for they are not established from the beginning; out of such an approach comes the need for symbolic reference.

The choice of narrative form for the romance-novels of Melville, however, have a peculiarly American tinge. European literature has certainly concerned itself with the "mystery of life," and especially in the twentieth century it has been concerned with the evocation of inner realities through a consciousness that frequently relies upon the experiences of the author for its thematic and structural

unity. But the process has been different; the omniscient narrator is more in evidence, without restricting the impact of perception. In Proust, in Virginia Woolf, in Joyce or in Thomas Mann, the distortions of perception and memory become diffused into a fluid realm wherein, because of the third-person voice, there occurs an authority for the image presented that freezes a moment in time. The empty house described in To The Lighthouse, the day in Ulysses, the timeless rhythm of The Magic Mountain--none of these are possible in a first-person novel. No American work--except perhaps Faulkner to a degree--comes close to the encompassing sensation of memory that such works provide. But the sensation is bounded, intentionally so.

Melville, however, writes in the tradition of American autobiographical narrative. He is a seeker, but of clearly unfinished journeys. The personal emphasis is both necessary and inevitable. His heroes encounter tranquility and a static apprehension of experience--of life--at points, but these are brief. A restlessness ensues; when Ishmael is turning the ball of yarn--of "free will"--in a meditation he drops it upon hearing the cry "Thar she blows!" just as Whitejacket falls from the mast-head during a soliloquoy on eternal verities.

The individual is alone in quest of something else--the elusive "democratic" fellowship aboard a sailing ship, perhaps. In his first-person novels Melville reiterates the persistent, undeniable conflict between self and society,

truth and compromise, that have been essential aspects of the democratic vision. His hero-narrators, and particularly Ishmael, are representative because they are alone. Only by hearing their individual voices is that solitude possible to convey. And at the same time, only then is it also possible to explain the inner motives that despite experience ever search towards a higher understanding of "finding out the Almighty unto perfection." It is Emerson's transcendental "ascending effort"; even though he denied the optimism, Melville admired Emerson because he too was "a diver" into the sea of symbol and truth, toward unity. In Emerson's words:

> There must be the Abyss, Nox and Chaos, out of which all come, and they must never be far off. Cut off the connection between any of our works and this dread origin, and the work is shallow and unsatisfying.
>
> . . .
>
> [the desire for the whole] is the desire raging, infinite; a hunger, as of space to be filled with planets; a cry of famine, as of devils for souls.[52]

Melville's first two novels, Typee and Omoo, are tales of the South Seas and present an ambivalent portrait of primitive life versus civilization. As tales of adventure, the narrative voice establishes an authenticity for the events that are related. There are hints of themes that will occupy Melville later, particularly the illusion of discovering beauty or truth anywhere. The Happy Valley of Typee is full of dark implication when the hero Tom learns

that the natives are cannibals. The indolence and hypocrisy of both the missionaries and islanders in Omoo present a sense that Eden is always corrupt; there is the suggestion, to be explored more fully later in Mardi, that serenity is an impossible dream--the heart of man always inclines toward evil and self-deception.

In Redburn and Whitejacket the adventure continues, though in a different way. Melville wrote both books in the summer of 1850, and considered them nothing but pot-boilers. But each novel foreshadows Ishmael in its narrator. The negative conclusions implicit in Typee and Omoo are less ambivalent. Structurally the novels trace the development of an innocent young man as he encounters the license and immorality of the world as shown through the lives of sailors. Each narrator is more deeply concerned with the revelation; each contemplates the limitless nature of forces that seem to control men, to lead them towards a selfish single-mindedness or indifference that prevents recognition. The Liverpool of Redburn or the brutality in Whitejacket appear as illustrations of an insensitivity that shrouds comprehension. But it is a point of view that is voluntary, by which the course of our lives is settled. In Whitejacket, the narrator declares that

> In our own hearts, we mold the whole world's hereafters; and in our own hearts we fashion our own gods. Each mortal casts his vote for whom he will to rule the worlds; I have a voice that helps to shape eternity; and my volitions stir the

> orbits of the furthest suns. In two senses, we are precisely what we worship. Ourselves are Fate.[53]

Each wanderer-hero in these two books confronts a restriction--gains a knowledge of evil. In Redburn there is the demonic figure of Jackson, and an image on a street in Liverpool when a woman and her children die in a cellar in poverty, covered with a white and glistening quicklime. He can find no one to help her; no way to save a child's life in the indifferent fatalism of the city. In Whitejacket, the inhumanity and degradation of flogging bring the narrator to a defiant and assertive rejection of "Martial Law" when his own punishment is threatened:

> No, I felt my man's manhood so bottomless within me, that no word, no blow, no scourge of Captain Claret could cut me deep enough for that. I but swung to an instinct in me--the instinct diffused through all animated nature. . . . Locking souls with him, I meant to drag Captain Claret from this earthly tribunal of his to that of Jehovah. . . . No other way could I escape the scourge.
> . . . The privilege, inborn and inalienable, that every man has, of dying himself, and inflicting death upon another, was not given to us without a purpose. These are the last resources of an insulted and unendurable existence.[54]

In Whitejacket as well there appears an image of whiteness that foreshadows Moby-Dick. The jacket itself is a scourge, a weight that nearly kills the hero. Its final destruction represents a rebirth for the narrator out of the experience he has undergone. He has gained a self-

achievement, self-recognition that had not existed before. The crisis marks a change, gives another dimension to the awareness of inner reality. The creation of the jacket as a symbol prepares the way for the broader symbolic meaning of Moby-Dick, for such a creation is an act of the imagination in its quest for the totality of relationships. Melville takes the act into the single mind, intending its extension to all humanity. As Conrad Aiken writes in his poem "Herman Melville,"

> Depth below depth this love of man:
> among unnumbered and unknown
> to mark and make his cryptic own
> one landfall of all time began:
> . . .
> o mariner of the human soul
> who in the landmark notched the Pole
> and in the Item loved the Whole.[55]

Another theme appears in these two novels that precede the voyage of Ishmael, one which harkens to a call two centuries old. For Melville is adamant in the tales, especially in Whitejacket, in his commitment to the democratic point of view. His enthusiasm is interesting, because it is a perspective that reaches its culmination in the controlled exposition of Moby-Dick, counterbalancing the theme of isolation, but which grows increasingly satirical afterwards, in Pierre, in Israel Potter, in "Bartleby the Scrivener," and most cynically in The Confidence Man.

The "man-of-war" in Whitejacket is like "this earth that sails through the air," with a packet of sealed orders. And "Thus sailing with sealed orders, we ourselves are the

repositories of secret packets, whose mysterious contents we long to learn. There are no mysteries out of ourselves."[56] The import is one towards the future. "In the Past is no hope; in the Future is both hope and fruition. The Past is the text-book of tyrants; the Future the Bible of the Free":

> Escaped from the house of bondage, Israel of old did not follow after the ways of the Egyptians. To her was given an express dispensation; to her were given new things under the sun. And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people--the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of liberties of the world. . . . The rest of nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. In our youth is our strength; in our inexperience, our wisdom. . . . we cannot do good to America, but we give alms to the world.[57]

The democratic conglomeration of the Pequod is Melville's demonstration of the "wilderness of untried things." As Marius Bewley has observed, "democracy is the denial of degree, and by implication, of limit also. . . . the democratic aspiration . . . is the very essence of formlessness."[58] Through the dramatic portrayal of that equalizing existence aboard the ship and its opposition to the monomania of Ahab, Moby-Dick becomes, as R. W. B. Lewis would have it, "the supreme instance of the dialectical novel--a novel of tension without resolution."[59] It is the unfinished, unformed nature of the novel as it is transmitted

through the voice of Ishmael that the work takes its power, for it leaves open the potentiality that Melville demanded in Whitejacket.

The very shifts of persona--Ishmael himself, the distanced scientific description of the whale, Ahab's soliloquoy's, the stage-setting of "Midnight, Forecastle"--are all knit nevertheless under the pattern Ishmael has constructed. The past and present cannot be judged without the sense that there remains a future to be interpreted. The impossibility of knowing the self does not prevent the seeking of a perfect truth, but it remains within the mind of one man who lives to tell the tale, who has not wholly penetrated the mystery. The democratic features lies in the attempt. The conflict is like the bright and dark sides of the tortoise in The Encantadas. In the assertion of the self democracy is positive; in its unlimited and ambiguous extensions, it brings a chaos of the soul. The tension of the two, reflected through the consciousness of the individual, makes Moby-Dick the archetypal American novel. Again, as in The Encantadas, the voyage of Ishmael is a half-mirage, the Pequod is an enchanted isle in the ocean of unknown depths. In his use of the first person for the directing vision, Melville has recapitulated the Puritan journey into the self and the democratic passage into the ideal. In its despair, courage and ambiguity, it is a contemporary American manifesto.

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CHAPTER IV

[1]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Custom House," The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, ed. with introd. by Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 5.

[2]From the preface to The House of Seven Gables, The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 244.

[3]Ibid., p. 243.

[4]"The Custom House," pp. 105-106.

[5]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Wakefield," The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 926.

[6]Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1957), passim.

[7]Norman Holmes Pearson, from the introduction to The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. xv.

[8]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 443.

[9]Ibid., pp. 443-444.

[10]Ibid., p. 444.

[11]Ibid., p. 496.

[12]Ibid., p. 523.

[13]Ibid., p. 479.

[14]Ibid., p. 533.

[15]Ibid., p. 521.

[16]Ibid., p. 562.

[17]Ibid., pp. 563-564.

[18]Ibid., p. 508.

[19]Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1967), pp. 166-167.

[20]The Blithedale Romance, p. 522.

[21]Ibid., p. 497.

[22]D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: The Viking Press, [reissue] 1964), pp. 104-105.

[23]The Blithedale Romance, p. 584.

[24]Ibid., p. 525.

[25]Charles Baudelaire, "Le Voyage," French Poetry from Baudelaire to the Present, introduced and edited by Elaine Marks (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1962), vii, p. 68.

[26]Joseph C. Pattison, "Point of View in Hawthorne," PMLA, Vol. 82 (October, 1967), p. 364.

[27]Howard Mumford Jones, O Strange New World: American Culture: The Formative Years (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 70.

[28]Daniel Hoffman, Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe (New York: Anchor Press, 1972), p. 325.

[29]Edgar Allen Poe, "Alone," Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, Vol. I (New York: Free de Fau and Company, [n.d.]), pp. 53-54.

[30]Charles Baudelaire, "Le Voyage," French Poetry from Baudelaire to the Present, viii, p. 69.

[31]Edgar Allen Poe, "Eureka!" Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, Vol. X, p. 170.

[32]Ibid., p. 280.

[33]Ibid., p. 323.

[34]Alexis de Toqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. I (New York: Schoken Books, 1961), p. 173.

[35]Edgar Allen Poe, "William Wilson," Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, Vol. III, p. 332.

[36]Edgar Allen Poe, "Nathaniel Hawthorne," Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, Vol. VII, p. 332.

[37]Ibid., p. 334.

[38]Ibid., p. 335.

[39]Ibid., p. 336.

[40]Edgar Allen Poe, "Silence--A Fable," Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, Vol. III, p. 251.

[41]Jules Verne, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (New York: Signet Classics, 1969), p. 376. It is interesting to note that Verne himself wrote a "completion" to Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym par Edgar Poe. Traduction de Charles Baudelaire avec la conclusion imaginée par Jules Verne dans "Le Spinx des Glaces." (Paris: Club des libraries de France, 1960).

[42]Edgar Allen Poe, "Narrative of A. Gordon Pym," Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, p. 191.

[43]Job, chapter 41, verses i, iv, ix, x, xxxi-xxxiv. Melville cites verse xxxi in his "Extracts."

[44]Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude, transl. by Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, Inc.), p. 9.

[45]Ibid., p. 82.

[46]quoted in Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York: Literary Guild, 1929), p. 324.

[47]Alfred Kazin, "'Introduction' to Moby-Dick," in Twentieth-Century Views, ed. Richard Chase (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 41.

[48]Erich Heller, The Artist's Journey to the Interior and Other Essays (New York: Vintage Press, 1968), p. 130.

[49]John Keats, in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, September 1819, quoted in The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), Vol. 2, p. 117.

[50]Mumford, Herman Melville, p. 138.

[51]Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), pp. 128-129.

[52]from the Journals, quoted in Stephen A. Whicher, ed., Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), p. 283, p. 300.

[53]Herman Melville, Whitejacket (Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1970), p. 321.

[54]Ibid., p. 280.

[55]from Conrad Aiken, "Herman Melville," in Extracts of The Melville Society, 32 (November, 1977), p. 7.

[56]Whitejacket, p. 398.

[57]Ibid., pp. 150-151.

[58]Marius Bewley, "Melville and the Democratic Experience," in Twentieth-Century Views, ed. Richard Chase (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 107.

[59]R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1955), p. 146.

CONCLUSION

Every age sees the whole of literary purpose in one genre that seems most directly to represent and apprehend a new interpretation of reality. The use of the first-person narrative in American literature--from the spiritual autobiographies of the Puritans, through the transcendental journal of Thoreau, to the symbolic autobiographical journey of Melville--derived from the assumption that one man's particular experience was the single most valid means of deciphering the "American" experience.

The result has been a literature that has remained focused upon change, and upon the delineation of internal states of being as an assertion of individuality. Unlike transatlantic writers, who chose more readily to assimilate the private mind with the public, American authors have periodically grappled with the fear of losing themselves in the democratic "en-masse." The authentic nature of their experience demanded a degree of isolation for its validity. The writers both sought and denied the ideals of the dominant group. The articulation of the self, and that self as it represents the society, eventually led them to introspection on a symbolic level. There, they could begin to accommodate the opposing tendencies.

The tone of the autobiographical literature--a literature that dominates the American literary direction up until the Civil War--is strident, idealistic and

ambiguous. The structural inconsistencies of the material, the laxity of form, its thematic extremes and "oracular" proscriptions are but the parallel of its multi-cast ideology. The central focus on the individual as the primary explorer of disunities and of the future prospect of a redemption of the self in history can be seen as necessitated by the uncertain and unrefined exigencies of living in a democracy. It is a literature for which critical standards remain, to a degree, elusive; it demands a judgment not only as observer, but as participant.

The pattern of the works discussed here is one of an extended metaphor of the self. It is a pattern growing out of a society in transition, whose founding principles were utopian in essence. An egalitarian credo suffused the imagination, along with a concentration on the inward regions of thought and truth that held a restless search for meaning. The implicit societal effect was to make the individual believe that anything was possible; the introspection made him or her question the viability of holding ideals at all. The literature affirms, as Sacvan Bercovitch writes in The Puritan Origins of the American Self, "The American dream, manifest destiny, redeemer nation, and fundamentally, the American self as representative of universal rebirth." But it also points up the disparities inherent in the attempt to formulate a relationship between art and life; the personal narrative implies that art is not a stasis, that true perception

exists outside the paradigms of form, and the "I" becomes then an organic element in the expression of indeterminate reality. The pattern of this literature reflects a tension that does not necessarily consider the integration of experience and imagination to be essential.

Another factor became crucial in the development of the autobiographical emphasis. American writers had the option to discard tradition--they did not need to infer that a situation of change was one of chaos. Like Ecclesiastes, a genius like Melville's attempted to fathom the abyss, yet did not find therein, so long as the process involved authentic experience, an end-point. The narrators of the journals and novels that have been surveyed understood in varying degrees the necessity of adaptation and a continuing re-integration of experience as natural features of existence, and survival. The writers of these books could experiment and take chances in literary expression that in another culture would have been anomalous. And interestingly, their perspective prefigures the existential nature of much twentieth-century literature.

By reaching out to democratic vistas--those horizons that Walt Whitman so passionately accepted--the American writers discussed here sought to transcribe an experience that was unique into the new cultural attitude. Their themes of isolation, wilderness, introspection, and their unremitting though conflicting sense of ideal possibility engage the whole scale of human endeavor. If their work

seems to lack universal meaning, it may be only that the times cannot accommodate universals of the future. Perhaps a vital apprehension of their scale will emerge when the perspectives they adhere to become accessible to more. The literature does not resolve; it gives no answers. But it places the attempt of the individual to understand in a central arena that cannot be diminished. Perhaps this is its legacy.

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