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THE ROLE OF THE CITY IN THE WORKS OF THEODORE DREISER, THOMAS WOLFE, JAMES T. FARRELL, AND SAUL BELLOW

by

FELICE W. DICKSTEIN

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.

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

9 November 1972
date

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27 Nov 1972
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to express my thanks to Professor Charles C. Walcutt, my thesis advisor, for his careful reading of the thesis and his valuable critical comments. I should like also to express my gratitude to the members of my family for their enthusiastic interest, and to Mrs. Harvey for the affection and attention she showered on Akiva which allowed me to pursue my studies with an untroubled mind. I am glad to have this opportunity to acknowledge and express my greatest debt and my deepest appreciation to my husband Louis, who has been a constant source of encouragement and support, a most accomodating sounding board for my ideas, and an acute and effective critic and editor.

The preparation of this thesis was supported in part by a Dissertation Year Fellowship from The City University of New York, for which I am most grateful.

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INTRODUCTION

"From a country that was essentially still agrarian in 1865 and, indeed, still contained large unsettled areas, America became, by 1914, bound to cities and to city needs."[1] City life has come to dominate American experience and, concomitantly, the image of the city has become a dominant one in twentieth-century American fiction. M. Spears has noted that the city "dominates the modern environment and is both cause and symptom of our characteristic maladies. The city is the literal embodiment and scene, and hence a part of the subject, of most modern literature; it is the background which produces the typical modern man and the stage upon which he acts."[2] And again:

> The urbanization of our culture, in England, Europe, and perhaps most spectacularly in the United States, has been the major sociological phenomenon of the last century. . . . The City is both massive fact and universally recognizable symbol of modernity, and it both constitutes and symbolizes the modern predicament: the mass man, anonymous and rootless, cut off from his past and from the nexus of human relations in which he formerly existed, anxious and insecure, enslaved by the mass media but left by the disappearance of God with a dreadful freedom of spiritual choice, is the typical citizen of Megalopolis, where he enjoys lethal and paralyzing traffic, physical decay and political corruption, racial and economic tension, crime, rioting, and police brutality. This is the lurid picture we are accustomed to; and even for those who have never heard of Dante or Baudelaire, it is the most natural of metaphors to speak of this scene of cruelty, ugliness, inhumanity, and despair as Hell.[3]

American novelists have been, from the first, acutely aware of the impact of industrialization and urbanization upon the life of the individual. While sociologists and economists tried to describe and assess in broad terms the changes in society that urbanization had wrought, it was the novelist who was concerned with and imaginatively recreated the behaviors, emotions, and sensibilities of the individual in reaction to these changes. Early writers experienced the city as new, novel, exciting, and frightening. Those who were dissatisfied or disillusioned with urban life could have their hero depart from the city, as does Jimmy Herf at the close of Dos Passos's Manhattan Transfer. As urban centers proliferated, however, writers no longer found it as easy to seek escape but had to accept the city as a given condition, as a reality with which they had to come to terms.

A variety of approaches have been adopted by writers to the presence of the city in the novel. These approaches can be classified into four basic categories. The first is an historical approach which uses the fiction to supplement non-literary sources for historical information. The second might be called a sociological approach; it deals with the novels of the city in a sociological framework, regarding the novels as illustrations of the nature of urban society. The third approach is concerned with determining the attitudes of the novelist towards various aspects of urban life as they are expressed in his fiction.

And the fourth is a literary approach which examines the aesthetic effects of the presence of the city on the novel.

The title of Nelson M. Blake's book, Novelists' America: Fiction as History, 1910-1940, immediately announces its historical approach. While recognizing that "the novelist has his own angle of vision,"[4] a personal and unique way of regarding and reacting to the urban scene, Blake uses the novels as sources of social history. He covers Thomas Wolfe, Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, and Richard Wright, in each case using their novels as historical source material. In his chapter on Farrell, for example, Blake reconstructs in chronological order the story of Danny O'Neill from the Studs Lonigan and Danny O'Neill novels and regards it as an informative and valuable statement about the early years of the twentieth-century. At the end of the chapter, he writes: "The Farrell novels may not provide a judiciously balanced picture of the American city during these years, but they provide the historian with a wealth of striking descriptions of the tendencies in family life, the conflicts of groups, and the forces of disintegration that would culminate in the urban problems of our own day."[5]

George A. Dunlap's published dissertation, The City in the American Novel, 1789-1900, is, as his concluding sentence states, "a veritable cyclopedia of facts about life in American cities from 1789 to 1900."[6] Dunlap discusses

urban themes that appear in the novels, dividing the novels into those that deal with (1) the struggle for success, (2) disasters of city life, (3) the religious life of the city, (4) the social life of the city, (5) the literary and artistic life of the city, and (6) the political life of the city. In each chapter he chronologically traces "the facts about the various phases of life in the city which the contemporary novels record."[7] His chapter on the religious life in the city includes novels which contain only brief sketches relating to the religious life, sketches which Dunlap concedes are "unimportant in relation to the whole story, yet help to reveal accurately the religious tendencies of the times." Dunlap asserts:

> The student of city life, as contemporaneously interpreted by the novel, early becomes impressed with the fact that in order to obtain a complete picture of that life he must at times beat the dust from aged-worn volumes that have lain for years in peaceful obscurity. Some of these forgotten novels may yield only one or two city incidents, but if they have anything at all to add to the whole picture, they are worth careful consideration.[9]

Dunlap's study is replete with plot summaries and includes many novels of negligible literary value. His is a documentary approach that tells much about the life of the city as it is revealed in the novel but that shows little regard for the aesthetic quality of the novels chosen.

Robert N. Burrows' unpublished dissertation, "The Image of Urban Life as it is Reflected in the New York City Novel, 1920-1930," takes a more sociological approach. It covers

almost one hundred novels and examines the image of New York as it is represented in the novels of the nineteen-twenties by contemporary novelists. "The study attempts to report the fullness and character of the view given in these novels of (1) the physical city, (2) urban man, (3) the jazz age, and (4) the major themes developed by these novelists."[10] "The data gathered from the novels," says Burrows, "is related to the findings of sociologists and other students of the city in order to suggest the extent of agreement of the separate presentations of the nature of urban life and to indicate areas in which distortion or stereotypy may be prevalent in the novels."[11] Burrows finds in the image of the city as perceived by the novelist an interesting contrast to that offered by sociologists and feels that the two views supplement each other.

R. E. Fleming's unpublished dissertation, "The Chicago Naturalistic Novel, 1930-1966," discusses the city as it appears in about fifty works of Chicago writers whose views of the city are usually conveyed through naturalistic techniques and who subscribe to the basic naturalistic philosophy.[12] Fleming shows howcertain themes which first appeared in Chicago novels during the period from 1890 to 1920 became principal concerns of Chicago naturalistic writers in the years following 1930. Fleming examines four thematic preoccupations of the Chicago naturalist anddevotes a chapter to each: the immigrant's difficulty in adjusting to a new land, the efforts of the Negro to improve his position in

society, the corruption and crime in Chicago, and the struggle between management and labor. Fleming omits discussion of "another celebrated writer from Chicago, Saul Bellow" because "he does not really concentrate on life in Chicago."[13] Bellow's novels, says Fleming, concentrate "on the internal life of the main character rather than on externals, on the feelings and thoughts of an individual rather than on the society in which he moves."[14] Fleming's approach is purely thematic and therefore does not concern itself with the literary role of the city in Bellow's fiction. The study includes many novels with negligible literary value.

In The Intellectual Versus the City, Morton and Lucia White use selections from American literature as supplements to the evidence of essays and notes of correspondence to determine the attitudes of writers to the American city. As our society became more and more urban, the Whites maintain, "the literary tendency to denigrate the city" became more pronounced.[15] They discuss the negative or at best ambivalent attitudes of, among others, Melville, Hawthorne, Poe, Howells, James, and Dreiser toward the American city, concluding that, for the most part, there is a "powerful tradition of anti-urbanism in the history of American thought."[16] Claude R. Flory's published dissertation Economic Criticism in American Fiction, 1792-1900, also concerned with the attitudes of writers of fiction, proposes to be a "summary of how the novelists during the first

hundred years of the history of our fiction looked at the American social scene, what faults they found in it, and what remedies they suggested for its puzzling problems. The selective principle here," Flory acknowledges, "has not been an esthetic one."[17] The study includes a brief section that deals with those novels that depict and protest against the depressing conditions of urban life.[18] Flory's concern with an author's attitudes as they are expressed in the novel is evident in the fact that he specifically excludes Stephen Crane's works from consideration. Crane, he notes, "is a naturalist in fiction rather than a sociologist. The criticism of slum conditions embodied in Maggie (1893) and George's Mother (1896) is objective rather than subjective: it consists in our reaction to the material presented rather than in Crane's reaction to it."[19]

Eugene Arden's unpublished dissertation, "The New York Novel: A Study in Urban Fiction," discusses the novels written about New York as illustrations of the tendency to regard the city as either the scene of opportunity, wealth, and power or as the seat of evil and corruption. The New York novels, Arden says, "display a definite social attitude toward the metropolis, which in the final analysis is in support of either the 'evil city' or the 'land of milk and honey' view of New York."[20] Arden explores these two antithetical attitudes towards the city in his chapters "The Evil City" and "A Romantic View," focusing on the thematic aspects of the New York novels that allow them to be thus

categorized. He finds that the literature which expresses the waste and frustration of New York life conveys the city's special qualities more successfully than those novels which express a cheerful view of life in New York; in the latter, the city is often used as "setting" in the most conventional sense.

In an unpublished dissertation, "Urban Values in Recent American Fiction: A Study of the City in the Fiction of Saul Bellow, John Updike, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, and Norman Mailer," Robert J. Nadon explores the attitudes of these five modern American writers to the city as part of an "on-going city-country dialogue."[21] In his introduction, Nadon poses several questions which indicate the direction that his thesis takes:

> What are the various attitudes toward the city which emerge from these works? Where does each author stand in relation to the various life styles traditionally associated with the city, country, and small town? What is the role of nature in the city? Is the city supportive of the idea of community? Is the city still revealed as a naturalistic force which victimizes its citizens and does the city still engender alienation and fear, as earlier literary studies have revealed? Is there a changing sensibility born of the city? Is the city denied or are there those whose fictional characters are learning to accomodate to it, perhaps even come to affirm it?[22]

After a lengthy resume of the city in American thought, in which he basically reviews Glaab and Brown's A History of Urban America[23] and the White's The Intellectual Versus The City, Nadon then offers a brief eight-page "Review of the Literature of the City in American Fiction."[24] He mentions Dunlap, Gelfant, and Anselm Strauss, whose article

"Urban Perspectives: New York City" "is a rich source of generalizations about the recent novel and its treatment of the city."[25] He adds: "The sociological cast of mind which Strauss brings to his examination of novels is an invaluable one for this study. His perspective from the discipline of urban sociology provides a balance for the predominantly literary emphasis of most commentators on the literature of the city."[26] As the preceding pages have shown, however, there is a surfeit of sociological emphasis in purportedly literary discussions of city fiction. Nadon's main concern is with establishing the attitudes of these writers as they stand on a rural-urban continuum. His chapter on Saul Bellow, it should be noted, contains many interesting literary interpretations and insights.

This thesis proposes to study the literary use of the city in modern American fiction. Frederick Hoffman has asserted that "the emphatic purpose of the American novelists was to present a vision or interpretation of life, to bring to the novel a sense of immediate present reality, and to translate the idiom of the present world into the materials of an art."[27] This thesis does not concern itself with the attitudes of writers toward the city but rather is interested in exploring the ways in which four twentieth-century American novelists, Theodore Dreiser, Thomas Wolfe, James T. Farrell, and Saul Bellow, translated "the idiom of the present world into the materials of an art." Little previous work has utilized a purely literary approach to the use of the city in fiction. David Weimer,

Monroe K. Spears, and Blanche H. Gelfant have moved in this direction.

In The City as Metaphor, David Weimer attempts to define what the city represents in the works of eight writers, four poets (Whitman, Cummings, W. C. Williams, and Auden) and four novelists (H. James, Fitzgerald, Dreiser, and Crane). He proposes to concentrate on "the fabric of metaphor, the nuances of tone,"[28] stressing that "the categories we most require in order to deal with these cities are . . . not historical, sociological, or epistemological but metaphoric."[29] The quality of Weimer's book is uneven. His chapter on Fitzgerald deals with the influence of Hollywood on Fitzgerald's fiction, the effect of cinematographic techniques on Fitzgerald's writing, rather than with the city as Fitzgerald uses it in his books. In contrast, in his essay on Crane, Weimer perceptively notes one of the central features in Crane's treatment of the city: that "the angle of perception seems familiar but rather dislocated,"[30] that his urban details "yoke realistic surface to a deeply nonrealistic way of perceiving that surface."[31] Crane's work, says Weimer, testifies to the experience of dislocation that urban life has bred. Weimer's chapters on James and Dreiser are, unfortunately, far too brief to adequately convey the complex uses of the city in their works. In his chapter on James, Weimer limits his discussion to James's handling of "city-place,"[32] and concentrates on James's interest in having his cities carry "part of the burden of

meaning through suggestiveness."[33] He discusses the reasons for James's failure in Roderick Hudson to create an effective antithesis between a New England village and Rome; he suggests what Rome signifies to Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady; and he examines the city as a symbol of the inextricable union of urbanity and simplicity in The Ambassadors. In a footnote, Weimer acknowledges that he is ignoring other aspects of the city in James's work and then suggests further exploration of

> how dependent the social drama of Washington Square, The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, or The Tragic Muse actually is on the metropolitan milieu of each, or -- in a comparable but narrower inquiry -- how integral specifically urban detail is to such stories as "An International Episode," "In the Cage," or "The Beast in the Jungle," or to such longer works as The Aspern Papers and The Wings of the Dove.[34]

Weimer's chapter on Dreiser concentrates on the architectural structures in the city as symbolically expressing Dreiser's view of the city as a trap. Dreiser's use of the city is more complex than Weimer's chapter suggests. Nevertheless, Weimer's attempts to focus attention, particularly in his chapters on the poets, on what the city represents within the context of the novel or poem are illuminating and rewarding.

The subject of Monroe K. Spears's book, Dionysus and the City, is modernism, especially in twentieth-century poetry. The third chapter of the book, "The Nature of Modernism: The City," explores how the modern poet learned to deal with the city, that "great modern subject."[35] Spears

finds that the great master of the city theme among modern poets is Eliot (Yeats, Pound, Auden, and Lowell are also discussed) and among modern novelists is Joyce. Spears recognizes Eliot's frequent use of the city as a "projection of inner psychic states,"[36] his use of realistic urban details to "resonate and suggest metaphors and allusions" and his ability "to make one city a microcosm of all cities and of all life."[37] In the area of fiction, Spears credits James Joyce with introducing the city "as principal subject of fiction in English and with the handling of this new subject in a manner distinctively modern. . . . Joyce, in so many respects 'old father, old artificer' of literary modernism, established in Dubliners and brought to fullest development in Ulysses both the central image of the City and the special method by which it is rendered by following writers, poets as well as novelists."[38] Spears discusses Joyce's use of the mythical as a means of apprehending past and present simultaneously. Because Joyce thinks of life as "something fundamentally social," Spears posits, the central image in his work "is that of the City."[39] Pound recognized that in Dubliners Joyce had "made the city a formal principle for the first time in modern English literature." Spears's chapter is noteworthy because it deals with the city neither in thematic terms nor in terms of attitudes toward the city but rather in terms of how the city is used as a literary tool, in this case in modern poetry.

Blanche Gelfant's The American City Novel was the

first full length work on the image of the city in the modern American novel, and it offers a compromise between the sociological and literary approaches.[40] Gelfant discusses the novels of Dreiser, Dos Passos, and Farrell, gives brief attention to Anderson, Wharton, and Wolfe, and reviews the city novels written between 1943 and 1953, categorizing them as either novels of sentiment or novels of violence.

Gelfant begins with a discussion in chapter two of the city's essential characteristics "as they have been formulated and systematized in the sociological theory of urbanism."[41] She points out that "sociological and literary interpretations of city life corroborate each other, and an understanding of urban sociology helps to explain the basic orientation of twentieth-century city fiction -- its emphasis upon the materialism and inequality in city life, upon the collapse of tradition and the community, upon the failures of social institutions, and upon the inner experience of alienation and aloneness."[42] At times, Gelfant imposes her sociological framework on the novels in an arbitrary and inappropriate manner. In her chapter on Dreiser, for example, she offers a "social explanation" for the predicament in which Dreiser's heroes find themselves.[43] Themes that are relatively minor in significance receive treatment and achieve importance out of proportion to their treatment in the context of the novel. Gelfant notes that one of the results of urban living is that the influence of organized religion is weakened, that "material success

and spiritual salvation seem to require irreconcilable modes of behavior," that "the constant pressures of a mechanized environment challenge religious convictions."[44] She then discusses the failure of religion in the lives of Dreiser's characters. While it is true that Clyde Griffiths does not conform to the evangelistic tenets of his father and is attracted to material values, it is equally true that the values of the religious life as they are presented in the novel are also being questioned. Similarly, it seems somewhat irrelevant to talk in sociological jargon about Jennie Gerhardt and An American Tragedy as "portrayals of the decline of the family."[45]

In addition to the sociological stress, there is also a stress on evaluating the writer's attitudes toward the city:

> Unlike a local color writer, the city novelist sees urban life as an organic whole, and he expresses a coherent, organized, and total vision of the city. . . . In creating a unified impression, he uses particularized incidents as a means of arriving at underlying truths about city life. He offers an interpretation and a judgment of the city -- a way of seeing and evaluating it as an ordered pattern of experiences consistent with the inner principles of its being.[46]

Gelfant analyzes individual episodes as they function "as an instrument of social commentary."[47] She examines the "social implications"[48] of the novels, the message conveyed, the attitudes expressed. Thus, Arty's death in Farrell's No Star is Lost, says Gelfant, is Farrell's way of expressing that "money is the arbiter of life and death in the South Side."[49]

Gelfant is really interested in relating the artist's social vision of city life and the aesthetic techniques through which he expresses this vision. Thus, despite her obvious dependence on sociological fact to buttress her discussions of the individual novels, there is in her book an appreciation of literary techniques and literary values which makes it a valuable reference in a relatively unexplored area. Her stress on aesthetic effects in her chapter on Dos Passos is, in this respect, particularly good as is her discussion of structure and style in her chapter on James T. Farrell. B. Gelfant must be credited with having brought the central image of the city in modern American fiction to the attention of literary critics.

In summary, then, there have been very few substantial attempts to examine the literary uses of the urban scene as a major new ingredient and force in the fabric of the modern novel. In his article "The City in Literature," I. Howe discusses five major changes that "the city as presence has wrought."[50] First, it has resulted in "major changes in narrative patterns."[51] Howe notes in the nineteenth-century novel a spiral-like pattern; first a pull toward the city, then a disheartened retreat to some point of origin." Later novels depict the city as "a maze beyond escape. . . . there is no place else to go."[52] Howe further notes that "the city allows for a more complex system of social relationships than any other locale. . . . For the novelist . . . the city's proliferation of casual

and secondary relationships offers new possibilities";[53] the experiences of Ulysses which were expressed through complicated journeys is encompassed by Joyce in one day's wandering through a single city. Howe adds that the rise of the city led to the inclusion of a host of minor characters and is also related to the use by some novelists of a multiplicity of narrative points of view. Thirdly, the city allows for "major changes in regard to permissible subjects, settings, and characters";[54] it "provides a new range of vocabularies" and also "encourages that flavorless language, the language of sawdust";[55] and finally, it "gives rise to a whole series of new character types."[56] Howe mentions the clerk, "soon taken to represent the passivity, smallness, and pathos of life in the city"; the Jew, "bearer of the sour fruits of self-definition"; the cultivated woman, "inconceivable anywhere but in the city"; and the underground man, "a creature of the city, without fixed rank or place, burrowing beneath the visible structure of society, hater of all that flourishes aboveground."[57]

All of these observations are supported by the discussions in the following chapters on Dreiser, Wolfe, Farrell, and Bellow. This study proposes to further explore the important question of what the city "does," how the city functions in the novel. Each of the following chapters examines the works of these four writers in an effort to determine how the author uses the city as a tool in the artistic creation of his novel. In each, the city is shown

to play a vital role in relation to plot and to characterization and in supporting and reinforcing the thematic concerns of the novel.

Dreiser was chosen because he is a seminal figure in the tradition of the urban novel in America. Many of the themes and problems which recur in the modern urban novel find early expression in his novels, and his wide-ranging treatment of various aspects of urban life opened the door for later writers to a greater range of settings and character types than had ever before appeared in American fiction.

Dreiser's use of the city changes from Sister Carrie through the Cowperwood novels to An American Tragedy. In Sister Carrie the city figures most prominently in relation to characterization. It is a crucial factor in defining Carrie's personality. On the second page of the novel, Dreiser establishes its importance. The city, says Dreiser, "has its cunning wiles, no less than the infinitely smaller and more human tempter."[58] The city is her suitor; it woos and wins her. In Dreiser's Cowperwood saga, the growth of the city (Philadelphia in The Financier and Chicago in The Titan) determines the action. Frank Cowperwood's actions are in direct response to the growth, change, and movement of the city. Furthermore, Dreiser's dramatic use of the urban scene in the Cowperwood novels as a determinant of plot accounts for a marked decrease in

his dependence on chance occurrences. Unlike the inexplicable occurrences in Sister Carrie that shape the lives of the characters, the factors beyond Cowperwood's control are complex but accountable urban occurrences. This marked decrease in Dreiser's use of chance is one indication of a change in his use of the city. In An American Tragedy, the city, after instilling in Clyde Griffiths an awareness of and longing for material comforts, no longer plays a vital role in the novel. In fact, the second half of the novel is totally removed from any urban setting.

Thomas Wolfe's interest in the city and repeated mention of it could not fail to be noted by readers and critics alike, but Wolfe's imaginative use of the city has not really been fully explored. In Wolfe, characterization of both the major and minor characters is inextricably associated with the city setting. The city setting is not presented in an objective account by Wolfe, as for example in Dreiser, and this then followed by interaction between that setting and character. Rather, the city is portrayed through the subjective perceptions of Wolfe's main character, and the city that the Wolfe protagonist sees is the city "that he has within his heart."[59] What the protagonist sees is colored if not determined by his moods. Thus, Wolfe uses the city as a literary device to portray the mind of his character, as a means of objectifying the psychological and emotional state of the protagonist. In creating his minor characters, there is a reciprocal

relationship between Wolfe's use of the city to describe many of the minor characters and the use of the characters to describe the city. The "fundamental structure of thesis and antithesis" that C. Hugh Holman notes in Wolfe's novels[60] is certainly confirmed by Wolfe's gallery of minor characters, some of whom exist to express the negative aspects of urban life while others are created as expressions of affirmation.

B. Gelfant notes that the themes of modern art "are also the themes of city fiction":

> The modern experience of alienation and aloneness is thus related to a breakdown of tradition and community nowhere so striking and definitive as in the city. The materialistic temper of the age, as well as the mechanistic basis of our modern way of life, is also most intensely expressed in the city. And the tempo and tensions of the twentieth-century world of speed and hectic amusement are revealed in the rhythms and pace of big city life. In the same way that the city epitomizes the twentieth century, city fiction focalizes the main themes of twentieth-century literature.[61]

These modern themes are evident, either implicitly or explicitly, in the novels of each of the four writers examined in this study. Wolfe's use of the city in relation to thematic development deserves special mention. There is in Wolfe's novels no plot in the traditional sense of the word. Certain images and themes weave their way in and out of all the novels, intertwining and interrelating with each other to provide a certain tonal unity. Wolfe uses the image of the city in relation to his theme of loneliness, his theme of quest, his concern with time in its aspects

of permanence and change, and his broad theme, most evident in his last novel, of American life. It is used to expand and develop some of these themes and at other times simply to recall and evoke images and ideas associated with other themes. It thus functions as a unifying device in a novel that has little formal structure.

James T. Farrell is generally regarded as a major city novelist. Through his effective use of a dreary urban setting, a distinctive urban language, and particular urban phenomena, Farrell recreates an authentic city neighborhood, the Fifty-eighth Street world of Studs Lonigan. Yet this study finds that in the Lonigan trilogy, contrary to accepted critical opinion, urban forces do not play as important a role in Studs's character development as does the unique cultural climate in which Studs grows up. Analysis of Farrell's Danny O'Neill pentalogy (A World I Never Made, No Star is Lost, Father and Son, My Days of Anger, The Face of Time) and the Bernard Carr novels (Bernard Clare, The Road Between, Yet Other Waters) indicates that there is a steady progression away from the use of the city in Farrell's writings. There are in the O'Neill novels fewer urban particulars than in Studs Lonigan. Most of the scenes in the pentalogy take place within the confines of apartment, home, or job. In the Carr trilogy, neighborhood recedes even more as a determinant of character development; Bernard Clare, the first novel of the trilogy, is entirely devoid of background material,

an indication that Farrell does not regard Bernard as bound by his past. The marked decline in involvement with urban issues corresponds with Farrell's move from environmental determinism to self-determination.

Each of Saul Bellow's novels is deeply immersed in the complex modern urban world. The city is the given, the inescapable reality of modern twentieth-century America, and its presence is always strongly felt.

Bellow's first novel, Dangling Man, introduces the central urban motif that runs through each of Bellow's novels, the question of man's relationship to the impersonal, mechanized, technological urban world around him. There must be a difference, says Joseph, "between things and persons . . . Otherwise the people who lived here were actually a reflection of the things they lived among."[62] Bellow brilliantly perceives and dramatizes the psychological consequences arising out of the conditions of an urban life style, most notably in The Victim and in Seize the Day. The oppressiveness of the city in The Victim perfectly corresponds with the feelings of oppression and hostility that mark the Allbee-Leventhal confrontations. In a sense, the Allbee confrontations only exacerbate and bring to a conscious level feelings engendered by the nature and quality of city life. In Seize the Day the materialism and the pressures of Wilhelm's urban surroundings are both cause and symptom of the modern predicament.

Bellow uses the physical world as a means of illuminat-

ing the psychological. Especially in The Victim, the urban scene reflects and illuminates, and at times contrasts with, the moods of the character. In The Adventures of Augie March, Bellow uses the infinite variety of the city as a means of conveying the passive nature of his vaguely defined protagonist. In Mr. Sammler's Planet, the particular urban scenes provide Sammler with opportunities to speculate and philosophize about various aspects of modern life.

Thus, the fiction of these four writers is firmly grounded in a new reality, the modern urban world. The urban milieu in their novels exists in vital relationship with the other main elements of the novel, and an understanding and appreciation of that interrelationship serves to enhance our appreciation of the craft and skill of the artists.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Jay Martin, Harvests of Change: American Literature 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 4.

[2]Monroe K. Spears, Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth-Century Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 70-71.

[3]Ibid., pp. 73-74.

[4]Nelson Manfred Blake, Novelists' America: Fiction as History, 1910-1940 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1969), p. 263.

[5]Ibid., p. 225.

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[30]Ibid., p. 56.

[31]Ibid., p. 57.

[32]Ibid., p. 42.

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[34]Ibid., p. 43.

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[37]Ibid., p. 79.

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[40]Blanche H. Gelfant, The American City Novel (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954).

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[47]Ibid.

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[60]C. Hugh Holman, "'The Dark, Ruined Helen of His Blood': Thomas Wolfe and the South," in Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Leslie A. Field (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 19.

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THEODORE DREISER

Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie, published in 1900, is one of the first novels in the development of the city as a central image in twentieth-century American fiction. The city setting is an essential element in Dreiser's novels, possessing an integral relationship to the plot, characterization, and theme. The function of the setting varies from novel to novel, at times figuring more prominently in its relationship to plot, more often in its relationship to characterization and theme.

James T. Farrell describes the period through which Dreiser lived and about which he wrote as "one of economic growth and accumulation, of intense competition and rivalry. New cities were springing up. New buildings. New industries. New universities. Newness -- forever the new. Men looked to the future with bright eyes. Millionaires were made overnight. The race was to the swift, the lucky. The stakes were high. The game was fevered and brutal."[1] Farrell continues:

> Theodore Dreiser became the great novelist of the period of capitalist growth and expansion, the period of urbanization in American life. In his youth, the city was the most powerful of all social magnets. It attracted eager youth, the ambitious boys and the beautiful girls. It attracted swarms from all parts of Europe. Some rose to great success in the city. Many -- thousands and thousands -- were crushed, destroyed. In the city the sound of the hammer was never still. Everywhere something was happening. And Dreiser saw all this, saw and remembered, and told us about it with depths of

> compassion, with wonder,with love of beauty, with anger at the sight of squalor, and, above all else, with objectivity.[2]

The feverish activity in the commercial world is wonderfully captured and presented in The Financier and The Titan. The emotions, longings, and dreams aroused in the poor by the signs of wealth and success around them are recorded in detail in Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy. And the magnetic pull of the city on each of Dreiser's characters as well as on Dreiser himself is evident in each of these novels, especially in The "Genius", the most autobiographical of them.

Dreiser wished to describe life as he knew it, and the city was more and more becoming an inescapable fact of life. Dreiser opens each of his novels with a self-conscious awareness of the city as a new phenomenon on the American scene. In Sister Carrie, as Carrie's train nears Chicago she catches glimpses of "wide stretches of flat, open prairie," with "lines of telegraph poles stalking across the fields toward the great city."[3] In the first chapters of the novel, Dreiser tells us that Chicago in 1889 was "a city of over 500,000, with the ambition, the daring, the activity of a metropolis of a million,"[4] with an influx of newcomers at a rate of 50,000 a year,[5] where "great industries were moving in."[6] The opening paragraph of The Financier describes Philadelphia as "a city of two hundred and fifty thousand and more. . . . Many of the things that we and he [Frank Cowperwood] knew later were not then in existence -- the telegraph,

telephone, express company, ocean steamer, city delivery of mails. . . . The street car had not arrived. In its place were hosts of omnibuses, and for longer travel the slowly developing railroad system still largely connected by canals."[7] In the opening chapter of The Titan Dreiser calls Chicago a "prairie metropolis."[8] The opening scene of An American Tragedy shows the Griffiths singing their hymns between "the tall walls of the commercial heart of an American city of perhaps 400,000 inhabitants."[9] The city was new, constantly growing, constantly changing, energetic, alive, fascinating, and different. Time and again Dreiser refers to the city as a magnet with powerful forces of attraction. Once having entered the city's domain, Dreiser's young men and women never leave. David Weimer calls Dreiser's city a trap from which his characters can never escape.[10] It is not, however, that the city traps them; rather, it changes them, transforms them, so that they choose never to leave because they no longer fit into a non-urban world. In Sister Carrie, after Carrie loses her job due to a three day illness, she must face anew the prospect of job hunting. Yet, miserable as she is with the situation in which she finds herself, Carrie, as all of Dreiser's characters who enter the city, cannot bear the thought of leaving the city and returning home to "the little old life out there"[11] in Columbia City. Dreiser thus breaks away from the spiral-like pattern so often found in the nineteenth-century novel of attraction towards and then retreat from the city. He shares with those authors the

mixed feelings of attraction to and rejection of certain aspects of city life, but escape to rural life is never a viable alternative for Dreiser's characters. The idyllic, short-lived country episodes in The "Genius" -- Eugene with Angela at Blackwood and with Christina Channing in the Blue Ridge Mountains -- may contrast with but are not sought as an escape from the city. Eugene's first visit home after only a short stay in Chicago convinces him that he could never return home; he "had undergone cataclysmic changes. . . . the great city had dawned on him."[12]

The city in Dreiser's novels is in itself neither good nor evil. "Dreiser was able to rescue the city for fiction," says Jay Martin, "by presenting it undistorted by literary or ethical conventions. He restored the city to the uses of the American imagination by attempting, as Floyd Dell remarked, 'to see [neither] the badness of the city, nor its goodness,' but rather, 'its beauty and its ugliness,' and to find 'a beauty in its ugliness.'"[13] What writer before Dreiser could have a character consider a "maze of black cindered car tracks" as "wonderful"[14] or see the city through the eyes of a Eugene Witla, who passionately desired to capture on canvas "big black engines throwing up clouds of smoke and steam in a grey, wet air; great mazes of parti-colored cars dank in the rain but lovely. At night the switch lights in these great masses of yards bloomed like flowers. He loved the sheer yellows, reds, greens, blues, that burned like eyes."[15] Eugene Witla writes and illustrates an article on

the Chicago River: "He did not write an article so much as a panegyric on its beauty and littleness, finding the former where few would have believed it to exist."[16] Dreiser, too, is able to find beauty where few would have believed it to exist. He is always sensitive and alive to the presence of something of beauty even in the most sordid surroundings. He conveys with delicacy the beauty and poignancy of the love that blossoms between Clyde and Roberta (in An American Tragedy), a love that develops through stolen glances at one another in the crowded collar factory stamping room and secret stolen moments in Roberta's rented room, on the city streets, in the "commonplace and noisy and gaudy" Starlight Amusement Park.[17]

Dreiser wrote about urban America. His novels paved the way for later writers by opening up a whole new area of potential settings. Limitless possibilities for settings are explored in the worlds of big business and high finance, manufacturing, banking, brokerage firms, the stock exchange, city and state politics, hotel scenes, theatre life, saloon scenes, newspapers and advertising, prison life, factory conditions, and the flophouses and breadlines of the Bowery. Dreiser enters each area with complete command of detail. His facts and figures are carefully substantiated and carefully woven into the narrative.

Dreiser took advantage of the many different aspects of city life and used settings heretofore considered inappropriate to the novelist. And this naturally provided him with a far

greater range of character types than had ever before appeared in American fiction. Dreiser includes in these novels an enormous range and variety of characters and character types from every corner of city life. The huge cast of characters includes, in Sister Carrie, salesmen, saloon managers, Mason members, detectives, theatrical agents and managers, chorus girls, Bowery bums, railway strikers and scabs; in The Financier, bankers, brokers, clerks, financiers, stock manipulators, politicians, prisoners and prison guards; in An American Tragedy, salesgirls, hotel bellhops, factory workers, immigrants, druggists, wealthy manufacturers, doctors, lawyers, jurors, prisoners. Minor characters spring to life as they appear for brief but intense moments. They linger in our memory and often set up long remembered echoes and reverberations. For example, as we watch Hurstwood take his place among the street beggars of the Bowery, begging for just enough to buy some food anda place to sleep, we recall a similar scene earlier in the novel where Hurstwood, Carrie, and Drouet, upon leaving the theatre, are accosted by a "gaunt-faced man" who asks them for "the price of a bed."[18] Drouet pities him and gives him a dime. Hurstwood "scarcely noticed the incident." We remember the brief scene and it stands in ironic counterpoint to the later scenes in the novel.

There are really two kinds of awareness of and response to the city in a Dreiser novel, that of the characters and that of Dreiser himself. Dreiser makes no attempt to disguise his presence as omniscient narrator. He is always

on hand to guide, comment, and reflect. Dreiser responded to the magnetic call of the city with the same unbounded enthusiasm that all his heroes and heroines share. He was so conscious of and responsive to the constantly changing environment that in The Color of a Great City, a series of brief pictures of New York between 1900 and 1914, Dreiser tried to capture those aspects of New York which he had known but which had already passed from the scene. Matthiessen notes this same desire to record every aspect of city life before it disappears in Sister Carrie: "He [Dreiser] recalled that not even the name 'North Shore Drive,' where Carrie goes riding with Hurstwood, dated back a dozen years. When he located the room of Carrie's chorus-girl friend in New York on 19th Street near Fourth Avenue, he noted that it was in 'a block now given up wholly to office buildings.'"[19]

Dreiser's experiences as a newspaperman exposed him to the darkest aspects of city life. He could not understand the discrepancy between what he observed and "the beauty and peace and charm to be found in everything, the almost complete absence of any reference to the coarse and the vulgar and the cruel and the terrible"[20] that he found in the fiction and articles in the then-current magazines. Dreiser's characters soon learn about the snares and threats of city life. It is not easy for Carrie to find a decent job with decent working conditions. In the shoe factory in which Carrie finally finds employment, "not the slightest provision had been made for the comfort of the employees,

the idea being that something was gained by giving them as little and making the work as hard and unremunerative as possible. . . . the whole atmosphere was sordid."[21] The last chapters of Sister Carrie graphically portray Hurstwood's decline into extreme poverty with sensitivity and objectivity. The reputation of the Bowery was established in the 1890's, says Ellen Moers, as "a symbol of failure . . . at a time when American eyes were opening to the spectacle of urban poverty."[22] In an age that worshipped success, the Bowery stood for failure. Dreiser gives us a vivid picture of Hurstwood's decline from the classy Fitzgerald and Moy's in Chicago tothe flophouses and breadlines of the Bowery. In this first novel, Dreiser manages to convey both the powerful attractions and the terrible squalor and deprivation that exist side by side in the metropolis. Indeed, as Blanche Gelfant has remarked, Dreiser's novels are structured on such contrasts,[23] and this reflects Dreiser's own awareness of and disenchantment with the values and realities of city life.

Dreiser's characters, however, do not share this awareness. The materialistic values of the city are absorbed by the characters and shape their desires. This is true of Carrie Meeber in Sister Carrie, Eugene Witla in The "Genius", Frank Cowperwood in The Financier, and Clyde Griffiths in An American Tragedy. The city has an especially powerful impact on the newcomer. It offers sights and sounds that dazzle and confound the senses, scenes of wealth and luxury that

arouse hopes and dreams, and an atmosphere of growth and opportunity that seems to offer the possibility of making those hopes and dreams a reality. Dreiser's characters remain incapable of transcending their material aspirations. In Sister Carrie, Carrie is constantly aware of the enormous gap between the rich and the poor and this constantly renews her desire to bridge that gap. She comes to Chicago dreaming "dreams of some vague, far-off supremacy,"[24] but soon finds that she cannot earn enough money even to clothe herself. After she has been outfitted by Drouet, she suddenly finds herself face to face with one of the girls from the factory in which she had been employed; the sense of superiority which her new clothes give her makes it exceedingly difficult for her to face the idea of returning to her previous situation. She sets up housekeeping with Drouet; a drive past the houses on the North Shore Drive makes her reevaluate her own small (but attractive) apartment with Drouet:

> When she came to her own rooms, Carrie saw their comparative insignificance. She was not so dull but that she could perceive they were but three small rooms in a moderately well-furnished boarding house. She was not contrasting it now with what she had had, but what she had so recently seen.[25]

She responds to Hurstwood not out of deep feelings of love but rather because she is dazzled by his polish and social standing.[26] For Carrie, financial success seems to hold the promise of personal fulfillment and happiness.[27] The life style of the Vances, her neighbors in New York, which includes vacations, theatre parties, and lavish dining, makes Carrie discontented with and self-conscious of her own limited

means. She longs to feel the delight of parading down Broadway in elegant finery: "Ah, then she would be happy."[28] The city scenes serve as a constant reminder to Carrie that what she has is not good enough.

There is in Dreiser's heroes, Blanche Gelfant notes, "a peculiar soul-hunger, a deep, romantic yearning for beauty. Dreiser is always vague or ambiguous about the exact nature of this beauty towards which his characters yearn. It is, we gather, a spiritual quality. . . . His characters burn with an incandescent desire for some glimpse, some fulfillment or realization, of an ideal of beauty."[29] Gelfant says that Dreiser doesn't articulate very clearly the nature of the beauty towards which his characters yearn. However, it is possible that this vagueness is intentional on Dreiser's part to express the limited awareness of the characters themselves, their inability to define for themselves what will bring the self-fulfillment that they so desire. Dreiser says of Carrie that "on her spiritual side . . . she was rich in feeling."[30] She has untouched dramatic abilities: "Carrie was possessed of that sympathetic, impressionable nature which . . . has been the glory of the drama."[31] Carrie intuitively senses her own ability to act but misinterprets her desire for self-expression as a desire for "the glamour, the tense situation, the fine clothes, the applause."[32] She confuses what she wants with the superficial values of a materialistic society. Carrie fits Irving Howe's description of Dreiser's characters as "romantics who behave as if the Absolute can be found,

immaculately preserved, at the very summit of material power."[33] Beyond this growth from innocence to partial awareness, there is no further character development, no developing self-awareness. What changes is not the character but the situation.

Although Dreiser tries to portray Carrie as having a sensitive artistic nature which is struggling to express itself, one is compelled to agree with Matthiessen[34] that it is difficult to believe in Carrie's "emotional greatness." Matthiessen suggests that perhaps this is due to the fact that Carrie is never deeply stirred in her relationships with others. At the end of the novel, Carrie only dimly senses that the values that she has so eagerly adopted are not bringing fulfillment; she had, however, no other substitute for them. The city has lured her, wood her, and won her. She is destined to remain unsatisfied: "In your rocking chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel."[35] Her situation has changed; she has the money, the clothes, the public acclaim that she once desired, but she remains unhappy, lonely, and dissatisfied.

Drouet and Hurstwood also remain static. Drouet is introduced as one who "loved fine clothes, good eating, and particularly the company and acquaintanceship of successful men."[36] He has "a keen desire for the feminine" and "a mind free of any consideration of the problems or forces of the world and actuated not by greed, but by insatiable love of variable pleasure."[37] Drouet does not change. Our last glimpse of him is in the lobby of the Imperial Hotel. "A

good dinner, the company of a young woman, and an evening at the theatre were the chief things for him."[38] "The old butterfly was as light on the wing as ever."[39] Hurstwood, too, never changes his values. The New York scenes that attract and inspire Carrie are a source of frustration to Hurstwood. He is "an inconspicuous drop in an ocean like New York,"[40] and the atmosphere of affluence is a disturbing contrast to his own distressing state of affairs. As he declines he begins to indulge in reverie. Scenes and incidents from his past are recalled with nostalgia and longing. The contrast between what was and what is ultimately becomes too unbearable, and Hurstwood finally decides to commit suicide. He stands, penniless, with his old coat "turned up about his red ears" and gazes at the crowds on Broadway who are hastening to dine: "Through bright windows, at every corner, might be seen gay companies in luxuriant restaurants. There were coaches and crowded cable cars. In his weary and hungry state, he should never have come here. The contrast was too sharp. . . . 'What's the use?' he thought. 'It's all up with me. I'll quit this.'"[41] Thus, the situations change; the characters do not. "Through the logic of the narrative, the working out of its implications, we are enabled to grasp with an almost visceral intensity how shallow are the standards by which the characters live."[42] This lack of character development beyond a point reached early in the novel marks not only Sister Carrie but The Financier, The Titan, and An American Tragedy as well.

From the very first page of Sister Carrie, the city functions in the novel to define character. The quality of Carrie's initial response to the sights and sounds of Chicago is a foreshadowing of her inability to relate meaningfully to either Drouet or Hurstwood. Carrie, upon arriving in Chicago, loved to gaze into the streets below the Hanson flat and "wondered at the sounds, the movement, the murmur of the vast city which stretched for miles and miles in every direction."[43] This adjective "vast" dominates the section in which Dreiser describes the impact of the city on Carrie as she walks through the commercial section of Chicago looking for a job. Dreiser paints Carrie's first experience of Chicago with images that convey a sense of the city's vastness, massiveness, power, and force. As Carrie walks through the streets of downtown Chicago, the "vast buildings," "strange energies and huge interests," "immense trundling cranes of wood and steel," "vast railroad yards," "huge factories," "great streets," and "vast offices" impress her with their grandeur and leave her with an overwhelming sense of helplessness. "It was all wonderful, all vast, all far removed."[44] She responds to the abstract vastness of the city, to its material, non-human aspects. This is in marked contrast to Eugene Witla's first encounter with Chicago in The "Genius", which is described in more personal, more human terms. He sees Chicago as "youthful, energetic and alive";[45] he responds to its "tide of people which represented the youth, the illusions, the untrained aspirations,

of millions of souls."[46] Chicago means "eagerness, hope, desire."[47]

> He was hypnotized by the wonder of this thing -- the beauty of it. Such seething masses of people! such whirlpools of life! The great hotels, the opera, the theatres, the restaurants, all gripped him with a sense of beauty. These lovely women in magnificent gowns; these swarms of cabs, with golden eyes, like monstrous insects; this ebb and surge of life, at morning and evening, made him forget his loneliness. . . . Here and there in the news an author had made a great success with a book; a scientist with a discovery; a philosopher with a new theory; a financier with an investment. There was news of great plays being put on; great actors and actresses coming from abroad; great successes being made by debutantes in society.[48]

It is the life of the city, its people and their activities, that Eugene finds so fascinating. Eugene's and Carrie's responses to the city are consistent with other aspects of their personalities. Thus, Eugene enters into many passionate relationships whereas Carrie continues to respond to objects rather than to people. Once she leaves her family she loses all contact with them. She drifts into the affair with Drouet. And she responds to Hurstwood not out of deep feelings of love but rather because she is dazzled by his sophistication and social standing. When Hurstwood, after having beguiled her into running away with him, begs Carrie for assurance that she loves him, Dreiser writes: "Carrie had never been ill-disposed toward him."[49] Carrie is wooed and won by the city. "The city," says Dreiser in the opening chapter, "has its cunning wiles, no less than the infinitely smaller and more human tempter. There are large forces which allure with all the soulfulness of expression possible in the most cultured human. The gleam of a thousand lights

is often as effective as the persuasive light in a wooing and fascinating eye."[50] Drouet meets Carrie while she is out searching for a new job and takes her to lunch. "He appeared to great advantage behind the white napery and silver platters of the table. . . . and captivated Carrie completely. . . . The great room soothed her and the view of the well-dressed throng outside seemed a splendid thing."[51] So begins Carrie's relationship with Drouet. Drouet doesn't press his suit too quickly. He first sets her up in a room of her own. Then, recognizing her deepest longings, he advises her not to worry: "What's the use worrying right now? Get yourself fixed up. See the city."[52] Dreiser says that Carrie would have done better if she hadn't taken a job so soon after her arrival in Chicago "and had seen more of the city which she constantly troubled to know about."[53] Drouet, conscious of her longing to see all of Chicago, fills her hours with sight seeing,[54] taking her walking, to the opera, wining and dining her in unaccustomed luxury. "Underthe influence of the varied occurrences, the fine, invisible passion that was emanating from Drouet, the food, the still unusual luxury, she relaxed and heard with open ears. She was again the victim of the city's hypnotic influence":[55] the city's, not Drouet's. As the train carrying Hurstwood and Carrie away from Chicago speeds through the night, Hurstwood tries to convince Carrie of his love for her and begs her to run off with him. It is only when he says "You can see Montreal and New York and then if you don't want to stay you can go back"[56] that he gets any kind of positive response: "The first gleam of

fairness shone in this proposition for Carrie. It seemed a plausible thing to do, much as she feared his opposition if she tried to carry it out. Montreal and New York. Even now she was speeding toward those great, strange lands, and could see them if she liked."[57]

For the most part, Carrie is more acted upon than self-assertive. William Phillips, in his discussion of the sea imagery in Sister Carrie, comments that "whether or not Dreiser consciously intended the pun on Carrie's name, it is clear that he conceives her as carried along by the sea, not moving by the exertions of her will."[58] When, however, critical moments of choice come and must be met, like those described above, what determines her actions are the visions of the city and the luxuries and pleasures it seems to offer.

Dreiser uses the city in a similar manner in The "Genius", which repeats the situation of discovery of the city by a youth from an impoverished background. The "Genius" is Dreiser's most autobiographical novel, and Eugene's first experience of Chicago, given in very rhapsodic terms, matches Dreiser's own reaction as described in Dawn.[59] The city spectacle appeals to Eugene Witla's artistic sense and he tries to capture his experience of the city on canvas. "The city appealed to him . . . He saw Fifth Avenue once in a driving snowstorm and under sputtering arc lights, and he hurried to his easel next morning to see if he could not put it down in black and white. . . . these spectacles were drawing him. He was wanting to do them -- wanting to see them

shown somewhere in color."[60] "It was all dramatic to him -- the wagons in the streets, the tall buildings, the street lamps -- anything, everything."[61] "He sought out quickly the wonders of metropolitan life."[62] M. Charles, a noted art critic, comes to see Witla's pictures:

> He saw that Eugene had covered almost every phase of what might be called the dramatic spectacle in the public life of the city and much that did not appear dramatic until he touched it -- the empty canyon of Broadway at three o'clock in the morning; a long line of giant milk wagons, swinging curious lanterns, coming up from the docks at four o'clock in the morning; a plunging parade of fire vehicles, the engines steaming smoke, the people running or staring open-mouthed; a crowd of polite society figures emerging from the opera; the bread line; an Italian boy throwing pigeons in the air from a basket on his arm in a crowded lower West-side street. Everything he touched seemed to have romance and beauty, and yet it was real and mostly grim and shabby.[63]

Charles congratulates Witla on his work and tells him that he is a great artist. The city, however, shows little interest in or reward for his work: "What did the city care? It was much more interested in other things, in dressing, eating, visiting, riding abroad."[64] The "cold commercialism" and "voluptuous sybaritism"[65] of the city gradually make an impact; these values that seem to leave little room for interst in art slowly take root even in Eugene's mind and his desire to paint begins to wane. "Art doesn't appeal to me so much as it once did," Eugene tells Angela. "Where could I make twelve thousand a year painting?"[66] The taste of the luxuries that money can buy makes the thought of living as a poor artist intolerable and unacceptable.

Would the approval of posterity let him ride in

> an automobile now? He smiled as he recalled Dula's [a fellow artist] talk about class superiority -- the distinction of being an artist, even though poor. Poverty be hanged! Posterity could go to the devil! He wanted to live now -- not in the approval of posterity."[67]

And Angela's dream of Eugene being a famous artist also fades quickly: "Art distinction might be delightful, but would it furnish such a table as they were sitting at this morning? . . . Art was glorious, but would they have as many rides and auto trips as they had now? Would she be able to dress as nicely?"[68]

Carrie Meeber comes to the city with goals and desires that are vague and undefined. Eugene Witla, however, knows that he wants "to be a great artist";[69] he has great sensitivity and ability. Urban life, however, is a corrupting influence, and it plays a primary role in the development of Eugene's character.

In Sister Carrie the city setting plays an important role in character portrayal; in The Financier and The Titan Dreiser shifts emphasis, using the city in these novels in relation to plot. One may say, in fact, that the growth of and changes in the city, Philadelphia in The Financier and Chicago in The Titan, determines the action of these novels. Frank Cowperwood responds to the changing conditions of the stock exchange, the rapid growth of city transportation lines and gas lines, the expanding business opportunities. He rises and falls on the social and financial scales according to how effectively he manipulates the changing conditions.

His actions are a response to the growth, change, and movement of the city.

Dreiser attempts to convey a sense of the city as an independent force that is pushing outwards beyond its limits, visibly expanding and growing. The development and expansion of street car lines inexorably follows the continuous expansion of city limits: "The omnibuses were slowly disappearing. . . . The city was growing. The incoming population would make great business in the future. One could afford to pay almost any price for the short lines already built if one could wait and extend the lines into larger and better areas later."[70] Street-railway control is "a new and intriguing phase of the city's financial life"; it is quickly recognized as a potential gold mine and becomes a political and economic football, with the power figures struggling to gain control of it. Using the funds from the city treasury at an extremely low rate of interest, Frank Cowperwood has been able to buy up a considerable number of shares of street-railway stocks. In 1871 the commercial section of Chicago goes up in flames. There is an immediate and electric impact on urban centers across the country. Chicago's tragedy becomes New York's and Philadelphia's as well. Brokerage houses and insurance firms close their doors, the stock market drops drastically, and people panic. Cowperwood makes every effort to convince the moneyed powers to support the market just long enough for the temporary panic to subside; their unwillingness to do so causes his financial

failure and puts him at their mercy. Edward Malia Butler, Henry Mollenhauer, and State Senator Simpson, the men to whom Cowperwood appeals, constitute "the great triumverate" that controls "the political destiny of the city."[71] Butler has learned of the affair between Cowperwood and his daughter Aileen and is determined to ruin him; Simpson wants the Republican party to be reelected and need a party scapegoat to cover the mishandling of city funds by a Republican administration; and Mollenhauer's desire to gain control of Cowperwood's railway stocks impels him to agree to use Cowperwood as the party scapegoat.

At the end of The Financier Frank Cowperwood is unchanged. Even while sitting behind bars in a prison cell, with nearly four more years of his sentence to serve, he is indomitable: "He felt, within himself, that the whole world was still before him."[72] After his pardon and release, Cowperwood eagerly waits "for some important development in the market -- some slump or something. He would show the world whether he was a failure or not."[73] He regains his fortune in the panic of 1873 and resumes his career in Chicago in Dreiser's next novel, The Titan.

Frank Cowpoerwood is one of Dreiser's most intelligent and forceful characters. His behavior cannot be explained or accounted for as easily as can Carrie's, Hurstwood's, or Clyde's (An American Tragedy) in terms of heredity and/or environment. Yet, as Charles Walcutt points out, "his position in the cosmos is essentially the same."[74] He, too, is swept back and forth by environing forces beyond his control.

There is a difference, however, between the forces at play in Sister Carrie and those in The Financier. In both, factors beyond the control of the individual have major consequences for the fate of the characters. In Sister Carrie, these take the form of chance occurrences. It is by chance that Carrie meets Drouet in the business section of Chicago just when it seems that she will have to return to Columbia City. It is by accident that the safe in Fitzgerald and Moy's locks and Hurstwood is left with ten thousand dollars in his hands. It is by chance that the building that houses Shaughnessy's and Hurstwood's saloon is to be sold, thus terminating their partnership. It is by chance that Carrie gets her first opportunity to act. And it is chance that dictates that Carrie shouldbe the chorus girl standing before the star comedian when he decides to ad-lib a line, thus giving her the opportunity of responding and distinguishing herself from the rest of the line. Even the review that notes her success in the role of Quakeress comments: "The vagaries of fortune are indeed curious."[75] In The Financier there is a shift in emphasis. Here, the factors which are beyond Cowperwood's control are not inexplicable chance occurrences. Philadelphia and Chicago are two great growing urban centers in which many men are engaged, as is Cowperwood, in the struggle for financial power and social prestige. The enormous complexity of city life makes it virtually impossible for any one individual to be fully aware and in control of all of the factors that may affect his decisions

and actions. The factors beyond Cowpoerwood's control in The Financier and The Titan are, for the most part, people in competition and in conflict with him who act for their own ends and contrive to bring about his downfall. In The Financier, Butler, Simpson, and Mollenhauer have their own individual reasons for wishing to see Cowpoerwood fail. In a similar fashion, in The Titan, Arneel, Merrill, Schryhart, and Hand all are antagonistic to Cowpoerwood for different reasons; they combine their efforts and resources to ruin him. The failure of Cowperwood's plan to obtain an extended franchise for his street car lines is the result of many factors not entirely within his control; the local politicians receive payment for their promised support but switch their votes to the opposition; the newspapers arouse an unprecedented public outcry against Cowpoerwood which effectively intimidates those who intend to vote in Cowperwood's favor; and the Governor most unexpectedly resists a bribe in an idealistic attempt to remain faithful "to the trust imposed on him by the great electorate of Illinois."[76] In Sister Carrie, chance is the major factor beyond the control of the protagonist. Chance events are not essentially urban occurrences. They could as easily occur in other settings. In contrast, the factors beyond the individual's control in these later novels are the actions of other men that operate in or against Cowpoerwood's interest. The interaction and interdependence of men's decisions, movements, and actions is one of the basic features of urban life. This does not mean

that chance occurrences have been wholly eliminated from Dreiser's philosophy or from these novels. However, the marked decrease in Dreiser's use of chance is another indication of a change in Dreiser's use of the city.

Frank Cowperwood shares with Dreiser's other protagonists a powerful longing for money. To Cowperwood, however, money is not simply a means of satisfying basic desires. In The Financier money takes on a new dimension: it represents power. Most people, says Dreiser, want money, "but not for money's sake. They want it for what it will buy in the way of simple comforts, whereas the financier wants it for what it will control -- for what it will represent in the way of dignity, force, power. Cowperwood wanted money in that way."[77] As a child Cowperwood shows interest in the worlds of banking and business. "He began to see clearly what was meant by money as a medium of exchange, and how all values were calculated according to one primary value, that of gold."[78] This not only is a lesson in business; it is, for Cowperwood, a lesson in life. Money means power, power means strength, and in this "dark, insoluble mystery" called life "strength would win."[79] At the beginning of The Titan, Cowperwood realizes that his penitentiary record will stand in the way of total acceptance by the rich and socially prominent; he calmly assesses the realities of the situation and concludes that "if through luck and effort he became sufficiently powerful financially he might then hope to dictate to society."[80]

The Titan gives a detailed account of Cowperwood's dealings in Chicago,first with the distribution of suburban gas and then with the Chicago street railways. From first to last, it is the growth and development of Chicago that determines and affects the choices and lives of the characters. In chapter one, Cowperwood approaches the outskirts of Chicago: "In the far distance, cityward, was, here and there, a lone working-man's cottage, the home of some adventurous soul who had planted his bare hut thus far out in order to reap the small but certain advantage which the growth ofthe city would bring."[81] Cowperwood is not alone in his ability to foresee what "the growth of the city would bring" and to act accordingly. Cowperwood is a strong-willed, forceful and brilliant manipulator; his strength lies in his foresight, his ability to see the future possibilities of a situation and to take immediate advantage of it. Every movement of the city is noticed by Cowperwood, and he seldom misses a chance to profit thereby. He is one of the few men in Chicago to see the tremendous possibilities in developing suburban gas lines; his success in obtaining franchises for gas companies in the outlying suburbs of Chicago frightens the three main Chicago gas companies with the prospect of new competition and forces them to buy him out. The problems of traffic tie-ups due to the division of the city by the Chicago River inspires Cowperwood with the idea of renovating the two tunnels that lie unused beneath the river. Near the end of The Titan Dreiser remarks

that "the great external element in Cowperwood's financial success -- and one which he had foreseen from the very beginning -- was the fact that Chicago was developing constantly. What had been when he arrived a soggy messy plain strewn with shanties, ragged sidewalks, a higgledy-piggledy business heart, was now truly an astounding metropolis which had passed the million mark in population and which stretched proud and strong over the greater part of Cook County."[82]

The characters respond to the opportunities presented by the growth and development of the city. Thus the city itself is the prime mover of the action in the novel. This idea is expressed in the novel by Addison in a conversation with Haeckelheimer, the head of one of the largest international banking firms in New York. Addison, speaking of the wealthy group of men opposed to Cowperwood, says: "The particular men you mention seem to feel that they have a sort of proprietor's interest in Chicago. They really think they own it. As a matter of fact, the city made them; they didn't make the city."[83]

The details of Cowperwood's transactions are given so fully that the reader is convinced of their authenticity:

> He comes from the books feeling that he has seen the whole picture, presented more minutely -- and far more effectively -- than it could have been in the best historical or economic treatise available. The facts all are there, vividly realized and brought to life. And since the affairs of Cowperwood are part and parcel of this vast economic complex, the recording of its intricacies is documentation in the closest naturalistic tradition. . . . It is setting, condition, and material

> for the novel; none of it is extraneous, none gratuitous, because it is all a part of Cowperwood's career.[84]

It is a part of Cowperwood's career, and Cowperwood's career is a part of its development. In the opening chapter of The Titan Dreiserwaxes eloquent: "The city of Chicago. . . . To whom may the laurels as laureate of this Florence of the West yet fall? This singing flame of a city, this all America, this poet in chaps and buckskin, this rude, raw Titan, this Burns of a city!"[85] Here Dreiser refers to Chicago as a "Titan"; and one may well ask whether the book is only about the career of Frank Cowperwood, titan in the world of finance and business, or about the career of Chicago as well, titan in its own right.

In An American Tragedy there is a marked change in Dreiser's use of the city setting. Irving Howe comments that Dreiser "was the kind of writer who must keep circling about the point of his beginnings, forever stirred by memories of his early struggles and preoccupations."[86] In this novel, Dreiser does indeed return to the situation in Sister Carrie, his first novel. In both novels we witness the effect of urban values on the character's own developing system of values. In Sister Carrie, however, the city is for Carrie a scene of excitement and pleasure. Carrie gazes out of the restaurant window while lunching with Drouet and thinks: "There it was, the admirable great city, so fine when you are not poor."[87] The enticing prospect of seeing Montreal and New York makes the idea of running off with Hurstwood

more acceptable to Carrie. New York captures her imagination. The flat she takes with Hurstwood is not lavish in its furnishings, but Carrie is far from dissatisfied: "Her thoughts were merry and innocent enough. . . . She looked much at what she could see of the Hudson from her west windows and of the great city building up rapidly on either hand. It was much to ponder over, and sufficed to entertain her for more than a year without becoming stale."[88] In Sister Carrie the city takes on a certain symbolic value, representing for Carrie a world of culture, beauty, and excitement. In An American Tragedy, it is not the city but rather the idea, the dream, of wealth, of material luxury, that grips Clyde's imagination. It is a dream that is universally accepted in this commercial materialistic society but that need not for Clyde necessarily be realized in an urban setting. Carrie's happiest moments in Sister Carrie are spent in the restaurants, shops, and theatres of the city; Clyde's are spent outside the city proper: with Roberta, in that memorable first meeting on Crum Lake and at the Starlight Amusement Park located just outside the city limits, and with Sondra at Twelfth Lake, a summer resort. Clyde's and Roberta's first arranged meeting takes place one night at the end of the street on which Roberta lives. Roberta finds Clyde leaning against "an old wooden fence that enclosed a five-acre cornfield . . . looking back toward the interesting little city, the lights in so many of the homes of which were aglow through the trees. The air

was laden with spices -- the mingled fragrance of many grasses and flowers. There was a light wind stirring in the long swords of the corn at his back -- in the leaves of the trees overhead."[89] They walk toward the river "which was to the north and untenanted this far out."[90] The city is not as overwhelmingly present in this novel as in Sister Carrie, the Cowperwood novels, or The "Genius". This is not to imply that An American Tragedy is not a city novel. The opening scenes of Clyde's early childhood is set "between the towering walls" of Kansas City;[91] the Green-Davidson Hotel, the typical commercial hotel to be found in every large city, provides his education; the physical nature of the city -- its crowded thoroughfares, traffic tie-ups, and rushing pedestrians -- makes it impossible for Clyde and his friends to return to the Green-Davidson on time and results in the loss of Clyde's job; Clyde goes to Schenectady and there wanders from drugstore to drugstore in an ineffectual attempt to find a means of aborting Roberta's pregnancy while at the same time keeping his identity a secret. Incidents such as these can only be realized in the city setting. It is not, however, the city itself and the stimulations and opportunities it offers but rather the dream of wealth and luxury that attracts Clyde. The city serves to instill in Clyde an awareness of and desire for material comforts; its mission accomplished, it then no longer plays a vital role in the novel. In fact, the second half of the novel -- Roberta's death at Big Bittern, the

camping party at Bear Lake, and Clyde's trial -- is totally removed from any city setting.

Dreiser states that Carrie "was no sensualist, longing to drowse sleepily in the lap of luxury."[92] Not so of Clyde. Clyde is obsessed by a dream, the dream of a life of affluence and ease. W. Phillips notes that there is a marked shift in Dreiser's language that separates it from all his earlier work; An American Tragedy is a more "interior" novel than any of the others and documents "the internal states of Clyde Griffiths."[93] He finds the "key word of this novel" to be "dreams."[94] Clyde retains his naive and immature reactions to signs of wealth and luxury. The Green-Davidson Hotel, with its gilded opulence, its "prodigal display" of luxury, awes and amazes him, thrills him "from head to toe."[95] His reaction is much the same in the kitchen of the Finchley home: Clyde, "impressed by this culinary equipment, the like of which he had never seen before, gazed about wondering at the wealth and security which could sustain it."[96] The dream of a life of luxury with Sondra Finchley absorbs him[97] and finally entices him to the point of planning the murder of Roberta Alden. Each time he thinks longingly of Sondra, his longing encompasses more than just the beautiful girl: "That wonderful girl! That beauty! That world of wealth and social position she lived in!"[98] How telling is the following line which slips into Clyde's thoughts as he dreams of Sondra: "Just love and summer, and idyllic and happy progress toward an eventual secure and

unopposed union which should give him to her forever."[99] Clyde does not think of the marriage in the traditional sense of the bride being given to the groom but rather sees himself as being given to Sondra and to her world. He continues to long not only for Sondra but for the wealth, position, and security that she represents.

In the final chapters of the novel, Clyde is in jail awaiting execution for the murder of Roberta Alden. He finally receives a brief unsigned note from Sondra. Is it possible, one wonders, that Clyde can have nourished even a grain of hope that he can still win Sondra, considering all that has transpired? The powerful grip of this dream on Clyde's imagination is evident in Dreiser's comment: "His last hope -- the last trace of his dream vanished. Forever! ... So this was the end of all that wonderful dream!"[100] Sitting on death row, Clyde reassesses his past and regrets that his mother "would never understand his craving for ease and luxury, for beauty, for love -- his particular kind of love that went with show, pleasure, wealth, position, his eager and immutable aspirations and desires."[101] Never does Clyde question the value of the objects he so ardently desires and so strenuously pursues. At the end he is only aware that he has lost them.

Thus, the urban setting in this novel plays a much less activerole than in Dreiser's earlier novels. It serves a function similar to that in Sister Carrie in that it

arouses in Clyde the desire to experience and partake of the comforts and luxuries that surround him. Clyde, however, does not share Carrie's emotional and aesthetic response to the city itself.

Dreiser was the first major American novelist to use the city as a vital and important element in his novels. He recognized and accepted the city as an inescapable fact of life. He was, as A. Kazin notes, sensitive to "the once unrealized beauty of the modern city."[102] Dreiser was conscious of the city in both its positive and negative aspects, its beauty and its ugliness. His interest in and treatment of almost every conceivable aspect of city life provided later writers with a greater range of settings and character types than had heretofore been considered acceptable. Many of the themes and problems unique to urban life that would be explored and developed in later fiction can be found in Dreiser's novels.

Dreiser does not, however, use the city as effectively or in as sophisticated a manner as do, for example, Thomas Wolfe and Saul Bellow. Dreiser was one of the first American writers to question, explore, and expose the American dream of success, a dream that had assumed mythic proportions in the work of Horatio Alger.[103] The city becomes a symbol of the false materialism that is so corrupt a force in American life. This is the central theme in Dreiser's novels. Dreiser himself had become captivated by this myth and went through a gradual disillusionment. His novels

explore the dream (especially in An American Tragedy where, as was noted earlier, the key word in the novel is "dreams") and reveal the shallowness of the values by which the characters live. The happiness and fulfillment that a character like Carrie or Cowperwood expects to achieve with the attainment of wealth continue to elude him. Thus, although urban experience is an integral part of the experiences and the life of every Dreiser character, the novels are essentially variations upon a single theme. In contrast to Dreiser, Wolfe's work concerns itself with many themes and the city functions to expand and develop these themes, thus serving an important function in providing integration and harmony. Similarly, in using the urban scene as a device for defining, developing, and enriching characterization, Dreiser is far surpassed in subtlety and skill by Saul Bellow.

Nevertheless, Dreiser retains his position as a seminal figure in the chain of twentieth-century urban novelists, both for the depth and power of his insights into urban life and for his use of the city as an integral component of his novels.

FOOTNOTES

THEODORE DREISER

[1]James T. Farrell, "Theodore Dreiser: In Memoriam," Literature and Morality (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1945), p. 31.

[2]Ibid., p. 32.

[3]Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie (New York: Random House, Modern Library, 1932 [1900]), p. 8.

[4]Sister Carrie, p. 16.

[5]Ibid., p. 12.

[6]Ibid., p. 16.

[7]Theodore Dreiser, The Financier (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1940 [1912]), p. 1.

[8]Theodore Dreiser, The Titan (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1925 [1914]), p. 3.

[9]Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1948 [1925]), p. 17.

[10]David Weimer, The City as Metaphor (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 13, 77.

[11]Sister Carrie, p. 74.

[12]Theodore Dreiser, The "Genius" (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1943 [1915]), p. 59.

[13]Jay Martin, "The Visible and Invisible Cities," Harvests of Change: American Literature, 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 254.

[14]*The "Genius"*, pp. 76,77.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 76.

[16]*Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

[17]*An American Tragedy*, p. 306.

[18]*Sister Carrie*, p. 153.

[19]F. O. Matthiessen, *Theodore Dreiser* (William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1951), pp. 68-69.

[20]Theodore Dreiser, *A Book About Myself* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), p. 490.

[21]*Sister Carrie*, pp. 43-44.

[22]Ellen Moers, *Two Dreisers* (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), p. 23.

[23]Blanche Housman Gelfant, *The American City Novel* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 74.

[24]*Sister Carrie*, p. 3.

[25]*Ibid.*, p. 128.

[26]*Ibid.*, p. 107.

[27]*Ibid.*, pp. 127-128: "She imagined that across these richly carved entrance-ways . . . was neither carenor unsatisfied desire. She was perfectly certain that here was happiness."

[28]*Ibid.*, p. 342.

[29]Gelfant, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[30]*Sister Carrie*, p. 159.

[31]*Ibid.*, p. 173.

[32]*Ibid.*, p. 174.

[33]Irving Howe, "Dreiser: The Springs of Desire," Decline of the New (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1970), p. 141.

[34]Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 73. See Gelfant, op. cit., p. 92.

[35]Sister Carrie, p. 557.

[36]Ibid., p. 47.

[37]Ibid., p. 4.

[38]Ibid., p. 549.

[39]Ibid., p. 550.

[40]Ibid., p. 321.

[41]Ibid., pp. 545-546.

[42]Howe, op. cit., p. 141.

[43]Sister Carrie, p. 12.

[44]Ibid., p. 18.

[45]The "Genius", p. 37.

[46]Ibid., p. 39.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid., p. 108.

[49]Sister Carrie, p. 308.

[50]Ibid., p. 2.

[51]Ibid., p. 67.

[52]Ibid., p. 85.

[53]Ibid., p. 61.

[54]Ibid., p. 86.

[55]Ibid., p. 89.

[56]Ibid., p. 300.

[57]Ibid.

[58]William L. Phillips, "The Imagery of Dreiser's Novels," PLMA 78 (December 1963), p. 573.

[59]Theodore Dreiser, Dawn (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1931), pp. 159-160; The "Genius", pp. 37, 39.

[60]The "Genius", pp. 108-109.

[61]Ibid., p. 89.

[62]Ibid., p. 102.

[63]Ibid., p. 232.

[64]Ibid., p. 103.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid., p. 462.

[67]Ibid., p. 440.

[68]Ibid., p. 462.

[69]Ibid., p. 238.

[70]The Financier, p. 112.

[71]Ibid., pp. 94, 93.

[72]Ibid., p. 473.

[73]Ibid., p. 487.

[74]Charles C. Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota

Press, 1956), p. 203.

[75]*Sister Carrie*, p. 494.

[76]*The Titan*, p. 485.

[77]*The Financier*, p. 205.

[78]*Ibid.*, p. 8.

[79]*Ibid.*, p. 272.

[80]*The Titan*, p. 27.

[81]*Ibid.*, p. 18.

[82]*Ibid.*, p. 472.

[83]*Ibid.*, p. 367.

[84]Walcutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

[85]*The Titan*, p. 6.

[86]Howe, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[87]*Sister Carrie*, p. 77.

[88]*Ibid.*, pp. 331-332.

[89]*An American Tragedy*, p. 298.

[90]*Ibid.*, p. 299.

[91]*Ibid.*, p. 17.

[92]*Sister Carrie*, p. 85.

[93]Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 580.

[94]*Ibid.*, p. 581.

[95]*An American Tragedy*, pp. 42, 44.

[96]*Ibid.*, p. 396.

[97]See pp. 343, 357, 455, 456.

[98]Ibid., p. 343.

[99]Ibid., p. 457.

[100]Ibid., p. 848.

[101]Ibid., p. 866, italics mine.

[102]Alfred Kazin, Introduction to the Dell edition of An American Tragedy, 1959, pp. 13-14.

[103]See Kenneth Lynn, The Dream of Success: A Study of the Modern American Imagination (Boston; Little, Brown and Co., 1955).

THOMAS WOLFE

Thomas Wolfe had a Faustian thirst to experience life in all its variety, to know and absorb into himself every aspect of American life, and to spin from this an epic of America. His two protagonists, Eugene Gant and George Webber, share this quality with him. In Of Time and the River, in a chapter appropriately called "Young Faustus," Wolfe says of Eugene Gant:

> It would now seem to him that every second that he passed among the books was being wasted -- that at this moment something priceless, irrecoverable was happening in the streets, and that if he could only get to it in time and see it, he would somehow get the knowledge of the whole thing in him -- the source, the well, the spring from which all men and words and actions, and every design upon this earth proceeds.
>
> And he would rush out into the streets to find it . . . spend hours in driving himself savagely through a hundred streets, looking into the faces of a million people, trying to get an instant and conclusive picture of all they did and said and were, of all their million destinies, and of the great city and the everlasting earth, and the immense and lonely skies that bent above them. And he would search the furious streets until bone and brain and blood could stand no more -- until every sinew of his life and spirit was wrung, trembling, and exhausted . . .[1]
>
> He wanted to know all, have all, be all -- to be one and many, to have the whole riddle of this vast and swarming earth as legible, as tangible in his hand as a coin of minted gold.[2]

And George Webber shares this passion: "He wanted to see things whole, to find out everything he could, and then to create out of what he knew the fruit of his own vision."[3]

The story of twentieth-century America is a story of increasingly widespread urbanization. To one who wished to experience, understand, and convey the texture and quality of American life, the city of necessity played a central and vital role. Thomas Wolfe recognized the urban direction that America was taking. He refused to join the Southern Agrarians in their rejection of the modern world and their proposal of return back to an agricultural society. "You can't go home again," Wolfe realized; you can't return "back home to your childhood, back home to romantic love . . . to escape to Europe and some foreign land . . . back home to places in the country, to the cottage in Bermuda, away from all the strife and conflict of the world, back home to the father you have lost and have been looking for, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time -- back home to the escapes of Time and Memory."[4] Wolfe, says B. R. McElderry, Jr., "relished the American past, but he was not victimized by nostalgia."[5] As Herbert Muller notes, Wolfe "always took for granted what most of the agrarians have since come to realize, sadly -- that industrialism is an irreversible process, and there is no going back."[6]

In Of Time and the River, when Eugene Gant leaves the Pierce estate disillusioned with that life of wealth and leisurethat had appeared even more beautiful than the golden visions of his childhood, he returns to the city, "to all the grime and sweat and violence of the city, the

unceasing city, the million-footed city, and into America."[7] In The Web and the Rock Wolfe again identifies the city with America; the city for Esther Jack "was a living, breathing, struggling, hoping, fearing, hating, loving, and desiring universe of life. . . . to her the city was America. And . . . Mrs. Jack was right."[8] Wolfe uses the city, whose arteries pulse with human life, to express his sense of what was happening across America. As we see in You Can't Go Home Again, by the time George Webber returns to Libya Hill to attend Aunt Maw's funeral, the small town had already assumed the characteristics of the city:

> The sleepy little mountain village in which he had grown up -- for it had been hardly more than that -- was now changed almost beyond recognition. The very streets that he had known so well, and had remembered through the years in their familiar aspect of early-afternoon emptiness and drowsy lethargy, were now foaming with life, crowded with expensive traffic, filled with new faces he had never seen before. . . . But what he noticed chiefly -- and once he observed it he began watching for it, and it was always there -- was the look on the people's faces. . . . The nervous, excited glitter in the eyes seemed to belong to nothing else but madness. . . . And their bodies, as they darted, dodged, and thrust their way along, seemed to have a kind of leaping energy as if some powerful drug was driving them on.[9]

These are the same terms with which he describes the city dwellers. In Of Time and the River and The Web and the Rock the city is used as a particular and unique aspect of American life and stands in contrast to rural America. In his last novel, You Can't Go Home Again, Wolfe places less emphasis on its novelty and uniqueness and, rather, invests it with a more general significance.

Look Homeward, Angel (1929) is set in a North Carolina mountain town called Altamont. The next three novels, Of Time and the River (1935), The Web and the Rock (1939), and You Can't Go Home Again (1940), all deal, at least in part, with the confrontation between the young protagonist, Eugene Gant in the first novel and George Webber in the last two, and the city. And while Boston provides Eugene with his first real experience of the city, in that account in Of Time and the River we see and hear less of Boston than we do of Harvard and of Uncle Bascom. It is to his portrayal of New York that one must turn for an assessment of the function of the city in the works of Thomas Wolfe.

> The most significant experience that the North afforded Wolfe was the experience of cosmopolitan New York, the melting pot of rural as well as foreign-born America, and the symbol of the multitudinous life he had a passion to absorb. . . . if New York is not the wholeof America, it is the symbol of modern industrial America at its best and its worst. It is the quintessential manifestation of the exuberant energy and the might of a polyglot land; of the fabulous power of "natural knowledge" expressed in the soar of skyscrapers, the sweep of bridges, the blaze of swarming streets; of the grandeur and the glory realized in concrete, steel and glass. It is also the quintessence of the grime and filth, the dreary waste, the raucous vulgarity, the blatant materialism, the brutal violence of industrial America. So it must be accepted, as magnificent monument and as foul blot.[10]

Since Wolfe's novels are very autobiographical, it has been tempting for critics to identify the characters, Eugene Gant and George Webber, with their creator, Thomas Wolfe, and to use the novels as tools for learning about the author. Louis Rubin, Jr.,[11] Blance Gelfant,[12] Maxwell Geismar,[13] and Maxwell Perkins[14] have commented

upon Wolfe's personal attitudes towards the city, Rubin and Gelfant offering a more literary appraisal than the latter two. This chapter proposes to focus on the city as it functions in the novels of Thomas Wolfe. It will not attempt to deal with Thomas Wolfe's personal attitudes towards the city as such but rather will concern itself exclusively with the artistic uses to which Thomas Wolfe put the city setting.

Characterization, regarding both the major and the minor characters, is closely, even inextricably, associated with the city setting. Wolfe uses the urban setting in very different ways in portraying his two main characters and in drawing his minor characters.

One of the most unique features in Wolfe's treatment of the city is that his two protagonists are always consciously aware of the city and are not simply responding to it automatically and unconsciously as, for example, Farrell's or Dos Passos's characters do. Wolfe's protagonists are stirred by certain aspects of city life and sickened by others; they are always responsive to the city as a unique and noteworthy entity.

As frustrating, as debilitating, as horrifying as the city often appears to Eugene and to George, it is interesting to note that they are unwilling to leave it; as much as they rave against it and denounce it, they remain in it for one of two reasons. First, it always retains for them its first magical fascination, and it continues to awe

them with its beauty and its magnificence. To Eugene and George the image of the city was "written like a golden legend in the heart of youth with a plume plucked out of an angel's wing."[15] They come to the great city dreaming golden dreams, and those dreams are quickly shattered by the realities of city life. Yet the city retains its power to rekindle and revive "in all their magic, his childhood dreams of the enchanted city . . . the city of unceasing joy, of power, triumph and success."[16] Second, and more important, both Eugene and George realize that the city offers them, as artists, a view of reality. As intoxicating, as beautiful, as magical as Eugene finds life on the Pierce estate, he knows that it is only a shelter from the realities of life. Joel's mother cannot understand any kind of life outside her own narrow circle of friends; she cannot understand why Eugene should prefer a walk down the East Side to a stroll through Central Park or down Fifth Avenue. "What kind of people do you find in those places?" she asks. And his mental response is

> Kind? Great God, the kind of all the earth, the kind of the whole world, the unnumbered, nameless, swarming, and illimitable kind that make all living! . . . a hundred tongues, a thousand tribes, unnumbered colonies of life, all poured in through the lean gateways of the sea, all poured in upon that rock of life, to join the countless freightage of that ship of living stone, all nurtured and sustained upon the city's strong breast -- a thousand kinds, a single substance, all fused and joined there at the heart of night, all moving with that central, secret and dynamic energy, all wrought and woven in, with all their swarming variousness, into the great web

> of America -- with all its clamor, naked struggle, blind and brutal strife, with all its violence, ignorance, and cruelty, and with its terror, joy, and mystery, its undying hope, its everlasting life.[17]

When Joel supports Eugene and says that the East Side has some interesting things that he would like to paint, Mrs. Pierce breaks into laughter. "'Joel!' she cried. 'You can get the most insane notions in your head of any boy I ever knew! If I didn't watch you, I believe you'd be painting ash-cans!'"[18] Eugene returns to the city, sorry to leave this dream world, yet knowing that he must return to reality. He feels "a moment's swift and rending pity for his friend. For he saw somehow that he was lost -- that there was nothing for him now but shadows on the wall -- Circean make-believe -- that world of moonlight, magic and painted smoke that 'the river people' knew."[19] Eugene recognizes that the artist who wishes to understand America must return to that honeycomb of life, the city. His decision is a difficult but necessary one:

> To grope and sweat and thirst and curse his way again among the unceasing flood-tides of the grimy swarming pavements; to be buffeted, stunned, bewildered, deadened, and exhausted by the blind turmoil, the quenchless thirst and searching. . . . and to come to this! To come to this!
>
> It was too hard, too painful, too much to be endured, he could not go! -- and even as his life shrank back in all the shuddering revulsion and loathing of his desolate discovery -- he heard the great train thunder on the rails -- and he knew that he must go.[20]

For much the same reason George Webber breaks with Esther Jack and her world. He attends the dinner party she gives (in You Can't Go Home Again) and that evening decides

that "there were stronger, deeper tides and currents running in America than any which these glamorous lives tonight had ever plumbed or even dreamed of. Those were the depths that he would like to sound."[21] To sound these depths, George moves not out of the city but into its heart, into Brooklyn, where he lives for the next four years.

Perhaps the best indication of the positive value of the city to the protagonist occurs in a brief passage in You Can't Go Home Again. George Webber is accompanying the famous author Lloyd McHarg on a trip into the English countryside. With the countryside all around him, George feels the "abiding strength and everlastingness of the earth," and begins to feel "a sense of exultation and release."

> It was a feeling he had had many times before, a feeling that every man who lives in a vast modern city must feel when, after months within the hive of the city's life -- months of sweat and noise and violence, months of grimy brick and stone, months of the incessant thrust and intershift and weaving of the endless crowd, months of tainted air and tainted life, of treachery, fear, malice, slander, blackmail, envy, hatred, conflict, fury, and deceit, months of frenzy and the tension of wire-taut nerves and the changeless change -- he leaves the city and is free at last, out beyond the remotest filament of that tainted and tormented web. He that has known only a jungle of mortared brick and stone where no birds sing, where no blade grows, has now found earth again. And yet, unfathomable enigma that it is, he has found earth and, finding it, has lost the world. He has found the washed cleanliness of vision and of soul that comes from earth. He feels himself washed free of all the stains of ancient living, its evil and its lust, its filth and cruelty, its perverse and ineradicable pollution. But curiously, somehow, the wonder and the mystery of it all remains, its beauty and its magic,

> its richness and its joy, and as he looks back upon that baleful glow that lights the smoky blanket of the sky, a feeling of loss and loneliness possesses him, as if in gaining earth again he has relinquished life.[22]

The city represents life itself, a composite of beauty and ugliness, of sorrow and joy. One may apply to the Wolfian hero the words that Wolfe uses to describe the reaction of the young men of the South to the city: "Somehow they loved the poison they had drunk; the snake that stung them was now buried in their blood."[23]

The city setting is not presented in an objective account by the author as, for example, in Dreiser, and this then followed by interaction between that setting and the character. Rather, the city is portrayed through the subjective perceptions of the main character. Wolfe writes of George Webber's arrival in New York City:

> how can we speak of such a man coming first to the great city, when really the great city is within him, encysted in his heart, built up in all the flaming images of his brain: a symbol of his hope, the image of his high desire . . . the citadel of all that he has ever dreamed of or longed for . . . For such a man as this, there really is no coming to the city. He brings the city with him everywhere he goes . . . for such a man as this . . . it will always be a question to be considered in its bewildering ramifications by the subtle soul psychologists to know which city is the real one, which city he has found and seen, which city for this man is really there.
>
> For the city has a million faces, and just as it is said that no two men can really know what each is thinking of, what either sees when he speaks of "red" or "blue," so can no man ever know just what another means when he tells about the city that he sees. For the city that he sees is just the city that he brings with him, that he has within his heart.[24]

Yes, indeed, the city that the Wolfe protagonist sees is the city "that he has within his heart." The protagonist comes to the city and what he sees there is colored if not determined by his moods. At times this is explicitly stated; at other times it is, though not explicit, quite obviously part of the same pattern. The mood of the protagonist dictates his reaction; two city scenes may be similar or even identical yet may evoke diametrically opposed responses. It is not correct to say, as Blanche Gelfant does,[25] that the city is so multifaceted that some part of it can always be used to correlate to a particular mood of the protagonist. The Wolfe hero is not reacting differently to different aspects of the city, nor is Wolfe using different aspects of the city to correlate with the character's dominant mood; the character is reacting with different responses to the very same scenes and his mood colors what he sees. An example from The Web and the Rock will illustrate this. George spends his first year in the city lonely and unhappy. Time and again he asks himself why he stays, "choosing the way of misery, torment, waste, and madness." With nostalgia he recalls the relaxed atmosphere of his past home-town life and contrasts it with the "mad coil and fury" of city life, the constant aimless, frenzied movement of throngs of people.[26] Yet he remains; and with a change in his mood, the crowds that before upset him now delight him: "At other times his mood would change, and he would walk the swarming streets for

hours at a time and find in the crowds that thronged about him nothing but delight, the promise of some glorious adventure. At such a time he would sink himself wholly and exultantly into the city's life. The great crowds stirred him with a feeling of ecstasy and anticipation."[27]

An examination of a series of examples from those sections of the novels that deal with the city will reveal how greatly the protagonist's reactions to the city are a function of his mood. Wolfe is using the city here as a literary means of portraying the mind of the character.

In Book IV of Of Time and the River, Eugene Gant, 23 years old, first comes to New York as an English instructor at one of the universities. He has already tasted the bitter taste of failure, his efforts at play-writing having produced only rejection slips. He lives that first year in New York with an overwhelming fear of renewed failure and of impending disgrace, with premonitions of ruin and shame.

> A thousand images of disgrace and terror swarmed through his mind, and . . . hovered in the vast unrest and dissonance of the air he breathed, and which at length crept poisonously through all the rivers of life, corrupting the healthy music of the blood, the sweet exultant music of the heart, curdling men's bowels with fear and withering their loins with sterile impotence. What was this gray lipless shape of fear that stalked their lives incessantly -- that was everywhere, legible in the faces, the movements, and the driven frenzied glances of the people who swarmed on the streets.[28]

In one sentence, Eugene moves from a personal experience of fear and insecurity to his seeing it everywhere around

him. He sees the hate and fear and envy and insecurity that he lives with on every face: "a thousand images of cruelty, violence, cowardice and dishonor swarmed about him in the streets."[29] He works intensely, feverishly, to prepare for his classes and he resents his students' lack of appreciation. He has no friends, no close contacts. The city scenes, which have a nightmarish quality too grotesque to be real, become an index to Eugene's emotional and psychological state. The city people seem to him to be a "race of mechanical creatures, who were as essential and inhuman a part of the city's substance as stone and steel and brick."[30] He sees images of death and hatred in their rat-like lives and hears only hate and death in their speech.[31]

In The Web and the Rock, George Webber's experiences in the city follow a pattern similar to Eugene Gant's. He, too, enters the city with dreams of glory, and he, too, experiences loneliness and frustration. George meets Esther Jack at the theatre, and his reaction to the "sophisticated" theatre audience and to the actors is dictated by his mood. Although there is an element of truth to his criticisms, Wolfe states that his "feeling of hostility was undoubtedly increased by the fact that he had approached this place and this meeting with the woman with a chip upon his shoulder. He had come here in a spirit truculently prepared."[32]

George is in love with Esther Jack, a woman considerably

older than himself. One day, in her workshop in her home, George sees a pensive, sad look cross her face, and he suddenly feels that he does not really know her, that a large part of her life is unknown and inaccessible to him. He experiences a moment of sudden jealousy, and immediately "a sinister vision of the city blazed in his mind . . . peopled with faithless loves and treacheries."[33] As soon as "the doubts and confusion of a moment before had vanished, suddenly the life of the city seemed opulent, glorious, and full of triumph for him."[34] Since all this takes place in Esther's home, it is not a city scene that evokes such responses. Here is a clear illustration of how the protagonist's mood of the moment is transformed into a vision of the city; as soon as his mood changes, his vision changes. The description of the city functions to reflect the subjective state of mind of the protagonist.

In the spring of his love for Esther, "everything seemed fine and wonderful to him."[35] The city "seemed carved out of a single rock, shaped to a single pattern, moving forever to a single harmony, a central, all-inclusive energy -- so that not only pavements, buildings, tunnels, streets, machines, and bridges, the whole terrific structure that was built upon its stony breast, seemed made from one essential substance, but the tidal swarms of people on its pavement were filled and made out of its single energy, moving to its one rhythm."[36] George sees harmony now in what he regarded before as aimless, chaotic, frenzied

movement. At the height of his affair with Esther, New York to him is beautiful and incomparable, and as he gazes upon it he hears "the song of the whole land."[37]

When, in the spring of 1927, his manuscript is rejected by Messrs. Rawng and Wright, his mood changes to one of bitterness and hopelessness, sorrow and gloom. His life becomes a nightmare; he feels helpless to check the "abomination of death and hatred" that would sweep over him.[38] He becomes "a hater of living men who saw nothing but death and cold corruption in everything and everyone around him."[39] And his madness is reflected in his nightmarish vision of the city streets:

> He would go along rat's alley where the dead men were, while the street, the earth, the people, even the immense and cruel architectures, reeled about him in a demented and gigantic dance, and all the cruel and livid faces of its creatures seemed to burn up at him suddenly with the features of snakes, foxes, vultures, rats, and apes -- while he looked forever for a living man.[40]

His manuscript is passed on to another literary agent and months pass; George sinks into "sea-depths of self-doubt and black despair beyond all caring."[41] His resentment of and hostility towards Esther follow directly after the rejection of his manuscript. In the pit of black despair, George decides to leave both Esther Jack and the city. E. K. Brown, in an article "Thomas Wolfe: Realist and Symbolist," notes that the main characters that Wolfe created "were at once richly complicated human individuals who attracted the realist in him and also typical figures,

often indeed gigantic symbols, of American life."[42] Esther Jack is such a character; she is a richly created individual and at the same time symbolically represents the city. "In some curious way," Wolfe writes, "the woman had come to represent 'the city' to him"[43] (A discussion of Esther Jack's symbolic role will follow later in this chapter). Esther represents the city and the success which George had hoped to realize in the city. She is a success, he a failure. In thedespair that follows the rejection of his book, George associates Esther, who has always believed in him and who loves him dearly, with the city that, as he sees it, is ready to destroy him: "And in the tortured, twisted crevices of his brain, he felt, with a wave of desolating self-pity and despair, that Esther had contrived this ruin against him. He saw her at the center of a corrupt and infamous world inhabited by rich, powerful, and cynical people."[44] Out of a need for self-justification, George identifies Esther with the city that has wronged him, that has allowed his talent to go unrecognized and unappreciated; and he cries out that she, too, has betrayed him. Yet even as he shouts his absurd accusations at Esther he knows that they are untrue; he knows that she loves him and is faithful to him and he feels unworthy of her. And in his calmer moments he also recognizes that he is dissatisfied not with the city but with himself.[45] Thus, once again, George's antagonism to the city is provoked by the state of his own personal

fortunes and feelings.[46]

Although Wolfe uses the city to objectify the psychological and emotional states of the protagonists, there does emerge through the minor characters a more objective picture of the city. Wolfe has often been praised for his ability to create characters that, though briefly sketched in swift bold strokes, live on in one's memory. There is a reciprocal relationship between his use of the city to describe many of these minor characters and the use of these characters to describe the city. Wolfe best captures and conveys the texture, the quality, of life in the city through his minor characters, the products of urban America.

In his effort to express his experience of urban life, Wolfe created characters who would embody some aspect of the city experience. The loneliness that Wolfe talks about in connection with the city[47] is a loneliness that his characters experience everywhere; it is not a uniquely urban experience. The corruption and greed that he feels pervades city life reaches across the country as well. There is, however, a sterility that Wolfe associates uniquely with the city, an atmosphere that sucks out the vitality, that dries out the rich potential of human beings, and that leaves them hollow. This aspect of city life is first found in Of Time and the River in Wolfe's description of the Murphys, the Irish family with whom Eugene boards while studying at Harvard. They are very

different from the Irish that he had known back home:

> The Murphys were hard, arid, meagre, and cruel. . . . There was nothing warm, rich, or generous about them or their lives: it seemed as if the living roots of nature had grown gnarled and barren among the walls and pavements of the city, it seemed that everything that is wild, sudden, capricious, whimsical, passionate, and mysterious in the spirit of the race had been dried and hardened out of them by their divorce from the magical earth their fathers came from, as if the snarl and jangle of the city streets, the barren and earthless angularity of steel and stone and brick, had entered their souls. Even their speech had become hard, gray, and sterile.[48]

He blames the city for the difference between the Irish he had known in Altamont and the Murphys: "Perhaps, he thought, the glory of earth and air and sky there [in Altamont] had kept them ripe and sweet as they always were, while their brothers here had withered upon the rootless pavements, soured and sickened in the savage tumult of the streets, grown hard and dead and ugly in the barren land."[49]

Certain of Wolfe's characters suggest what Wolfe wishes to convey about certain aspects of the city; these characters exist for this purpose alone, and are never presented in depth. Such, for example, is Sylvia Jones, a nervous, "highly enamelled city woman -- a lover of what was glittering and electric in life, caught up in the surge of a furious and feverish life, and yet not content with it, dissonant, irritable and impatient."[50] She represents the feverish unrest and discontent that Wolfe sees in city life.[51] Another such character is Mr. Jack's chauffeur, designed to convey this same quality of urban

life. Wolfe calls this nameless chauffeur "a literal embodiment of New York in one of its most familiar aspects."[52] "He seemed to be -- and was -- a creature which this furious city had created for its special uses. . . . In his veins there seemed to flow and throb, instead of blood, the crackling electric current by which the whole city moved. . . . it was evident that the unwholesome chemistry that raced in him was consonant with the great energy that was pulsing through all the arteries of the city."[53]

The man who sits day after day at his desk in the office of The Security Distributing Corp. gazing out of the window "with a fixed, abstracted stare"[54] exists as a contrast to the men who work for the corporation with "speed and power . . . furiously, unamiably, with high, exacerbated voices, spurred and goaded by their harsh unrest."[55] This unnamed character wins George's attention and a place in his memory because of the unusualness of finding such immobility in the city.

It has been asserted many times by critics that Wolfe hated and rejected the urban way of life. This is not true. C. Hugh Holman has recognized a very central feature of Wolfe's writing, his manner of seeing "patterns of opposites. The elements of lifeand of art seem to have existed for him as a congeries of contradictions, and he could not understand a thing until its negation had been brought forth."[56] His work, says Holman elsewhere, has a "fundamental structure of thesis and antithesis."[57]

While many of Wolfe's minor characters exist to express the negative aspects of urban life, certain characters spring to life precisely to deny that very thesis, to show, rather, that even in the city there is beauty and there, too, the human spirit prevails. Such characters are Abe Jones and, most important and central in Wolfe's writings about the city, Esther Jack.

Abe Jones is physically indistinguishable from the masses of city dwellers; he is described as "a gray pavement cipher, an atom of the slums, a blind sea-crawl in the drowning tides of the man-swarm."[58] Yet though his physical characteristics are to Wolfe so suggestive of the city in its spectre-like sterility, his personal attributes are rich and promising. George finds him to be "a dogged, loyal, and faithful friend, the salt of the earth, a wonderfully good, rare, and high person."[59] Although Abe does not belong to the company of handsome, beautiful, and fortunate people that Eugene had dreamed about, "Abe was made of better stuff than most dreams are made of. His spirit was as steady as a rock, as enduring as the earth, and like the flash of a light, the sight of his good, gray ugly face could always evoke for Eugene the whole wrought fabric of his life in the city."[60]

The next city character that appears in connection with Eugene is Joel Pierce, and he does belong to that magical dream city of the fortunate, thatglorious city of unceasing joy, power, and success that Eugene had dreamed

of as a child. Yet ultimately, as was shown earlier in the chapter, Eugene rejects Joel's world and returns to Abe's. His friendship with Abe has revealed to him the possible riches to be found within the city; he realizes that he must "find all the joy of living that he lusted for in the blind swarm . . . goodness and truth in the mean hearts of common men; and beauty in the only place where it can ever be found -- inextricably meshed, inwrought, and interwoven in that great web of horror, pain and sweat and bitter anguish, that great woven fabric of blind cruelty, hatred, filth and lustand tyranny and injustice, of joy, of faith, of love, of courage and devotion -- that makes up life."[61] Abe and his family[62] show Eugene that there is richness in the lives of city people, that their lives are filled with the same beauty and ugliness, joy and tragedy, that fill lives everywhere. To appreciate them, one need only retain one's sensitivity, one's ability to respond to people on an individual level rather than see them as part of the never-ceasing man-swarm. Wolfe stresses this again in <u>You Can't Go Home Again</u> in the creation of another city character, a waiter in a restaurant where George occasionally dines. The waiter approaches George with an offer to split the profits if George will help him write a story, a fantastic, absurd, romantic story which he believes will bring him a fortune if published. He never realizes that the real-lifestories of the people he meets and works with every day are far more intriguing, more exciting,

more interesting, than the one he has his heart set on publishing.[63]

Finally, in The Web and the Rock, Wolfe creates his most positive embodiment of the city, Esther Jack. From the first, she is identified with the city:

> He saw plainly that she was a product of the city. She had been born in the city, lived in it all her life, and she loved it; and yet she didn't have the harassed and driven look, the sallow complexion, the strident and metallic quality that many city people have. She was the natural growth of steel, stone, and masonry, yet she was as fresh, juicy, and rosy as if she had come out of the earth.[64]

Esther has a rare ability to communicate to everything she touches something of her own vitality, to invest them with her own richness and joy. She gives George "a vision of the city's life that was as different from the swarming horror of his own Faustian vision as anything could be. He saw that the city, whose immensity drowned him in confusion and impotence, was for her simply what rich woods and meadows might be for a country child. . . . The city was her garden of delight, her magic island, in which always she could find some new joy, some new picture to feed her memory."[65] It must be remembered that George's experiences are those of a country boy in the process of discovering the big city. George identifies himself with rural America: "His own America was the America of the country man of the wilderness. . . . the calm of the eternal earth . . . had been his inheritance. . . . his feet were tired of the endless pavements, his eyes were weary of incessant change and movement, and his brain was

sick with the horror of great crowds and buildings. But now, in Mrs. Jack, he beheld a natural and happy product of the environment that terrified him."[66] Esther Jack knows, understands, and loves the city; she embodies its richness, its beauty, and its joy.

Towards the end of the novel, near the close of her long affair with George, Esther gazes at life in the city streets and asks herself whether George is correct in his negative assessment of city life. She wonders whether it is possible that

> on this crowded rock which she had loved so well, and where she had found as much beauty, joy, and rich magnificence as any spot on earth could offer, that a monstrous race of living dead had grown up, so hateful, sterile, brutal in their senseless inhumanity that a man yet living could view them only with disgust and horror, and hope for their merciful and sudden extinction . . . Had the city suckled at its iron breast a race of brute automatons, a stony, asphalt compost of inhuman manswarm ciphers, snarling their way to ungrieved deaths with the harsh expletives of sterile words, repeated endlessly, and as rootless of the earth, and all the blood and passion of a living man, as the great beetles of machinery they hurled at insane speed through the furious chaos of the streets?

Thus, she sums up all of George's indictments. And she rejects them:

> No. She could not think that it was true. Upon this rock of life, and in these stupendous streets, there was as good earth as any that the foot could find to walk upon, as much passion, beauty, warmth, and living richness as any place on earth could show.[67]

Wolfe emphasizes the very positive role that Esther plays in the novel by giving her the next-to-last chapter in The Web and the Rock in which she defends both herself and the city most eloquently:

> We saw the life that all things have in them -- the life that slowly beats its pulse out of the thickness of an old brick wall, the life that hangs wearily in the set of an old warped door, the life that lives in chairs and tables . . . the life of all things that a man has used and dwelt in -- a coat, a shoe, the set of your battered hat, my dear one. And then these streets and motored heights at which your soul shrank, these swarms and movements where your heart grew faint!
>
> "The earth!" you said. "Give us the earth again!"
>
> I tell you that the earth is here, and that we knew it. . . . I tell you there has never been an earth more potent and more living than these streets and pavements. . . . This was my meadow. I knew it and loved it. . . . I understood the life that dwelt in it . . .
>
> Therefore I know this is as good earth as the hills and mountains of your childhood land. What horror did you want to flee? . . .
>
> "The horror of eight million faces!"
>
> Remember eight -- know one.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Oh, if I could only cry out to you now and give my wisdom to you, and tell you that you must not fear these monsters of piled stone and brightness! There is no wonder and no mystery here you cannot fathom. . . . Is not a man, then, taller than a tower? Is not the mystery in an atom of tired flesh greater than all these soaring lights?[68]

Through Esther Jack, Wolfe reasserts the humanity of the city.

Thus far, the function of the city in the delineation of character and the function of character in the portrayal of the city have been considered. The city also appears and reappears throughout the novels in a complex interrelationship with other central Wolfean themes.

Wolfe, says Holman, "attempted to express the essential loneliness and isolation of all human existence."[69] Wolfe regarded loneliness as "the central and inevitable experience of every man."[70] He realized that this overwhelming

sense of loneliness is intensified in the city but is certainly not uniquely a city experience.[71] The city, "the most homeless home in all the world," "the great No Home of the earth,"[72] accentuates and underscores the sense of aloneness that all men feel. Thus the city, that "rootless rock,"[73] gives Wolfe further opportunity to develop and expand on one of his favorite themes.

Time is another of Wolfe's central concerns. "The theme of all the novels," says Rubin, "is man caught up in time, and more particularly, the manifestation of time in the world, which is change."[74] In The Story of a Novel, Wolfe discusses the three aspects of time in Of Time and the River: present time, past time, and time immutable. Present and past time are aspects of chronological time, mortal time; time immutable is defined by Wolfe as "the time of rivers, mountains, oceans, and the earth; a kind of eternal and unchanging universe of time against which would be projected the transience of man's life, the bitter briefness of his day."[75] Wolfe attempts to deal with time in both its aspects of permanence and change. Margaret Church, in an article on Wolfe's concepts and uses of time, notes that "the river with its ceaseless flow, its continually new combination of particles, its irrevocableness, contained for Wolfe in its essence the sadness, the loneliness, and the loss that time passing brings. The river represented . . . a sense of Heraclitean flux. . . . It is evident too that the river . . . represents a kind of

immobility, for as Wolfe himself points out the river is 'eternal in its flow' and thus immutable as well as transient."[76] The river moves "in unceasing movement and in changeless change" and at the same time is "as fixed and everlasting as eternity."[77] The river, the earth, and the train are usually the symbols that are associated with Wolfe's subject of time. The city, too, is related to this central concept. In two consecutive and very beautiful passages in Of Time and the River, Wolfe associates the river and the city, the "endless river and eternal rock."[78] The protagonist has come "to consume you to your sources, river and spire and rock."[79] Chronological time is reflected in the constant change and movement in the city, "where the one permanent thing is change itself."[80] Wolfe calls the city the "protean and phantasmal shape of time."[81] Yet the city also seems to be as permanent and enduring as the rock on which it is built, and so corresponds to Wolfe's idea of immutable time; the city is the scene of change yet remains itself unchanged, an "eternal rock." Man leaves "not even the print of a heel upon your stony-hearted pavements."[82] These two views of the city, as mutable and as eternal, serve to echo Wolfe's ideas about time.

Blanche Gelfant notes that Wolfe uses the city to reinforce his theme of quest, quest "for a father, for certitude and wisdom."[83] As children, both Eugene and George associate thoughts of the city with thoughts of their

father. "The fathers of Wolfe's heroes are, significantly, Northern men; and because they are also men of passion and vitality, in their own way builders and artists, they represent the principle of life as it is expressed in the creative act. The Northern city symbolizes the spiritual fatherland that the heroes seek."[84] The Pentlands and the Joyners represent the life-sapping forces that strive for the soul of the child; Aunt Maw's voice drones on in its "unceasing chronicle of death and doom and terror."[85] The theme of the conflict between rural and urban America is further expanded in The Web and the Rock, where Wolfe speaks of the failure of the South to adjust to modern life. "They hang on for a while, are buffeted, stunned, bewildered, frightened, ultimately overwhelmed by the battle roar. One by one they falter, give way, and, dispirited, bitter, and defeated, struggle back to the familiar safety and the comforting assurance of the hinterland."[86] Wolfe condemns the Southern "fear of conflict and competition in the greater world; its inability to meet or adjust itself to the conditions, strifes, and ardors of a modern life."[87] Wolfe is, of course, referring to its failure to adjust to that modern phenomenon, the city.

In the first three novels, the city stands in contrast to rural America.[88] In You Can't Go Home Again, one gets the feeling that there is indeed no possibility of return to a rural America; the frenzy that characterizes city life, its glorification of progress and of material values,

is already evident in the country towns across America. In a study of the symbolic patterns in this last novel, Clyde Clements notes that "the symbolic pattern of the business ethic goes beyond 'the city' as a stronghold of dishonest privilege, being a folly of all America from Libya Hill to New York City, eventually bringing economic and moral collapse."[89] Wolfe cries out not only against the city with its "cement Mobways" but against the standardization of all of America, with its same streets, lamp posts, prefabricated buildings, same foods, and identical clothing, where even the "language, conversation, sentiments, feelings, and opinions" come neatly packaged and ready for use.[90] Thus in the final novel the theme of the city merges with and becomes inseparable from the broader theme of American life.

The city thus intertwines and interrelates with many of Wolfe's most important themes so that it evokes images and ideas that weave their way in and out of all the novels. It is used to expand and develop some of the themes and at other times simply to recall and evoke images and ideas associated with other themes. This complex interrelationship between themes is of prime importance in a novel that has little formal structure. It functions as a means of unifying the separate threads of the novel, of providing a more integrated pattern of images and ideas than would otherwise have been achieved. J. W. Beach recognizes the importance of this thematic interweaving. In his discussion

of form in Wolfe's novels, Beach suggests regarding the novels as "tone poems":

> It is not so much the plot as the musical themes or motives that give us a clue to their form. By reference to these musical themes the various characters and incidents take on significance, losing much of their effect of lumpiness or irrelevance. The main trouble is that there are many themes, more or less related but still distinct, woven together in a pattern of infinite complexity; and it takes study to realize how they are composed into something like a harmonious whole.[91]

Thus, Wolfe uses the city in different ways in his novels. First, he uses it as an aid in characterization, as a means of objectifying the inner state of being of his two protagonists. He then reverses this procedure, using many of his minor characters to convey his sense of what the city is like; indeed, this is their primary function. Finally, Wolfe uses the theme of the city in a complex set of relationships with other of his themes, thus providing greater structural unity and internal harmony to his novels.

FOOTNOTES

THOMAS WOLFE

[1]Thomas Wolfe, Of Time and the River (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 92.

[2]Ibid., p. 137.

[3]Thomas Wolfe, You Can't Go Home Again (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1940), p. 408.

[4]Ibid., p. 706.

[5]B. R. McElderry, Jr., Thomas Wolfe (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 172.

[6]Herbert J. Muller, Thomas Wolfe (Norfolk, Conn.: New Direction Books, 1947), p. 184.

[7]Of Time and the River, p. 598.

[8]Thomas Wolfe, The Web and the Rock (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1939), p. 391.

[9]You Can't Go Home Again, p. 109.

[10]Muller, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

[11]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1955).

[12]Blanche Housman Gelfant, "The City as Symbol," in The American City Novel (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), pp. 119-132.

[13]Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis: The American Novel, 1925-1940 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942).

[14]Maxwell Perkins, "Thomas Wolfe," in Thomas Wolfe:

Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Leslie A. Field (New York: New York University Press, 1968), pp. 139-147.

[15]The Web and the Rock, p. 222.

[16]Of Time and the River, p. 501.

[17]Ibid., pp. 535-536.

[18]Ibid., p. 537.

[19]Ibid., p. 595.

[20]Ibid., pp. 595-596.

[21]You Can't Go Home Again, p. 321.

[22]Ibid., pp. 586-587 (italics mine).

[23]The Web and the Rock, p. 248.

[24]Ibid., p. 223.

[25]Gelfant, op. cit., p. 119.

[26]The Web and the Rock, p. 276.

[27]Ibid., pp. 278-279.

[28]Of Time and the River, pp. 420-421.

[29]Ibid., p. 421.

[30]Ibid., p. 423.

[31]Ibid., p. 421.

[32]The Web and the Rock, p. 329.

[33]Ibid., p. 370.

[34]Ibid., p. 377.

[35]Ibid., p. 447.

[36]Ibid., p. 448.

[37]Ibid., pp. 472-474; quote from p. 474.

[38]Ibid., p. 548.

[39]Ibid., p. 555.

[40]Ibid., p. 547.

[41]Ibid., p. 536.

[42]E. K. Brown, "Thomas Wolfe: Realist and Symbolist," in The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe, ed. Richard Walser (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 208.

[43]The Web and the Rock, p. 390.

[44]Ibid., p. 539.

[45]Ibid., pp. 586-588.

[46]In You Can't Go Home Again, George renews his affair with Esther; when he decides at last to break with her again, this time for good, the reasons for that break are presented with less passion and less self-justification than in The Web and the Rock, and with a more objective assessment of himself and his needs. He rejects Esther's world for the same reason that he rejected Joel Pierce's in Of Time and the River, i.e. he rejects that part of New York society that is alien to his purposes. He feels that they are cut off from the real world, the sources of life that feed his work as an artist. With their money they try to insulate and isolate themselves from the world of reality. George does not reject the city; he moves to Brooklyn, where he lives for the next four years.

[47]Of Time and the River, p. 113.

[48]Ibid., pp. 160-161.

[49]Ibid., p. 166.

The idea that the city drains the juices of life from the men who dwell within its confines is repeated time and again in Wolfe's general descriptions of the city inhabitants.

The people share certain dry qualities, "as if their ten thousand days and nights upon the rootless pavement had dried all juice and succulence out of them, as if asphalt and brick and steel had got into the conduits of their blood and spirit, leaving them with a quality that is tough, dry, meagre, tallowy, and somewhat calloused" (pp. 457-458).

[50]Ibid., p. 459.

[51]See You Can't Go Home Again, p. 38.

[52]Ibid., p. 188.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid., p. 40.

[55]Ibid., p. 37.

[56]C. Hugh Holman, Thomas Wolfe, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 6 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 5.

[57]C. Hugh Holman, "'The Dark, Ruined Helen of his Blood': Thomas Wolfe and the South," in Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Leslie A. Field (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 19.

[58]Of Time and the River, p. 468.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid., p. 447.

[61]Ibid., p. 571.

[62]Each member of Abe's family has a decisive individuality and independence of spirit, a result of their lives of "combat, toil and struggle in the city streets" (p. 496); not one of them had been brutalized by this struggle. Eugene finds them all strange and wonderful (p. 497).

[63]You Can't Go Home Again, pp. 414-423.

[64]The Web and the Rock, p. 377.

[65]Ibid., pp. 380-381. See pp. 390-391 for further identification of Esther with the city.

[66]Ibid., pp. 381-382.

[67]Ibid., p. 574.

[68]Ibid., pp. 685-687.

[69]Holman, "The Dark, Ruined Helen of His Blood: Thomas Wolfe and the South," op. cit., p. 21.

[70]You Can't Go Home Again, p. 499.

[71]See The Web and the Rock, p. 231.

[72]The Web and the Rock, pp. 315, 316.

[73]Of Time and the River, p. 499.

[74]Rubin, op. cit., p. 28.

[75]Thomas Wolfe, The Story of a Novel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), pp. 50-51.

[76]Margaret Church, "Thomas Wolfe: Dark Time," in Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Leslie A. Field (New York University Press, 1968), p. 85.

[77]Of Time and the River, p. 245.

[78]Ibid., pp. 508-510. Quote from p. 508. See also pp. 497-499.

[79]Ibid., p. 508.

[80]The Web and the Rock, p. 230.

[81]Of Time and the River, p. 509.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Gelfant, op. cit., p. 120.

[84]Ibid., p. 121.

[85]*The Web and the Rock*, pp. 8-9.

[86]*Ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

[87]*Ibid.*, p. 243. See pp. 245-246.

[88]See *The Web and the Rock*, pp. 583-584.

[89]Clyde C. Clements, Jr., "Symbolic Patterns in *You Can't Go Home Again*," in *Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. Leslie A. Field (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 235.

[90]*You Can't Go Home Again*, p. 476.

[91]J. W. Beach, *American Fiction, 1920-1940* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), p. 179.

JAMES T. FARRELL

Theodore Dreiser and Thomas Wolfe came from rural environments as strangers to the city, and they were awed and overwhelmed by its largeness and its spectacle. James T. Farrell, however, was born and raised in Chicago's South Side; having known no other life, the city was to him a natural and commonplace phenomenon. One does not find in Farrell's novels any of the rural-urban contrast that may be found in Dreiser's or Wolfe's novels. Nor does one find in Farrell's novels any of their enthusiasm for and enchantment with the city. Rather, his novels convey his own "cold, furious loathing of the barrenness" of his past life, a past strikingly similar to that described in the Studs Lonigan trilogy and the Danny O'Neill books.[1] In The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan Farrell expresses through Danny O'Neill his aims in writing Studs Lonigan:

> He wanted to be a writer. . . . He wanted to purge himself completely of the world he knew, the world of Fifty-eighth Street, with its God, its life, its lies, the frustrations he had known in it, the hates it had welled up in him . . . . . Some day, he would drive this neighborhood and all his memories of it out of his consciousness with a book.[2]

This neighborhood is the setting for all of the novels in the Studs Lonigan trilogy and the Danny O'Neill series in which Farrell presents life as he experienced it in Chicago's South Side.

Farrell further departs from Dreiser's and Wolfe's use of the city in that he limits his interest to one particular neighborhood in the city. Dreiser and Wolfe try to capture the movements and characteristics of an entire city, to achieve a sense of the city's multifaceted nature. In Studs Lonigan Farrell is content to limit himself to the small world that he knows so well, a homogeneous and geographically well-defined neighborhood in the south side of Chicago.

In discussing Farrell's novels as city novels, Blanche Gelfant uses her sociological framework, indicating that the portrayal of life in the novels is consistent with the sociological descriptions of urban life. She discusses "the failureof social institutions to play a constructive part in the individual's spiritual life" and regards the failures of family, school, and church to instill in the youth any positive values or goals as urban failures.[3]

The question that this chapter proposes to examine is not whether Farrell has indeed captured the flavor of life in an urban neighborhood but rather whether in attempting to do so Farrell hasused the city as a literary tool in the portrayal of character, in the development of plot, and/or in the clarification of theme. It is true that Farrell effectively uses a dreary urban setting, a distinctly urban language, andthe uniquely urban phenomenon of the street gang in his development of character and theme. At the same time, however, some of the most dynamic forces in

Farrell's trilogy are those exerted by lower-middle-class Irish Catholic culture.

There is no question that the Fifty-eighth Street neighborhood in Studs Lonigan is an authentic city neighborhood. The opening pages of Young Lonigan immediately create a sense of an urban area where gangs break basement windows, play "shinny with tin cans" in empty lots and near the Fifty-ninth Street elevated structure, climb the elevated girders, and bat stones in the vacant lots of Fifty-eighth and Indiana.[4] The three novels of the trilogy are filled with urban imagery. Studs and Helen Shires play soccer on the street pavements[5] and talk of watching the "can-house around on Fifty-seventh Street."[6] The gang groups together at the poolroom, "choking the few squares of sidewalk outside it";[7] cars whiz by, drunks drape themselves around the fire hydrants, paper boys yell their final "box-score editions," and people hurry out of the train stations on their way home from work. The streets are full of apartment buildings, wooden frame houses, and stores notable for their "commercial ugliness."[8]

Farrell's style significantly enhances one's sense of the authenticity of the city setting. In his essay "Thirty and Under" Farrell states: "We city-dwellers have been educated without the lyric emotions. Dust and prairies, gravel playgrounds and artificially pretty parks, were our childhood backgrounds."[9] Feeling that the "lyric emotions" are inappropriate to his subject, Farrell writes

in a language that is as plain, as empty of rhetoric and linguistic beauty, as is the urban neighborhood in which his characters grow up. H. Straumann states that "the power of the book rests on the almost incredible unity of tone produced by the use of all shades and varieties in the scale of Chicago idiom and slang."[10] J. W. Beach calls Farrell's novels "linguistic documents, as they are social documents, of high seriousness and value."[11] While both Dreiser and Wolfe strive to capture the flavor and texture of urban speech in the conversations of their city-bred characters, Farrell goes even further, using the speech patterns of his characters in the narrative sections as well. The extensive use of urban language within the narrative provides a unity of tone that is maintained throughout the three novels. The first line of Young Lonigan sets the tone of the trilogy: "Studs Lonigan, on the verge of fifteen, and wearing his first suit of long trousers, stood in the bathroom with a Sweet Caporal pasted in his mug."[12] Throughout the novels, actions, scenes, and thoughts are described in the slang of Studs's everyday speech; the following lines come from an Armistice Day scene in The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan:

> The train rocketed along . . . A souse on the rear platform donged a cowbell. The train whistle emitted a piercing wah-wah.[13]
>
> The Chicago loop was like a nuthouse on fire. . . . Studs followed a guy playing a clarinet. A bag of water dropped on the guy's bean. He played on, and a fellow clamped him on the dome with a banana stalk.[14]
>
> He went on, head lowering as if he was a fullback hitting the line, feeling like he was a bursting boiler that was liable to blow the whole Loop to smithereens. . . . Damn good stunt! thought Studs, trying to out-bellow everyone else, wishing like

hell he had mightier lungs and stronger mitts.[15]

Studs's thoughts are formulated in the same crude language with which he verbally expresses himself, providing further evidence of his blunted sensibility. Language is used throughout as a means of revealing character and at the same time serves to convey a uniquely urban atmosphere.

Farrell again effectively uses the city in his portrayal of the street gangs and their activities. In his introduction to the Studs Lonigan trilogy, Farrell says that the social milieu in which Studs lived and was educated "was one of spiritual poverty. . . . The important institutions in the education of Studs Lonigan," Farrell continues, "were the home and the family, the church, the school, and the playground."[16] But the street gang is the one institution that plays an important role in Studs's development that is distinctly urban in character. The basic activities of the gang -- pool playing, street-corner hanging around, goofing, gang fights -- depend upon the physical setting of the city. The urban conditions in the Fifty-eighth Street neighborhood determine the options that Studs and his friends have and the activities in which they engage. The gang members drape themselves around the fire hydrants, crowd around the poolroom, loot the apartment buildings, steal from the local stores and escape through the lots and alleys of an urban neighborhood. The gang is a genuine urban force and is a major factor in Studs's life. It provides Studs with the opportunity to

prove his virility: "I'm small but I'm awfully tough."[17] Toughness wins respect and admiration on Fifty-eighth Street. After his victory over Weary Reilley, "Studs, the conquering hero, returned to the gang. . . . They talked about the battle, showering Studs with praise, telling him how great he was and how he was the champ of the neighborhood."[18] Strength means power and power means importance:

> and he was going to be an important guy, and all the punks would look up to him and brag to other punks that they knew him; and he would be . . . well, in the limelight. Maybe it would set things happening as he always knew they would; and he would keep on getting more and more important.[19]

Drinking and boasting of one's sexual prowess are other means of self-glorification. Studs and his friends have learned the lessons of hate and bigotry, and, as there is strength in numbers, they unite to harass the Jews and blacks that they find in "their territory." It will become evident in the course of this chapter that the values accepted and practiced by the gang members are not alien to the parent members of this cultural group. Rather, gang membership allows certain cultural values to find overt expression.

Although Farrell's depiction of the city and city gangs and his usage of urban language are authentic, urban forces do not play an important role in character development. Studs Lonigan is set in an Irish Catholic lower-middle-class neighborhood in Chicago's South Side. The characters in the novel are shaped by and define themselves in terms of their relationships to the family, school, church, and

peer group. And the distinguishing feature of these institutions is that they are almost entirely Irish Catholic in makeup. The world of the novels is the world of a homogeneous social class group in a geographically well-defined area in the city of Chicago. There is little depiction of the city outside the boundaries of this neighborhood.

> Perhaps the most outstanding fact about the South Side was its insularity. Although its boundaries were physical, the barriers between it and the outside world were social and emotional. . . . bigotry and prejudice isolated them from neighbors of different religion or background, and suspicion of secular education prevented them from reaching out towards a broadening knowledge. The consequence of social isolation was that one's vision of life, of the variety and complexity of the human experience, was narrowed to what one found in the South Side.[20]

While the insularity of the community, the homogeneity of its members, and its acceptance of certain cultural values is acknowledged by critics, perhaps because of Farrell's graphic delineation of life in this neighborhood, the small world of Fifty-eighth Street seems to have taken on a broader, representational meaning. George Snell sees in Studs Lonigan a "horrifying pattern of American city life."[21] W. M. Frohock is somewhat more perceptive:

> While the place names . . . are Chicago names, there is nothing to keep the streets and houses from being representative of any American city large enough to have elevated tracks, heavy traffic, and crowded living conditions. The change from the older picture of the bustling, brawling young city which was so dear to the Sandburg school is in a way welcome. It permits Farrell to achieve the one sort of generality he attains; his story is less specifically the story of Chicago poor folk than it is that of poor folk anywhere in urban America where the Irish have concentrated.[22]

Frohock does not see in the novels a pattern of city life in general; he sees, rather, a pattern true of those urban areas "where the Irish have concentrated."

While Studs Lonigan is the main protagonist in Farrell's trilogy, other points of view are occasionally presented. "These additional perspectives and the stream of action involving many persons create a strong sense of cultural process. Studs is thereby firmly related to the past and to his contemporaries. He is precisely located in a well-defined historical current."[23]

It is usually assumed that the values of brutality and toughness, of playing practical jokes and of fighting, are learned on the city streets. These values, however, are part of the culture of this neighborhood, accepted by the older generation, and are either implicitly or explcitly passed on to the youth. Part of the first chapter of Young Lonigan is devoted to the portrayal of the thoughts of "old man Lonigan" as he rests on the back porch on the day of his children's graduation. He recalls his childhood days with nostalgia, and the style of life he recalls is strikingly similar to that of Studs. In the few pages devoted to Pat Lonigan, Farrell provides a flashback of life in the Chicago of the eighteen-eighties and eighteen-nineties and at the same time presents a microscopic embodiment and foreshadowing of what is to occur in the novel. Each of his experiences is repeated in the life of his son. Pat remembers "the boys that hung out at Kieley's

saloon, and later around the saloon that Padney Flaherty ran";[24] Studs and his friends assemble at the Fifty-eighth Street poolroom. Pat Lonigan recalls the jokes they used to play on Padney Flaherty:

> They were always calling him names, pigpen Irish, shanty Irish, Padney, ain't you the kind of an Irishman that slept with the pigs back in the old country. Once they told him his house was on fire, and he'd dashed out of the saloon and down the street with a bucket of water in his hand. It was funny watching him go, a skinny little Irishman. And while he was gone, they had all helped themselves to free beers. He came back blazing mad, picked up a hatchet, called them all the choice swear words he could think of, and ran the whole gang out into the street. Then they'd all stood on the other corner, laughing. Yeh, them was the days![25]

In chapter six of Young Lonigan this incident is repeated in almost identical form in Studs's life; he and his friends raid Schreiber's ice cream parlor while he is away and "for five days they were filling up on sodas, having fights with ice cream and whipped cream, carting away candy."[26] Pat thinks of his friends and the roads they have travelled, of Paddy McCoy "whose ashes rested in a drunkard's grave at Potter's Field," and of the many others, most of whom "didn't turn out so well."[27] Judgment Day opens with Studs returning from the funeral of Shrimp Haggerty who, it is commonly agreed, should not have done "as much carousing and drinking as he did."[28] Studs's friends, too, haven't turned out too well:

> You know, boys, speaking straight from theshoulder, it does kind of get you the way so many of our old gang passed away. Arnold Sheehan, the Haggertys and Tommy, Hink Weber who killed himself in the nut house, Slug Mason beating the Federal Government Prohibition rap by dying of pneumonia, all our old pals.[29]

The experiences and attitudes of father and son are similar. It is clear that Studs's strong ethnic prejudices are learned, at least in part, from his father who often complains about "the niggers and kikes [who] were getting in."[36] Old man Lonigan recalls:

> And many's the fight they'd have with the gangs from other streets. And many's the plunk in the cocoanut that Paddy Lonigan got. It's a wonder some of them weren't killed throwing lumps of coal and ragged rocks at each other like a band of wild Indians. To live some of those days over again! Golly![31]

Pat's admonitions to his sons about fighting ironically contrast with the relish with which he recalls his own wild past. Pat Lonigan's actions often contradict his words: "The old man said that smoking stunted a boy's growth, ruined his health, disrupted his moral sense, and was against . . . nature. He lit a long stogy."[32] In spite of Pat Lonigan's conservative demeanor, violence remains his solution to a problem. Near the end of Judgment Day Pat sees a parade of men, women, and children marching in protest against unemployment. Pat angrily asserts that "they ought to be clubbed until they get some sense knocked into their heads. This is America, not Russia, and the sooner we teach them so, the better."[33] Pat thinks of his lovely daughter Frances and daydreams that he "beat up a number of imaginary villains who would try to ruin her."[34] Studs, too, fantasizes a heroic display of "beating up some hard guy to protect Lucy's character. Soon he was beating up a whole gang of them."[35]

Studs Lonigan begins when Studs is fifteen years old,

at a time when the relationship between Studs and his parents is rather strained and when there is little direct communication between them. Thus, although it is more than likely that all of the attitudes and values expressed by Pat Lonigan have been conveyed to his son, directly or otherwise, it is difficult to assert this with certainty. One can note, however, that Studs follows in his father's footsteps, repeating the same cycle. As he grows older, he grows more conservative, even to the point of joining his father's lodge of the Order of Christopher; but in his thoughts he continues to see himself as a tough guy. One sees the same cycle begin to repeat itself in Martin, Studs's younger brother. More explicit evidence of the transference of these values and attitudes is provided in the figure of Mr. O'Brien.

"Old man O'Brien" is, in his own eyes and in Studs's, "a pretty tough one."[36] He is admired for having stood up to a policeman and having "told him where to get off in regular he-man's language. He said he was the kind of father these boys had, and what was there to say about it. . . . And he told the damn bluecoat that if he would take off the star, he'd punch him all over the corner, and when he got through, wipe the street with him. . . . Studs and all the guys had wished they had an old man like Johnny had."[37] O'Brien gives expression to all the same values that were presented in the flow of Pat Lonigan's stream of consciousness. He extols the "good old days" when kids fought with brass knuckles.[38] He echoes the same prejudices: "Baseball's the only clean game

we got left. The Jews killed all the other games, . . . There never was a white Jew, or a Jew that wasn't yellow."[39] He advises them to have nothing to do with the son of his Jewish neighbor "unless it's maybe to paste him one."[40] He continues his lesson:

> A Jew and a nigger. Never trust 'em farther than you can see 'em. But some niggers are all right. These southern ones that know their place are only lazy. But these northern bucks are dangerous. They are getting too spry here in Chicago, and one of these days we're gonna have a race riot, and then all the Irish from back of the yards will go into the black belt, and there'll be a lot of niggers strung up on lampposts with their gizzards cut out.[41]

Prejudice, toughness, and violence are an accepted part of this culture. Even Macnamara, the cop on the beat, condones the gang's harassment of a twelve-year-old Jewish boy, Stein: "He told the guys that they'd done right, but the next time to go back in the alley where they wouldn't cause such a commotion."[42] As Edgar Branch says, "Studs and his friends constantly absorb -- and then fairly exude -- the values of their milieu."[43] It is a gross oversimplification to assert, as Gelfant does, that these are street values learned from the gang, "a kind of outlaw institution which sets up values opposed to those of the parents."[44] The brief but important sections devoted to Pat Lonigan and Mr. O'Brien indicate that these values are by no means in contrast and in opposition to the values of the parent generation. Studs Lonigan lives in a Chicago of the nineteen-teens and nineteen-twenties; Pat Lonigan grew up there in the eighteen-eighties and eighteen-nineties. The

intervening years do not seem to have made much difference in their styles of living. The times have changed, the city has changed, but the neighborhood and its values have not.

Each of the institutions of home, school, and church is shown to be an important contributing factor to the "spiritual poverty" that characterizes this environment. The lines of communication between Studs and his parents are broken. Studs feels that they do not understand him: "his old man was always giving advice, bossing, instructing him as if he was a ten-year-old."[45] Pat Lonigan finds himself wondering "just what Bill [Studs] thought about."[46] He feels that he is fulfilling his duty as a father by providing his children with a more comfortable life than he had had; he assured them that he was a good father. He said he asked very little from them."[47] Studs resents the fact that his mother is "always pestering him, telling him to pray and ask God if he had a vocation."[48] That Mrs. Lonigan can entertain dreams of Studs becoming a priest is adequate indication of her insensitivity to the true character of her son.[49]

The nuns in the Catholic school which the children of this neighborhood attend fail to inspire the youth with any interest in learning. In fact, their first lessons in physical violence are learned at the hands of these "black-garbed Sisters of Providence, with their rattling beads, their swishing strides, and the funny looking wooden clappers

they used, which made a dry snapping sound and which hurt like anything when a guy got hit over the head with one."[50] The youth resent the brute power exercised by those in authority. Weary Reilley tells Studs how during graduation exercises "Muggsy McCarthy made some crack when Gilly [Father Gilhooley] was speakin', and [Father] Doneggan didn't like it, so he cracked his puss." Studs expresses his resentment: "You know, they got a hell of a lotta nerve haulin' off on a guy just because they're priests or nuns."[51] The most effectively taught lesson is that of the advantage of being in an unchallengeable position of power.

The church fails to relate meaningfully to the lives of its parishioners. It encourages in them a sense of their own superiority. The Lonigans are quite sure "that no Catholic would ever commit such a foul deed" as that committed by Will Orpet.[52] Studs feels that there is "something in Catholic girls that made them different from other girls";[53] he shares Red Kelly's opinion that "the finest and most decent girls are Irish Catholic girls."[54] Studs is not particularly devout. He decides to say his morning prayers "while he was washing; a wise guy could always kill two birds with one stone."[55] Much of his religion is rooted in fear and superstition. Just before the football game Studs goes to confession: "He wasn't going to be hurt. . . . Well, he was going to confession so he wouldn't be. He'd be afraid to enter that game tomorrow if he didn't."[56] Studs believes that if he had gone to war he'd have been safe

because "the Blessed Virgin would have protected him because he would have worn her scapular."[57]

The home, the school, and the church exemplify and contribute to the spiritual poverty of this neighborhood. Farrell, however, does not show that the failures of these institutions, the primary determinants of the quality of life in Studs Lonigan, are an outgrowth or consequence of the forces or conditions of urban life. He does not demonstrate that the urban processes function to bring about the disharmony in the home, the inadequacies of the school system, or the failure of the church to relate meaningfully to its members.

There is one scene in Judgment Day in which Farrell uses the city scene to reveal some of Studs's thoughts and feelings. Studs, now almost thirty-years-old, is returning home from Shrimp Haggerty's funeral, and thoughts of death obsess and unnerve him. As his train moves across the landscape, he catches fleeting glimpses of "flat Indiana plains and isolated farm houses" and supposes that "living like they did out here" in this world of silence "their minds must . . . always be on such things as death. He chuckled to himself thinking how glad he was that he lived in a big city like Chicago."[58] Upon his return to Chicago, he goes to keep an appointment with his girl friend Catherine. As he walks along deserted Dearborn Street, he thinks about Shrimp Haggerty's funeral and about his own life. "And these days he hated to be alone, and when he was

alone, he worried and puzzled over too many things, and stewed over his health."[59]

> He turned the corner on to Randolph, the Loop noises bursting upon him with a sudden increase of volume, the elevated trains from Lake Street, the clanging of a street-car going on Dearborn, the humming movement of the automobiles, the parade of people along the sidewalk, snatches of their talk, their feet scraping over the sidewalk. He felt as if he had left a place that was cold to come into one that was warm.[60]
>
> He stared quickly from face to face as he walked, liking the sight of so many people, of so many girls. He realized how he had come to feel so differently just by turning off Dearborn and coming onto Randolph, where there were lights and people. . . . On Dearborn, he had felt out of the picture and all alone, and now he didn't.[61]

The sounds, lights, and movements of the street capture his attention, allowing him to forget his anxieties about his health and his obsessive fear of death and alleviating his feelings of loneliness and isolation. Studs is painfully aware of his own nervous fears and gratefully accepts the temporary relief that the street scene offers. Earlier in the novel Studs had relished the quiet and peaceful moments spent in Washington Park that gave him a chance to reflect on his past and his future. Now he is only too happy to be able to escape from his thoughts. Usually the city setting is taken for granted. Here is one of the few times that the setting elicits a response from the character; at the same time it serves as an occasion for revealing Studs's thoughts and feelings.

The urban setting functions in conjunction with theme. The sterile ugliness of the city setting lends additional support to the central theme of spiritual poverty. Apart

from the small and artificially pretty Washington Park, the urban imagery is bleak and unpromising. Elevated stations, tall, old office buildings, drab apartment houses, vacant lots, gas stations, and for-rent signs in dirty windows are but a few of the common sights that greet the eye. Studs is not depressed by his physical surroundings, but he is always bored. Time and again, Studs, "restive with inaction," complains: "Say, for Christ sake, let's do something."[62] He and his friends walk the streets "looking for something to do."[63]

> They wondered what they would do. Two kids came along, and they were stopped and asked where they came from. The kids said Fifty-ninth and Wentworth. Red Kelly said it was an Irish neighborhood and all right, so they let the kids go. They wondered what to do, and Kenny thought he'd like to play his cat trick. . . . There were no cats to be found, so Kenny said he'd like to rob ice boxes.[64]

The poolroom, the bar, and the local movie theatre are the only recreational outlets for the youth of this neighborhood. The only time that Studs experiences a sense of exhilaration, of freedom and release and of promised renewal, are those times when he is in the presence of nature. These rare moments usually occur in Washington Park, the only spot of beauty in an aesthetically barren, gray city.[65] During these moments of reflection, stifled hopes and hidden dreams surface briefly, giving the reader a glimpse of Studs's finer impulses, and then sink out of sight. Studs's sensibilities are never allowed to develop. Farrell thus uses the park scenes to reveal an important albeit hidden aspect of Studs's character. One may infer, therefore, as no doubt Farrell

intends one to, that the city milieu does not provide fertile soil for the growth and development of the more generous side of Studs's character. Thus the home does not function to meet Studs's emotional needs; the school fails to encourage intellectual growth; the church fails to inspire spiritual development; and the colorless, drab city setting provides no relief from the tedium and monotony of daily life.

The city also functions in relation to the theme of time. In Studs Lonigan's world, time moves slowly. As B. Gelfant notes, "because the novel is paced slowly, the changes in the characters are sometimes almost imperceptible; but suddenly, when one sees . . . Studs collapse in the street . . . one realizes with a shock how much they have changed under the pressures of work, boredom, and time."[66] Farrell uses the changes in the composition of the neighborhood as an indication that times are changing and that time is passing. Wabash Avenue is the dividing line between the black and white communities. Pat Lonigan is sure that "the niggers will be run raggedy if they every try to get past Wabash Avenue";[67] he continues to refuse to sell his house on Michigan Avenue despite the ever-growing evidence that the blacks are moving into the neighborhood in increasing numbers. Each of the four sections of <u>The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan</u> deals with a different time period, and in each Farrell introduces additional evidence that the neighborhood is in the process of changing hands. Finally,

in the last section of the novel, the Lonigans are forced to admit defeat and move out.[68] Near the end of the novel, Studs walks through his old neighborhood, now all black, and finds it difficult to believe the changes that time has wrought. He stops at the old school building: "With this building here, looking the same, things couldn't be changed, and it couldn't be so many years ago, it couldn't. This building gave him confidence. Everything was all the same as it used to be, and he wasn't fat and worried about his health, and it couldn't be different, and all that couldn't be gone."[69] But he knows that it is. The gradual changes in the composition of the neighborhood are an index for the reader of the inexorable passage of time. In this last scene it arouses Studs to the same realization.

Young Lonigan and The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan have as their setting Studs's immediate neighborhood environment. In Judgment Day Farrell attempts to impart a more general significance to the particular events described in the first two novels by relating Studs's experiences to political issues and national problems. The failure of the stock market dramatically affects both Studs and his father, and it is followed by the difficult days of the depression. In the last sections of Judgment Day Studs trudges from building to building looking for a job. Front page headlines are introduced into the text to convey the idea that Studs's experiences are by no means unique; rather, his difficulties are part of a general struggle for

livelihood in a city of unemployed men:

> He entered a small, dim office and found six others waiting on a bench to the left of the door. Same thing all over again with a line ahead of him, he thought spiritlessly. What time did one have to get out to be first in following a lead for a job? Was it necessary to bring a tent along and camp outside the building all night? There was certainly something wrong between seeing the lineups for jobs and listening to Carroll Dowson tell how times weren't so bad, the way he'd done last Sunday.[70]

Studs's repeated failure is a last crushing blow to his ego. It is Farrell's intention that the episodes and incidents in Studs's life be seen as illustrative of the quality of life in America. However, the fact that Studs's situation during the depression is typical of the situations of thousands of other American men in the cities of America does not lead one to conclude that all of the events presented in the first two novels are equally typical. Farrell tries to encourage this conclusion through his use of Pat Lonigan. At the end of Judgment Day Studs is dying, and Farrell once again exposes the thoughts of Pat Lonigan as he distractedly wanders through the neighborhood in which he had grown up:

> At Fifty-first Street he wheeled westward, driving along a dreary, dusty street, with shabby stores, wooden houses, sooty, low, brick buildings. A train roared overhead as he went under the viaduct, and he drove on, turning onto Wentworth Avenue, seeing again a dusty street filled with people, for-rent signs in store windows.[71]
>
> He turned on Thirty-fifth Street. . . . Dingy, smoky street. Wooden houses, buildings stained from smoke, drab stores, for-rent signs in dirty windows.[72]
>
> He told himself that he was going back to an old

> neighborhood, to look at places where he had lived and played as a shaver . . . . . He glanced down a block-paved street, with tumbling and sinking wooden houses stacked between old brick buildings of two and three stories.[73]

As Pat travels across the city toward the place where he had spent his youth, the same scenes keep repeating themselves. One neighborhood looks very much like the next. In the old, dilapidated neighborhood that was once home ground, he sees "a whole new generation, going through the same mill that he had."[74] Farrell tries to convey the idea that all of these urban neighborhoods share the same characteristics and produce the same impoverished products: "What would become of these lads? They'd scatter like the kids he'd known. Some go to jail. Some just get nowhere. Some pull themselves up by their own bootstraps just as he had done. . . . how many generations of kids had come and gone since his time, and how many more would follow after those kids cursing and playing ball in the lot across the street?"[75] However, Pat Lonigan's meanderings and musings at the end of Judgment Day do not provide sufficient evidence that the Irish Catholic middle-class neighborhood of Studs Lonigan is indeed similar to thousands of other urban neighborhoods where kids curse and play ball in empty lots.

Although Farrell is generally regarded as one of the major city novelists, it is interesting to note a steady progression away from the use of the city in his novels. In Studs Lonigan Farrell makes his most effective use of

the city. He vividly evokes the image of a neighborhood with its urban setting, its gangs, and its institutions as the determining factors of the main character's life. The characters live their lives within the confines of this neighborhood and this gives the trilogy a certain focus and power.

Frank O'Malley erroneously states that there is "little or no development in Farrell's universe after Studs" and that all of his characters "move in essentially the same world, a world that does not change."[76] In fact, however, although Studs and Danny O'Neill grow up in the same neighborhood, and though Danny appears quite often in the Lonigan trilogy (Studs appears only once or twice in the five O'Neill books), the neighborhood depicted in the Lonigan books is used in a very different manner from in the O'Neill books.[77] The basic difference between the O'Neill series and the Studs Lonigan trilogy is the receding importance of the neighborhood as a major force on character development.

The first two of the five O'Neill novels, A World I Never Made and No Star is Lost, continue to show, though to a much lesser extent, an interest in urban particulars. In them Farrell constructs the urban world in which Danny O'Neill finds himself. There are scenes and physical details which unmistakably set these novels in an urban world. Danny plays ball in empty city lots,[78] the kids "shag" candy stores and escape through the alleys and gangways of an urban neighborhood,[79] there are elevated

train stations and "identical three-story, red-brick apartment buildings,"[80] busy streets and busy storefronts.[81] Nevertheless, there is less description and inclusion of such details in the O'Neill books than there is in the Lonigan trilogy. Most of the scenes in the pentalogy, especially in the last three novels, take place indoors, within the confines of apartment, home, or job. As E. Branch perceptively comments, "the concrete images of the outdoor urban world so effectively employed in Studs Lonigan are not so evident" in the O'Neill novels.[82]

The immediate neighborhood is not as uniform in composition as is theone in Studs Lonigan. This is due in part to the fact that the O'Flahertys (Danny's grandparents with whom he lives) repeatedly change their address, so that Danny does not spend all of his time in one well-defined area. Although each move is only several blocks away from the previous address, it means a new environment and a new set of friends for Danny. There are no familiar localities which are constant throughout the novels as there are in Studs Lonigan, such as a neighborhood store, lunch-counter, or poolroom. Furthermore, there is no significant interaction between the characters in the O'Neill books and other characters who live in the neighborhood.

The activities of the characters in the O'Neill books are not confined to the immediate neighborhood in which they live. Uncle Al's business trips as a traveling shoe salesman take him into other parts of Chicago and other

parts of the country. Margaret works as cashier in one of the city's large hotels, and it is there that she becomes involved with Lorry Robinson. This affair is used as a means of introducing local and national politics. Robinson's desertion of her creates the emotional upheaval around which the rest of her life revolves. For characters like Al and Margaret, as well as Aunt Louise and Uncle Ned, the local neighborhood is essentially irrelevant.

The urban phenomenon of the street gang which plays such an important role in the shaping of Studs's life recedes into the background in the O'Neill books. Danny never establishes strong ties with the neighborhood gangs. He is unable to win acceptance, and after No Star is Lost the gang plays no role in his life.

Thus, for a variety of reasons, the neighborhood no longer exists as a vital force in the O'Neill novels. The diminished role of the neighborhood in the pentalogy as compared to the Studs trilogy reflects a difference in the basic philosophies underlying the two series. Environmental determinism is at the core of Studs Lonigan. Farrell presents in rich and exhaustive detail the factors in Studs's life that "account" for his fate. In the novels dealing with the life of Danny O'Neill, environment is not presented as a controlling force. "In a sense," says C. Walcutt, the characters in the O'Neill books "are wasted humanity, but in a more immediate sense they have personal qualities which are not accountable to the environment. They are all

alive and kicking. . . . as characters and as people they take the bit in their teeth and run."[83] Although the debilitating and stultifying environment is still acknowledged, it does not chain the characters with steel bonds. They retain a certain unaccountable quality that makes them real and exciting. It is this elusive, unaccountable, quality in Danny that saves him from Studs's fate. Danny grows up in an environment that is very similar to Studs's, yet there is hope for Danny while there is none for Studs. This is an expression of Farrell's growing interest in creative individuality. At the end of My Days of Anger Danny is able to summon up the will and energy to go to New York with the hope of creating for himself a better world, and through his writing to create a better world for mankind.

The Bernard Carr trilogy picks up where My Days of Anger leaves off.[84] The Carr novels are set in New York, a New York of literary and political ferment, where writers struggle to win recognitionof their achievement and political philosophies struggle for dominance. The trilogy describes Bernard's attempts to define for himself his social, political, and literary roles, to determine what path, as a writer, he shouldfollow. It extends further Farrell's movement away from environmental determinism. Bernard's actions and choices are not presented as the consequence of external forces impinging upon him. Throughout the novels, Farrell emphasizes Carr's independence and self-direction. In The Road Between, the Carrs are

expecting their first child and Bernard takes a job in a food store in order to support them. When he unexpectedly finds a one-hundred-dollar check in his mailbox as payment for a story accepted by the American Mercury magazine, he decides to quit his job and return to writing his novel until the money runs out: "He'd try to write this novel not merely because of economic need but also as a form of warfare, conducted in defense of his freedom."[85] Time and again Bernard asserts his individuality in the face of opposition. In Yet Other Waters, despite the pressures brought to bear on him by the Communist Party to use his art as a weapon for the benefit of the workers, Bernard refuses to join the "new school of proletarian writing."[86] He writes and delivers his "declaration of literary independence" at a Congress for Proletarian Literature.[87] Bernard refuses to compromise his talent or his beliefs. He is a self-contained and self-sufficient individual who treasures above all else his freedom to write what and how he pleases. It is interesting to note that the conditions of Bernard's home life from which he has escaped are revealed only in The Road Between and Yet Other Waters, the last two novels of the trilogy. The fact that Bernard Clare, the first novel, is free of background material is further indication that Farrell does not regard Bernard as bound by his past.

There are passages that describe some physical aspects of the city or that seek to convey the quality of urban

life, but these are not well integrated into the fabric of the novel. In The Road Between, Bernard enters the subway and observes:

> There was no reason for assuming that these fellow passengers of his would be unfriendly. Yet he'd entered the car with just such a feeling. Wherever he went, except in cases where he knew people, he expected unfriendliness and hostility. Didn't others expect the same? You walked down the street or rode in the subways, casually noticed a stranger, and imagined that he was a potential enemy. In cities people were closed in on themselves, closed out from one another. In time, in a big city, people began almost to seem like objects rather than human beings.[88]

There is no evidence in the novel that Bernard meets with hostility, or that he regards or is regarded by anyone as a "potential enemy." There is no dramatic portrayal of the fact that "in cities people were closed in on themselves, closed out from one another." Later in the novel, Bernard takes a behind-the-counter job in a food store. He stares at "the endless succession of people on the sidewalk outside" and makes the following observations:

> He was crystallizing an impression of New York. Here in New York you were flung up against humanity even more than in Chicago. You were never free of it. It was pressed against you. Without necessarily thinking about it, you were aware of humanity day and night, of millions walking by you, living lives parallel to your own, working and loving and suffering. The noises and roar, the rumbling traffic, the endless human and mechanical sounds of the city were but part of this one general, nervous beat of humanity upon your senses.[89]

There is no indication in the novel, other than in this one passage, that Bernard experiences the "nervous beat of humanity upon your senses," the pressure of living with and being pressed and oppressed by the multitudes around him.

Thus, while the Carr trilogy includes observations about urban life, these observations tend to be trite generalizations which are not well integrated with the experience of the protagonist.

The only feature of urban life about which Bernard speaks that has real personal meaning for him is the experience of loneliness that envelops one in this crowded city. "Here he was in New York, so damned lonely that he sometimes talked to himself."[90] His own sense of loneliness makes him sensitive to the loneliness in others. The men who live, as he does, at the Willis Hotel "were lonely. And there was something ugly, unpleasant, but also very wistful in the sight of so many lonely men."[91] He sits on a bench in Washington Square, having nothing to do and hoping that someone will talk to him; and he realizes that "that was why many sat on park benches. They sat in order to while away the time. They sat hoping that somebody would come along and talk to them."[92]

In the last two novels of the trilogy, Farrell creates a sense of the past from which Bernard has escaped through scenes set in the Chicago homes of the Carrs and the Whelans, his wife Elizabeth's family. These interspersed scenes sharply contrast with those depicting Bernard's style of life in New York.[93] The Carrs and the Whelans have no involvement with social, political, or literary ideas. Bernard's world is alien to them. Bernard is sharply aware of "a gulf between him and his family. He was trying

to tell them of a life beyond them."[94] Yet there is a distinctly urban atmosphere created in these Chicago scenes which is in some ways more substantial than that conveyed by the New York scenes. This is due in large part to Farrell's realistic and convincing use of urban speech patterns which, it should be noted, is almost entirely limited in the Carr novels to the Chicago scenes. In the New York scenes, the social and literary ideas of the times are more important than the characteristics of urban life.

Thus, examination of the Danny O'Neill novels and the Bernard Carr trilogy reveals that there is in Farrell's work a gradual but steady progression away from the use of the city both as setting and as determinant of action, character, and theme. This decline in involvement with urban issues corresponds with Farrell's move from environmental determinism to self-determination.

FOOTNOTES

JAMES T. FARRELL

[1]Charles C. Walcutt, "James T. Farrell: Aspects of Telling the Whole Truth," American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 240-241.

[2]James T. Farrell, The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, Inc., 1938), pp. 371, 372. The Modern Library edition includes Young Lonigan, The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, and Judgment Day, originally published by The Vanguard Press, Inc. in 1932, 1934, and 1935 respectively. Future references to Studs Lonigan will be from this edition.

A change in Farrell's attitude is expressed in My Days of Anger, the last novel in the Danny O'Neill pentalogy: "He would do battle so that others did not remain unfulfilled as he and his family had been" (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1943), p. 401).

[3]Blanche Housman Gelfant, The American City Novel (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 196.

[4]Young Lonigan, pp. 7, 70.

[5]Ibid., p. 73.

[6]Ibid., p. 75.

[7]Ibid., p. 147.

[8]Ibid.

[9]James T. Farrell, "Thirty and Under," The League of Frightened Philistines (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1945), p. 150.

[10]Heinrich Straumann, American Literature in the Twentieth Century (London: William Brendon and Son, Ltd., 1951), p. 46.

[11]Joseph Warren Beach, American Fiction, 1920-1940 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), p. 303.

[12]Young Lonigan, p. 3 (italics mine).

[13]The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, p. 31.

[14]Ibid., p. 35.

[15]Ibid., p. 37.

[16]James T. Farrell, Introduction to the Modern Library edition of Studs Lonigan, pp. xii, xiii.

[17]Young Lonigan, p. 69.

[18]Ibid., p. 86.

[19]Ibid., p. 87.

[20]Gelfant, op. cit., p. 175.

[21]George Snell, The Shapers of American Fiction: 1798-1947 (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 290.

[22]W. M. Frohock, The Novel of Violence in America (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1950), p. 80 (italics mine). In his introduction to the Modern Library edition of Studs Lonigan, John Chamberlain concurs: "For the youthful gang morality, the immature ideals, and the empty late twenties and early thirties of Jim Farrell's Chicago Irish, might just as well have been attributed to the Grand Avenue Irish of New Haven" (p. viii).

[23]Edgar M. Branch, James T. Farrell, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 29 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 19.

[24]Young Lonigan, p. 13.

[25]Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[26]Ibid., pp. 155-156.

[27]Ibid., p. 15.

[28]Judgment Day, p. 3.

[29]Ibid., p. 9.

[30]Young Lonigan, p. 19.

[31]Ibid., p. 14.

[32]Ibid., p. 162.

[33]Judgment Day, p. 439.

[34]Young Lonigan, p. 19.

[35]Ibid., p. 115.

[36]Ibid., p. 94.

[37]Ibid., p. 95.

[38]Ibid., pp. 96, 98.

[39]Ibid., p. 99.

[40]Ibid., p. 100.

[41]Ibid., pp. 100-101. These same stereotypes are expressed by Pat Lonigan in Judgment Day, p. 99.

[42]The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, p. 12.

[43]Branch, op. cit., p. 17.
Branch further notes that Farrell avoided making Studs a slum dweller "because he wanted to explore the interaction of character and culture in his own middle-class neighborhood" (p. 17, italics mine).

[44]Gelfant, op. cit., p. 200.

[45]Young Lonigan, p. 70. See p. 103: "Studs sulked, and told himself there wasn't any use arguing with his old man and old lady. They just didn't understand."

[46]Ibid., p.17.

[47]Ibid., p. 160. See pp. 19, 21.

[48]Ibid., p. 69.

[49]Ibid., pp. 31, 47, 60.

[50]Ibid., p. 3.

[51]Ibid., pp. 39, 40.

[52]Ibid., p. 49. See also pp. 20-21.

[53]Ibid., p. 107.

[54]The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, p. 331.

[55]Young Lonigan, p. 68.

[56]The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, p. 110.

[57]Ibid., p. 33.

[58]Judgment Day, pp. 3, 6.

[59]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

[60]Ibid., p. 27.

[61]Ibid., p. 28.

[62]The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, p. 45.

[63]Young Lonigan, p. 131.

[64]Ibid., pp. 171-172 (italics mine).

[65]Ibid., pp. 109ff, 196, 144ff; The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, pp. 209ff.

[66]Gelfant, op. cit., p. 220.

[67]The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, p. 138.

[68]Ibid., p. 373.

[69]Ibid., p. 386.

[70]Judgment Day, p. 363.

[71]Ibid., p. 428.

[72]Ibid., p. 429.

[73]Ibid., pp. 429-430.

[74]Ibid., p. 430.

[75]Ibid., p. 431.

[76]Frank O'Malley, "James T. Farrell: Two Twilight Images," in Fifty Years of the American Novel: A Christian Appraisal, ed. Harold C. Gardiner, S. J. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 238.

[77]The novels of in the Danny O'Neill pentalogy are, in order of publication: A World I Never Made (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1936); No Star is Lost (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1938); Father and Son (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1940); My Days of Anger (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1943); The Face of Time (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1953). The latter goes back to when Danny was five years old.

[78]A World I Never Made, p. 3.

[79]No Star is Lost, p. 21ff.

[80]Tbid., p. 4.

[81]Ibid., p. 210.

[82]Edgar Branch, James T. Farrell (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 88.

[83]C. Walcutt, op. cit., pp. 245-246.

[84]The Bernard Carr books include Bernard Clare (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1946), The Road Between (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1949), and Yet Other Waters (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1952). Bernard Clare's name was changed to Bernard Carr in the second novel after a libel suit by a person of that name.

[85]The Road Between, p. 231.

[86]Yet Other Waters, p. 391.

[87]Ibid., p. 126.

[88]The Road Between, pp. 18-19.

[89]Ibid., p. 217.

[90]Bernard Clare, p. 39.

[91]Ibid., p. 131.

[92]Ibid., p. 201.

[93]Chapters 3, 7, 10, 17-19 in The Road Between, and Sections 2 and 4 in Yet Other Waters.

[94]Yet Other Waters, p. 204.

SAUL BELLOW

Saul Bellow has received wide recognition as "a city writer,"[1] "a chronicler of the city."[2] His characters, notes E. Rovit, are "urban-bred and urban-oriented. Their native habitat is the modern metropolis -- cities of elevated trains, overheated apartments, traffic, universities and museums, slums and suburbs, city parks and anonymous cafeterias, the subway rumbling underfoot and the smog polluting the upper air."[3] M. Klein even suggests that although Bellow's Henderson the Rain King "takes place mostly in Africa," it is "an Africa urbanized."[4] Henderson continues to think "in city metaphors and of city events," says Klein, and the city maintains its pressure even in the jungles of Africa.[5] Bellow is intimately acquainted with every facet of urban life and he uses the city in a variety of ways in his novels. This chapter proposes to examine how the city functions in Bellow's novels.

Although the city is not used as effectively in Dangling Man as in Bellow's later novels, this first novel does contain the germ of many of the urban-related themes that Bellow explores in different ways in every one of his novels.

"In a city where one has lived nearly all his life, it is not likely that he will ever be solitary; and yet, in a

very real sense, I am just that," says Joseph, hero of Dangling Man.[6] As the novel progresses, Joseph withdraws more and more into his own isolated world. He seldom leaves his "six-sided box";[7] he loses contact with most of his friends; and he waits, waits for the army induction center to remember its intention to call him. At the end of the novel, after having "dangled" fruitlessly for eleven months, Joseph requests to be taken into the service.

During these eleven months, Joseph tries to fill up the empty, lonely days of waiting. He is forced to admit to himself that "I do not know how to use my freedom."[8] Joseph reads the newspaper from cover to cover, "reluctant to put it aside,"[9] "missing not a word. First come the comic strips . . . then I read the serious news and the columnists, and, finally, the gossip, the family page, the recipes, the obituaries, the society news, the ads, the children's puzzles, everything."[10] Joseph does not discriminate between the noteworthy and the unimportant. All are of equal importance -- or, rather, of equal unimportance. The comics and the recipes are read "ritualistically"[11] together with the news. The days gradually lose "their distinctiveness. . . and it is difficult to tell Tuesday from Saturday";[12] they are "blanks punched out of the calendar."[13] When Joseph does go out, he walks the streets aimlessly, purposely choosing "unfamiliar streets" to break the daily monotony; however, "they turned out to be no different from the ones I knew."[14] Baumbach correctly states that "Joseph, isolated

from his brethren like his biblical counterpart, has no world. Similarly, the novel exists in no real world, only a peripheral one, limited by Joseph's abortive contacts outside himself."[15] Joseph has no real connection with the urban world outside his room.

A dominant theme present in each of Bellow's novels is the question of man's position in the modern world, his relationship to the complex environment in which he finds himself in twentieth-century America. In the course of his novels Bellow gradually raises the city to a symbolic level. It becomes, as Nadon rightly suggests, representative of "society, the modern world, and a reflection of the modern human condition. It is the world dominated by technology, mechanization, and mass man."[16] In Dangling Man, Bellow introduces this theme on its simplest level. As Joseph gazes out of the window at the Almstadt's home, he reflects upon the uglinesses of the city, "these ruins before my eyes":

> ranges of poor dwellings, warehouses, billboards, culverts, electric signs blankly burning, parked cars and moving cars, and the occasional bare plan of a tree. . . . It was my painful obligation to look and to submit to myself the invariable question: Where was there a particle of what, elsewhere, or in the past, had spoken in man's favor? There could be no doubt that these billboards, street tracks, houses, ugly and blind, were related to interior life. And yet, I told myself, there had to be a doubt. . . . There must be a difference, a quality that eluded me, somehow, a difference between things and persons and even between acts and persons. Otherwise the people who lived here were actually a reflection of the things they lived among.[17]

Joseph's concern with the relation of "billboards, streets, tracks, houses, ugly and blind" to the "interior life" is

a concern for man's place in the modern world, which the city in microcosm reflects and represents. It is a concern which every Bellow protagonist shares, from Joseph in Dangling Man to Mr. Sammler in Mr. Sammler's Planet, Bellow's latest novel to date. Sammler also asks: "How could the ignorant nonspecialists be strong with strength adequate to confront these technical miracles which made him a sort of uncomprehending Congo savage?"[18] The Bellow protagonists share Joseph's fear of "the lack of the human in the too-human,"[19] sharehis "recognition of the difficult, the sorrowful, in what to others is merely neutral, the environment."[20]

However alienated Joseph may in fact be, he refuses to subscribe to a doctrine of alienation: "Because I was involved with them; because, whether I liked it or not, they were my generation, my society, my world."[21] From his first book to his most recent, Bellow has consistently refused to assume a posture of hopelessness, disgust, and despair with the modern urban world in which he and his characters find themselves. In a dialogue between Joseph and his alter-ego, Bellow states his position:

> "Listen, Tu As Raison Aussi. We abuse the present too much, don't you think so?"
> "You're not so fond of it."
> "Fond! What a word!"
> "Alienated, then."
> "That's bad, too."
> "It's popular."
> "There's a lot of talk about alienation. It's a fool's plea."
> . . . . . .
> "You can't banish the world by decree if it's

> in you. Is that it, Joseph?"
> "How can you . . ."
> "You can decide that you want to forget these things."
> "The world comes after you. It presents you with a gun or a mechanic's tool, it singles you out for this part or that, brings you ringing news of disasters and victories, shunts you back and forth, abridges your rights, cuts off your future, is clumsy or crafty, oppressive, treacherous, murderous, black, whorish, venal, inadvertently naive or funny. Whatever you do, you cannot dismiss it."[22]

Tanner notes that for Joseph "true reality is somewhere out there in the muck and mire of the world, enduring and always to be found. Recalling his slum upbringing with all its cruelty and violence, he nevertheless feels it was 'the only place where I was ever allowed to encounter reality.'"[23]

Escape from the city to a rural environment is never in Bellow a viable alternative. The ugliness, the "lack of the human in the too-human" setting is frightening and makes man wish to "bolt for 'Nature.' It happens in all cities," says Joseph. Yet, he continues, "cities are 'natural,' too."[24] Man must come to terms with modern life, with the city itself that is now a "natural" part of modern life. As Joseph walks through the city streets in springtime, he sees "an untimely butterfly, out of place both in the season and the heart of the city, and somehow alien to the whole condition of the century."[25] The "condition of the century" is that of modern technological urban society, and the city is its most representative manifestation.

In The Victim, Bellow's second novel, there is

further exploration of the theme of man's place in the modern world. The issue of man's adjustment to the demands of modern urban life is here not contemplated but dramatized. Asa Leventhal, living in the midst of metropolitan New York, strives to preserve his individuality by withdrawing from commitment:

> With everybody except Mary [his wife] he was inclined to be short and neutral, outwardly a little like his father, and this shortness of his was, when you came right down to it, merely neglectfulness. When you didn't want to take trouble with people, you found the means to turn them aside. Well, the world was a busy place . . . You couldn't find a place in your feelings for everything, or give at every touch like a swinging door, the same for everyone, with people going in and out as they pleased.[26]

His capacity to respond to others has been dulled; he cannot give "like a swinging door." Asa is described at the beginning of the novel as "unaccomodating" and indifferent.[27] In a city of swift and constantly changing stimuli, reserve has become a means of self-preservation. In addition, the materialistic ethic that is the life force of the city further reduces the possibility of meaningful relationships. The sociologist Georg Simmel describes this aspect of city life in the following manner. The money economy "is concerned only with what is common to all: it asks for the exchange value, it reduces all quality and individuality to the question: How much? All intimate emotional relations between persons are founded in their individuality, whereas in rational relations man is reckoned with like a number. . . . Only the objective measurable achievement is of interest."[28] This is precisely the way Asa Leventhal is treated at

Burke-Beard, the firm for which he has worked for six years. To his employer he has no more individuality than a machine. Although his work is good, he can barely squeeze a nod of approval from Beard. Even the death of his nephew evokes no words of sympathy or condolence from his employer. The money economy that dominates the metropolis reduces qualitative values to quantitative ones; only Leventhal's "objective measurable achievement is of interest." Thus, the city's unique physical makeup and its materialistic ethic both serve to diminish the possibilities for and the quality of human relationships.

Leventhal lives with a deep sense of insecurity, uncertain even about his position at Burke-Beard's. He is never able to forget that he was once nearly one of "the lost, the outcast, the overcome, the effaced, the ruined."[29] One night Leventhal watches a scene of violence take place in the street below his window:

> the scene on the corner remained with him . . . and he returned to it every now and then with the feeling that he really did not know what went on about him, what strange things, savage things. They hung near him all the time in trembling drops, invisible, usually, or seen from a distance. But that did not mean that there was always to be a distance, or that sooner or later one or two of the drops might not fall on him. As a matter of fact he was thinking of Allbee.[30]

Leventhal juxtaposes his fear of the strange and savage city with the thought of Allbee, for Allbee stands before him as an example of that failurefrom which he has thus far escaped; although Leventhal is now doing well, Allbee stands before him as a reminder that the abyss stands open,

ready to accept those who slip.

So Leventhal preserves himself, but at a high cost. He is lonely,[31] and when Mary is called away for a few weeks he suddenly becomes aware of how alone and isolated he is. He keeps the bathroom light on all night, feeling both lonely and threatened.[32] Life in the city is like an egg race: "We were all the time taking care of ourselves, laying up, storing up, watching out on this side and on that side, and at the same time running, running desperately, running as if in an egg race with the egg in a spoon."[33] Yet sometimes, Leventhal realizes, one tires of "watching the egg, fearing for the egg," one tires of taking "pains and precautions," and at those times the idea of "playing catch with the egg, threatening the egg," is exciting.[34] Leventhal realizes that "if you shut yourself up, not wanting to be bothered, then you were like a bear in a winter hole, or like a mirror wrapped in a piece of flannel. And like such a mirror you were in less danger of being broken, but you didn't flash, either. But you had to flash. . . . Everybody wanted to be what he was to the limit."[35]

The Allbee confrontation exacerbates Leventhal's personal feelings of loneliness and insecurity, feelings engendered by the nature and quality of city life.

Percy Lubbock, in The Craft of Fiction, describes how Balzac used setting to confirm an incredible story, to make an action that is harsh and overcharged look less so and more real.[36] In a similar manner, the city setting in Bellow's The Victim serves to give an air of reality

to a rather unreal situation.

Bellow skillfully uses the city as a means of creating an atmosphere appropriate to the story. The city scene is realistic. And it is oppressive. It is oppressive in its style of life, its rushed pace, its crowded conditions that result in men living like strangers. And it is oppressive in its physical details. On the first page of the novel, Leventhal "alighted hurriedly from a Third Avenue train. In his preoccupation he had almost gone past his stop. . . . The black door of the ancient car was already sliding shut; he struggled with it, forcing it back with his shoulder, and squeezed through."[37] Leventhal is left on the station "breathing hard" and "cursing." The sights, sounds, and movements of the city are harsh and strident. The trains race through the tunnels with a "rapid concussion of cars, like hammer blows."[38] The busses stand "throbbing before the station" with "threshing motors."[39] The music in the movie theatre "was strident."[40] In the restaurant "the musical crash of the check machine filled their ears."[41] The buildings are "scorched, smoky, gray," and even the Statue of Liberty looks "black, a twist of black that stood up like smoke."[42] On a lunch break Leventhal walks towards the river, "passing through the sidewalk markets, between the sacks of coffee beans. The roasting odor was mixed with the smell of gas. The occasional piping of a tug or the low blurt of a steamer came through the trample and jamming of trucks, and booms bristled like the spikes of a

maguey."[43] The sights, the noises, and the smells of this scene are harsh and offensive.

As real as the city as place is, there is in the imagery an element of strangeness that corresponds with the nature of Leventhal's experiences and so lends support to the atmosphere of the story. The opening paragraph of the novel establishes the sequence of events as taking place in the heart of New York City:

> On some nights New York is as hot as Bangkok. The whole continent seems to have moved from its place and slid nearer the equator, the bitter gray Atlantic to have become green and tropical, and the people, thronging the streets, barbaric fellahin among the stupendous monuments of their mystery. . . .[44]

The comparison of the heat of New York with the heat of Bangkok sets a perfect tone for the events that follow; they are as strange as if they had taken place in strange lands among "barbaric fellahin." (In Henderson the Rain King, the protagonist does indeed travel among "barbaric" tribes into the heat of Africa.) Bellow stresses the "foreign" several times in the course of the novel. Later in the novel he again compares the New York heat to that in foreign ports: "Surely the sun was no hotter in any Singapore or Surabaya, on the chains, plates, and rails of ships anchored there."[45] Leventhal experiences feelings of bewilderment, confusion, and disbelief at the events that he is experiencing;[46] Bellow writes that as Leventhal approaches the church for his nephew Mickey's funeral "he had a momentary impression of being in a foreign city."[47] Throughout the novel there are suggestions of a vagueness,

a blurriness of vision, an indistinctness of outline, that suggest the unreal quality of Leventhal's experiences. Leventhal's first meeting with Allbee takes place in a small park, a "green square" around which the city traffic "whipped endlessly, and the cumbersome busses crawled groaning, steering down from the tall blue oblong of light at the summit of the street through a bluish pallor."[48] Their third meeting in a relationship which for Leventhal becomes increasingly nightmarish and unreal takes place on Eighteenth Street: "He [Leventhal] had to look twice in the wavering, longitudinal grays and shadows of the watery street to identify him."[49] On his way to Mickey's funeral, "the colors, granular and bloody, black green, blue, quivered like gases over the steady baselines of shadow."[50] The unreal, strange sense of things is further reinforced by Bellow's use of mixed sense impressions: "the bitter gray Atlantic,"[51] busses waiting "in a shimmer of fumes,"[52] the "tenebrous brown heat,"[53] "the cumbersome busses crawled groaning,"[54] "the fountain ran with a green, leaden glint,"[55] the "hot green netting of the bridges,"[56] the "dead brown air."[57] This mixing of sense impressions in describing the urban environment suggests that the city overwhelms and confuses the senses and serves to reinforce the element of strangeness and confusion.

Baumbach, commenting on the opening paragraph of The Victim, notes that in addition to evoking the oppressive humidity of a hot New York summer night, "it serves also to

set an emotional atmosphere in which the victims, Leventhal and Allbee, will be seen sweltering throughout the novel, and it suggests Leventhal's spiritual malaise. Bellow follows with, 'On such a night, Asa Leventhal alighted from a Third Avenue train,' and we are gradually led into the anteroom of Leventhal's hothouse consciousness. By introducing Leventhal in conjunction with the suffocating heat, Bellow makes the atmosphere a reflector of Leventhal's interior suffocation."[58] With few exceptions, Baumbach is correct in stating that "the physical properties of Leventhal's outer world are always, in some form, manifestations of his inner disturbances." The city in The Victim is used as a means of defining the plight of the character. At times Leventhal consciously reacts to the city scene:

> After getting off the subway he delayed going home. He stopped in the park. The crowd was extraordinarily thick tonight. . . . A woman was singing. Her voice and the accompaniment of the organ were very dim, only a few notes emerging from the immense, interminable mutter. . . . The trees were swathed in stifling dust, and the stars were faint and sparse through the pall. The benches formed a dense, double human wheel; the paths were thronged. There was an overwhelming human closeness and thickness, and Leventhal was penetrated by a sense not merely of the crowd in this park but of innumerable millions, crossing, touching, pressing. What was that story he had once read about Hell cracking open on account of the rage of the god of the sea, and all the souls, crammed together, looking out?[59]

The scene evokes in Leventhal an image of Hell, crammed with millions of souls trapped within it. The word "Hell," in addition, perfectly expresses the atmosphere of oppressive heat of a New York summer that pervades the novel.

More often, the city descriptions serve to reflect the

mood of the character and to suggest the quality of his feelings. After his first meeting with Allbee in the park, Leventhal returns home to find Allbee's note. He wakes up the next morning after a deep sleep and observes from his window that "the clouds were heavily suspended and slow. To the south and east, the air was brassy, the factories were beginning to smolder. . . . There was a hard encircling rumble of trucks and subterranean trains."[60] The description is acceptable on the literal level and at the same time is true to the psychological reality of the moment. The rumble of "subterranean trains" are the "subterranean" thoughts of Allbee that Leventhal would prefer to suppress. As soon as he sees Allbee's note on the table, his mood turns "brassy" and he begins to "smolder": "He was about to slam down the lid but checked himself."[61] For a while Leventhal forgets about Allbee: "He did not think of him again until he was on the subway."[62] The "subterranean" subway is again associated with thoughts of Allbee.

The scenic details most often reinforce rather than substitute for the author's revelation of character. On the ferry to his brother Max's apartment, Leventhal sees the Statue of Liberty: "The Statue of Liberty rose . . . in the trembling air, it was black, a twist of black that stood up like smoke."[63] The Statue is a symbol of freedom, yet its appearance denies its symbolic meaning. It is a "twist of black," turned about itself, and it stands up "like smoke," not clearly defined, a shadowy symbol of

freedom. As such, it perfectly represents Leventhal's state of mind. Leventhal feels hemmed in on every side by the pressures of Allbee's presence, Beard's demands, and Mickey's illness. He stands on the ferry "with an appearance of composure; he did not look as burdened as he felt."[64] Later in the novel, Leventhal receives word of Mickey's death: "He held himself off from the edge of the desk . . . and with the sick drop of fuller realization his broad face lost all color and his features grew thick."[65] He immediately takes the ferry to Max's house: "On the ferry there was only a current of brackish air instead of the usual fresh breeze. . . . The air was chalky and the afternoon sun looked pale."[66] The brackish air, the chalky air, and the pale sun are images that convey Leventhal's emotional reaction. On the way to the church, Leventhal notices "in a long, black peninsular yard a row of scratchy bushes grew, dead green."[67] Green, the color of growth, of spring, of life itself, is now "dead green." The phrase underlines the full tragedy of little Mickey's untimely death.

The pulsing, throbbing movements, the noises, the smells, the heat of the city serve to exacerbate Leventhal's already tense state. Leventhal leaves his third meeting with Allbee in a state of violent anger.

> Leventhal strode home blindly and rapidly, his stout body shaken by the unaccustomed gait. Perspiration ran from his bushy, lusterless hair over his dark skin. He was thinking that he should have done something, slammed Allbee on the head, not let him off. . . . "I ought to have done it," he thought, "even if it meant murdering him."

> Just then, the blink of a yellow light in the middle of the street started him into a trot. An eddy of exhaust gas caught him in the face. He was behind a bus. A tearing of gears carried it forward, and he came up on the curb, breathless. . . . His head ached. . . . He felt that his nerves were worse than ever and that his rage had done him harm, affected his very blood. . . . His heart quickened again. He cast a glance behind. . . . "Let him better not come near me," he muttered.[68]

The yellow light that in Bellow often signifies the "inhuman" appears immediately after Leventhal entertains the idea, albeit for a moment, of murdering Allbee. Earlier, Leventhal had associated the yellow light of the sun with "the yellow revealed in the slit of the eye of a wild animal, say a lion, something inhuman, that didn't care about anything human and yet was implanted in every human being too, one speck of it, and formed a part of him that responded to the heat and the glare."[69] The evil, the "inhuman," that is in this last passage associated with the natural world is also "implanted in every human being." By juxtaposing Leventhal's violent impulse to murder Allbee with the yellow street light, Bellow recalls and reemphasizes an important thematic point without breaking the flow of the narrative. The "tearing of gears" that carries the bus forward suggests the internal "tearing of gears" that moves Leventhal homeward "blindly and rapidly" in an "unaccustomed gait." And on the literal level, the not uncommon street experience leaves him breathless and intensifies his feelings of irritation and anger.

At times, though not often, the details of the city scene contrast with the mood of the character. Leventhal

returns to his empty apartment, tired, depressed about Mickey, and lonely for his wife. "Dumb and motionless in the silent room, he heard the slamming of car doors and the racing of motors outside."[70] The adjectives are paired in contrasts: dumb -- slamming of doors, motionless -- racing of motors. Leventhal's consciousness of the movement and noise of the streets below makes him doubly aware of his own feelings of aloneness and exhaustion. A better example of such contrast occurs in a crucial scene near the end of the novel, the farewell scene between Leventhal and his brother Max. Leventhal and Max sit in Leventhal's apartment "in silence."[71] Then Leventhal accompanies his brother to the subway. They find it difficult to communicate with one another. Together they wait "till the grind of the approaching train reaches them."[72]

> "If you need me for anything . . ." Leventhal said.
> "Thanks."
> "I mean it."
> "Thank you." He extended his hand. Leventhal clumsily spread his arms wide and clasped him. They felt the concussion of the train, and the streaked face of the lead car with its beam shot toward them in a smolder of dust; the windows ran by. Max returned his embrace.
> "Call me,"Leventhal said hoarsely in Max's ear. The crowd swirled around them at the doors.[73]

Their moment of mutual warm embrace takes place in the middle of a dirty, noisy, crowded train station. This moment of silent understanding and communication, this moment of love, is torn from the impersonal environment, as indeed such moments must be torn in a busy, noisy, crowded urban world. And perhaps the very impersonality of the environment

brings Leventhal and Max together, if only for a moment, by forcing them to realize that they have only each other, that only love can redeem life in an urban world.

In Dangling Man the return of spring brings with it "the hope of an impossible rejuvenation."[74] Bellow, says Klein, "shifts the mood of the novel toward resolution with the coming of spring."[75] Klein, Malin, and Nadon[76] have noted the rural-urban contrast that is present in Dangling Man and that is suggested elsewhere in Bellow's novels. Despite the fact that there are signs in Bellow's first novel of such contrast, nature and the rural world are never seriously offered as an alternative to the urban world of Bellow's novels. This becomes quite clear in The Victim. The park offers no refuge from the crowds, filth, and noise of the city. The natural elements, air and water, are polluted; they retain none of their traditional purity. The sky is a "murky" red, "absorbed from the neon lights and the clock tower on Fifth Avenue."[77] The air is described as "brassy," "dead brown."[78] The water is "bitter gray," or "yellowish green," covered with "stray planks and waterlogged, foundering crates."[79] Both sky and water are obscured by urban industry: "booms bristled like the spikes of a maguey, dividing the white of the sky as the piers did that of the water."[80] While this may be further cause to condemn the city that pollutes everything with which it comes into contact, nevertheless the fact remains that the natural elements offer no reassuring contrast to the ugli-

ness of urban life.

Thus, in The Victim Bellow uses the city in a variety of ways: to create an atmosphere appropriate to the events; to give a sense of reality to those events; as an aid in character portrayal, by reflecting and illuminating the moods of the character, by adding to his tensions, and by occasional contrast with his moods; in the development of basic themes that run through Bellow's novels. Its main function in this novel is to illuminate situation and character. The pervasive use of the city in The Victim makes this novel uniquely urban.

William Barrett's comments in a chapter on existentialism and modern literature may serve as an apt description of Dangling Man, The Victim, and Seize the Day:

> Modern literature tends to be a literature of "extreme situations.". . . It shows us man at the end of his tether, cut off from the consolations of all that seems so solid and earthly in the daily round of life -- that seems so as long as this round is accepted without question. . . . When, by chance or fate, we fall into an extreme situation -- one, that is, on the far side of what is normal, routine, accepted, traditional, safeguarded -- we are threatened by the void. The solidity of the so-called real world evaporates under the pressure of our situation.[81]

In Dangling Man, Joseph is free of all responsibility while he waits for an induction call, yet he finds that he doesn't know what to do with his freedom. He searches for values to redeem the meaninglessness of his existence. Finally, in despair, and on the brink of the void, he rushes off to the army induction center and demands to be taken. In The Victim, Leventhal too finds himself in an unusual

situation that challenges and threatens him; his wife has gone away for a few weeks, he feels insecure about his job, his nephew is dying, and he must face Allbee in a totally unexpected confrontation. At the end of the novel, "Bellow does not really show us a changed and wiser man, so much as merely a more confident, less neurotic man."[82] Leventhal sinks with relief back into his job, his home life, and the old securities. In Seize the Day, the situation is even more extreme, the pressures are greater, and Tommy Wilhelm is not allowed any easy escape from his problems.

Like The Victim, Seize the Day also has New York City as its setting, in this case the neighborhood of the upper West Side. The protagonist, Tommy Wilhelm, finds himself in an extreme situation as the novel opens. He is out of a job; he is separated from his wife Margaret who has been making increasingly heavy financial demands which Wilhelm cannot meet: "Whenever she can hit me, she hits, and she seems to live for that alone. And she demands more and more, and still more";[83] he is denied either emotional or financial aid from his father; and he has invested and is about to lose his last seven hundred dollars on market speculation in partnership with Tamkin. He feels that his financial obligations are crushing and destroying him. He senses the emptiness of the life that he is leading and yearns for "some useful advice" that would "transform his life."[84] In the last scene of the book, as Wilhelm stands and weeps over the body of a stranger, he is indeed "at the end of his

tether," "threatened by the void."

Wilhelm's personal misfortunes are intensified by the pressures of that giant pressure cooker, New York City. The noise of the city keeps him awake at night, and "every little thing is a strain."[85] He is reluctant to use his car lest he lose his parking space.[86] The pace of life is too fast in the city: "There's too much push here for me. It works me up too much. I take things too hard."[87] He walks around with pockets filled with "little packets of pills and crushed cigarette butts."[88]

> The upper West-Side New York scene is brilliantly described from the huge and gloomy hotels to the barbershops, the steam baths for the tired, flabby businessman, and the local branch of the stock market which is the nerve center of this overdressed and overfed segment of middle class urban society.[89]

The dominant value in Wilhelm's world and the creator of many of the pressures of urban life is money. Tamkin warns him against catching "the money fever. This type of activity is filled with hostile feeling and lust,"[90] as Tommy Wilhelm well knows. Everyone with whom Wilhelm comes into contact has the "fever": Dr. Adler (his father), Perls, Rappaport, even Tamkin himself.

> Uch! How they love money, thought Wilhelm. They adore money! Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money. While if you didn't have it. . . . You had to excuse yourself from the face of the earth. . . . The world's business. If only he could find a way out of it.[91]

Tamkin, who advises playing the market with "a calm and rational, a psychological approach,"[92] admits in the same breath that he gets "so worked up and tormented and restless,

so restless!" that he hasn't "even been able to practice my profession. With all this money around you don't want to be a fool while everyone else is making."[93] As Wilhelm anxiously stands in the brokerage office watching the stock market ticker tape as it swallows his last seven hundred dollars, he resolves to leave New York: "Recovery was possible. First he had to get out of the city. No, first he had to pull out his money. . . ."[94] Money attracts him, too, like a magnet. One moment he is thinking about how to revitalize his life, how to "go back a ways and try once more"; the next:

> Only a few hundred yards separated the cafeteria from the broker's, and within that short space Wilhelm turned again, in measurable degrees, from these wide considerations to the problems of the moment. The closer he approached to the market, the more Wilhelm had to think about money.[95]

Wilhelm is involved in three relationships from which he cannot disentangle himself, with his father, Dr. Adler, with his wife, Margaret, and with Tamkin. All three relationships are rooted in money. It is interesting to note that each of three references in the novel to the "gassy air" of New York appears in connection with one of these three relationships. The first such instance occurs in the dining room of the Hotel Gloriana, as Wilhelm appeals in vain to his father for sympathy and understanding:

> Oh, thought Wilhelm, eyes turning upward. Why did I come here in the first place, to live near him? New York is like a gas. The colors are running. . . . He thinks I want to take away his money or that I envy him. He doesn't see what I want.[96]

The second instance occurs when Wilhelm is with Tamkin. Tamkin awes Wilhelm with his discussion of man's "real soul" and his "pretender soul." He tells him that "the interest of the pretender soul is the same as the interest of the social life, the society mechanism" and that man must be true to his "true soul."[97] Then Tamkin switches to the subject of the stock market, promising glibly "We'll make you a good living on the market."[98]

> They came into the sunshine of upper Broadway not clear but throbbing through the dust and fumes, a false air of gas visible at eye-level as it spurted from the bursting buses.[99]

Tamkin offers Wilhelm a mixture of truths and falsehoods; as soon as he jumps to the subject of the market, a "society mechanism," there is a reference to the "false air of gas visible at eye level." Finally, Wilhelm pleads with Margaret, from whom he is separated, to understand his difficulties. "How did you imagine it was going to be -- big shot?" she responds. "Everything made smooth for you?"[100] Wilhelm, enraged, hurries into the street: "On Broadway it was still bright afternoon and the gassy air was almost motionless under the leaden spokes of sunlight."[101] Bellow thus uses an urban image to suggest the tainted nature of Wilhelm's relationships, and to suggest, perhaps, the nature of human relations in the city. "New York is like a gas" suggests that things are blurred, distorted, unclear; Wilhelm cannot make himself and his needs understood to those who recognize only one need: money. The lines of communication between

people are broken:

> And this happened over and over with everyone you met. You had to translate and translate, explain and explain, back and forth, and it was the punishment of hell itself not to understand or be understood. . . . You had to talk with yourself in the daytime and reason with yourself at night. Who else was there to talk to in a city like New York?[102]

Wilhelm wishes to escape from the depersonalizing forces within modern society. In the last scene of the novel, Wilhelm stands on Broadway "under the leaden spokes of sunlight"; the street "quaked and gleamed and it seemed to Wilhelm to throb at the last limit of endurance."[103] Wilhelm can endure no more. As he searches for Tamkin, he is swept by the crowd into a funeral parlor. Thus it is the crowd of city people that finally forces Wilhelm to face this ultimate confrontation -- with death.

Seize the Day, says I. Howe, is "a masterpiece, a work in which many of the pressures and problems that seem unique to contemporary life are fiercely dramatized."[104] Bellow focuses in this novel on the materialism that pervades the modern world, using the city as a symbol of modern life. Geismar recognizes this when he says that "this whole New York City scene is of course an ironic parody of American society as a whole."[105]

"I am an American, Chicago born": so opens the novel that won Bellow fame as an urban writer, The Adventures of Augie March.[106] Tony Tanner suggests that the following quote from Richard Chase's book, Walt Whitman Reconsidered, "could stand as a description of Augie March":[107]

> Of great importance is the fact that most of "Song of Myself" has to do not with the self searching for a final identity but with the self escaping a series of identities which threaten to dissolve its lively and various spontaneity. . . . The motif of "Song of Myself" is the self taking on a bewildering variety of identities and with a truly virtuous agility extracting itself from each one.[108]

In Seize the Day, Tommy Wilhelm would like very much to forget his problems, cast them aside, assume a new role and begin afresh. But he, like most people, cannot, in picaro fashion, leave his past behind:

> The spirit, the peculiar burden of his existence lay upon him like an accretion, a load, a hump. . . . This large, odd, excited, fleshy, blond, abrupt personality named Wilhelm . . . was assigned to be the carrier of a load which was his own self, his characteristic self.[109]

Augie March does not, through most of the novel, carry "a load which was his own self, his characteristic self."

More than half of this novel deals with Augie's adventures in "that somber city," Chicago.[110] Throughout this entire section Augie is never really touched by his experiences, molded or formed by his environment. As I. Hassan states, "Bellow's teeming images of our cultural life specify; they do not, like the images of Dreiser, say, or like those of Farrell, attempt to determine."[111] Augie is "a very passive character, amenable to suggestions and offers, pliant, with apparently little momentum of his own. He seldom initiates any course of action, seldom makes a positive, forward-moving, creative decision or choice."[112] In which direction Augie moves, Augie acknowledges,

"depended on which way I was drawn."[113] He lacks his brother Simon's "singleness of purpose" and recognizes himself as being "more diffuse."[114] Even when all his friends had "chosen their directions . . . I was circling yet."[115] Early in the novel, says Opdahl, Bellow "dissolves the selfhood of his protagonist in the broad spectacle of Chicago. He succeeds in creating a hero who feels little pain, but he also gives the impression that Augie feels nothing at all."[116]

Bellow uses the city as a means of conveying the passive nature of this vaguely defined character. He has Augie experience the "infinite variety of the city." He is acquainted with a wide variety of urban personalities, from the city's intellectuals to its criminals,[117] "an immense sampling of a tremendous host."[118] He tries his hand at many different types of jobs: "Saying 'various jobs,' I give out the Rosetta stone, so to speak, to my entire life."[119] To name just a few: delivering newspapers, selling papers, magazines, and candy at a newsstand, working in a department store, delivering flowers, being an apprentice soda jerk, selling women's shoes, selling sporting goods, peddling rubberized paint, working in a dog salon, stealing and reselling books, working in a coal yard, being a union organizer. "I touched all sides," says Augie, "and nobody knew where I belonged. I had no good idea of that myself."[120]

Augie drifts from job to job, from experience to experience, a picaro on the loose. The city forces and city experiences do not have any substantial impact on him.

The city offers a multiplicity of roles and jobs and Augie drifts through them all. He does not learn from his experiences; chameleon-like, he simply adjusts himself to each new set of circumstances. There is no coherent link, no unifying thread, between Augie's different experiences, between his many roles and his various jobs.

Augie is painfully aware of the meaninglessness of the functions he performs. He feels that in this highly industrialized and technological society, the individual is but a cog in a giant machine, and he resents being reduced to insignificance. Early in the novel, as Augie travels the streetcars trying to peddle rubberized paint, he reflects: "There was something fuddling besides in the mass piled up of uniform things, the likeness of small parts, the type of newspaper columns and the bricks of buildings. To sit and be trundled, while you see: There's a danger in that of being a bobbin for endless thread or bolt for yard goods; if there's not much purpose anyway in the ride."[121] Augie is upset by "the likeness of small parts"; he does not wish to be a small meaningless component of a large urban complex. This same feeling is expressed even by the insane Basteshaw. He, too, recognizes that "the soul cries out against this namelessness," that "there must be some distinction"; the modern world contains "a billion souls boiling with anger at a doom of insignificance," only desiring "assurance of a fate worth suffering for."[122] The modern phenomenon of boredom which he proposes to study

is a result of "useless effort." It is "the shriek of unused capacities, the doom of serving no great end or design, or contributing to no master force."[123] Furthermore, Augie does not wish to "die in one subdivided role or another, with one or two thoughts, these narrow, persistent ideas of your function"; he resists the specialization of function that is a characteristic of this modern technological age: "In the world of today your individual man has to be willing to illustrate a more and more narrow and restricted point of existence."[124] Toward the end of the novel, Augie looks over the city and feels that "a mysterious tremor, dust, vapor, emanation of stupendous effort traveled with the air, over me on top of the great establishment . . . and over the clinics, clinks, factories, flophouses, morgue, skid row." Yet despite the "stupendous effort" put out by the inhabitants of the city, Augie feels that "you're nothing here. Nothing."[125] The individual is lost in this "Ezekial caldron of wrath" that is "stoked with bones" of those who slave for it.[126] Augie recognizes the "stupendous effort" that the city demands of its dwellers; and he recognizes that the effort brings no rewards, no sense of identity: "You're nothing here. Nothing."

Augie's moments of reflection, like his experiences, have no dramatized consequences. In spite of the long reflective passages in the second half of the novel, Augie as a character remains empty and identity-less. Tanner rightly concludes that at the end of the novel "Augie has

not really come to the point of any specific, concrete valid commitment or reconciliation. . . . and the marriage with Stella is really only a cutting off -- in no sense a consummation or resolution. . . . And despite the entanglements we see Augie involved in, at the end of the book one does not feel that he has really come to firm grips with a concrete environment."[127]

Thus, Augie's city experiences convey the impression of Augie as a lost wandering soul. Bellow uses the multiplicity of jobs and the variety of unrelated activities that the city makes available as a way of portraying a character who lacks an identity (and this is true of Augie whether one considers him to be a character in search of an identity or a character in search of adventure). Throughout that part of the novel set in urban Chicago, Augie does not develop; he simply assumes new roles.

The fact that the novel presents an atmosphere of endless possibility and countless opportunities has led most critics to interpret the novel as Bellow's eloquent statement of affirmation. I. Howe writes that "with Augie March he [Bellow] made a sharp turn, casting aside the urban contemplativeness and melancholy of his previous work, and deciding to regard American life as wonderfully 'open', a great big shapeless orange bursting with the juices of vitality."[128] Opdahl writes that "Bellow affirms the world by celebrating the color and vitality of many different scenes and characters, all interesting for their own sake."[129]

Yet when one examines the entire gamut of Augie's experiences, one finds that the options open to Augie are rather dismal and that his experiences are basically negative ones. His early jobs teach him dishonesty[130] and bring him into contact with a host of unsavory characters. He rides the elevators at City Hall from the gilded lobby to the Municipal Courts:

> In the cage we rose and dropped, rubbing elbows with bigshots and operators, commissioners, grabbers, heelers, tipsters, hoodlums, wolves, fixers, plaintiffs, flatfeet, men in western hats and women in lizard shoes and fur coats . . . evidence of . . . calculations, grief, not-caring, and hopes of tremendous millions in concrete to be poured or whole Mississippis of bootleg whiskey and beer.[131]

Corruption filters into every corner of city life. Augie gets a job with Bluegren, a florist with a "big gangster clientele"[132] and then casually remarks that "a lot of guys were shot that winter."[133] Einhorn, whom Augie compares to Caesar and Ulysses,[134] is engaged in "numerous small swindles."[135] From Einhorn Augie learns that "the city is one place where a person who goes out for a peaceful walk is liable to come home with a shiner or bloody nose," and that the advantage "of the roughness of a place like Chicago" is that one learns not to have illusions about man's nature, that men all over "live by blood."[136]

The relationships formed are never deep or lasting ones. Simon and Augie institutionalize their idiot brother George and then let months, even years, pass without visiting him.[137] Augie forms a close attachment to Einhorn, yet when he later comes to Einhorn for advice he finds him "too busy to give me his attention."[138] Characters drift in and

out of Augie's life, disappearing and reappearing at unexpected moments and in unexpected roles. His childhood friend Jimmy Klein, who taught Augie the art of stealing, suddenly reappears as a store detective about to apprehend Augie for book theft. Frazer, a student and scholar, surfaces in Mexico as a Trotsky supporter, and then again in Paris "working with the World Educational Fund."[139] Other characters appear briefly and then sink out of sight in an endless parade. In the middle of his wanderings through the city, Augie pauses to reflect: "There haven't been civilizations without cities. But what about cities without civilizations? An inhuman thing, if possible, to have so many people together who beget nothing on one another." The fact that Augie follows this thought with a denial, "No, but it is not possible, and the dreary begets its own fire, and so this never happens," does not deny the fact that the possibility has indeed occurred to him.[140] Thus, Augie March does not, on the whole, present a positive affirmation of city life. Clayton perceptively recognizes that beneath the "yea" is "a deep, persuasive 'nay.'"[141] This view of Bellow's vision of Augie and of the city is consistent with Bellow's attitudes and views as they are expressed in his other novels.

The powerful impact of this novel as urban derives in part from the fact that Augie is so clearly and so vividly located. In a sense, the novel belongs less to Augie than to the Machiavellian characters among whom he wanders who inhabit this urban world. Bellow brings every character to

life in broad, bold strokes. Bellow's brilliance in creating living, unforgettable characters is never more evident than in Augie March, where dozens of characters make quick entrances and exits and impress the reader with their unique qualities, their life-like idiosyncrasies, their zest for life. In his discussion of Mr. Sammler's Planet, I. Howe compliments Bellow on his "great gift for evoking every street, every figure, every shade of light and dark, but still more . . . the saturation of his characters with the spirit of the place."[142] This observation captures the essence of the urban flavor of Augie March. The characters are, indeed, "saturated" with the values, interests, and designs of urban life. Jimmy Klein's family buys everything on the installment plan, and Jimmy and Augie are sent around the city to make payments on "the phonograph, on the Singer machine, on the mohair suite with pellet-filled ashtrays that couldn't be overturned, on buggies and bicycles, linoleums, on dental and obstetrical work, on the funeral of Mr. Klein's father, on back-supporting corsets and special shoes for Mrs. Klein, on family photos taken for a wedding anniversary."[143] The interests and life-style of the Kleins are captured in this brief passage. Jimmy's uncle Tambow, "who delivered the vote of his relatives in the ward and was a pretty big wheel in Republican ward politics," arranges with the police not to interfere with Jimmy and Augie as they sell his goods -- "razors, leather straps, or doll dishes, toy xylophones, glass-cutters,

hotel soap, or first-aid kits" -- at a stand on Milwaukee Avenue without a license.[144] Dingbat, Einhorn's brother and the fight manager for Nails Nagel, spends his time "in Trafton's gym, always angrily on his rights over tapes and punching bags in the liniment-groggy, flickety-rope-time, tin-locker-clashing, Loop-darkened rooms and the Polish, Italian, Negro thump-muscled, sweat-glittering training-labor, where the smart crowd of owners and percentage-figurers was."[145] Bellow uses his intimate knowledge of the city to breathe life into each of his characters and to create characters with uniquely urban characteristics.

In Augie March Augie discovers the "axial lines with respect to which you must be straight"[146] but he does not learn to live by them. The protagonists of Bellow's next novels search for the "axial lines" of their lives, but only the aging Mr. Sammler in Bellow's last novel to date, Mr. Sammler's Planet, seems to have found them.

Mr. Sammler lives in New York. In its physical aspects the city is appallingly ugly. Public phonebooths serve as public urinals.[147] The public paths are "invariably dog-fouled."[148] From his window Sammler sees "a soft asphalt belly rising, in which lay steaming sewer navels."[149] The city is ugly. Even nature is despoiled:

> Turning from the new New York of massed apartments into the older New York of brownstone and wrought iron, Sammler saw through large black circles in a fence of daffodils and tulips, the mouths of these flowers open and glowing, but on the pure yellow the fallout of soot already was sprinkled. You might in this city become a flower-washer.[150]

The waters of the Hudson are "beautiful, unclean, insidious" and the bushes and trees along the water's edge are "cover for sexual violence, knife point robberies, sluggings, and murders."[151] Yet although "green in the city had lost its association with peaceful sanctuary," escape from the city into nature, Sammler recognizes, is a "thing of the past," no longer a viable alternative. "Truth was now slummier and called for litter in the setting -- leafy reverie? A thing of the past."[152] Each man must discover the "Truth" by which to live within the givens of modern urban life. To understand urban life "you must train yourself. You had to be strong enough not to be terrified by local effects of metamorphosis, to live with disintegration, with crazy streets, filthy nightmares, monstrosities come to life, addicts, drunkards, and perverts celebrating their despair openly in midtown. You had to be able to bear the tangles of the soul, the sight of cruel dissolution. You had to be patient with the stupidities of power, with the fraudulence of business."[153]

Although Mr. Sammler is surrounded by the same violent city as are all of Bellow's other characters, he basically remains untouched by it. In this respect he is like Augie; neither character is really defined or shaped by his urban experiences but for diametrically opposed reasons. Augie's character remains "shadowy"[154] as, foot-loose and fancy-free, he moves from adventure to adventure. Sammler begins the novel as a fully developed character, a man in his

seventies, who does not develop or change in the course of the novel. Unlike Augie, Sammler is a man with a past, a past that is always with him and that is a constant reminder of death's omnipotence. For Augie, there is always enough time, there is no sense of time running out. Sammler, having once stood at death's door, is extremely conscious of time and of the importance of making each moment count. The unpleasant details of city life are philosophically contemplated by Sammler. They affect him, but never have the same impact on him that they have on most of Bellow's characters like Leventhal or Wilhelm. Age and experience have given him the "privileges of remoteness."[155] Sammler is "a meditative island on the island of Manhattan."[156] He understands that if one wishes to be happy, one mustn't contradict one's time: "Just don't contradict it, that's all. Unless you happened to be a Sammler and felt that the place of honor was outside."[157]

Bellow uses the particular urban sights and scenes as opportunities for Sammler to speculate and philosophize on various aspects of modern life. Each of Sammler's city experiences is another opportunity for meditative reflection by this "meditative island on the island of Manhattan." Sammler's ride through the streets of the city leads him to reflect that "truth was now slummier and called for litter in the setting."[158] Broadway carries its own message: "By a convergence of all minds and all movements the conviction transmitted by this crowd seemed to be that reality was a

terrible thing, and that the final truth about mankind was overwhelming and crushing. . . . Broadway at Ninety-sixth Street gave him such a sense of things."[159] Sammler stands in a hospital waiting room and gazes down at the white markings on the window pane of a tailor-shop in the street below. The yellow of the carpet on which he stands[160] and the indecipherable scrawls on the window of the shop[161] recall to him the despair and madness of his days of hiding during World War II: "And during this period there was a yellow tinge to everything, a yellow light in the sky. In this light, bad news for Sammler, bad news for humankind, bad information about the very essence of being was diffused."[162] And Sammler reads in the scrawl on the shop window evidence of the madness of the present age. "It was in Poland, in wartime, particularly during three or four months when Sammler was hidden in a mausoleum, that he first began to turn to the external world for curious ciphers and portents. . . . for many larger forms of meaning had been stamped out."[163] Now, as then, "many larger forms of meaning" seem to have been lost. Sammler feels that civilization is again threatened by total collapse: "you could smell decay."[164] He deplores the "modern individuality boom"[165] in which every individual insists on the gratification of his every desire: "A full bill of demand and complaint was therefore presented by each individual. Non-negotiable. Recognizing no scarcity of supply in any human department."[166] Sammler looks out of his window and sees "the moon not too remote from the

Spry sign" and wonders: "wasn't everything being done to make it intolerable to abide here, an unconscious collaboration of all souls spreading madness and poison?"[166] "Perhaps," Bellow writes later in the novel, "it was the madness of things that affected Sammler most deeply."[168] Watching the "human types" on Broadway "while bound for the bus" -- "the barbarian, redskin, or Fiji, the dandy, the buffalo hunter, the desperado, the queer, the sexual fantasist, the squaw; bluestocking, princess, poet, painter, prospector, troubadour, guerilla, Che Guevara, the new Thomas à Becket" -- affords Sammler another opportunity for a lengthy discussion of the madness that he feels characterizes the age.[169] On Broadway, Sammler reflects, "you might see the soul of America at grips with historical problems."[170]

In reflecting upon the corruption of the city, Bellow regards the city once again, as in Seize the Day, as a symbol of modern civilization. He sees "the suicidal impulses of civilization pushing strongly";[171] the "emancipated masses of New York, Amsterdam, London" were adopting "the sexual ways of the seraglio and of the Congo bush."[172] Thus it is not the city per se which Bellow is criticizing but rather contemporary life:

> New York makes one thing about the collapse of civilization, about Sodom and Gomorrah, the end of the world. The end wouldn't come as surprise here. Many people already bank on it. And I don't know whether humankind is really all that much worse. . . . I am not sure that this is the worst of all times. But it is in the air now that things are falling apart.[173]

Despite Bellow's pessimism about modern civilization, he

remains affirmative about the possibility for transcending the situation: "There is still such a thing as man. . . . There are still human qualities."[174] Modern life is mad and chaotic; "a human being, valuing himself for the right reasons, has and restores order, authority."[175] "There is a bond" between man and his fellow man that must be continually asserted.[176] Man, says Bellow time and time again in his novels, must realize himself within and in spite of the urban world in which he finds himself.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Marcus Klein, After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 47.

[2]Edward Schwartz, "Chronicles of the City" (a review of Seize the Day), New Republic (Dec. 3, 1956), p. 20.

[3]Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 65 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), p. 14.

Bellow's Herzog is not included in this study mainly because the significant action, as Tony Tanner rightly notes, takes place in Herzog's mind (Saul Bellow [New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1965]):

> the city-scapes are incomparably vivid, detailed, and pungent; essentially there so we can really feel the background against which the modern mind works, and has to work. Herzog feels part of the New York mess, and indeed there seems to be at times an intimate connexion between the city and his thoughts. Perhaps the teeming confusion of its chaos agitates his mind into a state of over-excited emulation -- the city triggering off the spasms of unrelated thoughts, just as the thoughts sometimes grind to an inconclusive halt in the congestion of the city streets. . . . For all that, the most important reality in the book is inside Herzog's head, in the ramifications of his ungovernable memory and the fretful reachings of his mind (pp. 92-93).
>
> His subject is the lone individual, passive and locked-up in himself, seeing things but not relating to them, talking to himself but not the world: whose reality is mainly composed of the words of his self-commining, whose action is the discontinuous movements of his own mind" (p. 108).

[4]Klein, op. cit., p. 47.

[5]Ibid., p. 49.

[6]Saul Bellow, Dangling Man (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1944), p. 10.

[7]Ibid., p. 92.

[8]Ibid., pp. 12, 151.

[9]Ibid., p. 15.

[10]Ibid., p. 14.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 81. "I pass one more day no different from the others" (p. 123).

[13]Ibid., p. 151.

[14]Ibid., p. 107.

[15]Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 39.

[16]Robert J. Nadon, "Urban Values in Recent American Fiction: A Study of the City in the Fiction of Saul Bellow, John Updike, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, and Norman Mailer," Unpubl. diss. (University of Minnesota, 1969), p. 407.

[17]Bellow, Dangling Man, pp. 24-25.

[18]Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), pp. 181-182.

[19]Bellow, Dangling Man, p. 153.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., p. 25.

[22]Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[23]Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1965), p. 24.

[24]Bellow, Dangling Man, p. 153.

[25]Ibid., pp. 172-173, italics mine.

[26]Saul Bellow, The Victim (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1947), p. 98.

[27]Ibid., p. 13.

[28]Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in Cities and Society, ed. Paul K. Hatt and Albert J. Reiss, Jr. (The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1957), pp. 636-637.

[29]Bellow, The Victim, p. 20.

[30]Ibid., p. 94.

[31]Ibid., p. 14.

[32]Ibid., p. 25.

[33]Ibid., p. 99.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid., p. 98.

[36]Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 211.

[37]Bellow, The Victim, p. 3.

[38]Ibid., p. 100.

[39]Ibid., p. 6.

[40]Ibid., p. 102.

[41]Ibid., p. 135.

[42]Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[43]Ibid., p.175.

[44]Ibid., p. 3.

[45]Ibid., p. 51.

[46]Ibid., see pp. 34, 78, 146, 229.

[47]Ibid., p. 179.

[48]Ibid., p. 22.

[49]Ibid., p. 139.

[50]Ibid., p. 179.

[51]Ibid., p. 3.

[52]Ibid., p. 6.

[53]Ibid., p. 12.

[54]Ibid., p. 22.

[55]Ibid., p. 25.

[56]Ibid., p. 36.

[57]Ibid., p. 186.

[58]Baumbaugh, op. cit., p. 39.

[59]Bellow, The Victim, pp. 183-184.

[60]Ibid., p. 36.

[61]Ibid.

[62]Ibid., p. 37.

[63]Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[64]Ibid., p. 51.

[65]Ibid., p. 176.

[66]Ibid., p. 177.

[67]Ibid., p. 179.

[68]Ibid., p. 148.

[69]Ibid., p. 57.

[70]Ibid., p. 158.

[71]Ibid., p. 242.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Ibid., p. 243.

[74]Bellow, Dangling Man, p. 172.

[75]M. Klein, op. cit., p. 52.

[76]Klein, op. cit.; Nadon, op. cit.; Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), pp. 135-138.

[77]Bellow, The Victim, p. 149.

[78]Ibid., pp. 36, 186.

[79]Ibid., pp. 3, 52.

[80]Ibid., p. 175.
Even the life-giving sun is associated with evil, as was shown earlier in the chapter. Nadon makes this point, too, (pp. 97-98) and notes that "Allbee makes the equation of evil with sun when he, in Job-like fashion, pleads his blamelessness for the evil that has befallen him: 'We do get it in the neck for nothing and suffer for nothing, and there's no denying that evil is as real as sunshine'" (quote from The Victim, p. 146).

[81]William Barrett, Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 62.

[82]Tanner, op. cit., p. 36.

[83]Saul Bellow, Seize the Day (New York: The Viking

Press, 1956), p. 47.

[84]Ibid., p. 72. "There were depths in Wilhelm not unsuspected by himself" (p. 56).

[85]Ibid., p. 33.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid., p. 44.

[88]Ibid., p. 8.

[89]Maxwell Geismar, "Saul Bellow: Novelist of the Intellectuals," in Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 19.

[90]Bellow, Seize the Day, p. 10.

[91]Ibid., p. 36.

[92]Ibid., p. 10.

[93]Ibid., p. 9.

[94]Ibid., p. 78.

[95]Ibid., p. 99.

[96]Ibid., p. 50.

[97]Ibid., pp. 70, 71.

[98]Ibid., p. 74.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Ibid., p. 114.

[101]Ibid., p. 115.

[102]Ibid., pp. 83-84.

[103]Ibid., p. 115.

[104]Irving Howe, Classics of Modern Fiction (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1968), p. 457.

[105]Geismar, op. cit., p. 19.

[106]Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March (New York: The Viking Press, 1953), p. 3.

[107]Tanner, op. cit., p. 12.

[108]Ibid., p. 11, quote from Richard Chase, Walt Whitman Reconsidered (1955), pp. 60, 61, 65, 66.

[109]Bellow, Seize the Day, p. 39.

[110]Bellow, Augie March, p. 3.

[111]Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 305.

[112]Tanner, op. cit., p. 47.

[113]Bellow, Augie March, p. 26.

[114]Ibid., p. 29.

[115]Ibid., p. 84.

[116]Keith M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), p. 82.

[117]Bellow, Augie March, p. 113. See also p. 288.

[118]Ibid., p. 125.

[119]Ibid., p. 28.

[120]Ibid., p. 113.

[121]Ibid., p. 159.

[122]Ibid., p. 503.

[123]Ibid., p. 504.

[124]Ibid., p. 436.

[125]Ibid., pp. 458-459.

[126]Ibid., p. 458.

[127]Tanner, op. cit., p. 54. See also Hassan, op. cit., p. 311.

[128]Irving Howe, "Odysseus, Flat on his Back," The New Republic (Sept. 19, 1964), p. 22.

[129]Opdahl, op. cit., p. 78. Nadon concurs, p. 103.

[130]Bellow, Augie March, pp. 35, 41.

[131]Ibid., p. 39.

[132]Ibid., p. 49.

[133]Ibid., p. 50.

[134]Ibid., p. 60.

[135]Ibid., p. 69.

[136]Ibid., p. 82.

[137]Ibid., p. 419: "On the way back from Mexico to Chicago I took a side trip . . . to see my brother George after many years." Also p. 420: "He hadn't had a visitor in three or four years."

[138]Ibid., p. 155.

[139]Ibid., p. 521.

[140]Ibid., p. 159.

[141]John J. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 76.

[142]Irving Howe, "Mr. Sammler's Planet," Harper's

(Feb. 1970), p. 106.

[143]Bellow, Augie March, p. 38.

[144]Ibid., pp. 40, 41.

[145]Ibid., p. 86.

[146]Ibid., p. 454.

[147]Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 7.

[148]Ibid., p. 105.

[149]Ibid., p. 9.

[150]Ibid., p. 104.

[151]Ibid., p. 181.

[152]Ibid., p. 279.

[153]Ibid., p. 74.

[154]Opdahl, op. cit., p. 82.

[155]Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 5.

[156]Ibid., p. 75.

[157]Ibid., p. 73.

[158]Ibid., p. 279.

[159]Ibid., p. 280.

[160]Ibid., p. 92.

[161]Ibid., p. 89.

[162]Ibid., p. 90.

[163]Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[164]Ibid., p. 33.

[165]Ibid., p. 233.

[166]Ibid., p. 34.

[167]Ibid., p. 135.

[168]Ibid., pp. 142-143.

[169]Ibid., p. 147.

[170]Ibid., p. 146.

[171]Ibid., p. 33.

[172]Ibid., p. 32.

[173]Ibid., p. 304.

[174]Ibid., p. 305.

[175]Ibid., p. 45.

[176]Ibid., p. 261.

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