

NARCISSUS AND THE VOYEUR

NARCISSUS AND THE VOYEUR: SOME ASPECTS  
OF EMPIRICAL DESCRIPTION

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that three literary works and two films, all of which deal with the problems of reporting an experience, incorporate various aspects of an empirical epistemology: specifically, that Herman Melville's Moby-Dick and Michaelangelo Antonioni's The Passenger make use of John Locke's An Essay Concerning Human Understanding; that James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men makes use of the early thought of I. A. Richards; and that William Burroughs' Naked Lunch and Jean-Luc Godard's Alphaville make use of both phases of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy. Each work deals with the fact that the faculty of observation or attention finds no reflection of itself in the world, and that narcissistic attachment to what it takes to be that reflection is at odds with the salutary project of criticizing empirically unsound preconceptions, and with compiling an uncommitted, finally voyeuristic, report. Chapter I summarizes those aspects of Locke's Essay and the thought of Richards and Wittgenstein which are relevant to the literary and filmic texts, and concludes with an analysis of The Passenger as an allegory of the Essay, and as bringing it to bear on the limitations of description. Chapter II sets up, in terms of The Scarlet Letter, the romantic pattern in the context of which voyeurism is opposed to the symbolic mode of redemption, and shows that Melville's texts; especially Moby-Dick, criticize that pattern from an empirical point of view. Chapter III demonstrates the incorporation of a Richardsian epistemology into Famous Men and other works by Agee. Chapter IV is an analysis of Naked Lunch and other works by Burroughs, as influenced by Wittgenstein. And Chapter V discusses Godard's use of Wittgenstein in Alphaville.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse soutient que trois ouvrages littéraires et deux films, dont tous se concernent des difficultés de rapporter une expérience, incorporent des aspects diverses d'une épistémologie empirique: précisément, que Moby-Dick de Herman Melville et The Passenger de Michaelangelo Antonioni utilisent An Essay Concerning Human Understanding de John Locke; que Let Us Now Praise Famous Men de James Agee utilise la toute première pensées de I.A. Richards; et que Naked Lunch de William Burroughs et Alphaville de Jean-Luc Godard utilisent les deux phases de la philosophie de Ludwig Wittgenstein. Chaque ouvrage traite le fait que la faculté d'observation ou d'attention ne trouve pas de reflet de soi-même dans ce monde, et que l'attachement narcissiste à ce qu'elle regarde comme ce reflet est en désaccord avec le projet salulaire de critiquer des opinions préconçues qui sont défectueuses du point de vue empirique, et aussi avec la rédaction d'un rapport non engagé, et enfin, voyeuriste. Le premier chapitre résume ces aspects de l'Essay de Locke et de la pensée de Richards et de Wittgenstein qui sont pertinents aux textes littéraires et filmiques, et termine avec un analyse du Passenger comme une allégorie de l'Essay, qu'il utilise pour démontrer les limitations de la description. Le chapitre II schématise, dans les termes du Scarlet Letter, le modèle romantique dans le contexte duquel le voyeurisme s'oppose à la mode symbolique de la rédemption, et montre que les textes de Melville, surtout Moby-Dick, critiquent ce modèle d'un point du vue empirique. Le chapitre III démontre l'incorporation d'une épistémologie richardsienne dans Famous Men et autres ouvrages d'Agee. Le chapitre IV analyse Naked Lunch et autres ouvrages de Burroughs en termes de l'influence de Wittgenstein. Et le chapitre V discute comment Godard emploie la philosophie de Wittgenstein dans Alphaville.



## FOREWORD

To 'describe' is both to 'write down' and to 'trace, represent, picture, divide into parts': so that the word 'description' is appropriate both to prose and to film. Moby-Dick, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Naked Lunch, Alphaville and The Passenger are descriptive works, each of which utilizes some form of 'empirical' philosophy-- philosophy, that is, which limits itself to the description of experience. With the exception of R. G. Peterson's "A Picture Is a Fact: Wittgenstein and The Naked Lunch," there have been no analyses of these works as exploring the implications of an empirical stance.

The three literary texts have been studied in various contexts. Moby-Dick has most frequently been regarded, as in Charles Feidelson's Symbolism and American Literature (University of Chicago Press, 1970), as an example of Romantic American symbolism. Of the two recent epistemological readings, Paul Brodtkorb's Ishmael's White Whale (Yale University Press, 1965) is phenomenological, arguing that Melville opts for Kant's position that mind actively constitutes fact (p. 11); and while Edgar Dryden's Melville's Thematics of Form (Baltimore, 1968) emphasizes the self-reflexivity of Moby-Dick, it argues that Ishmael is a "novelist," the author of his own destiny, who escapes from the world of "fact" into that of "fiction" to achieve "a victory of art over life" (pp. 21-112): both books treat Moby-Dick as a novel. Michael J. Hoffman's "The Anti-Transcendentalism of Moby-Dick" (Georgia Review, XXIII, 1, Spring 1968), which sees Ahab's mania as a parody of Emersonian individualism, more closely approximates the approach of this dissertation, though it makes no mention of empiricism. Epistemological readings of Famous Men have

emphasized its realism. Alfred T. Barson's A Way of Seeing (University of Massachusetts Press, 1972) describes I. A. Richards' influence on Agee as Romantic, specifically Wordsworthian, (pp. 33-34) and analyzes Famous Men as incorporating, via the Joycean model of the epiphany, a Thomistic realism. (pp. 7, 74-76, 88). William Stott's Documentary Expression and Thirties America (Oxford University Press, 1973) treats Famous Men as a documentary work, a classification which Agee specifically rejects. Naked Lunch has commonly been regarded as typical of the Beat culture of the fifties (see, for example, Ronald Weston's "William Burroughs: High Priest of Hipsterism"): Burroughs himself has denied any association either with the "literary style" or with the "outlook" and "objectives" of his friends in the Beat movement. (Evergreen Review, XIII, June 1967, p. 87) Critical treatments of the book have dealt almost exclusively with whether or not its literary merit justifies its obscenity; and the above-mentioned Peterson article, by showing how it is consistent with the Tractatus, defends Naked Lunch against charges of incoherence and lack of view-point. Peterson is concerned with the confessional form and comparisons with De Quincey, and uses the term 'symbol' in a literary rather than a Wittgensteinian sense, so that "Junk is...at last, [a] symbol of life itself"; focusing on the horrifying aspect of the ego-centricity portrayed in Naked Lunch, Peterson emphasizes its satiric rather than its reportive or descriptive elements, and points up the despair and "meaninglessness" he finds in the book more centrally than does this dissertation. While some notice has been taken of Godard's attention to language, there have been no such treatments of Alphaville, or of Godard's relation to Wittgenstein; Toby Mussman has pointed out that Godard and Burroughs deal similarly with notions of time and the association of ideas. ("Duality, Repetition, Chance, the Unknown, Infinity," Jean-Luc Godard, pp. 306-08) Nothing of an

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epistemological nature has been written on The Passenger.

In this dissertation, I am placing each of the five works<sup>1</sup> in a specific context by arguing that there exists an empirical point of view that dominates Melville's prose, the shadings of Agee's arguments about description and Burroughs' pronouncements on the nature of reality, as well as the ideas of Agee, Godard and Antonioni on the epistemological status of the film image. These five otherwise disparate texts have in common that they are both reports and self-reflexive comments on the nature of reporting: the dissertation offers no historical argument to otherwise tie them together, or to their respective philosophical informants, although it does cite evidence of each author's awareness of empirical thought, and of Agee's and Burroughs' awareness of Moby-Dick. A great deal of cross-referencing and quotation of textual detail has been carried out in order to demonstrate the manner in which those texts do fit together, and this has seldom resulted in a loose or discursive style of exposition. The problem has been, not only to document the argument, but to clarify its thorough relevance to a body of textual material. The reader is forewarned that the plethora of reference occasionally makes for a rather convoluted syntax; moreover, the larger syntax of each chapter must bear the weight of a tendency to show rather than to tell. The mode of explicating the empirical position in Chapter I, for example, is to investigate in some detail the epistemological arguments of Locke, Richards and Wittgenstein; and in Chapter II, the analysis of The Scarlet Letter has the force of a summary statement on literary symbols and voyeurism by virtue of its adequacy as exposition. This method was felt to be the most efficient in a dissertation consisting of close readings. Not only has it seemed preferable to offer detailed accounts of the relevance of specific philosophers to the literary and filmic texts, rather than, for example, a more general summary of the empirical stance, but nothing else has seemed as interesting.

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II

And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.

Herman Melville, Moby-Dick

# CHAPTER I. Three Philosophers: Let Us Now Appraise Famous Men

This dissertation argues that three literary works and two films, all of which deal with the problems of reporting an experience, incorporate various aspects of an empirical epistemology; specifically, that Herman Melville's Moby-Dick (1851) and Michaelangelo Antonioni's The Passenger (1972) make use of John Locke's An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690); that James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (1941) makes use of the early thought of I. A. Richards; and that William Burroughs' Naked Lunch (1959) and Jean-Luc Godard's Alphaville (1965) make use of both phases of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy. Evidence for this use is cited from the relevant comments, where available, of each author, and from explicit intra-textual references; it consists chiefly in showing the extent to which epistemological readings make sense of the texts in question and, more briefly, of related texts by each author. This preliminary chapter comprises interpretive summaries of the epistemologies of Locke, Richards and Wittgenstein, and concludes with a close reading of The Passenger; each of the succeeding four chapters analyzes one of the remaining works as exploring the implications of its respective philosophical informant. While the interpretations in the present chapter are supported by the philosophical texts from which they are derived, it must be emphasized at the outset that they do not pretend to be definitive, but are formulated with a mind to their usefulness in specific explication.

To borrow Wittgenstein's concept, each of the texts in question might be regarded as a game played according to the rules of empiricism, a mode of thought which attempts to reduce to that beyond which all else is theory. As such, it is employed as a critique of metaphysics-- both of the Platonic, Cartesian and Kantian tradition of innate forms, ideas

or categories; and of the realism of Aristotle, Aquinas, the Scottish Common-Sense philosophers, Kant and the American pragmatists, the belief in the existence of 'universals,' specifically denied by Locke,<sup>1</sup> which have some unambiguous connection with a real, objective, knowable, 'outer' world. In Coleridge on Imagination (1934), Richards sets up materialism and idealism as "complementary" procedures of thought meeting in a "self-critical process," and agrees, though he treats each as a form of 'metaphysics, to write "as a Materialist trying to interpret before you the utterances of an extreme Idealist."<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Locke, Richards and Wittgenstein all incorporate some form of realism into their thinking: the formulation employed by each is that we cannot know 'what' the real world of objects is, but we can know 'that' it is, 'how' it behaves. And both Richards and Wittgenstein pick up Locke's distinction between "real" and "verbal" truth, which places the propositions which encode understanding in a digital, true-false relation to that reality; even for the later Wittgenstein, who regards the proposition as one among many language-games, "The agreement, the harmony, of thought and reality consists in this: if I say falsely that something is red, then, for all that, it isn't red."<sup>3</sup> The question, in Godard's terms, is whether words or things come first; the recognition that it is unanswerable is the basis of the empiricist's stance.

According to Bertrand Russell, "almost all philosophers" from Plato to Descartes and Leibnitz "had thought that much of our most valuable knowledge is not derived from experience. Locke's thorough-going empiricism was therefore a bold innovation."<sup>4</sup> Locke's definition of knowledge as "nothing but the perception of the connexion of and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas," (Essay IV, 1, 1) limits



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knowledge to the arrangements of the particulars of sense experience: his modern successors emphasize language as the mode of that arrangement, that ability or skill, according to Wittgenstein, (PI, pp. 208-09) which makes having experience possible. Moreover, while it has been suggested that Locke's reduction to the simples of sensation is a quest for certainty in a form alternative to Cartesian rationalism,<sup>5</sup> it is, for the purpose of this discussion, better understood as a mode of criticizing vague and invalid general ideas which mislead the understanding into unfounded habits of thought: Locke insists upon a tentative and limited point of view, rejects the notion of an invisible primary order manifested in a universe of analogies. Since analogy is invalid, the understanding, or subjective attention which takes cognizance of ideas, is, Locke says, "like an eye which whilst it makes us see and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself" (Essay, "Introduction" 1); Wittgenstein, who uses the same comparison-- "nothing in the visual field allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye"--describes the perceiving subject as that which alone could not be mentioned in a book called "The World as I found it."<sup>6</sup> The understanding, that is, finds no reflection of itself in the world; so that it is narcissistic when, like that of Melville's Ahab, it insists upon finding that reflection, and voyeuristic when, like Ishmael's, it confronts an ineluctably impenetrable, unidentifiable surface. For the empiricist, as for Ishmael, habits of language and configuration can neither be transcended nor identified with, are the vain but necessary instruments of understanding; attention is left without a myth to guarantee the validity or continuity of its presence, a voyeuristic tourist in its own reality, and is handled as such in the literature and film to be discussed. Locke defines thought as "the condition of being awake"

(Essay II, 1, 11); all of these works deal with that irreducibly ambiguous fact, and realise the corresponding problems of intention, motive and free will: for neither has the onlooker chosen to observe, has he any excuse for his presence, nor can he guess-- nor, finally, is it relevant-- whether the statements and gestures of others are inhabited by an intention in any way commensurate with its consequences. The voyeur is without myths or ultimate contexts to explain either what he sees or, which is the same, his presence before it.

The response to this mythless condition, in each of the five texts, is to resort to self-reflexive modes of description or presentation. Agee's "effort," as he calls it, "to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording, communication, analysis, and defense,"<sup>7</sup> is in many ways stylistically apposite to Ishmael's attempts at description, his going to sea "to find out by experience what whaling is,...to see the world,"<sup>8</sup> and shares epistemological concerns with Naked Lunch, wherein William

Burroughs asserts: "There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing....I am a recording instrument....I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity.'...Insofar as I succeed in recording direct areas of psychic process I may have limited function....I am not an entertainer...."<sup>9</sup>

And Agee has in common with Jean-Luc Godard, who has sought to adapt the Hollywood vocabulary of stories, plots and continuities to the problem of recording actuality, strategies and techniques of formulation which are based on the empirical position that knowledge can only proceed from what is directly observed. In Godard's Pierrot le fou (1965), Marianne

paraphrases Pierrot's speech: "He spoke to them of man, of the seasons, of unexpected encounters, but he warned them never to ask what came first: words or things, or what would happen to us afterwards...." In an article in Cahiers du Cinéma Godard indicates that "what was true for Marianne and Pierrot, not asking what came first, was not true for me-- I was actually asking myself that very question; in other words, the very moment that I was certain that I had filmed life it eluded me for that very reason."<sup>10</sup>

The pursuit of "life," or quest for the secret source of things, and the forms into which that pursuit is forced by its frustration, is dramatized by Ahab's hunt for the white sperm whale, and for "the little lower layer" that it symbolizes for him. "All visible objects," he says, "are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event-- in the living act, the undoubted deed-- there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall shoved near to me." (MD, p. 144) Every event is the product of a conscious, reasoning intention. Ishmael joins the search for that lower layer, but he never finds it. In him we encounter an unrelieved struggle with the medium of language: he opens Moby-Dick with an etymology of the word "whale" and a lengthy inventory of quotations on the subject (among its other forms, Moby-Dick is a work of scholarship) and provides chapters listing pictorial and sculptural renderings of the sperm whale, anecdotes and descriptive accounts, "citations of items practically or reliably known to me as a whaleman," (p. 175) and detailed computations based on the measurement of an extant skeleton, declaring himself "omnisciently

exhaustive in the enterprise; not overlooking the minutest germs of his blood, and spinning him out to the uttermost coil of his bowels," (p. 378) all to the rhythm of his reiterated despair of ever, rendering the actual whale, of making him live before us: "I promise nothing complete; because any human thing supposed to be complete must for that very reason infallibly be faulty." (p. 118) Unlike Ahab, whose preoccupation is completion, Ishmael has no foreknowledge of the whale, does not know what it ultimately means or essentially is, and so is forced to an account of the ambiguous and unconfigured details of his experience; a slain sperm whale, moored to the ship and methodically cut into, dismantled, anatomized and reduced to so many tuns of clear oil reveals not a symbolic depth but an ineluctable surface: "Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin-deep; I know him not and never will." (p. 318) The forms of Moby-Dick-- epic, romance, tragedy-- break down into episodes, accounts and words-- harpoons that miss the mark of actual content; like the Pequod, a floating symbol of civilization, those forms are scuttled by the reality they are constructed to subdue. Despairing of content Ishmael counts and recounts the items of his experience-- offers that form into which experience has shaped him and which is his coming to terms with it.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men provides an illuminating bridge between the epistemological problems of this type of prose description and those of film. By the time he wrote the work Agee was an experienced poet, fiction-writer and journalist, and according to Dwight Macdonald contemplated becoming a film-director as early as 1929<sup>11</sup>; his later screenplays, his essays on the photography of Walker Evans and Helen Levitt and his distinguished body of film criticism display that regard for photography which he recorded in Famous Men: "One reason I so deeply care for

the camera is just this. So far as it goes (which is, in its own realm, as absolute anyhow as the traveling distance of words or sound), and handled cleanly and literally in its own terms, as an ice-cold, some ways limited, some ways more capable, eye, it is, like the phonograph record and like scientific instruments and unlike any other leverage of art, incapable of recording anything but absolute, dry truth." (p. 234) In Godard's Le Petit Soldat (1960), Bruno similarly refers to the anatomizing function of the camera when he says, "Photography is truth...and the cinema is the truth twenty-four times a second;" and Godard himself has quoted Cocteau to the effect that the moving camera "films death at work." The person one films is growing older and will die. We film, therefore, a moment when death is working."<sup>12</sup> It is this analytic precision at which Agee's descriptive effort is aimed; like Ishmael, Agee self-reflexively offers himself in the process of giving form to his experience:

I would do just as badly to simplify or eliminate myself from this picture as to simplify or invent character, places or atmospheres. A chain of truths did actually weave itself and run through: it is their texture that I want to represent, not betray, nor pretty up into art. The one deeply exciting thing to me about Gudgeon is that he is actual, he is living, at this instant. He is not some artist's or journalist's or propagandist's invention: he is a human being: and to what degree I am able it is my business to reproduce him as the human being he is; not just to amalgamate him into some invented, literary imitation of a human being. (p. 240)

The "truth" of which he speaks, that is, is a subjective, empirical, merely "relative" truth: "Name me one truth within human range that is not relative and I will feel a shade more apologetic of that." (p. 239) No matter how exhaustive his manipulation of words in the service of accurate representation, he is, like Ishmael and Godard, "unable to

render life. As with Burroughs, Agee's limited function is the recording of direct areas of psychic process, and he is unable to transcend the units-- words and images-- of that process, to strike through the medium of description into an objective reality: he can "get at a certain form of the truth" about George Gudger "only if I am as faithful as possible to Gudger as I know him, to Gudger as, in his actual flesh and life (but there again always in my mind's and memory's eye) he is." (p. 239) That such truth remains ambiguous and unstable is due to the impossibility of its being anchored in any stable context or conception of an objective world beyond its forms. In a passage strikingly similar to that cited above from Naked Lunch, Agee-- who also denies "the obligations of the artist or entertainer" (p. 111)-- remarks on his restriction to the data of the senses:

I will be trying here to write nothing whatever which did not in physical actuality or in the mind happen or appear; and my most serious effort will be, not to use these 'materials' for art, far less for journalism, but to give them as they were and as in my memory and regard they are. If there is anything of value and interest in this work it will have to hang entirely on that fact. Though I may frequently try to make use of art devices and may, at other times, being at least in part an 'artist,' be incapable of avoiding their use, I am in this piece of work illimitably more interested in life than in art. (p. 242)

The aim at an absolute and comprehensive overview is given up in favour of a detailed recounting of the minutiae of experience: unable to identify 'what' these minutiae are, Agee's description addresses itself to 'how' they are known or represented-- to his reader as well as to himself.

Ishmael takes the opportunity of the poised whale's heads to allegorize his objections to philosophical ponderings: "So when on one

side you hoist in Locke's head, you go over that way; but now on the other side, hoist in Kant's and you come back again; but in very poor plight....Oh, ye foolish! throw all these thunderheads overboard, and then you will float light and right." (MD, p. 277) But just as Godard, despite Pierrot's summary dealing with it, acknowledges a preoccupation with the problem, so it remains central for Melville, despite Ishmael's dispatch (which is to be considered in the light of his propensity for self-negation, as discussed in the next chapter), from Typee to Billy Budd. The empirical method which Agee explores, anguishes over, attempts to transcend and finally accepts in Famous Men, and which Burroughs wields with sardonic delight in Naked Lunch, can be linked on the one hand to the model of Moby Dick, which Agee regarded as, "outside of Huckleberry Finn, the most beautiful piece of writing I know in American writing,"<sup>13</sup> and to which Burroughs alludes repeatedly, and on the other to their respective enthusiasm for the ideas of Richards and Wittgenstein, which share much with those of Locke.

Russell regards Locke as "the founder of empiricism, which is the doctrine that all our knowledge (with the possible exception of logic and mathematics) is derived from experience." (HWP, p. 589) For Locke the mind is a "white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas," deriving "all the materials of reason and knowledge" solely from "EXPERIENCE," whether of "external sensible objects" or of "the internal operations of our minds." These latter are ideas of the conscious activities of "perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing," supplied to the understanding by means of "internal sense" or "REFLECTION": reflection is defined as "that notice which the mind takes of its own operations, and the manner of them, by reason whereof there come to be

ideas of those operations in the understanding." (Essay II, 1, 2, 4)

This position of a non-transcendent critical faculty is central. "Having ideas, and perceptions," says Locke, are "the same thing;" "Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man's own mind;" "the mind" is spoken of as the presence of ideas in consciousness (aided by "memory," "the storehouse of ideas" or, less metaphorically, the "ability to revive them again"), whereas "the understanding" is what is thereby furnished "with ideas of its own operations," so that "mind" and "understanding" appear to be different degrees of abstraction. (II, 1, 9, 19, 4; x, 2)

I. A. Richards objects to Locke's inconsistency on this point: it thus appears, he says, not that the mind is present to the understanding, but "that only what the mind DOES, its operations are so present. And these operations seem to be present as ideas of reflection. But his view on this is not entirely clear. Only ideas are present to the mind. Therefore its operations, if present to it, must be ideas. But we would expect these ideas to be <sup>of</sup> the operations rather than to be them."<sup>14</sup>

These limitations on the explanation of cognition, Locke's avowed refusal to invoke a metaphysical context, (Essay, "Introduction" 2) define the boundaries within which Melville and Agee operate, as is evinced by the latter's remarks on the inexplicable "difference between a conjunction of time, place and unconscious consciousness and a conjunction of time, place and conscious consciousness." (LUNPFM, p. 226) Also left ambiguous by Locke is the fact that "bodies produce ideas in us...by impulse"-- concerning which, along with the idea of "the power of exciting motion by thought," if "we inquire how this is done, we are equally in the dark"-- "some motion" being "thence continued by our nerves and animal spirits... to the brain or the seat of sensation, there to produce in our minds the



particular ideas we have of them." And since the mind "stirs not one jot" beyond its ideas, (II, xxiii, 28, 29; viii, 12) understanding is "merely passive;" the "mind," however can actively combine "several simple ideas into one compound one," can compare ideas and thereby obtain "all its ideas of relations," and can abstract ideas from those which "accompany them in their real existence" to form "general ideas." But since the mind has no "immediate" object but ideas, since knowledge consists "alone" in the perception of their agreement or disagreement, the understanding is powerless to transcend the conditions of mediation. (II, i, 25; xii, 1; IV, i, 1)

Knowledge can either be "actual...which is the present view the mind has" of ideas as they are related in the world, or "habitual," of memory: the latter is either "intuitive" knowledge, whereby the mind "actually perceives the relation" between remembered ideas "immediately by themselves"-- such knowledge "forces itself immediately to be perceived" and is the source of "the certainty and evidence of all our knowledge"-- and thus knows that black is not white, two plus one equal to three; or demonstrative knowledge, "that which we call reasoning," accomplished by "proofs," "the intervention of other ideas." But since its usefulness lies in retention of "the memory of the conviction, without the proofs," demonstrative knowledge, however it proceeds through a series of intuitions, however "clear; yet it is often with a great abatement of that evident lustre and full assurance" that belongs to intuition, and so is often the vehicle of "falsehood." (IV, i, 8, 9; ii, 1, 2, 6)

But in order to deal with our being left, as Richards says, "still shut up within the walls of our ideas," (HRP, p. 52) Locke invokes common sense (a regard for which Russell points to as one of his important

legacies-- HWP, p. 586) in the name of which to establish a third kind of knowledge, that of a substantial world of "corpuscles" or "particles of matter whereof each is too subtle to be perceived," which are the motive causes underlying our ideas: while he avoids pronouncing on such issues as the hypothesized globular nature of light particles or on the "texture" of reflective material, he "cannot...conceive how bodies without can any ways affect our senses" but by "contact," as in taste and touch, or by "impulse," as in sight, sound and odour; such knowledge, "going beyond bare probability, and yet not reaching perfectly to either of the foregoing degrees of certainty, passes under the name of knowledge." The common sense suspicion of substance, our ability to distinguish between dream and reality, is supported by the argument that our certainty of the pleasure or pain consequent to "the application of certain objects to us...is as great as our happiness or misery, beyond which we have no concernment to know or to be." (IV, ii, 11, 12, 14) The observable effects that follow upon the endangering of well-being involve an unquestionable acknowledgement of the physical state of one's affairs, and thus constitute the imperfect solution (based, that is, on the common-sense presupposition of causality) to Locke's problem, which, according to Russell, "has troubled empiricism down to the present day." (HWP, p. 591) Ishmael, too, regards the survival imperative as the only irrefutable source of knowledge concerning the contingencies upon individual identity: when the sailor who watches for whales from the mast-head is a "sunken-eyed young Platonist," he is apt to be

lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie...by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful

thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Wickliff's sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over.

There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Cartesian vortices you hover,

but with no saving dualism: "Heed it well, ye Pantheists!" (MD, p. 140)

There are for Locke four "sorts" of knowledge, that of identity or diversity, of relation, of co-existence or necessary connection, and of real existence: the first three are "truly nothing but relations;" the fourth includes our ideas of self, God and other things. (IV, i, 3, 7) Knowledge of self is intuitive, a form of Cartesian cogito ("If I doubt of all other things, that very doubt makes me perceive my own existence") which is nevertheless confined to empirical data, to our "Experience" of acts of "sensation, reasoning and thinking" which depend--again, as such pains as of hunger must convince us--on our existence as material beings. Perception is not the "essence" of the soul, whatever that may be, "but one of its operations"; so that while it is "past controversy, that we have in us something that thinks" we do not know whether it is material or transcendent: "We have the ideas of matter and thinking, but possibly shall never be able to know whether any mere material being thinks or no," and so "must content ourselves with faith and probability." (IV, ix, 3; II, i, 10; IV, iii, 6) (Melville scored, in his copy of Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea, a comment on "the truth of Locke's principle, that what thinks may also be material."<sup>15</sup>) Whereas the "identity of the

same man," as of an animal, consists "in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly 'fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized body," and is that to which "the word I is applied," personal identity, or "Selfe," is that "consciousness" which "always accompanies thinking," distinguishes the self "from all other thinking things" and is limited by memory: "as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person." 'Person' is a purely utilitarian "forensic term, appropriating actions and their merit; and so belongs only to intelligent agents, capable of a law, and happiness, and misery." Inclusiveness of attention however is directed by the concern "that that self which is conscious should be happy," which is "the unavoidable concomitant of consciousness," so that "whatever past actions it cannot reconcile or appropriate to that present self by consciousness; it can be no more concerned in than if they had never been done." (II, xvii, 7, 19, 11, 26) This pre-Freudian model of a dynamic of repression which counteracts, by exclusion, threats to the sovereignty of the albeit arbitrarily formulated self over circumstances, informs Ishmael's speculation on his captain's madness: "'I'd strike the sun if it insulted me,'" swears Ahab; and when he bursts from his stateroom in mid-nightmare he exhibits the "intensity" of the conflict between the subjected but unamenable substance of the man and the maniacal self-formulation which is his mission:

For, at such times, crazy Ahab, the scheming, unappeasedly steadfast hunter of the white whale; this Ahab that had gone to his hammock, was not the agent that so caused him to burst from it in horror again. The latter was the eternal, living principle of soul in him; and in sleep, being for the time dissociated from the characterizing mind, which at other times employed it for its outer

vehicle or agent, it spontaneously sought escape from the scorching contiguity of the frantic thing, of which, for the time, it was no longer an integral. But as the mind does not exist unless leagued with the soul, therefore it must have been that, in Ahab's case, yielding up all his thoughts and fancies to his one supreme purpose; that purpose, by its own sheer inveteracy of will, forced itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own. (MD, pp. 174-75)

Words, and thus identity, are not arbitrary for Ahab; unlike Ishmael he "did not name himself," bears a name that might "somehow prove prophetic," and possesses a dualistic sense of the correspondence between mind and matter: "'O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterances are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind.'" (MD, pp. 77, 264) Such a knowledge of mental and physical substance transcends the empirical point of view delimited by Locke. In his outrage at fate, his inability to accept his vulnerable physical condition and consequent insistence upon returning the blow and correcting the balance, he evinces a rigidity unknown to Ishmael, who must relinquish his preconceptions, which are after all only habits of thought, and finally himself-- submit that self to the random and fragmenting details of experience and recognize the formulation of that experience as arbitrary, incapable of an 'ultimate' or redemptive significance. For such characters as Ahab, symmetry is primary; he has lost his and gone mad, and his whalebone leg suggests the means of its restoration.

Knowledge of the real existence of God, the second type of such knowledge for Locke, is demonstrative, put together from our intuitions that we exist, that "nonentity cannot of itself produce any real being" and that "incogitative" matter cannot of itself produce motion or impart cogitation to other beings. The argument rests on causality, an idea

which can be present to us without our knowing the "manner" of the operation of cause and effect, and the notion of a Prime Mover, and does not depart from that of Hobbes, who likewise works back to the "first cause of all causes," allowing that we "may know that God is, though not what he is"<sup>16</sup>: this is as far as Locke goes. He finds no signs of a transcendent order in nature, and cites the example of changelings to show that not even the human form "is the sign of a rational soul within, that is immortal" (IV, viii, 16); moreover not even an immediate divine revelation could "exceed, if equal, the certainty of our intuitive knowledge," or contradict it. (IV, xviii, 5) The existence of God alone "can certainly be known further than our senses inform us" (IV, xi, 13); nor is this knowledge brought in to 'explain' the observable, thereby "to make our comprehension infinite:" manual movement, e.g., is caused by "will,-- a thought of my mind; my thought only changing, the right hand rests and the left hand moves....explain this and make it intelligible, and then the next step will be to understand creation." (IV, x, 19) Locke similarly disclaims any theory of sense perception, "the certainty of our senses, and the ideas we receive by them" being unqualified by our lack of knowledge of "the manner wherein they are produced"; so that knowledge of the real existence of things, the least certain of knowledges, is gained by observing "the actual receiving of ideas from without"-- rests, that is, on the four propositions that, since we don't see colours in the dark or smell roses in winter, sense organs do not themselves produce ideas; that sense perception is passive, since the mind cannot avoid the idea of brightness if the eyes are turned toward the sun at noon; that the senses support each other's "report" of things; and, again, that pain can accompany present as opposed to remembered ideas; for the

"faculties" are suited not to "comprehensive knowledge" but to "the preservation of us in whom they are." (IV, xi, 2-8)

This handling of physical and spiritual substance-- with which Berkeley and Hume respectively did away-- in which the three "real existences" are based, has, according to Russell, "dominated practical physics until the rise of quantum theory in our own day." (HWP, p. 585) The "substratum" which supports the "accidents" or "qualities...capable of producing simple ideas in us" is posited because Locke cannot imagine "how these simple ideas can subsist by themselves," though he compares it to the explanation of the Indian philosopher who claimed "that the world was supported on the back of a great elephant" on the back of a giant tortoise, etc., until he ran out of supports, for 'substance' means, "in plain English, standing under or upholding." A material substance-- as of man, horse, gold-- cannot be classified, but only defined semiologically, by listing its particular "qualities;" ideas of bodily and spiritual substance break down respectively into ideas of "the cohesion of solid, and consequently separable, parts, and a power of communicating motion by impulse" and those of "thinking, and will, or a power of putting body into motion by thought, and, which is consequent to it, liberty." However, since spirits, "viz. God," are active and matter passive, it must not be supposed that the power of matter to impel ideas into our minds is active, any more than is the power of a flame to melt wax (II, xxiii, 1-5, 17-18, 28; xxi, 2); a thing 'causes' in that, to use A. C. Fraser's word, it "occasions" an idea. (IV, xi, 2, n.2) There are "real, original primary qualities" which exist "in the things themselves, whether they are perceived or not," including "bulk, figure, number, situation and motion or rest;" secondary qualities produce ideas

of "colours, sounds, smells, tastes, etc."; and if the power of fire to produce the idea of brightness is secondary, that to melt wax is tertiary. (II, viii, 23) But it is impossible to know which qualities "have a necessary union or inconsistency one with another" in the ideas of objects. Perception occurs by the operation on our senses of the "insensible particles" of matter-- each of which has all the primary qualities of the substances of which it is a corpuscle, as can be proven by division of any portion of substance to the point of imperceptibility-- resulting in simple ideas which are combined into complex ones which must correspond to the combinations of qualities as they co-exist in nature, and producing thereby "not perhaps very exact copies." (IV, iii, 11-13, 25; II, viii, 9, 13; IV, iv, 12) There is no guarantee that ideas in the mind resemble what is in nature, nothing to substantiate Ahab's notion of "linked analogies." Resemblances exist, says Locke, between "ideas of primary qualities" and "their patterns" as they exist in bodies, but "There is nothing like our ideas" of colour, sound, taste or touch "within the bodies themselves." (II, viii, 15)

It should be noted that Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities originates with Democritus,<sup>17</sup> and in Aristotle is based on the distinction between touch, which "acts as a direct contact with objects," and other sensations, produced "through a medium" of other materials; since for Aristotle "tangible qualities" are the only ones which "in excess, are fatal to the living animal," touch alone is "indispensable" to its existence, the basis of its definition as an animal, since other senses belong only to certain species and are "the means, not to its being, but to its well-being."<sup>18</sup> But Locke distinguishes qualities which are perceived by "more than one sense" (touch and sight),



and emphasizes the mediation of even our knowledge of the mechanisms of survival, by ideas. (V, ii, 1) Thus it is possible, as of Locke's Essay, to hypothesize a word beyond our ideas of secondary qualities, visible perhaps, but colourless.

In the June 24, 1712 edition of The Spectator, for instance, Joseph Addison, referring his reader to "Mr. Locke's Essay," makes the following remarkable speculation:

Things would make but a poor appearance to the eye, if we saw them only in their proper figures and motions: and what reason can we assign for their exciting in us many of those ideas which are different from anything that exists in the objects themselves, (for such are light and colours) were it not to add supernumerary ornaments to the universe, and make it more agreeable to the imagination? We are everywhere entertained with pleasing shows and apparitions, we discover imaginary glories in the heavens, and in the earth, and see some of this visionary beauty poured out upon the whole Creation; but what a rough unsightly sketch of Nature should we be entertained with, did all her colouring disappear, and the several distinctions of light and shade vanish? In short, our souls are at present delightfully lost and bewildered in a pleasing delusion, and we walk about like the enchanted hero of a romance, who sees beautiful castles, woods and meadows; and at the same time hears the warbling of birds, and the purling of streams; but upon the finishing of some secret spell, the fantastic scene breaks up, and the disconsolate knight finds himself on a barren heath, or in a solitary desert. It is not improbable that something like this may be the state of the soul after its first separation, in respect of the images it will receive from matter; though indeed the ideas of colours are so pleasing and beautiful in the imagination, that it is possible the soul will not be deprived of them, but perhaps find them excited by some other occasional cause, as they are at present by the different impressions of the subtle matter on the organ of sight.<sup>19</sup>

This passage anticipates the setting of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," though it suggests that the here-and-now is the richer state and prepares for a rupture of context, whereas the winter world devoid of floral colours or the songs of birds, in which Keats's disenchanting knight

"palely" loiters, symbolizes the fallen state of life on earth, and thus involves a context as inevitable as the seasonal round.

Ishmael's mode of doubt and vision of such possibilities is more akin to Addison's, and is similarly derived from Locke. He devotes a chapter to the analysis of "what at times" Moby Dick "was to me" in terms of his colour, or lack of it, opening with the observation that "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me," thereby wittily suggesting the submissiveness, to being "appalled" by whiteness, that distinguishes his stance from the rigid defiance of Ahab. Ishmael despairs as usual of putting his "mystical and well nigh ineffable" horror into "a comprehensible form," but tells us, "and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be nought." He refers to "the many natural objects" in which "whiteness refinably enhances beauty," lists the instances of its being the sign of authority, gladness, honour, purity and divinity, and notes that these "accumulated associations" seem incompatible with the "elusive something" which strikes "panic to the soul." (MD, pp. 163-64) In A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), Edmund Burke distinguishes between the "passions...which are conversant about the preservation of the individual," which depend upon ideas of "pain and danger" and "are the most powerful of all passions," and those which appertain to "society," both sexual and more general, which are the respective causes of sublime and beautiful emotions. He makes exhaustive lists of ideas productive of each (Kant produced a similar but abbreviated work in 1764, based on the notion that the sublime-- tall oaks, night, understanding, men-- "moves" while the beautiful-- flowers, day, wit, women-- "charms"<sup>20</sup>), noting for instance that the conjunction

of "two ideas as opposite as can be imagined reconciled in the extremes of both" (as in the combination of bright sunlight and the black spots it leaves before our eyes) is productive of the sublime.<sup>21</sup> Ishmael proffers the argument, based like Burke's Enquiry on the theory of the association of ideas developed by Locke and his followers, that while whiteness, "divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object in itself," produces a surpassing terror, the combination of opposite ideas is a special case:

With reference to the Polar bear, it may possibly be urged by him who would fain go still deeper into this matter, that it is not the whiteness, separately regarded, which heightens the intolerable hideousness of that brute; for, analysed, that heightened hideousness, it might be said, only arises from the circumstance, that the irresponsible ferociousness of the creature stands invested in the fleece of celestial innocence and love; and hence, by bringing together two such opposite emotions in our minds, the Polar bear frightens us with so unnatural a contrast. But even assuming all this to be true; yet, were it not for the whiteness, you would not have that intensified terror.

There is more to the terror of whiteness than meets the eye, for it produces "transcendent horror," "spiritual wonderment" and "a silent superstitious dread": "how is mortal man to account for it? To analyse it, would seem impossible." Yet perhaps we can approach "the hidden cause we seek" by examining instances in our experience of whiteness "stripped of all direct association" with terror. However Ishmael here warns his reader that he requires "imagination" where "subtlety appeals to subtlety," and that while "some at least of the imaginative impressions about to be presented may have been shared by most men, yet few perhaps were entirely conscious of them at the time, and therefore may not be able to recall them now": like Agee, who calls Famous Men "an effort in human actuality, in which the reader is no less centrally involved than the authors and

those of whom they tell," (LUNPFM, p. xvi) Ishmael invites us to examine the details of our impressions and of our responses to them, and so presents for our meditation a number of images of whiteness which, not manifestly terrible, terrify. He substantiates his irrational fear by noting that a colt foaled far from the prairie in Vermont, despite the impossibility of a memory of "anything associated with the experience of former perils," fears the scent of a buffalo robe: like the colt Ishmael knows that "somewhere" the things he fears "must exist. Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright." Ishmael goes to sea to actualize; Aristotle's connection of the primary qualities of things with the sense of touch gives force to Ishmael's credential as a reporter ("I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with whales with these visible hands"); like his namesake, he has left Burke's "society" in order to become conversant with the passions appertaining to "self-preservation," has left Aristotle's well-being to experience the conditions of being, and so arrives at this limit to the conscious formulation of experience:

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows-- a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? And when we consider that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues-- every stately or lovely emblazoning-- the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods; yea, and the gilded velvets of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of young girls; all these are but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified

Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within; and when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge-- pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper; and like wilful travellers in Lapland, who refuse to wear colored and coloring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him. And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt? (MD, pp. 164-70)

The dumb blankness which is the basis of meaning is the conjectured substance which lies past the outermost boundary of experimental knowledge, and which is treated as such by Wittgenstein in the Tractatus, for whom, "In a manner of speaking, objects are colourless." (2.0232): since "Death is not an event in life," (64311) 'death' is a meaningless word, marking a boundary past which experience cannot penetrate. Burroughs, who slightly misquotes the Tractatus in Naked Lunch-- "'If a proposition is NOT NECESSARY it is MEANINGLESS and approaching MEANING ZERO'"<sup>22</sup>-- also quotes Ishmael in describing the limits of the knowable: "Writers talk about the sweet-sick smell of death whereas any junky can tell you that death has no smell...at the same time a smell that shuts off breath and stops blood...colorless no-smell of death." (NL, p. 221) The Vigilante, a con man/addict who suddenly assumes the costume and mannerisms of a western sheriff, goes berserk in Lincoln Park and "hangs three fags before the fuzz nail him," testifies at his trial, "I was standing outside myself trying to stop those hangings with ghost fingers ....I am a ghost wanting what every ghost wants-- a body-- after the Long Time moving through odorless alleys of space where no life is only the colorless no-smell of death.'" This bare physical world lying

beyond the secondary qualities perceived by the mind-- "The title means exactly what the words say: NAKED Lunch-- a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork" (NL, pp. 3, 8, v)-- is that envisioned by Addison and Ishmael; and the Vigilante is the schizophrenic heir to Ahab, whose "tormented spirit, when what seemed Ahab rushed from his room, was for the time but a vacated thing, a formless somnambulistic being, a ray of living light, to be sure, but without an object to color, and therefore a blankness in itself." (MD, p. 175) The world of the after-life is apparently deadly dull: in the descriptive work that follows the pattern of Moby Dick the foremost fact about the present world of the senses is that (to those who are not frustrated by their impermeability, as the Vigilante is, boredom being one species of frustration) it is endlessly, if voyeuristically, interesting; the experience formulated in Famous Men, says Agee, "is worth your knowing what you can of... as the small part it is of the human experience in general" (LUNPFM, p. 246); Godard has expressed the lingering wish "to make a movie about a wall. If you really look at a wall, you wind up seeing things in it."<sup>23</sup>

In terms of the issue whether words or things come first, then, Locke's empiricism suspends the question; whereas idealists in the tradition of Descartes and Kant know to the exclusion of other possibilities that reality is generated by the symmetry of words or categories, Locke, while he locates primary qualities in the physical world and considers perception as consequence or response, is forced to an inclusive openness to either possibility, since to posit that things are prior to words is to claim, with the realists, some unambiguous knowledge of what things are. Ishmael's chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale," is thus inclusive, as is the final "On the Porch" section of Famous Men, each

serving to diagram the method of the book in which it appears.

Locke's semiotic assumes simple ideas, each of which is "uncompounded, contains in it nothing but one uniform appearance, or conception in the mind, and is not distinguishable into different ideas"; these are so blended as they exist in things "that there is no separation, no distance between them," and yet "enter by the senses simple and unmixed," so that it is always possible to analyse complex ideas into component simples: hence the importance of "judgement" as "separating carefully, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity," as thus "quite contrary to metaphor and allusion," and as distinct from wit, "lying most in the assemblage of ideas." (II, ii, 1-2; xi, 2; IV, xiv, 3; xvii, 17) There comes a point at which experience must speak for itself, since one cannot make simple ideas in themselves less ambiguous, "clearer in the mind," with "words:" if anyone asks what solidity is, "I send him to his senses to inform him. Let him put a flint or a football between his hands and attempt to join them, and he will know." (II, iv, 4) There are two kinds of propositions into which words can be formed, that concerning particulars, which is empirically verifiable, and that which expresses "the agreement or disagreement of our abstract ideas, and their dependence on one another;" the first sort "is the consequence of the existence of things;" the second, the "consequence of ideas," consists of "general certain propositions" or "aeternae veritates," so called not because they are "eternal" or "antecedent to the understanding" or "imprinted on the mind from any patterns that are anywhere out of the mind, and existed before," but because they are true whenever the ideas are present from which they were abstracted. (IV, xi, 13-14) It is

similarly the position of the Tractatus that the propositions of logic are a priori true because they are "tautologies," and thus, since 'two' is no advance on 'one plus one,' "say nothing." (6.11) Logic tells us nothing certain about experience since, as Locke says, there is no "necessary" connection among five qualities of any object-- the presence of any four, that is, does not guarantee the fifth (or as it is put in the Tractatus, "It is an hypothesis that the sun will rise tomorrow; and this means that we do not know whether it will rise"-- 6.36311); "certain knowledge" is only of an "experience" of a particular event. (IV, xii, 9) Thinking is formulating propositions with ideas; truth consists in "nothing but the joining or separating of Signs, as the Things signified by them do agree or disagree one with another," and is either "nominal" ("verbal," "chimerical"), expressing a logical consistence or agreement among words, as in the statement that "all centaurs are animals," or "real," expressing an arrangement of ideas as experienced in nature. Propositions can be either mental, of ideas, or verbal; but since thinking is usually carried on in words, especially when it comes to "complex ideas" for which words are a convenient shorthand, we tend to use uncritically such words as "man, vitriol, fortitude, glory" without reflecting on their precise meanings. (IV, v, 1-7) This is the basis of Locke's concern with language, and it recurs in Melville as a critique of the forms which limit the range of Pierre's consciousness, confound the victims of the Confidence Man and define our ideas of whales, so that Moby Dick opens with an etymology of the word, and in the glossaries, footnotes and parenthetical notations on the language and slang generic to cotton farmers and drug addicts in Famous Men and Naked Lunch. Locke regards words as extremely liable to "impose" upon and cloud our



understandings. Moreover, words are merely arbitrary "marks," "corporeal signs and particular sounds," which can "stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them," and so inevitably fall short of perfect or "immediate communication," no matter how well considered. (IV, iv, 17; II, xxiii, 36; III, ii, 2, 5-8)

Taking note of the dependence of words on "common sensible ideas" exposes as deceptive those which "stand for ideas that come not under the cognizance of our senses; e.g. to imagine, apprehend, comprehend, adhere, conceive," etc.; "Spirit" means breath, as "angel" means messenger; and while "Analogy" may allow us to speculate about a spiritual hierarchy above the observable physical one, the possibility of life on other planets and the secret causes of natural effects, and is a useful guide in the conduct of productive experiments, it attains at best to the uncertain status of probability. (III, i, 5; IV, xvi, 12) "General terms," each of which names a "genus" or sort of similar things, are useful because it is beyond our capacity to frame a distinct idea of and give a name to every particular thing, and would not serve the end of language or improve knowledge if it were. But since "ideas become general, by separating from them the circumstances of time and place, and any other ideas that may determine them to this or that particular existence," the process excludes what is peculiar to each individual, as when the general idea "man" is abstracted from "Peter and Paul"; so we proceed to such "universal terms" as "substance," "being," "thing." Just as Hobbes questions words derived from the verb 'to be,' Locke distinguishes between the probable but unknowable "Real" essences of things and "nominal" essences, which are general names; since "essence" is a matter of words, we must not suppose that things "are distinguished by nature into

species, by real essences, according as we distinguish them into species by name," for that is to claim Ahab's knowledge of linked analogies, a prior order of words: nothing is essential to any individual, for "An accident or disease may very much alter my colour or shape; a fever or fall may take away my reason or memory, or both; and an apoplexy leave neither sense, nor understanding, no, nor life," still nothing essential will have been removed unless the individual is "to be counted of the sort man, and to have the name man given it" (III, iii, 1-3, 6, 9, 15, 17; vi, 13, 4); essence is dependent upon the verbal ordering of ideas. Thus when he decides, having considered the arguments of Linnaeus that the whale is a mammal, to define it with Jonah as a fish, Ishmael likewise draws attention to the arbitrary and verbal nature of species; his definition of the whale as "a spouting fish with a horizontal tail.... is the result of expanded meditation" on the characteristics thereby comprehended and involves the inclusion of "all the smaller, spouting, and horizontal tailed fish" in his classification, which is subdivided among folio, duodecimo and octavo whales, each sub-species being described at length within the limits of Ishmael's experience. (MD, pp. 118-20) Locke too rejects as a false question "Whether a bat be a bird or no": the proper way of defining, he says, is not by "genus and differentia," which is to derive the thing from its essential name, and to attribute to language a consistency it lacks, but by "enumerating those simple ideas that are combined in the term defined." (III, xi, 7; iii, 10)

While a simple idea can no more be defined than light can be described to a blind man, its name gives the least verbal difficulty because its reference is readily agreed upon; so with simple modes ("seven," "triangle"); by the names of mixed modes, "such as for the most part are

moral words," it is difficult, not only to communicate the extremely complex ideas to which they refer, but to repeatedly mean the same thing oneself. Because such ideas "want standards in nature" to guide their formation, there is endless wrangling over "the interpretation of laws, whether ~~divine~~ or human" (III, iv, 7, 10; 18-19, 6-9); Ishmael likewise avers the history of wrangling over the two superbly simple and arbitrary laws touching the "Fast Fish," which "belongs to the party fast to it," and the "Loose Fish," "fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it," and points out that they "will, on reflection, be found the fundamentals of all human jurisprudence." (MD, pp. 331-33) It is the very fact, however, that ideas of material substances are supposed to have precise standards in nature that confuses their names which (while the names of mixed modes are always "adequate" to the limited combination of ideas to which they refer) must always be "inadequate," because the real essence and "precise number of properties" of any substance is unknowable. (II, ix, 20, 11; vi, 44, 47, 19) Again, neither does Ishmael hope to comprehend all the properties of whales in his definition and cetological system: "God keep me from ever completing anything." And just as Locke considers an abuse of words, "the taking them for things," and so giving credence to such sophistic "gibberish" as "substantial forms, vegetative souls, abhorrence of a vacuum," etc., (III, x, 14) Ishmael omits from his list of whales which have yet to be examined and incorporated into his system, those names which he "can hardly help suspecting...for mere sounds, full of Leviathanism, but signifying nothing." (MD, pp. 127-28)

The "force and manner of signification" of words, since certitude is "founded in the habitudes and relations of abstract ideas" which they govern, have everything to do with the "extent and certainty of

knowledge." (III, ix, 21; IV, xii, 7) In examining them we depend upon "reason," which comprises "sagacity and illation." By the one it finds out; and by the other it so orders the intermediate ideas as to discover what connexion there is in each link of the chain." Locke de-emphasizes the Aristotelian syllogism, locating "reason" rather in our observation of "the actings of our own minds." (IV, xvii, 4) The whole treatment of words in the third book of the Essay is designed "to make men reflect on their own use of language," to bring the reader to "enter into his own thoughts and observe nicely the several postures of his mind in discoursing": if the understanding is "tied down to the dull and narrow information of the senses" and does not even comprehend "the extent of our own ideas," it can attain to self-consciousness only indirectly, by a critical process of negation or "mere wary survey" of words and ideas, can know only what it is not. (III, v, 16; vii, 3, IV, iii, 5-6; III, v, 9) Metaphor and analogy, the only avenues to such knowledge, are invalid, for "all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement" (III, x, 34): such is the effect of Ahab's eloquence on Starbuck-- "But he drilled deep down, and blasted all my reason out of me!"-- who is challenged, when he does oppose Ahab's will, "'Dost thou then so much as dare to critically think of me?'" (MD, pp. 148, 394) Locke ends the Essay by defining as the third branch of knowledge, after natural philosophy and ethics,

Σημειωτική, or the doctrine of signs; the most usual whereof being words, it is aptly enough termed also Λογική, logic: the business whereof is to consider the nature of signs, the mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge to others. For, since the things the mind

contemplates are none of them, besides itself, present to the understanding, it is necessary that something else, as a sign or representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it: and these are ideas....The consideration, then, of ideas and words as the great instruments of knowledge, makes no despicable part of their contemplation who would take a view of human knowledge in the whole extent of it. And perhaps if they were distinctly weighed, and duly considered, they would afford us another sort of logic and critic, than what we have been hitherto acquainted with. (IV, xxi, 4)

Locke limits experience to the arrangement of ideas. While the mind is their passive recipient, selection and recall is carried on by that "internal sense" of reflection whereby we perceive "the operations of our own mind within us," a kind of "secondary perception," though amenable to no metalinguistic description, in which "the mind is oftentimes more than barely passive; the appearance of those dormant pictures depending sometimes on the will." (II, i, 4; x, 7) But the will, the "power" of the mind "to order the consideration of any idea, or the forbearing to consider it; or to prefer the motion of any part of the body to its rest, and vice versa," is not "free," for freedom is one's ability to do what he wills, while will itself is determined by the mind, which is motivated only by its "satisfaction" or "uneasiness" with a present "state or action": a thought may be "the occasion of volition," but the will itself is a "power," not an "agent." (II, xxi, 5, 19, 21, 23, 29) As Wittgenstein puts it, "I can't will willing....'Willing' is not the name of an action; and so not the name of a voluntary action either." (PI 613) While Locke regards morality as as "capable of demonstration" as mathematics, (Essay III, xi, 16) it is linked, like the common-sense insistence upon material substance, not to a transcendent order, but to the self-preservation imperative, for "Things...are good or evil only in reference to pleasure or pain." (II, xx, 2) Ultimately, all that can

be said about the in-itself inconceivable faculty of attention is that it is guided and imposed upon by "settled habit," which it opposes by attending to the manner of its operation: "Habits, especially such as are begun very early, come at last to produce actions in us, which often escape our observation." (II, ix, 9-10) Berkeley and Hume take up the critique of habitual association begun in Locke's Essay, (II, xxxiii, 18) likewise emphasizing the dependence of self-preservation on habits of expectation; but Berkeley argues (1710) that, in the absence of material substance, visible and tangible ideas are arbitrarily related, so that visible fire is not the "cause" of tangible pain, but a forewarning sign "instituted by the Author of our Nature" for our benefit<sup>24</sup>; and Hume (1748) reduces mental activity to three principles of association-- "Resemblance, Contiguity in time or place, and Cause or Effect"-- which constitute "a general habit whereby we always transfer the known to the unknown and conceive the latter to resemble the former,"<sup>25</sup> an operation entirely the result of custom and without the predictive force of logical necessity.

According to Russell, "Subsequent British empiricists rejected Hume's scepticism without refuting it": moreover, Kant and Hegel, who claim to have answered Hume, "represent a pre-Humian type of rationalism, and can be refuted by Humian arguments." (HWP, p. 646) A major source of the emphasis on language by Wittgenstein and Richards is American Pragmatism: according to Charles Sanders Peirce (1868), "the word or sign a man uses is the man himself.... Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought."<sup>26</sup> In The Principles of Psychology (1890), William James cites a description by one Mr. Ballard, born a deaf-mute, of his thoughts before learning to speak or write<sup>27</sup>:

Wittgenstein comments, "Are you sure-- one would like to ask-- that this is the correct translation of your wordless thoughts into words?...The words in which I express my memory are my memory reaction." (PI 342-43) However, the pragmatists are committed to Darwin's theory of evolution, conceive of evolution as the effect of and response to prior things, a movement, as Peirce says (1890), from "indeterminacy" or "chance" to "a complete reign of law": "all things have a tendency to take habits," and mind, a condition of matter marked by the "habit of taking and laying aside habits," is, "by the principle of continuity," the result of matter.<sup>28</sup> Pragmatism is a form of realism, holding that things come before words, that conceptual universals have validity as steps in evolutionary development, and thereby giving thought the unambiguous context of an empirically unverifiable temporal continuum: in John Dewey's terms (1938), the "spatial" phase of "judgement," which is the "description" of co-existent conditions, is not in itself complete until seen in the context of "narration," developing in time toward a more complete understanding.<sup>29</sup> Dewey (1922) links his psychology with John B. Watson's Behaviourism<sup>30</sup>; and in fact, Watson was Dewey's student in philosophy, and derives from him the opinion that thought is a sub-vocal, laryngeal activity.<sup>31</sup> As of 1971, B. F. Skinner is still arguing that understanding is explicable in terms of Darwin's "process of selection," "the effects of which can be formulated in 'necessary laws.'"<sup>32</sup>

Wittgenstein rejects the context of evolution in the Tractatus-- "Darwin's theory has no more to do with philosophy than any other hypothesis in natural science" (4.1122)-- and later elaborates: "Did anyone see this [evolutionary] process happening? No. Has anyone seen it happening now? No. The evidence of breeding is just a drop in the

bucket. But there were thousands of books in which this was said to be the obvious solution. People were certain on grounds that were extremely thin....This shows how you can be persuaded of a certain thing. In the end, you forget entirely every question of verification, you are just sure it must have been like that." (His objection to swallowing Freud whole is related: "Freud asks 'Are you asking me to believe that there is anything which happens without a cause?'"<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Wittgenstein is later concerned to answer the charge that, in dispensing with the "grammatical fiction" of subjective "inner process," he is "a behaviourist in disguise:"

We talk of processes and states and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we shall know more about them-- we think. But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite concept of what it means to learn to know a process better. (The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that we thought quite innocent.)-- And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them. (PI 307-08)

Whereas, for the empiricists, understanding can neither transcend nor be identified with the facts of experience, the pragmatists sort it onto the linear foundation of continuous time, resolve description in narration. However the narrators of Moby-Dick, Famous Men and Naked Lunch are all fragmented, discontinuous personalities, devices at best, transparent yet displaying only themselves, and offering an unresolved series of sometimes contradictory descriptions. Evolution in time is one of the grids which Agee superimposes on his experience of depression Alabama, in terms both of an explanatory myth of the past and of hopes for the future, neither of which can, finally, alter the present. A



demolitions expert in Sergio Leone's Duck You Sucker, who like Leone blows things into their component bits, announces, "I don't make judgments any more-- I believe in dynamite," and dies leaving a man he has drawn away from all possible modes of identity, in a situation of utter ambiguity: so in Famous Men, Agee's experience and the reader's are left without the support of any contextual story or alibi. The empirical status of the evolution myth might best be indicated by its treatment in Stanley Kubrick's 2001, which holds a variety of grids before our eyes, and which begins as a man in an ape costume throws a bone he has just learned to use as a weapon into the air, whereupon it becomes, in the piece of horizontal-- that is, narrative-- montage that covers the longest time gap in film history, a futuristic space craft: a simple juxtaposition is all that is required, so automatically do we understand. The question of the nature of understanding is posed by the presence of Hal, the computer, who perhaps has "feelings," and who attempts to affirm his analog nature by taking over the space expedition for his own purpose; as he is being dismantled he sings in a slowing and now obviously mechanical fashion, "Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do; I'm half crazy all for the likes of you:" like crazy Ahab, who also takes over an expedition for his own purpose, Hal has fastened on the "likes" of things, and thus on himself as a real entity, but finds himself finally in a precariously digital relation to Daisy, who can only give one of two answers.

It is Dewey's objection (1949) to "'Logical positivism'"-- properly the name of a movement that co-opted and emphasized some aspects of Wittgenstein's Tractatus-- that it "does not get beyond short-span, relatively isolated, temporal sequences and spatial co-existences."<sup>34</sup> Whereas Dewey bases "implication" or "ratiocination"-- the arrangement

of factual evidence by means of symbols or propositions into a meaningful "ordered whole" for empirical testing-- on an "inference" constituted by the breadth of experience, holds that when suggestions "'pop into our heads'" they are "not logical" but the "primary stuff of logical ideas,"<sup>35</sup> logic is for Wittgenstein "prior to every experience-- that something is so," to description that is, "to the question 'How?', not prior to the question 'What?'" (5.552) Thus to "know an object" is to know its possible contexts of "occurrences in states of affairs." (20123) Logic is the a priori constraint on description, for "The truth is that we could not say what an 'illogical' world would look like," (3.031) and on thought, since a thought is a "logical picture of facts," (3) "a proposition with sense." (4) Language is "the totality of propositions," (4.001) and "disguises thought" to such a degree that "it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it" (4.002): we can get no closer to understanding or "sense" than to notice that it takes the form of propositions, in the context of which names have "meaning," (3.3) for a proposition is not merely "a blend of words.-- (Just as a theme in music is not a blend of notes.)" (3.141) While the "impossibility of illogical thought" (5.4731) makes logic a priori, "no part of our experience" is a priori since whatever we "see" or "can describe at all could be other than it is" (5.634); reality is defined digitally as "the existence and non-existence of a state of affairs" (2.06) as described in a proposition, from any one of which "it is impossible to infer the existence or non-existence of another" state of affairs, (2.062) there being posited no such temporal continuum or "causal nexus" as validates pragmatic inference: "Superstition," in fact, "is nothing but belief in the causal nexus." (5.136, 5.1361) To "understand" a proposition is to be aware of its logical implications,

"to know what is the case if it is true," (4.024) and thus has nothing necessarily to do with "knowing whether it is true," a distinction comparable to Locke's between "verbal" and "real" truth. While Wittgenstein dispenses with Locke's psychologism, (Essay III, v, 15; ix, 9) which accounts for verbal meaning by mental process and is rejected by the behaviourists, he maintains Locke's subjectivism: although "There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas," (5.631) the fact is that "'the world is my world,'" (5.641) that the subject "is a limit of the world." (5.632) Just as "nothing in the visual field allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye," so the subject, in "a book called The World as I found it," which included "a report on my body," would be the only thing which "could not be mentioned in that book" (5.631, 5.633); so in Famous Men, and in Godard's films, nothing beyond the immediate arrangement of signs can be deduced which 'reads' them: for Godard "the camera that filmed itself in the mirror would make the ultimate movie,"<sup>36</sup> and Agee describes just such a shot in his film scenario, "The House;"<sup>37</sup> Kubrick's 2001 includes long sequences of Keir Dullea's face covered with patterns of coloured light reflected by an instrument panel, staring into our faces, which are covered with the same coloured patterns. "I am my world. (The microcosm.)," (5.63) says Wittgenstein, and he offers no conceivable whole or macrocosm to give the world meaning; if the "metaphysical subject" (5.641) is the boundary rather than a part of the world, the "metaphysical" has no "meaning" (6.53); if philosophy is a "'critique of language,'" (4.0031) it offers no meta-linguistic avenue of knowledge (though Wittgenstein later criticizes the Tractatus for trying to isolate the ideal form of language), for logic is the condition of experience, and cannot itself be experienced (5.552):

thus to understand his propositions is eventually to recognize them as "nonsensical." (654) That "world," "self," "life" and "language" are the same and cannot be abstracted from one another, (5.5563, 5.621) elucidates the search for 'life' undertaken by Melville, Agee and Godard; and the expression, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world," (5.6) is the logical formulation of "Call me Ishmael."

All knowledge is of experienced "objects" which "can only be named" or represented, not "put into words. Propositions can only say how things are, not what they are." (3.221); names, the "simple signs" or "elements" (which "cannot be anatomized by means of definitions") of a propositional sign, that arrangement which gives the "sense" of a proposition, "correspond to the objects of thought," so that "A name means its object. The object is its meaning." (3.2, 3.261, 3.202, 3.203) This one-to-one relationship of word and thing is criticized both by Richards and by the later Wittgenstein, who distinguishes between words and names, and between the bearer of a name and its meaning, which is usually its use, and which is "sometimes explained by pointing to its bearer." (PI 40, 43, 45) A situation, "complex" or "fact" can be "described" but not named, for names have no sense: a propositional sign is a fact, and differs from a "set of names" in that "its elements (the words) stand in a determinate relation to one another," though in written or printed form there is no apparent difference "between a propositional sign and a word." (3.12-3.143, 3.144) A propositional sign might also "be composed of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, and books)" so that "spatial arrangement" expresses the "sense of the propositions" (3.1431): apposite considerations are the description in Mardi of the disarrayed furniture of an abandoned ship, Jason Compson, Agee, Philip

Marlowe and Hitchcock's camera as each registers the arrangement of objects in a deserted room: "The word," says the "vicious, fruity old Saint" in Naked Lunch "cannot be expressed direct....It can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negation and absence." (NL, p. 116)

A proposition thus "communicates a situation" which it constructs "by way of experiment" (that is, truly or falsely) and with which it is connected by having "exactly as many distinguishable parts" as the situation; configuration is what makes a proposition or thought a "picture" or "model of reality as we imagine it." (4.03, 4.031, 4.04) This connection between name and object, however "arbitrary," (3.322) in the context of configuration, is the realism which Wittgenstein later rejects, and is comparable to Locke's realistic qualification of empiricism, in that both formulate a notion of substance. The limit of "Empirical reality" is manifest equally in "the totality of objects" and in "the totality of elementary propositions" (each of which consists of names, asserts the existence of a state of affairs and cannot be contradicted) (5.5561, 4.21-4.22); while the "'experience'...that something is" is necessary to our understanding of logic, that-- since logic is prior to all experience, "that something is so"-- is precisely what cannot be experienced; the 'how' of logical experience must take for granted the in-itself unexperienced 'what.' (5.552) "Substance is what subsists independently of what is the case," (2.024) and is what confirms or denies propositions, makes possible a "picture" of the world which is verifiably, not just logically, true or false. (2.0211, 2.0212) There are no "'logical objects' or 'logical constants,'" (5.4) as Peirce and Dewey maintain, for objects are "simple," (2.02) "unalterable and subsistent," whereas

their "configuration," the "structure" of states of affairs, is "changing and unstable," and is evident or "shown"-- since "What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language"-- in propositions. (2.027-2.032, 4.121, 4.1212) Substance "is form and content," (2.025) and thus corresponds to subjective understanding. Form is constituted or determined by objects, (2.023, 2.031) and is what language has in common with the world (2.022, 4.014)-- the "possibility of structure," an object's occurrence in states of affairs: "Space, time and colour (being coloured) are forms of objects." (2.033, 2.0141, 2.0251) The "logical form of reality" is displayed or manifest in, rather than represented by, propositions, (4.121) is the possibility of that "common logical pattern" of sense which is translatable according to a "general rule" or "law of projection," as a symphony is translated into the various languages of the "grammophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound waves." (4.014-4.0141)

Content on the other hand is what is projected in the "perceptible sign of a proposition" which expresses "a possible situation" (since it may be true or false)-- one, that is, which is understood; so that while the "method of projection is to think of the sense of the proposition"-- to understand it-- a proposition nevertheless "contains the form, but not the content, of its sense." (3.1-3.13) Thus form is like a two-dimensional screen or grid upon which logical configuration takes place, which encodes or is the projection of content-- that of "sense," which is its being understood, without any comprehension of the "enormously complicated" tacit conventions which determine the verbal meanings whereby sense is expressed (4.002); and that of substance, which determines its forms (but not "material properties," which can only be "represented" by

propositions, "produced" by configuration), and which, like Ishmael's white world (for "In a manner of speaking, objects are colourless") is the hypothesized unexperienced basis of experience. (2.0231, 2.0232) "It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists" (6.44); and likewise "Feeling the world as a limited whole," as bounded by subjectivity, is "mystical"-- cannot be spoken about, that is, but makes itself "manifest." (6.45, 6.522)

Description is the digital manipulation of configured forms, a necessary but futile hypothesis which must always give place to what Agee calls "the cruel radiance of what is," (LUNPFM, p. 11) the unpredictable violence of the white whale. For Wittgenstein, the different "systems for describing the world" are "optional:" Newtonian mechanics, for example, is comparable to a fine mesh laid over an irregularly black and white surface which, by our saying of every square in the mesh whether it is black or white, offers the means to a complete description of the surface. (6.341) Descriptions must proceed according to "law" in order to be "thinkable," (6.361) so that while the "law of causality" is an exclusively logical concern (as in Hume, "There is no compulsion making one thing happen because another has happened. The only necessity that exists is logical necessity."), what it is "meant to exclude"-- the "accidental"-- "cannot even be described." (6.3, 6.362, 6.37) "Value"-- "Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same"; ethics is unrelated to "consequences," and what is pleasant or unpleasant resides "in the action itself"-- lies outside the world, is "transcendental" (6.41, 6.421, 6.422) (also as in Hume: "Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt more properly than perceived," is not a "fact."-- Inquiry, p. 173). It is this empirical consideration that informs Agee's suspicion that "the 'sense

of beauty,' like nearly everything else, is a class privilege. I am sure in any case that its 'terms' differ by class, and that the 'sense' is limited and inarticulate in the white tenant class almost beyond hope of description." (LUNPFM, p. 314)

Thomas A Sebeok, speaking at McGill (November 3, 1975), quoted Freud's "sometimes-a-cigar-is-just-a-cigar" remark to make the point that semiotic in its manifold branches asks the question, "When is the object transformed into a semiotic entity?" In terms of the semiotic of Locke and Wittgenstein, the semantic status of an object or quality is constituted by its perception-- its place, that is, in a relation or context; this is I. A. Richards's position. He regards judgements of beauty and aesthetic value as "emotive" rather than "descriptive" statements, rejects the notion of an established continuity between the physical world and subjective consciousness ("restatements" of such doctrines as Hartley's which emphasize "process" rather than "content"<sup>38</sup> and aims at a nominalistic reform of unclear and imprecise terms incompatible with the "real vagues" and hypostatic judgements of Peirce and Dewey. ("Everything that can be thought at all," says Wittgenstein, "can be thought clearly."-- 4.116). Like Peirce, Richards employs a triadic model of the sign; and like James he conceives of thoughts or ideas as individual pointings-to or references. In an interview published in 1973 Richards lists James' The Principles of Psychology among his early influences and de-emphasizes Wittgenstein, whose domination over Moore and Cambridge "gave me the creeps,"<sup>39</sup> though it is worth noting that C. K. Ogden, co-author with Richards of The Foundations of Aesthetics (1922) and The Meaning of Meaning (1923; some essays independently as early as 1920) and the general editor, at Russell's instigation, of the first English version of



the Tractatus (1922), is regarded by G. H. von Wright as having been "active" in the book's translation, though to what degree is not certain.<sup>40</sup> According to W. H. N. Hotopf, "it is highly unlikely that Ogden and Richards derived their emotive/referential distinction from either Russell or Wittgenstein. Any influence is more likely to have been the other way round."<sup>41</sup> While Richards' New Critical critics have not been unanimous, they have generally divided his career at Coleridge on Imagination, applying to the first segment the term 'positivist' and 'behaviourist' in a loosely conceived, occasionally epithetical fashion.<sup>42</sup>

In The Foundations of Aesthetics Richards, Ogden and James Wood deny that there is any "essential" condition for an aesthetic experience and suggest that a "description" of such an emotion would include the psychological history of the subject and the "special momentary setting" of his "impulses and instincts," and a "physico-physiological account of the work of art as a stimulus," with its "sensory effect" upon and consequent aroused "impulses" in the subject. They list and discuss sixteen uses of the word 'beauty,' and find most satisfactory the Confucian notion of "synaesthesia," involving the balance of systems of impulses which correspond, in the "early stages" of systematization, to emotions: the artist selects and arranges the "elements" of experience according to "the direction and accentuation of his interest-- in other words to the play of impulses which controls his activity at the moment," with the possible result "that the same group of impulses are aroused in the spectator." This is "the only way unless by telepathy, of coming into contact with other minds than our own"; and it is only when "emotion assumes a more general character" and "attitude has become impersonal," when such "adjustment" has been found "as will preserve free play to

every impulse, with entire avoidance of frustration," that beauty is experienced, the "equilibrium" of which is distinguished from "passivity, inertia, over-stimulation or conflict," as well as "Nirvana, Ecstasy, Sublimation or At-oneness with Nature." The term "synaesthesia" includes "both equilibrium and harmony," the former entailing "no tendency to action," the latter a response rather to the "'stimulative'" than to the "'beautiful.'" The increase in self-realization, proportionate to the involvement of impulses in responding to beauty, is self-explanatory if, "as is sometimes alleged, we are the whole complex of our impulses": interest becomes free "to take any direction we choose," and becoming "more fully ourselves" is simultaneously becoming "differentiated or isolated from the things around us." The arrangement of the elements of experience records the interest of the artist, and of the spectator, by involving his play of impulses, does not seek their resolution in an objective work or formulation, but transforms the ambiguity of undirected interest into a poised and available interest. This process of "individualisation," the value of which is the involvement of "all our faculties" and the fullest possible realization of the "richness and complexity of our environment,"<sup>43</sup> is pertinent to Agee's description, in Famous Men, of the experience of actuality:

The dead oak and pine, the ground, the dew, the air, the whole realm of what our bodies lay in and our minds in silence wandered, walked in, swam in, watched upon, was delicately fragrant as a paradise, and, like all that is best, was loose, light, casual, totally actual. There was, by our minds, our memories, our thoughts and feelings, some combination, some generalizing, some art, and science; but none of the close-kneed priggishness of science, and none of the formalism and straining and lily-gilding of art. All the length of the body and all its parts and functions were participating, and were being realized and rewarded, inseparable

from the mind, identical with it: and all, everything, that the mind touched, was actuality, and all, everything, that the mind touched turned immediately, yet without in the least losing the quality of its total individuality, into joy and truth, or rather, revealed of its self, truth, which in its very nature was joy, which must be the end of art, of investigation, and of all anyhow human existence.

This situation is possible at any junction of time, space and consciousness: and just as (at least so far as we can know and can be concerned) it is our consciousness alone, in the end, that we have to thank for joy, so too it is our consciousness alone that is defective when we fall short of it. It is curious, and unfortunate, that we find this luck so rarely; that it is so almost purely a matter of chance: yet that, as matters are, becomes inextricably a part of the whole texture of the pleasure: at such time we have knowledge that we are witnessing, taking part in, being, a phenomenon analogous to that shrewd complex of the equations of infinite chance which became, on this early earth, out of lifelessness, life. (LUNPFM, p. 225)

According to Hotopf, Richards and Ogden "popularized," in The Meaning of Meaning, an idea freshly revitalized by Russell and Wittgenstein "about the influence of language upon philosophical theories," associated with the intellectual reaction to the "propaganda power" demonstrated by the press during World War I.<sup>44</sup> But while they agree that the "influence of language upon Thought is of the utmost importance," they regard the notion of a logical form shared by thought and reality as "implausible," "Pre-Socratic" and "psychological" rather than logical: Wittgenstein's model, imposing limitations that lead to "a dissatisfaction with language; and to an anti-metaphysical mysticism," could only apply to a language that did not have to deal with the increasing complexity of the modern world. While Ogden and Richards regard even the simplest reference as "either true or false," they insist upon Berkeley's distinction between the emotive or rhetorical use of words and their use to symbolize a reference to a "state of affairs." (MM, pp. 243, 253-55, 258) Their science of symbolism is also contrasted with de Saussure's semiology which,

while "a very notable attempt in the right direction," pretends to define "things and not words," fixes meanings within the context of a fictitious "langue," invents "verbal entities outside the range of possible investigation" and rejects "'symbol'" as a term for "linguistic sign" because a symbol is never "'quite arbitrary.'" (MM, pp. v, 5-6) Symbols, say Ogden and Richards, both direct and organize thoughts or references and "record events and communicate facts" or referents ("referent," though they also approve "event," is preferable to "thing" or "object" because it does not imply "material substances" or entities): words are "instruments" acquiring meaning only in "use," but have "emotive" functions apart from meaning. Symbol and thought are causally related (by conventions of meaning, such as "social and psychological factors" as purpose in speech, response in the listener), as are thought and referent (whether a direct reference to an observed referent or a reference to Napoleon, mediated by "historian - contemporary record - eye-witness"); symbol and referent are indirectly and arbitrarily related and not, as the "superstition" has it, metaphysically connected by "meaning": symbols-- "images of all sorts, words, sentences, whole and in pieces"-- accompany references which are themselves of varying comprehensiveness of "grasp." (MM, pp. 9-11, 14-15) "Sign-situations," of which symbols are a particular kind, mediate "all perception," so that we treat the "group of data (modifications of the sense organs)" which we name a chair "as signs of a referent;" and while Ogden and Richards charge exclusive subjectivism with leading to the "impasse of solipsism" and stress the need for behavioural observation, they reject Watson's invalidation of psychological process and introspection. (MM, pp. 18-23) "Word-magic" is a relic of primitive attempts to control the environment, remains "universal in

childhood" and is exemplified by Plato's idealism (though Plato does attempt "a scientific study of symbolism"), Hegel's Dialectic, Whitman's celebration of the power of words and "the dissemination and reiteration of clichés" in political and commercial advertising, all of which employ the assumption that language is "a duplicate, a shadow-soul, of the whole structure of reality" (MM, pp. 24, 29-31, 40); Berkeley's observation that words acquire emotive power by association and the whole nominalist tradition suggest a mode of combating the "hypnotic influence" of "verbo-mania." (MM, pp. 40, 42-44, 47)

Despite the fact that "A Cause...in the sense of something which forces another something called an effect to occur, is so obvious a phantom that it has been rejected even by metaphysicians," a description of perception in causal terms is offered "merely...as an expository convenience for the sake of its brevity and its verbs," and because the "general hypothesis that thinking or reference is reducible to causal relations" renders "'meaning'...a matter open to experimental methods." (MM, pp. 51, 55, 73) "In all thinking we are interpreting signs," though there is experience, "very little of it," which is "enjoyed" without being interpreted: "non-cognitive contacts," already "indirect," become more "distant and schematic" in proportion as thinking becomes precise; the interpretation of a sign is the "psychological reaction to it," which is "determined" by present and past similar situations. (MM, pp. 244, 50, 155) A sign, which can be an external "stimulus" or an internal "process," exists only in the context of other signs with which it combines to effect "in our organization" an "engram," a "residual trace of an adaptation" or pattern of expectation, as when the physical movements and sound of striking a match "cause," or more properly, contextually "direct" the expectation of a

flame. To reduce "causation to correlation": interpretation, placing a sign in a "psychological context" (as a dog responds to the dinner-bell by positioning himself under the table), is made possible by the recurrence of "clumps of events" in experience; a psychological context is a "set of mental events peculiarly related to one another so as to recur... with partial uniformity," and differs from a literary context in being both recurrent and "such that one at least of its members is determined, given the others"-- is related to, forms a "wider" context with, external contexts truly or falsely, by the fulfillment or not of an expectation. This is the basis of all "knowledge" and "probable opinion:" as in Locke and Wittgenstein, "which relations actually occur will be discovered only by experience;" and since the uniformity of recurrence is only approximate, knowledge not of a high degree of generality must be couched in "terms of probability." Like the pragmatists, Ogden and Richards doubt the presence of imagery or mimetic copies in reference; however they posit no evolutionary progress from particular to general beliefs, for the repetition of a particular verified expectation conditions the "degree" rather than the "reference" of a general belief, the mode of formulation of which must be "left uncertain." (MM, pp. 50-65) All beliefs ("The distinction between an idea and a belief is...one of degree") are "theoretically analysable into compounds" composed of "simple references" ("This is a book" = "'book'" + "'here'" + "'now'"), the relation of which is the "'logical form'" of the reference, so that, again as in Locke and Wittgenstein, there is verbal (because a false proposition has referents) as well as real truth; and since "to believe, or entertain, or think of, a proposition, is...simply to refer," the "Utrahquistic subterfuge" whereby 'knowledge' is either "what is known or...the knowing of it" is rejected.

(MM, pp. 71-74, 292-93, 134)

Direct apprehensions of modifications of a ~~sense organ~~ are neural occurrences "as to which at present neurologists go no further than to assert that they occur"; this is not "materialism," which is a form of metaphysics, but simply "the most plausible systematic account of 'knowing' which can be given": we can by "no manner of make-believe...discover the what of referents," but are limited to the "how." An ellipse is the "first order" sign of a tilted coin, of a surface which physics tells us is round and is thus not "directly given" but seen only via the mediating contextualization of the sign; so that the distinction between "Vision and Imagination," the observable moon and its equally real dark side, the table and its atomic structure, misleads us into the "standard pre-scientific paradoxes" which ignore the "many senses of 'see,'" the various sign-situations determined by "point of view, interest, scientific technique or purpose of investigation"; hence a renewed attention to the "theory of primary and secondary qualities, which seemed to have been disposed of by Berkeley's arguments." (MM, pp. 80-86)

In symbol situations, the listener discriminates words as initial signs or sounds, and proceeds from the psychological context of similar sounds to that of "further experiences" of which the sound is a member--to the recognition of sound as word. The difference between simple and complex symbols ("Thomas" and "my relatives") is one of abstraction, the latter symbolizing references to "varied groupings of experiences whose very difference enables their common elements to survive in isolation": vocabulary and thought are advanced through "levels" of abstraction, the mastery of which makes possible metaphor-- "the use of one reference to a group of things between which a given relation holds, for the purpose

of facilitating the discrimination of an analogous relation in another group"-- which is always subject to expansion into components. For the speaker symbols are not essential to "the psychological context required for the reference," and the optimum critical situation combines a maximum freedom from imposition by words with "the guidance of those systems of narrow contexts which are called verbal habits, speech mechanisms, or the linguistic senses": speakers also proceed from sound to word to logical form (that which is common to complex symbols whose components, which may have the same logical form, are interchangeable). (MM, pp. 209-18, 220)

The "critical scrutiny of symbolic procedure" which combats "the set of confusions known as metaphysics" and controls "the System of Symbols known as Prose," though more evidently in scientific than in literary prose, is guided by six canons, which state that a symbol stands for only one referent; that intersubstitutable symbols symbolize the same reference; that the expansion of a symbol in inquiry does not alter the referent; that the reference of a symbol depends on its actual use, not on "good usage" or the intentions of user or interpreter; that a complex symbol whose constituent symbols "claim the same 'place'" is void; and that, as in Aristotle's Laws of Thought, "All possible referents together form an order, such that every referent has one place only in that order." (MM, pp. 222, 246, 88-99, 103-8) Like Wittgenstein, for whom they are rules of translation, (3.343) Ogden and Richards emphasize definitions as the means to "understanding, i.e., identification of referents"; definition proceeds by the substitution of symbols (rather than by the enumeration of qualities, possible only "with complex objects which have been long studied by some science"), by noting the connections of an agreed-upon referent with that to be defined, according to the four main "routes" of combination which



are vital to "survival," and which correspond to Hume's principles of association: "Similarity, Causation, Space and Time." (MM, pp. 110, 115, 127) Since symbols function in "language transactions" to bring about similar ("in all relevant aspects") acts of reference in speaker and hearer, "psychological events" which cannot themselves be observed, definition is the sole method of controlling meaning and dispelling the fiction that symbols "have 'meaning' on their own account:" hence the extensive treatment of "Beauty," incorporating much of The Foundations of Aesthetics, and of "Meaning," listing its uses and misuses by philosophers and rejecting the validity of introspection-- for whether we think of something or think of ourselves thinking of something "we are equally engaged in a sign situation" of obscure "feelings," incapable of clarification-- in favour of symbol substitution according to the six canons. (MM, pp. 201-6) Interlocutors deal with both referential and emotive "sign situations," the latter comprising "expression of attitude to listener" or to "referent" (greetings and exclamations are appropriate rather than symbolic), "promotion of effects intended" and indication of "stability or instability of reference": the emotive function of a symbol is more relevant to its form and less readily translated than the referential aspect, is due less to physiological qualities-- "such cumulative and hypnotic effects as are produced through rhythm and rhyme"-- than to "'association,'" and occurs in such "non-verbal languages" as painting, where "forms and colours" are both emotional stimulants and "words" to be understood. (MM, pp. 223-31, 233-40)

Language is not a "medium of communication" but an "instrument," extending and refining our sense organs, "capable of distorting, that is, of introducing new relevant members into the contexts of our signs,"

affording no such completed "language circuit" as de Saussure posits and unable to guarantee identity of reference in speaker and hearer. (MM, pp. 98, 232, 208) Ogden and Richards reject the pragmatists' "account of meaning in terms of Practical Consequences" as the "keystone of a metaphysical edifice," Dewey's connection of meaning with intention, the idea that consciousness is a "unique" relation to a proposition, or universal, or judgement (as in the Tractatus, propositions about propositions are nonsensical-- 4.124) and the notion that symbolization is more than a "device," constitutes "an addition to our knowledge:" "The sole entities in the world are propertied things which are only symbolically distinguishable into properties and things"; and as for Wittgenstein, properties, adjectives become nouns, occur only in the context of symbolization. (MM, pp. 198, 181, 48-49, 188-89) Reference occasionally occurs as "feeling-signs" inappropriate to available symbols, which are necessary for extended "Thinking" (MM, pp. 203-4); subjective consciousness, if not dispensed with as in behaviourism, cannot be abstracted from the correlation of signs: language is simultaneously vain and necessary.

In Principles of Literary Criticism (1924) Richards expands the thesis that "communication defined as a strict transference of or participation in identical experiences does not occur," is limited to approximation, and achieves "Depth" or relative completeness more readily in verse than in prose.<sup>44</sup> The "mind" in both conscious and unconscious aspects is a "fiction," actually the "nervous system, or rather a part of its activity" according to evidence amassed by "Behaviourists and Psychoanalysts," though at this point in time a neurological account can be "only a degree less fictitious than one in terms of spiritual happenings"; however, such an account does confine itself to the observable, and is neither "Materialism"

nor "Idealism"-- emotive terms both, addressing the "what" of things rather than the "how" of their behaviour. (PLC, pp. 82-90) An emotional experience is characterized by both "a diffused reaction in the organs of the body" and a "tendency to action" (an emotion is thus the sign of an attitude), and it is upon the latter which value depends, not the "intensity" or "poignancy" of the conscious experience but "the organization of its impulses for freedom and fullness of life," (PLC, pp. 101, 132) the mobilized availability that is celebrated as actuality in Famous Men. Richards portrays the mind as an "energy system" capable of "an indefinitely large number of stable poises" into which it is "thrown" in experience, responding to the partial return of an experience by seeking the former poise: it thus exhibits memory without keeping records, is itself a record. While as "wildly conjectural" as theories of association and of deepening "channels of conduction," this one does suggest both why only some contexts become "'associated,' those namely which yield a stable poise," and why something is recognizable in different aspects, because it too leads to a recurrent stable poise (PLC, pp. 104-5); so that the "thin trickle of stimulation which comes in through the eye finds an immense hierarchy of systems of tendencies poised in the most delicate stability," each ready to act-- refer, formulate-- or not, to yes or no its own appropriateness; "being able to make the required responses in an imaginal or incipient degree, adjusting them to one another at that stage," constitutes the "'understanding'" of a work of art. (PLC, pp. 124-25, 111) The mind is thus a mechanical "instrument of communication"-- in Science and Poetry it is compared to an arrangement of mutually influential compass needles<sup>46</sup>-- dependent upon "verbal apparatus," just as a book is "a machine to think with" (PLC, pp. 25, 22, 1); thinking is the logical arrangement of parts in a mechanical whole which has not substantive value as such,

but exists as does the sense of a loose, unperiodic sentence, indefinitely qualifiable and followed, as so often in Agee's work, by a colon.

In Science and Poetry (1926) Richards introduces the term "pseudo-statement" for poetry, which so irritated his New Critical critics, and suggests that while the "Magical" view of the world gives place to the "scientific" in the modern context, emotions and attitudes cannot be ordered "by true statements alone," the solution being a salvatory poetry along Matthew Arnold's lines, cut "free from that kind of belief which is appropriate to verified statements" (SP, pp. 17, 50-51, 60-61); since the "old dream of a perfect knowledge which would guarantee a perfect life," due to what we know about epistemology, is no longer credible, and since thoughts are only a means for the adjustment of attitudes (man is "not primarily an intelligence" but "a system of interests" which directs intelligence) a poem has the status, though certainly not objective, of a record which encodes and communicates the play of interest which constitutes the poet's experience. (SP, pp. 30, 33, 44, 65) In his 1970 addition to the book Richards speaks of the "composing" or "growth" of a poem not merely as a "record" but as "cognizant," "an activity seeking to become itself" with which we can no more identify the consciousness of the poet than we can the sophisticated muscular and neural "feed-back" system of "co-operative circuits," which is the activity of drawing a circle, with the consciousness of one who draws: language has the function of helping us find "improved orders of being," conscious intellection being neither source nor end. (SP, pp. 95-98, 100, 108) That this utilitarian, by-product account of consciousness-- setting a high value on which Agee calls "making a virtue of a necessity...being provincial...pleading a local cause" (LUNPFM, p. 204)-- is not behaviourism, is indicated in

Richards' review (1928) of John B. Watson's Behaviourism: while Richards finds valuable the kind of psychological research that is strictly confined to the observable, he denies that the meaninglessness of 'consciousness,' its substitution for the more ancient 'soul,' follows necessarily "from its non-observable nature. We may not observe consciousness, but we have it or are it (in some yet undetermined sense), and in fact many of our observations of other things require it"; he agrees that stimulus-response models can account for all human behaviour, that a conditioned reflex can be developed in man by only one stimulus-response occurrence, that the notion of "instincts" is a mystification of structural contingencies upon response exhibited equally by infants and boomerangs, and that intelligent conditioning might do much to eradicate fear, but he denies that observation can provide a complete account, and that introspection is simply invalid.<sup>47</sup> And as of his article, "Structure and Communication" (1965), wherein both Skinner's substitution of "Behavior for Meaning" and Noam Chomsky's opposite method (which "depends upon mental procedures about which as yet almost nothing whatever is known, upon innumerable 'acts of immediate perception,' acts of intellectual vision about which we can as yet say little more than that they are complex and various comparisons of structure and that all the rest of our mental procedure turns on them") are found insufficient,<sup>48</sup> Richards has not altered that view. That, coupled with his rejection in the Principles of the position of the "hard-headed positivist" who "at best suffers from an insufficient material for the development of his attitudes," (PLC, p. 282) seems adequate refutation of the labels "positivist" and "behaviourist" so often applied: Richards' arguments are those of an empiricist.

In Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement (1929), he employs the experimental method in order, he says, "to introduce a new

kind of documentation for those who are interested in the contemporary state of culture," provide a mode of self investigation and suggest improvements of "educational methods"; consisting of a selection of and comments upon written responses to a wide range of poems of undisclosed and rarely recognized authorship, the book is "the record of a piece of field research in comparative ideology": a list of the ten chief difficulties of criticism is abstracted from the protocols, which are referred to both as "'statement," when their referential meaning is attended to, and as the "'expression'" of the "mental operation of the writers"-- a method required for the analysis of any opinion.<sup>49</sup> Richards wishes to dispense with all "critical certainties" except for the "firm sense of the importance of the act of choice, its difficulty, and the supreme exercise of all our faculties that it imposes," to dispel the myth that values objectively "inhere in poems which, after all, are only sets of words," and to point out that most of our responses are "not our own" but formulated defenses against the "social ordeal" of judging poetry, by insisting that value is a question which, after we have "understood" a poem, solved the "communication problem," got the "experience" or "mental condition relevant to the poem," "nearly always settles itself," cannot be determined in advance by an appeal to "principles, however refined and subtle": just as for Wittgenstein value cannot be spoken about, so for Richards "Value cannot be demonstrated except through the communication of what is valuable"; good judgement is simply a matter of experience in reading. (PC, pp. 286-87, 326-29, 101) Poetry is a "device" for preventing the interference of emotional beliefs with the "logical context of our ideas" which is fixed for the most part "by the facts of Nature"-- a function unhappily termed by Coleridge "a willing suspension of disbelief," since in successful poetry

the suspension is neither conscious nor arbitrary (PC, pp. 258-61); intellectually, poetry rewards attention by "breaking up unreal ideas and responses" and training us to be conscious of response patterns: we must live either with "good" or with "bad" poetry, "And in fact the idle hours of most of our lives are filled with reveries that are simply bad private poetry." (PC, pp. 238, 300) While intellectual inquiry is limited by what is "inexplicable, or ultimate in so far as our present means of inquiry cannot explain it," there is "mystery" and then there is the "mystery-mongering" due to the linguistic abstractions we daily employ "with the pathetic confidence of children," upon the awareness of which depends "greater suppleness" of viewpoint, the experience of a poem without the "doughty authority" of critical maxims. Training in "multiple definition" might raise literary criticism to the condition of a science-- "a General Theory of Critical Relativity." (PC, pp. 296, 319, 322-25) When speech moves away from the "realm of things which can be counted, weighed and measured, or pointed to, or actually seen with the eyes or touched by the fingers," or from such inferred facts as the physicists' atoms, which "lend themselves to unambiguous discussion," precision of reference is lost-- since a thought is always a "pointing" to something (as expressly opposed to Wittgenstein's notion of shared logical form)-- and communication impaired, (PC, pp. 310, 320, 323) a condition which can be rectified by an expansive analysis of the meanings of words.

On his way back to Cambridge from a lectureship at Tsing Hua University in Peking, according to Robert Fitzgerald,<sup>50</sup> Richards continued this experimental mode of teaching in a half-course in "Practical Criticism," given with one in "Contemporary English Literature (1890 to the Present Time)," during the second term of the 1930-31 academic year at

Harvard.<sup>51</sup> James Agee attended both courses, and in December 1931 wrote Father J. H. Flye:

But altogether the most important thing in that spring was I. A. Richards, a visiting professor from Cambridge. It's perfectly impossible for me to define anything about him or about what he taught-- but it was a matter of getting frequent and infinite vistas of perfection in beauty, strength, symmetry, greatness-- and the reasons for them, in poetry and in living. He's a sort of Hamlet and some Dostoevsky character, with their frustration of madness cleared away, and a perfect centre left that understands evil and death and pain, and values them, without torment or perplexity. This sounds extravagant-- well, his power over people was extravagant, and almost unlimited. Everyone who knew him was left in a clear, tingling daze, at the beginning of the summer. It stayed, and grew, all summer.<sup>52</sup>

A less "extravagant" and more thorough-going indication of the extent of Richards' influence is the appearance in the May 31 issue of The Harvard Advocate of a story by Agee, "They That Sow in Sorrow Shall Weep," the course of which is interrupted when the narrator makes the following comment on perception and the instability of viewpoint:

The mind is rarely audience to experience in perfection; rarely is it granted the joy of emotions and realities which, first reduced to their essential qualities, are then so juxtaposed in harmony and discord, in sharp accentuation and fluent change, in thematic statement, development, restatement and recapitulation, as to achieve in progress a continuous, and in consummation, an ultimate beauty. As a rule, experience is broken upon innumerable sharp irrelevancies; emotion and reality, obscurely fused and inexplicably tarnished, are irreducible; their rhythms are so subtly involved, so misgoverned by chance, as to be beyond analysis; and the living mind, that must endure and take part, is soon fugitive before, or else, however brave, falls to pieces beneath this broad unbeautiful pour of chaos.

The experience referred to is objective; the same difficulties hold in the case of subjective experience. The true sum of experience is, as a rule, an inconceivably complex interpenetration of subjective and objective experience. And the true sum and whole of experience is doubly chaotic.



It is therefore fortunate that most minds are constructed to float. However rigorous the weave of currents, however huge the plunge of waves, they are forever near the surface. And it is fortunate, God knows, that minds which anatomize experience are given the mercy of a million moods; these complement and relieve one another, and those which are not wholly proof against pain at least shift the weight of experience to a fresh area of the mind.

The interpenetration of contexts, the distinction, as in The Meaning of Meaning, between close and full, and cognitively distant and schematic experience, the inevitable discontinuity of narrative, which functions as analysis, or anatomy, the passivity of the mind before an unknowable "pour" of experience, the notions of aesthetic experience as an achieved balance and of the artist's activity as "selection and arrangement...due to the direction and accentuation of his interest" (FA, p. 74)-- Agee's narrator goes on to comment that "certain moods, if kept as clear as possible of deflecting intellect, reflect a selection and arrangement of experience which approaches beauty" (CSP, pp. 93-94)-- are all clear links with Richards' theory, and suggest the basis of an epistemological stance.

During that spring, according to Fitzgerald, "Jim held the English Poetic Tradition and the American Scene in a kind of equilibrium under the spell of Richards;"<sup>53</sup> towards the end of that summer, during which, Agee writes Flye, "much more than I realized, these things Richards had done were fermenting," Richards told Agee that he thought the latter's poetry "good-- maybe more than good" (LFF, p. 54); and in his poem "Dedication" (1934), Agee includes "Ivor Armstrong Richards" in his list of truth-tellers.<sup>54</sup> By "truth" Fitzgerald suggests that Agee meant "correspondence between what is said and what is the case-- but what is the case at the utmost reach of consciousness," and he portrays Agee as inspired by the techniques of documentary film and sociological study,

responding as an artist (the "intent of art," says Fitzgerald, "is to make, not to state things") to "this challenge to perceive in full and to present immaculately what was the case." By the writing of "Dedication" Agee was applying the "intellect that Richards had altered" to journalism, a trade "ostensibly and usually in good faith concerned with what was the case," though the epistemological difficulties seem to have been Agee's preoccupation:

What was the case in some degree proceeded from the observer. Theoretical in abstract thought for centuries, this cat seemed now to have come out of the bag to bewitch all knowledge in practice: knowledge of microcosmic entities, of personal experience, of human society. Literary art had had to reckon with it. To take an elementary example, Richards would put three x's on a black-board disposed thus . . . to represent poem, referent and reader, suggesting that a complete account of the poem could no more exclude one x than another, nor the relationship between them. Nor were the x's stable, but variable. Veritas had become tragically complicated. The naive practices of journalism might continue, as they had to, but their motives and achievements, like all others, appeared now suspect to Freudian and Marxian and semanticist alike; and of what these men believed they understood James Agee was (or proposed to make himself) also aware.<sup>55</sup>

The coverage of any event or condition is unalterably mediated and defined by the perception of it, so that, as in Moby Dick, Famous Men and Naked Lunch, the reporter's perceptions (Burroughs' persona is frequently "your reporter") are the event, and subjective distortion the subject of the report. A report can only be substantiated by experience, by having thoughts which actually point to or refer to things, whatever their context in the report; "The source of all our attitudes," Richards says, "should be in experience itself." (PLC, p. 281) In the October 1934 issue of Fortune magazine Agee introduces a group of photographs entitled "The Drought" by emphasizing the primacy of experience:

That this has been by all odds the most ruinous drought in U.S. history is old stuff to you by now. So are the details, as the press reported them, week by broiling week, through the summer. But all the same, the chances are strong that you have no idea what the whole thing meant; what, simply and gruesomely, it was. Really to know, you should have stood with a Dakota farmer and watched a promissory rack of cloud take the height of the sky, weltering its lightnings...and the piteous meager sweat on the air, and the earth baked stiff and steaming. You should have been a lot more people in a lot more places, really to know. Barring that impossibility, however, there is the clear dispassionate eye of the camera which under honest guidance has beheld these bitter and these transient matters, and has recorded this brutal season for the memory of easier time to come.<sup>56</sup>

And it was, in order "really to know" that Agee and Walker Evans went to Alabama in 1936, on assignment by Fortune, to cover the desperate situation of the tenant farmers there, and compiled a report which Fortune declined to print, and which was published in 1941 as Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Therein are noticeable similarities to Richards' particular concerns: the meticulous attention to word definition; the avoidance, despite the use of artistic "devices," of the condition of "art," which, "'true' as it may be in art terms, is hermetically sealed away from identification with everyday 'reality,'" and requires "the killing insult of 'suspension of disbelief,' because it is art" (p. 240); the insistence upon the "process of extraordinary complexity [which] takes place between perceiving the situation and finding a mode of meeting it," (PLC, p. 102) reflected in Agee's strenuous effort after, and despair of, propriety of response ("It seems to me now that to contrive techniques appropriate to it in the first place, and capable of planting it cleanly in others, in the second, would be a matter of years, and I shall try none of it or little, and that very tortured and diluted, at present." LUNPFM, p. 12); the notions of

mentation as the occurrence of a stable poise, and of the desirability of relinquishing formulae of response in order to submit to experience, which are shown in Agee's various humiliations by the state of affairs he regards, and in his concept of symmetry as exhibited by landscape, life, consciousness and human consciousness-- which is thus, as in Richards, not a unique relation-- as at all times subject to the "complex equations" of chance "which are probably never repeated":

Symmetry as we use it here, then, needs a little further examination. Because it is a symmetry sensitive to so many syncopations of chance (all of which have proceeded inevitably out of chances which were inevitable), it is in fact asymmetrical, like Oriental art. But also, because it is so pliant, so exquisitely obedient before the infinite irregularities of chance, it achieves the symmetry it had by that docility lost on a 'higher' plane: on a plane in any case that is more complex, more comprehensive, born of a subtler, more numerous, less obvious orchestration of causes. This asymmetry now seems to us to extend itself into a worrying even of the rigid dances of atoms and of galaxies, so that we can no longer with any certitude picture ourselves as an egregiously complicated flurry and convolved cloud of chance sustained between two simplicities. (LUNPFM, pp. 230-31)

On the contrary it is the present, a pointing reference to an utterly ambiguous 'that,' which is "simple," yet can be perceived only within the context which the reporter must attempt to supply; the weaving of Ishmael's sword-mat is a similar representation, the shuttle of "free will" threading among the "fixed threads" of "necessity," Queequeg's careless jostling guaranteeing that the third strand of "chance," however restrained by the other two, "has the last featuring blow at events." (MD, p. 185) We are cut loose from the explanatory myths of ultimate context by the critical awareness Agee brings to bear, just as Richards, in "What is Belief?" (1934), distinguishing between "beliefs" ("feelings, attitudes, settings of the will, concentrations of attention") and "Beliefs," which have a "secondary sanction," declares himself, "so far as I know, without

Beliefs."<sup>57</sup> On the other hand while, as Agee says, words "cannot embody" but can "only describe," while their ability even to state a case is mitigated by both "falsification (through inaccuracy of meaning as well as inaccuracy of emotion); and inability to communicate simultaneity with any immediacy," and while Agee values what he calls the "cleansing and rectification of language, the breakdown of the identification of word and object," he finds it impossible to transcend attitude (as Richards says, we must always live with poetry, good or bad), the wish to obtain an unambiguous purchase on experience, to embody it in words: "Human beings may be more and more aware of being awake, but they are still incapable of not dreaming, and a fish forswears water at his own peril." (LUNPFM, pp. 213-15) The analog component must be hypothesized, the whale dangerously lunged at: it is Ahab's mania for unambiguous truth that brings Ishmael into the presence of what he comes back to report. Just as symbolic statements are encoded upon (and in poetry, subservient to) verbal signs, a descriptive account-- and thus the perceiving subject-- is encoded upon the fragmented series of gestures and attitudes which can neither be transcended nor identified with, and which, in the absence of a stable context, are never free of the condition of self-deception.

Richards' context theory substitutes co-ordination and actualization in language for Locke's "storehouse" of ideas; in How to Read a Page (1942) he rejects the notion that we are "wax which takes impressions from an alien world. We are so intimately interrelated with it that it is impossible to say where we stop and it begins; or whether we are more its work than it is ours." And if he finds inadequate Locke's cautiously proceeding no further than to leave us "still shut up within the walls of our ideas," he concurs in the difficulty of saying anything about

substance.<sup>58</sup> Context is controlled by language; and about the context of language itself, the relation of words to other things, nothing can be said but that a maximum awareness of definition is the condition of a self-actualizing responsiveness: "Language," he says in "The Interactions of Words" (1942)-- including such linguistic "modes" as "pictures, music or the expressions of faces"-- "as understood, is the mind itself at work and these interdependencies of words are interdependencies of our own being."<sup>59</sup>

The idea that 'mind' is a fiction remains central in Wittgenstein's work; in the Blue Book (1935) he defines thinking as "operating with signs" and thus is not necessarily a mental activity: "It is correct to say that thinking is an activity of our writing hand, of our larynx, of our head, and of our mind, so long as we understand the grammar of these statements"; to suggest that a machine can think is to take a description for an explanatory account, a 'how' for a 'what:' "It is as though we had asked 'Has the number 3 a colour?'" Like Richards in The Philosophy of Rhetoric, (p. 52) Wittgenstein distinguishes between a reason-- having been taught supplies a "reason for doing what one did; as supplying the road one walks"-- and a cause, an explanation why learning operates the way it does, which must always be a matter of "conjecture" or "hypothesis." In the Brown Book (1936) he refers to the "general disease of thinking which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our acts spring as from a reservoir," but allows that an innate "mechanism" or ability to follow rules is a useful hypothesis.<sup>60</sup> Although Cecil H. Brown insists upon the centrality of this mechanism in Wittgenstein's later work as "part of our 'natural history,'"<sup>61</sup> it is difficult to see how this differs from Hume's admission that ideas are innate insofar as they are "natural" as opposed to "uncommon, artificial or miraculous,"

(Inquiry, p. 30) or from Watson's illustration of the boomerang's structure; moreover, in Philosophical Investigations (1953) Wittgenstein disclaims interest in "that in nature which is the basis of grammar," in the "possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history-- since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes." (PI, p. 230)

In this later phase he challenges the assertions in the Tractatus which tend towards realism, the notion "that the ideal 'must' be found in reality" (PI 101): namely, that a proposition or thought can be "'completely analysed'" so that each of its elements or names corresponds to an object of the thought (TLP 3.2, 3.201); that there exists a general propositional form, "This is how things stand," common to all propositions, "the essence of all description, and thus the essence of the world" (TLP, 4.5, 5.4711); that the tautologous and content-free propositions of logic show the "formal-- logical-- properties of language and the world." (TLP 6.12) The later Wittgenstein opposes the idea of an artificial "ideal" meta-language, a "super-order between-- so to speak-- super-concepts" represented by "logic," the "essence" of thought and a priori order of possibilities (PI 81, 97); such an order gives the illusion of "tracing the outline of the thing's nature," whereas what is actually traced is "the frame through which we look at it" (114): as they exist in ordinary speech, sentences exhibit no "striving after an ideal," are already, since they make sense, in "perfect order" (48); and this humbler form of order is constituted by the role of a sentence in a particular "language-game," each of which is a "form of life," all of which (and there is no necessary limitation of their number) have no one thing in common, are related by unsystematically shared "'family resemblances.'" (23, 67) A proposition

is not, as in the Tractatus, whatever is true or false, "fits" or "engages" the "concept of truth," but what is "determined" both by "rules of sentence formation" and by its use in the language-game which has among its "constituent parts" the words 'true' and 'false' (136); whereas by emphasizing the logical element of speech and pretending to abstract the rules of meaning from their application, the Tractatus tends toward the invention of "a myth of 'meaning,'" meaning is defined in Philosophical Investigations as the speaker's being "in motion" or "rushing ahead" ("We go up to the thing we mean"), as an understanding of the relation of parts in a game so as to recognize which are essential, and so having "spatial and temporal context," rather than as a "mental activity" or an "experience." (455-56, 539, 568, 693; pp. 147, 217)

Language is the sphere of sense ("You learned the concept 'pain' when you learned language"), and excludes combinations of words which make no sense; but a combination is not identified with its sense: "When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless." (384, 499-500) Language and its concepts are "instruments," a name simply a "label": a concept is a particular "game," like a style in painting, "For is even our style of painting arbitrary? Can we choose it at pleasure?"; concepts "lead us to make investigations; are the expression of our interest, and direct our interest." (569-70, 15; p. 230) The "agreement" or "harmony" between thought and reality lies in ostensive definition (pointing), which however can only indicate "use" ("the meaning of a word is its use in language") when the role of the word in the language-game is understood-- in the context of an inexplicable skill: "One has already to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of asking a thing's name." (429, 43, 30) The notion in the Tractatus of



substantial objects which determine the logical form shared by language and the world is replaced by the "substratum" of the ability to speak a language (p. 208): the sense of a picture does not depend upon the configuration of its parts but upon its use or place in its language-game, just as the duck-rabbit picture can be perceived "as" duck or "as" rabbit, never simultaneously as both and never unambiguously, except in the context of a particular game, as either. We must not, in the sentence, "I see it like this," allow "it" and "this" to refer to the same thing; "Always get rid of the idea of the private object in this way: assume that it constantly changes, but that you do not notice the change because your memory constantly deceives you." (pp. 194-95, 207) If things cannot be said to have objective reality neither can their "elements," those parts of reality with names (as distinguished from descriptions in which names play roles, and for which "naming is a preparation"), which have no sense in themselves, any more than the standard metre in Paris can be said to be a metre long-- are not represented but the "means of representation": if everything we call 'being' and 'non-being' consists in the existence and non-existence of connexions between elements, it makes no sense to speak of element's being (non-being)." (49, 50) Since a thing's existence can only be asserted by indicating the meaning of its name in a language-game, it is grammar which "tells us what kind of object anything is," and the ability to follow its rules, to know in "particular circumstances" how to proceed, "go on," which constitutes understanding: "The grammar of the word 'knows' is evidently closely related to that of 'can,' 'is able to.' But also closely related to that of 'understands.'" (57, 373, 154, 150)

Although such thinking as the close calculation of the structure of a boiler may be considered as much the "effect" of past experience as the burnt child's fear of the fire, Wittgenstein is "not interested in causes"--

cause is "something established by experiments, by observing a regular concomitance of events, for example"-- asserts only that "human beings do in fact think," know how to proceed in making a boiler, which is nevertheless liable to explode (466); nor is understanding based on "induction"-- "Fire has always burned me, so it will happen now too"-- which is either making an argument to oneself (impossible, as Hume says, in infants and animals) or positing past experience as "cause" (rather than "ground") of certainty, which depends on the contextual language-game of "hypotheses" and "natural laws" (325); the past is linked to the future (recurrence) in language-games, (445) so that "to say that this ground makes the occurrence probable is to say nothing except that this ground comes up to a particular standard of good grounds-- but the standard has no grounds!" (480-82); the certainty that fire burns is "shewn" by how people "think and live" rather than logically justified. (325) Understanding, knowing that 'L' comes after 'K,' is neither a "mental process" (such as a "pain's growing more or less; the hearing of a tune or sentence") during which a "formula occurs" to us (the understanding of the formula would then have to be explained), nor any of the "characteristic accompaniments" of knowing how to go on, for if any common demoninator could be isolated, "why should it be understanding?" (152-55) As for Locke, the earlier Wittgenstein and Richards, understanding differs from real (true) knowledge, is encoded on that attitude, or "state" of "seeing," which makes possible thinking-- interpreting or forming "hypotheses, which may prove false." (pp. 208, 212) Meaning does not transcend use; but in the absence of a "model for the "superlative fact" that we can grasp the meaning of a word in a formula, for example, an instruction to count by two's, without anticipating or predetermining its use in carrying out the order, we are "seduced into using a super-expression"-- namely, "grasp it in a flash"-- to state understanding. (186-92) Attention

cannot be defined except in terms of its circumstances— thinking is not a detachable "incorporeal process which lends life and sense to speaking"— but the speech necessary to thought can, like music, be attended to or not (339, 341, 392, 527); and intention is "embedded in its situation," is no more an "experience" than is meaning (whereas willing is "an experience.... I can't will willing") (337; 611-13; p. 181): the notion of the "intangibility" of a mental state is due to our refusal "to count what is tangible about our state as part of the state we are contemplating." (608) Knower cannot be abstracted from known, thought from expression, (317) understanding from mental state, (p. 59) remembering (the "description," without "experiential content," of a past experience) from accompanying "memory-experiences," (p. 221) soul from behaviour or body ("My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul." -- p. 178), consciousness from brain process, (412) intention from act, (p. 217) or self-consciousness from a particular disposition of consciousness (417): neither can any of these pairs be identified. Ethics, aesthetics, the "new (spontaneous, 'specific') " are always language-games. (77; p. 224) Like Hume, for whose principles of association he substitutes the mastery of a technique, Wittgenstein insists that "nothing is concealed," (435) and condemns an uncritical faith in analogy: "Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a spirit." (36)

Richards' empiricism may be considered, in terms of its tendency to realism, as fitting between the position of a substantially determined logical form in the Tractatus and Wittgenstein's later insistence upon the amenability of investigation to particular examples. Whereas Richards rejects the proper name theory of meaning advanced in the Tractatus ("A name

means an object. The object is its meaning"-- 3202; "one could say that the real name of an object was what all the symbols that signified it had in common."-- 33411), he agrees that a symbol is expandable into a set of simple statements which can be clarified by means of symbol substitution (definition); the later Wittgenstein conceives of no "final analysis" or "single completely resolved form" for expressions, (PI 91) and rejects the schematic approach characteristic of Richards: "Nominalists make the mistake of interpreting all words as names, and so of not really describing their use, but only, so to speak, giving a paper draft on such a description." (PI 383) If the Tractatus anchors reference in substance, and Richards and Ogden advance a Theory of Signs to account for the perception and interpretation of the data of sense-- make provisional use of a physiological hypothesis-- the later Wittgenstein addresses the "impression" as it can be given in a "description," as exemplified by one of the "'aspects of organization'" of an ambiguous diagram-- ("Above all, don't wonder 'What can be going on in the eyes or brain?'"), denies that we make an "inference" ("transition to an assertion") from "sense impressions" to "physical object," which are terms belonging to different language-games existing in "complicated relation," (PI, pp. 211, 208, 180, 202-4) and thus de-emphasizes the 'pointing' function which Richards regards as basic: "in certain circumstances, even pointing to the object one is talking about may be quite inessential to the language-game, to one's thought" (PI 699); the statement "'Red exists'" is a statement about word use, not about the world. (PI 58) Thus Richards' distinction between emotive and descriptive or propositional uses of language is included in the idea of language-games: "What has to be accepted, the given, is-- so we could say-- forms of life." (PI, p. 226) All three approaches regard symbolic statements as encoded in the arrangement of perceptible signs and thus as imprecisely communicable:

"The gesture," says Wittgenstein, "tries to portray, but cannot do it" (PI 434); thought and intention do not "'accompany'" speech and action, are "neither 'articulated' nor 'non-articulated.'" (PI, p. 217) Like Richards, Wittgenstein doubts the existence of images, basing imagination on language, (PI 370, 392) and so distinguishes a "picture"-- someone's comportment pictures his pain-- from an "image." (PI 301)

A juxtaposition of the approaches of the Tractatus, Richards and the later Wittgenstein shows an increasing emphasis on the subjective, a progression from the logical form shared by object and description through the hypothetical account of association to the consideration of difficulties that become "surveyable" by rearrangement" by eliminating "theory" and the "hypothetical"-- the notion of an "essence" lying "beneath the surface" of language: "We must learn to do without explanation, and description alone must take its place." (PI 92, 109) This purest form of analysis is exhibited in the films of Kubrick and Leone, the latter encoding stories, or the subversion of story-conventions, onto clusters of clichéd episodes, images, landscapes, acting styles, sound effects, ritual events and codes of Honour-- the whole game of western-movie signals, saliently dubbed and edited-- and addressed to the ability to speak a language, knowing "how to play," as it is put in Once Upon a Time in the West (1969): the elements of a mental state can be listed, counted up-- as the bounty-hunter counts corpses at the end of For a Few Dollars More (1965)-- set up as a game. Wittgenstein speaks literally rather than metaphorically of the "language" of "sense-impressions," which "like any other is founded on convention," (PI 355) and of the "use" of a sign as its "life:" "Every sign by itself seems dead....In use it is alive." (PI 432) It is in this sense that Godard objects to structuralism ("structures, without images and without sounds-- how can one speak of them?)"-- to Barthes' decoding of

fashion as a "dead language" rather than as "something you live:" "But we're the sons of a filmic language; there's nothing in the Nazism of linguistics we have any use for. Notice: we always come back to how hard it is for us all to be talking about 'the same thing.'" <sup>62</sup> Yet if Locke's substantial colourless world of contingency, brain-process and the imperative of survival is present in Melville and Burroughs, and if Richards' hypothetical causality informs the experience in Famous Men, Godard too posits "realism"-- "If you didn't rely on realism you'd never be able to do anything. If you were on the street you wouldn't dare to get into a cab-- if you'd even risked going out that is"-- as the precondition of experience lying beyond the understanding of the witness, thinks of himself as making movies which are evidential, will frustrate glib assertions about history by "future Foucaults." <sup>63</sup> Despite varying degrees of realism, the different empirical stances of Melville, Agee, Burroughs and a related group of film-makers have in common a context theory of meaning: what is present to the understanding, whatever that may be, is a relation or arrangement of signs which constitutes or represents a sense or comprehensibility, and which seeks stability, hypostasis, universal applicability or validation, a reduction of the ambiguity of experience and the tentativeness of understanding; for "All things that exist," says Locke, "besides their Author, are all [sic] liable to change." (Essay III, iii, 19) The act of criticism, of awakening from reliance on unexamined myths of context, is often portrayed as a violent rupture, as in the smashing of the Pequod: Melville compares his "pulling down" activity with touching off the "keg of powder [that] blew up Block's monument." <sup>64</sup>; in Jiri Menzel's Closely Watched Trains (1966) a photographer awakens to find that during his sleep an air raid has demolished his house around him, and surrenders to laughter; the explosives expert in Duck You Sucker (1971) repeatedly detonates the

contexts upon which his companion depends, as Leone does the myths and forms which are his materials, acceptance of any one of which constitutes an uncritical failure to duck; and in Zabriskie Point (1969), "the killing of the young hijacker of a plane, on the side of which he had written "NO WORDS," triggers an explosion (whether 'real' or 'imagined' is, logically, not stipulated) of a house full of American consumer goods which are examined in close-up as they float slow-motion through the air-- an exercise similar to that in Blow-Up (1966): a photographer enlarges a casual photograph until it becomes evident that something, an aimed pistol, is 'out there' providing a context for the movements he too has 'shot'-- frozen, made dead-- but is left without unambiguous answers to his questions, performing gestures only 'as if' in relation to a contextual substance. Explosions-- again, literally rather than metaphorically-- blow apart that which words, universals, logical connections and notions of substance-- habitual associations-- make sense of, leaving the witness a tourist in his own reality, without a myth to guarantee the validity of his presence. Kubrick claims to have learned to stop worrying and love the bomb.

Michaelangelo Antonioni's The Passenger (originally entitled Profession: Reporter) is the fullest single treatment of the problems of empiricism, and is a delimitation of the question of what remains when the vehicle of signification has been discarded; as the film's protagonist, film journalist David Locke, is told by an offended interviewee who turns the camera back on him, "There are perfectly satisfactory answers to your questions, Mr. Locke, but you don't understand how little you can learn by them. Your questions are more revealing about yourself." The Passenger is remarkable for its allegorical representation-- as Locke's name and history suggest: he was "born in Britain and educated in America," has "a great talent for observation"-- of the type of epistemology and

semiotic analysis that originates in John Locke's Essay. Moreover, Peter Wollen, who wrote the original story and assisted in the screen adaptation, sets forth in his Signs and Meaning in the Cinema a theory of value which approximates that of Richards-- "A valuable work, a powerful work at least, is one which challenges codes, overthrows established ways of reading or looking, not simply to establish new ones, but to compel an unending dialogue"-- and rejects "the mystification that communication can exist,"<sup>65</sup> thus concurring with John Locke's statement that there can be no more exact correspondence between the thoughts of two conversants than between words and "things as they really are." (Essay III, ii, 5-8)

"Perhaps for once," says the leader of an African government into David Locke's microphone, "the official terminology corresponds to the actual facts; and the facts are these...." No such fascistic correspondence is available to Locke: exasperated by his failure to make contact with the camp of a revolutionary army, and by his alienated situation in a third-world country, he asks David Robertson, his hotel-mate and fellow bourgeois traveller, "How do you talk to these people?" "It's like this," he is told: "you work with words and images-- fragile things: I come with merchandise, concrete things; they understand that better." Indeed, Robertson sells arms to the men to whom Locke has been trying to get through, seems to have successfully involved himself in a world beyond that in which the latter is confined, and before which he is a passive spectator. "He believed in something," the girl played by Maria Schneider reminds him later, when he is about to give up the role of Robertson: "Isn't that what you wanted?" Whereas Robertson, who is "unusually poetic for a businessman," sees a "still" quality in the desert, "a kind of waiting," there is nothing anthropomorphic in Locke's response: "I prefer people to landscapes." When he is left in the desert by one of a series of guides, he waves in



greeting at a passing mounted Bedouin who returns no sign; and when his jeep breaks down there, he experiences the landscape as oppressive and victorious rather than poetic and inviting.

The jeep which breaks down and is deserted shortly before Locke discards his identity for that of Robertson, and the car which also breaks down before Locke/Robertson's death, are illustrative in that neither has carried him as far as he has wished to go, enabled him to make his connection, just as, having taken over Robertson's itinerary, Locke either mismanages the appointments or is stood up by the scheduled parties. Like his successive identities-- "I used to be somebody else," he says, "but I traded him in"-- the cars are arbitrarily chosen vehicles of his frustrated quest, connected with him in no more fundamental way than by their use value (one is pointedly "third-hand"). They can be anatomized, dismantled, are amenable to the understanding: while the anonymous Schneider character recommends the landscape to him, he describes the specific malfunction of the car.

Just as the depth of his imagery is limited by the superficiality of allegorical designation, Antonioni's protagonists have always failed to make ultimate connections, but whereas in such early films as L'Avventura (1959) and La Notte (1960) the failure is to make good the promise of romantic love, the films made since his self-exile from Italy-- Blow-Up and Zabriskie Point-- have been explicit semiotic exercises; and in The Passenger, a self-reflexive film about a self-reflexive man, Locke's self-analysis yields the disparate and not necessarily related signs that we are accustomed to thinking of as constituting identity, based on John Locke's distinction between actual and habitual knowledge, his noting that a "settled habit" of judgement operates "so constantly and quick, that we

take that for a perception of our sensation which is an idea formed by our judgement," (Essay II, ix, 8-9) his forensic definition of personal identity and his definition by negation of the understanding: David Locke's point of view, he suggests to the Schneider character, is that of someone riding backward in a convertible. Locke contemplates the dead body of David Robertson, similar enough to his own to enable him to assume Robertson's personal identity, and touches a wisp of the thinning hair as it is fanned by the desert breeze: like the landscape, the body is merely oppressive, has nothing to teach or promise. As he carefully exchanges the photographs in their passports, he recalls Robertson's having remarked on the sameness, after a while, of all such countries as the one they had met in, to which Locke had replied, "It's us who remain the same; we translate every experience into the same old codes...we're creatures of habit"; and later, "no matter how hard you try it's impossible to break away from the same old habits." Keeping one of Robertson's appointments in Barcelona, Locke meets, instead of the scheduled agent, an old man who tells him as he nods toward some children: "Ninos, I've seen so many grow up. Other people look at them and think it's a new world, but I see the same old tragedy beginning all over again. They never escape us. It's boring." And he adds to his list of the elements of the identity he has left behind-- "wife, house, adopted child, successful job"-- the qualification, "everything but a few bad habits I can't get rid of."

When he had expressed the wish to get beyond his habits Robertson had told him "It doesn't work that way," and he had answered, "It doesn't work the other way either." For David Locke, identity is not anchored in any absolute reality; if, by the manipulation of a few signs-- a set of habits and a passport-- it can be exchanged, then those signs cannot logically

be transcended, for in their absence 'identity' does not exist-- is not, that is, recognizable: Locke first meets the girl, who becomes another kind of passenger, when attempting to avoid his television producer ("I thought someone might recognize me"); when the police ask if they "recognize him" as he lies dead, the girl and his wife give contradictory answers.

The inability to consolidate an identity, the fact that it doesn't work, is as important to film-maker Antonioni as to film-maker Locke. We are shown the coverage of a firing squad execution which incorporates all the signals of documented reality-- minimal green and white tones, long wide-sweeping shots with self-conscious and apparently unrehearsed adaptations of focus; but the question of its objective 'reality' ("I didn't mean to upset you," says the producer to Rachel Locke as he switches off the tape) is no more pertinent here than to the explosion in Zabriskie Point. In a televised eulogy for him, the producer recalls the limitations within which Locke had worked: "David maintained that objectivity was impossible, whereas I maintained that it was both possible and necessary." If all objects are mediated by signs, then the mosaic of conscious ideas and images, like the motion-picture screen, is an impenetrable surface, a conglomeration of accidents behind which subsists no essence that can be reached and known; thus John Locke declares it impossible to "explain" such matters of fact as "voluntary motions" or material "creation." (Essay IV, x, 19) The film opens as a vehicle enters a village square and ends with a vehicle leaving a similar square: no further-reaching context is available to clarify things. "It sounds crazy," says David Locke of his situation, "because I can't explain it." To explain is to invoke context, to attempt to predict and control experience: Locke's producer makes a

point of the unexpectedness of his death, just as the girl answers Locke's question about the impressive Gaudi building in which he has sought refuge, "The man who built it was hit by a bus"; and when Locke, musing over some occupations to which he might proceed, suggests "How about a gun-runner"-- exactly what he has become-- the girl answers, "Too unlikely."

Rather, knowledge is limited to the interrelation of ideas, and so it is by an intricate choreography that the film proceeds: Locke is first shut-tled from one guide to another in a series of disconcerting exchanges carried on out of his visual range, and ours, and then can never quite make sense of the series of moves plotted in Robertson's appointment book. At one such appointment we watch Locke's movements as he engages and releases passersby to ask directions, then see and hear the rhythmic cane and feet of an old man as they encounter and respond to Locke's. He sees the girl in London; we see her in Munich; when he sees her in Barcelona they are in precisely the same postures and spatial relationship that they had briefly assumed in London: later he asks, "Do you believe in coincidence? I never used to notice it: now I see it all around." He is involved in, and struggles for detachment from, a kind of swirling dance over which he has no control. His present situation is "an accident: everybody thought I was dead and I let them think so." And his dependence upon the coincidence of ideas informs the semantic method of the film: the camera regards Locke as he stands red-shirted in a noise filled room before Robertson's body, looks up toward a whirling fan, the source of the noise, and returns to Locke, now in Robertson's blue shirt; again, while over the soundtrack we hear the voices, as in memory, of Locke and Robertson in conversation, the camera shifts slowly from Locke, as he sits working on the passports, to a window looking out onto the desert as Locke and Robertson stroll

into view conversing: as they return to the room, Locke leaves the frame to the left to refill their glasses, and the camera shifts right from Robertson, who has continued to regard Locke off, again picking up Locke at work in the 'present.' Later, when we see him turn it off, we realize that we have been listening to a tape-recorder; through both shots, in their parallel treatments of sound, Antonioni suggests the mechanical nature of memory. Moving the actors around while the camera records the successive and anatomized gestures and signs which mediate our perception of an event is a device patented by Lelouche in Live for Life, and such shots as that which follows Locke through the corridor of a hotel viewed from the exterior, and is completed by the covering of a window in a white wall with a green shutter, suggest Godard's chromatic analysis in La Chinoise. Here, the choreographed arrangement of images on the screen is the realization of the epistemology of Locke's Essay.

If the dancer cannot be told from the dance, the indissolubility of real and imagined does not imply the identity of actor and role; on the contrary, it is the nature of that passenger which finds itself alienated from role which concerns both Antonioni and David Locke. At their meeting in a Munich church, for example, the actor portraying the revolutionary leader Achebe executes a series of reactions to some xeroxed diagrams of weapons, concluding with a pleased response, while Locke struggles to improvise the role of Robertson; both are pointed exercises in acting, drawing our attention to the fact that we are watching actors at work before a camera rather than the dramatic confrontation of actual characters. || As we watch, we peer through a lens at activities as detached observers, like the bellman who lingers at the door after admitting Locke and the girl to their hotel room. So is David Locke, who keeps the camera between himself and the people he interviews; "You involve yourself in real

situations," his wife complains, "but you've got no dialogue." His knowledge is mediated, vicarious, gained at a remove: as his wife listens to their taped conversation, we hear Robertson pause and point out to the suddenly embarrassed Locke that his tape-recorder is running. And when he asks the girl, "What kind of impression do you think you make when you walk into a room?" she replies:

People think I'm all right-- nothing mysterious. You learn more by packing someone's things.

Yes, it's like listening in on a private phone conversation.

The penchant for the suggestive presence of clothing and belongings, quite literal 'habits,' dates back to L'Avventura; and is one of Antonioni's salient debts to Hitchcock; when an embassy official offers to go through Locke's things with his wife, she declines in embarrassed silence.

While meticulous attention is devoted to the soundtrack of The Passenger (which records, for example, the sound of the wind as it rushes past a moving car), the film is addressed chiefly to the analytic sense of sight, which is experienced as a kind of violation. Locke tells the story of a blind man who gains his sight through an operation when he is nearly forty: "At first he was elated, really high: faces, colours, landscapes. But then everything began to change. No one had ever told him how much dirt there was. He began to notice dirt and ugliness everywhere. When he was blind he could cross the street with a stick, but once he could see he began to be afraid; he lived in darkness, never left his room. After three years he killed himself." Most of the suggestions of self in the film are associated with the sense of sight, "the most comprehensive of all our senses," according to John Locke, and the one to which he regularly compares the operation of the understanding (Essay II, ix, 9; x, 7; IV, xiii, 1);

and all of them involve the closed spaces of vehicles or rooms. It is in the outdoors that Locke conducts his interviews, invoking here the enclosed space of the camera; and he avoids confrontations with his producer, his wife and the police by ducking into buildings, racing for his car. We view the world through the windshields of three cars; find ourselves in a noise filled air terminal and in the silence, inadvertently profaned by Locke, of a church; in the twisting asymmetrical convolutions of Gaudi's buildings (Maria Schneider plays a student of architecture), one of which permits us the glimpse of a couple arguing violently, and the sculpted shade of an umbracolo; in an editing room watching video-tapes; in the glass labyrinth of a hotel lobby, a mirror-filled glassed-in bar, a glass-walled restaurant, shoe shine stand, and Avis office; staring into bird cages, phone booths, bedrooms and through a window over the shoulder of Rachel Locke. All of our visual perceptions are mediated by the glass of the lens: "What goes on beyond that window?" Locke asks; "People who read what I have to say do so because it conforms to their expectations-- or worse, it conforms to mine." Much of the choreography-- the movements of people in the air terminal; a last minute decision not to enter his wife's house; the alternate interrogation and beating of a revolutionary leader in rooms partitioned by a broken plate of glass; Locke's registration at a hotel desk while his wife, beside him in a phone booth, tries to trace his whereabouts; the car chase-- depend upon the bringing into relation of discrete discontinuous closed spaces. When Locke switches identities with Robertson, he does so by switching rooms; and he asks a policeman who insists on checking out the registration of his car, "Senor, are you looking for the car of the person in it?"

The comparison of the mind to a camera or room dates from John Locke's Essay and suggests the limitation of viewpoint that is the

starting-point of empirical semiology: the observation that "though it be highly probable that millions of men do now exist, yet, whilst I am alone, writing this, I have not that certainty of it which we call knowledge" (Essay IV, xi, 9) is the basis of Berkeley's esse est percipi, and is echoed in David Locke's answer to the girl's comment that "people disappear all the time:" "Yes, every time they leave the room." Particularly relevant is the model of the camera obscura, which operates by the admission of light through a tiny aperture into a darkened room, casting an inverted moving image on the opposite wall, sharpened and controlled by a lens and corrected by a mirror<sup>66</sup>: according to the Essay, "the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without: would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all objects of sight, and the ideas of them." (IV, xi, 9) Such, of course, is Antonioni's camera. The situation is allegorically set up at the end of the film: the girl stands at the barred window of a hotel room-- we see her only as reflected in a full-length mirror-- while Locke asks from the interior, "What can you see?" She lists "A man scratching his shoulder, a kid throwing stones, and dust. It's very dusty here." The scene is repeated as Locke lies on the bed. He had wished to leave behind the 'room' constituted by habits and a forensic definition, had leaned through the window of a cable car extending his arms as in flight, watching his shadow on the waves below; there is a shot, as he looks for a mechanic to repair his car, of a panting dog pacing at the end of his tether. Now, as he reclines alone on the bed, the camera moves slowly past him toward the window, the bars of which, like the wire framework in Dürer's Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude,



analyze the scene on a rectangular grid, and proceeds through the bars: outside, it wheels slowly around in the square, registering the mundane activities and the distant expanse of landscape, following the police as they drive up with Rachel Locke and enter, with the girl, Locke's room, where-- whether he has been killed by the thugs who had interrogated Achebe (we have seen them drive up and heard one of them enter behind the camera) or whether his adopted identity, like his third-hand car, simply no longer functions-- he now lies dead. The camera has come around 180° to peer into the source of its origin, the apertured room in which Locke's body lies; a room within a room, recording images from an uncomprehended source and representing to itself the decomposed elements of its identity, it remains a camera, does not transcend its own point of view, is confined, by a method that recognizes no basis for metaphysics, to the invalid but necessary terms of analogy. Like Melville, Agee and Godard, Antonioni derives from its empirical limits the poetry of the self-reflexive experience.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Locke, An Essay on Human Understanding, ed. A. C. Fraser (New York: Dover, 1959), III, iii, 11-13; IV, xvii, 8. Subsequent references are noted in the text. The Fraser edition has been used because the Peter H. Nidditch edition (Oxford, 1975) was not available at the time of writing.

<sup>2</sup> I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination (London: Kegan Paul, 1934), p. 19. Subsequent references are noted in the text (CI).

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 429. Subsequent references are noted in the text (PI).

<sup>4</sup> Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1974), pp. 58-90. Subsequent references are noted in the text (HWP).

<sup>5</sup> Charles H. Kahn, "Empiricism," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), Vol. II, p. 500.

<sup>6</sup> Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (New York: Humanities Press, 1961), 5.631, 5.6331. Subsequent references are noted in the text (TLP).

<sup>7</sup> James Agee and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. xiv. Subsequent references are noted in the text (LUNPFM).

<sup>8</sup> Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ed. Harrison Hayford and Herschel Parker (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 70. Subsequent references are noted in the text (MD).

<sup>9</sup> William Burroughs, Naked Lunch (Castle Books, 1959), p. 221. Subsequent references are noted in the text (NL).

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, "Pierrot Mon Ami," Cahiers du Cinéma; trans. Joachim Neugroschel and reprinted in Jean-Luc Godard, ed. Toby Mussman (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 242.

<sup>11</sup> Dwight Macdonald, Against the American Grain (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 160-61.

<sup>12</sup> Godard, "An Interview with Jean-Luc Godard," Cahiers du Cinéma, trans. Rose Kaplin for reprint in Mussman, p. 108.

<sup>13</sup> Agee, "Letter to a Friend," James Agee: A Portrait (Caedmon Records, 1971), side 2.

<sup>14</sup> Richards, How to Read a Page: A Course in Effective Reading with an Introduction to a Hundred Great Words (New York: Norton, 1942), pp. 193-94. Subsequent references are noted in the text (HRP).

<sup>15</sup> Jay Leyda (ed.), The Melville Log (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), Vol. II, p. 832.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hobbes, "Human Nature, or The Fundamental Elements of Policy," The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1899), Vol. IV, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Russell, p. 89; Werner Heisenberg, The Physicist's Conception of Nature (London: Hutchinson, 1958), pp. 12, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, De Anima, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1907), III, 12-13, pp. 159-63.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Addison, Critical Essays from The Spectator (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 182-83.

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965), pp. 47, 51, 97.

<sup>21</sup> Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed. J. T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 38, 40, 81.

<sup>22</sup> Burroughs, Naked Lunch, p. xiv. The original passage reads, "If a sign is useless, it is meaningless. That is the point of Occam's maxim." (TLP 5.328)

<sup>23</sup> Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard," Film Quarterly, Vol. XXII, No. 2, Winter 1968-69, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> George Berkeley, "A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge," Berkeley's Philosophical Writings, ed. D. M. Armstrong (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), 65-66.

<sup>25</sup> David Hume, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. C. W. Hendel (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), pp. 32, 114. Subsequent references are noted in the text.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," Philosophical Writings of Peirce, ed. J. Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 249-50.

<sup>27</sup> William James, The Principles of Psychology (Dover, 1950), Vol. I, pp. 265-69.

<sup>28</sup> Peirce, "Synerchism, Fallibilism, and Evolution," Buchler, ed., pp. 358-60.

<sup>29</sup> John Dewey, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry (New York: Holt, 1938), pp. 241-51.

<sup>30</sup> Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. John J. McDermott (New York: Putman's, 1973), Vol. I, p. 52.

<sup>31</sup> J. D. Uytman, "John Broadus Watson," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. VIII, p. 279.

<sup>32</sup> B. F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (Toronto: Bantam, 1972), pp. 194-95.

<sup>33</sup> Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), pp. 26-27, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Dewey and A. F. Bentley, "Interaction and Transaction," Knowing and the Known (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> Dewey, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, pp. 230-37, 115-17.

<sup>36</sup> Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard," p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Agee, "Notes for a Moving Picture: The House," The Collected Short Prose of James Agee, ed. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Ballantine, 1970), p. 187. Subsequent references are noted in the text (CSP).

<sup>38</sup> Richards and C. K. Ogden, The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 51. Subsequent references are noted in the text (MM).

<sup>39</sup> Reuben Brower, "Beginnings and Transitions: I. A. Richards Interviewed," I. A. Richards: Essays in his Honour (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 26-28.

<sup>40</sup>G. H. von Wright, "Introduction" to Wittgenstein's Letters to G. K. Ogden (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 2, 9.

<sup>41</sup>W. H. N. Hotopf, Language, Thought and Comprehension: A Case Study of the Writings of I. A. Richards (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 164.

<sup>42</sup>See particularly John Crowe Ransome, The World's Body (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 146-47; Allen Tate, "Literature as Knowledge," The Man of Letters in the Modern World; Selected Essays: 1928-1955 (New York: Meridian, 1955), pp. 39, 51, 57; S. E. Hyman, The Armed Vision (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 312; Manuel Bilsky, "I. A. Richards' Theory of Metaphor," Modern Philosophy, L, November 1952, p. 137; Murray Kreiger, The New Apologists for Poetry (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 118, 123-25; W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), pp. 623-24, 641; Richard Foster, "The Romanticism of I. A. Richards," ELH, Vol. 26, March 1959, pp. 95-97 (Foster supplies a thorough bibliography on the subject of Richards' imputed "conversion"); and G. W. Graff, "The Later Richards and the New Criticism," Criticism, IX, Summer 1967, pp. 229-30, 240.

<sup>43</sup>Richards, Ogden and James Wood, The Foundations of Aesthetics (New York: Lear, 1925), pp. 63, 65, 72-79. Subsequent references are noted in the text (FA).

<sup>44</sup>Hotopf, pp. 1-2.

<sup>45</sup>Richards, The Principles of Literary Criticism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1925), pp. 176-77. Subsequent references are noted in the text (PLC).

<sup>46</sup>Richards, Poetries and Science: A Reissue of Science and Poetry (1926, 1935) with Commentary (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 26. Subsequent references are noted in the text (SP).

<sup>47</sup>Richards, "Behaviourism," The New Criterion, April 1926, IV, 2, pp. 374-77.

<sup>48</sup>Richards, "Structure and Communication," Structure in Arts and Science, ed. Gyorgy Kepes (New York: George Braziller, 1965), pp. 130-31.

<sup>49</sup>Richards, Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), pp. 3, 6-8, 11-15. Subsequent references are noted in the text (PC).

<sup>50</sup>Robert Fitzgerald, "A Memoir," The Collected Short Prose of James Agee (New York: Ballantine, 1968), p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Harvard University Catalogue (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1930), pp. 192, 196.

<sup>52</sup> Agee, Letters of James Agee to Father Flye, ed. J. H. Flye (New York: Ballantine, 1971), pp. 53-54. Subsequent references are noted in the text (LFF).

<sup>53</sup> Fitzgerald, "A Memoir," p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Agee, "Dedication," The Collected Poems of James Agee, ed. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Ballantine, 1970), p. 11. Subsequent references are noted in the text (CP).

<sup>55</sup> Fitzgerald, "A Memoir," pp. 29, 30-31.

<sup>56</sup> Agee, "The Drought," Fortune, October 1934, X, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Richards, "What is Belief?" Poetries: Their Media and Ends, ed. Trevor Eaton (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 238.

<sup>58</sup> Richards, How to Read a Page: A Course in Effective Reading with an Introduction to a Hundred Great Words (New York: Norton, 1942), pp. 184, 196-97.

<sup>59</sup> Richards, "The Interactions of Words," The Language of Poetry, ed. Allen Tate (Princeton Univ. Press, 1942), p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Books (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), pp. 14-15, 143, 97.

<sup>61</sup> Cecil H. Brown, Wittgensteinian Linguistics (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), pp. 80-81, 85-86.

<sup>62</sup> Godard, "Three Thousand Hours of Film," trans. Jane Pease, Jean-Luc Godard, ed. Toby Mussman (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 299; "Struggle on Two Fronts," p. 79.

<sup>63</sup> Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts," pp. 32, 26.

<sup>64</sup> Melville, "To Evert Duyckinck," The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. M. R. Davis and W. H. Gilman (Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 79. Subsequent references are noted in the text.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Wollen, Signs and Meaning in the Cinema (London: British Film Institute, 1974), pp. 172, 163.

<sup>66</sup> Arnold Gossan, A Chronology of Photography (Athens, Ohio: Hand-book Co., 1972), pp. 12-13, 295.

Often, when I was young, last year, I walked out to the water. It spoke to me of myself. Images came to me, from the water. Pictures. Large green lawns. A great house with pillars, but the lawns so vast that the house can be seen only dimly, from where we are standing. I am wearing a long skirt to the ground, in the company of others. I am witty. They laugh. I am also wise. They ponder. Gestures of infinite grace. They appreciate. For the finale, I save a life. Leap into the water all clothed and grasping the drowner by the hair, or using the cross-chest carry, get the silly bastard to shore. Have to bash him once in the mush to end his wild panicked struggles. Drag him to the old weathered dock and there, he supine, I rampant, manage the resuscitation. Stand back, I say to the crowd, stand back. The dazed creature's eyes open-- no, they close again-- no, they open again. Someone throws a blanket over my damp, glistening white, incredibly beautiful shoulders. I whip out my harmonica and give them two fast choruses of "Red Devil Rag." Standing ovation. The triumph is complete.

Donald Barthelme, The Dead Father

## CHAPTER II. Locked Out: The Flotsam of Narrative Continuity

A symbol is a word, image or gesture which represents a verbally organized context, and is thus an abstraction. Even for Locke, making one simple idea stand for many, as the "whiteness" of milk agrees roughly with that of snow and chalk, is a verbal activity, accomplished by naming. (Essay II, xi, 8-10) The names of "mixed modes," or abstract ideas, he says, have "perfectly arbitrary" meanings, while those of substances are arbitrary to a degree, referring "to a pattern, though with some latitude," and the reference of names of simple ideas, which are "determined by the existence of things," is "not arbitrary at all" (III, iv, 17): that is, 'meaning,' a term derived from Latin and Teutonic words for 'mind,' whether it be equated with referent (object, fact) or the act of referring (thought, intention), is grounded in substance, the unknowable.

OED says that words were spoken of as the "signs and symbols of things" as early as 1686. But David Hartley is the first of Locke's followers to use 'symbol' in an epistemological sense, suggesting that, in association, "the visible Idea, being more glaring and distinct than the rest, performs the Office of a Symbol of all the rest, suggests them, and connects them together"; and his "Art of Logic" recommends the "use of Words in the way of mathematical Symbols."<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, who regards a proposition as a symbol, also calls "any part of a proposition that characterizes its sense an expression (or symbol," (TLP 3.31) And for Richards, meaning occurs when "one item" in a context, usually a word, substitutes for or symbolizes-- means-- other members, which can thus be omitted in recurrence<sup>2</sup>; symbols are used both to "direct and organize"-- to think-- and to "record and communicate" references and referents. (MM, pp. 9, 23)

The idea that a symbol represents a context has affinities with



literary uses of the word. Erich Auerbach speaks of the symbolic, or "figural view of human life" fostered by Christianity, which brings figure forward from ground by making particular sets of gestures, as of the hero, traitor or saint, "appear as exemplary, as models, as significant, and to leave all 'the rest' in abeyance."<sup>3</sup> Coleridge emphasizes the non-arbitrary, organic nature of the symbol, as opposed to mere allegory:

Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is in itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses....On the other hand a symbol...is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general, above all, by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which renders it intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of that unity of which it is the representative.<sup>4</sup>

This notion of an organic link between symbol and context, and thus between Symbol and eternal context, persists in such opinions as T. S. Eliot's, that allegory is "a lazy substitute for profundity,"<sup>5</sup> and carries over into linguistic considerations, informing Ferdinand de Saussure's rejection of the term 'symbol' for verbal sign: "One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified," as between a pair of scales and justice.<sup>6</sup> Ogden and Richards are therefore careful to distinguish their science of Symbolism from the Symbolism of the French poets of the 1890's, "who were in revolt against all forms of literal and descriptive writing." (MM, p. v)

Newton Arvin is representative-- symbolic-- of those critics who insist that Melville is a Symbolist: according to Arvin, while the "word 'symbolism,' in its literary bearing, had not come into use at the time Moby-Dick was written," the works of Poe, Hawthorne and Whitman show that

"the poetic mind in America was already symbolist in everything but the program." Melville is co-opted by that program; Ahab's postboard-masks and linked-analogies speeches are identified as "Melville's personal vision of the doctrine of correspondences that lay below so much romantic and symbolist writing" (this despite Melville's indictment, in his correspondence, of "transcendentalisms, myths and oracular gibberish"-- LHM, pp. 77-78); and the "leading images" of Moby-Dick are defined as "symbols in the sense that their primal origins are in the unconscious, however consciously they have been organized and controlled; that on this account they transcend the personal and local and become archetypal in their range and depth; that they are inexplicit, polysemantic, and never quite exhaustible in their meanings."<sup>7</sup>

Northrop Frye also treats the symbol as Symbol, the representative of an ultimate and meaningful context. The only story, he says, and the "framework of all literature," is that of "the loss and regaining of identity"; literature, which aims at "identifying the human world with the natural world around it, or finding analogies between them," is a universe or family of derivative stories, and "can only derive its forms from itself"; the "content" of "experiences" may change, but the vocabulary of forms remains constant. Art is always constructed according to "some principle of repetition or recurrence": rhythm in music and pattern in painting provide the basis for the sought identity with what is recurrent in the natural cycle.<sup>8</sup> For Frye, a symbol is "any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention. A word, a phrase, or an image used with some kind of special reference (which is what a symbol is usually taken to mean) are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in critical analysis." Like Saussure, he refers to words in terms of their

"external meaning" as "signs, verbal units which conventionally and arbitrarily, stand for and point to things outside the place where they occur"; the "inward" direction of meaning, which words have in "all literary verbal structures," is the context in which they are non-arbitrary symbols. Metaphor, "the unit of relationship of two symbols," is a hypothetical "statement of identity" ("A is B") opposed to "ordinary descriptive meaning" and most powerfully realized in "the anagogic aspect of meaning": "The literary universe, therefore, is a universe in which everything is potentially identical with everything else"-- grows out of everything else, as a man is identical with the boy he once was.<sup>9</sup> In Moby-Dick, however, something is left over when the quest for identity is finished: the myth of intention, the inveterate will to re-establish rhythm or symmetry, is a version of Frye's one great Story, which may be paraphrased, 'I want to go back to sleep'; but the asymmetrical presence of Ishmael permits no such neat conclusion. Cases in point are Burroughs' exhortation in The Soft Machine-- "Will the gentle reader get up off his limestones and pick up the phone?-- Cause of death: completely uninteresting"<sup>10</sup>-- and, in Antonioni's Blow-Up, the photographer's looking into the camera, ostensibly addressing his models as they strike various attitudes, and shouting, "Wake up!"

Whereas, for Frye, literature is independent of experience, a body of hypothetical thought and action, Melville, Agee and Burroughs treat literature as experience, and experience as vicarious, mediated by signs. Symbols, as Richards says, are the mind itself at work; but they are misleading, for they suggest the possibility of a symmetry, a uniform recurrence of contexts, which cannot empirically be realized in the light of Locke's emphasis on the universal liability to change. Symmetry, that which Ahab has lost, has the two subdivisions of beauty and knowledge (beauty and

meaning, for Ogden and Richards), as is suggested by the double quest in Mardi, Taji's for the former, Babbalanja's for the latter. Melville's texts undercut myths of identity and the hypnotic forces of rhythm, metaphor and symbolism which reinforce them. It is the Confidence Man's insistence that symmetry is immanent and trustworthy: like Burroughs and Antonioni, Melville exhorts us to wake up, to be aware that the necessary and vain symmetry of language implies no redemption from the condition of ambiguity.

The redemptive force of the Symbol, its establishment of an ultimate Context, and thus of an ultimate Understanding, might be illustrated by a consideration of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850). As the "representative" of his witch-hunting ancestors, Hawthorne tells us in "The Custom House," "I...take shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them may now henceforth be removed": so deep go the "aged roots" of his family in Salem, so numerous are the ancestors who "have mingled their earthly substance with the soil," that his "inevitable" attachment to the place, is not one of "love" but of "instinct," "the mere sensuous sympathy of dust for dust"; and despite dreary appearance and climactic and social chill, the "spell survives.. just as powerfully as if the natal spot were an earthly paradise."<sup>11</sup> But neither door of the Custom House, breeding-lace of "evil and corrupt practices," where Hawthorne serves time as if in expiation of the ancestral curse, "opens on the road to Paradise": here he puts "Literature, its exertions and objects," aside, is separated from "Nature...and all the imaginative delight, wherewith it had been spiritualized," and, as to "human nature," is an observer rather than one involved, "was fond of standing at a distance and watching" the dreaming face of the old Collector rather than conversing with him. (pp. 11, 24, 21) He is conscious that his "transitory life" at the Custom House is

subject to political contingency, and his assertion that "the past was not dead" refers both to his temporarily shelved literary ambition and to his ancestral environs-- makes of them one concern. (pp. 24, 26) Exploring a room filled with ancient documents he discovers the historical researches of Jonathan Pue, a predecessor Surveyor, among which is a gold-embroidered cloth scarlet 'A': the papers recording the "internal operations of his head," along with the "imperfect skeleton, and some fragments of apparel, and a wig of magestic frizzle," constitute the physical remains of Surveyor Pue, but do not, it is insisted, define the "limits" of Hawthorne's art:

"in the dressing up of the tale, and imagining the motives and modes of passion that influence the characters who figure in it," he has allowed himself "as much license as if the facts had been entirely of my own invention."

(pp. 28, 31) The gap between the stark fact of record (Hawthorne measures the letter, finding "each limb...to be precisely three inches and a quarter in length") and the world of imagination (context and "motives") is bridged by the power of the 'A,' on which his eyes have "fastened" as if entranced:

"Certainly, there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind." Placing it on his breast, he experiences "a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heat"; the "scarlet symbol," with its explanatory manuscript, is a direct exhortation (an intentional gesture) by Pue to bring the story "before the public," thereby to remedy a soon to be terminated income, so that Hawthorne's mind is "recalled...in some degree, to its old track." (pp. 30, 32, 31) Setting to work, he again confronts the gap between lifelessness and life, for his imagination has become "a tarnished mirror," its creations retaining "all the rigidity of dead

corpses"; like Wordsworth and Coleridge, he laments the loss of creative power, and repairs for its renewal to the "invigorating charm of Nature" and meditation by moonlight, "a medium most suitable for the romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests," rendering mundane details "spiritualized," so that "they seem to lose their actual substance and become things of intellect," in a "neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other." The mirror image becomes an in-depth "repetition of all the gleam and shadow of the picture, with one removed further from the actual, and nearer to the imaginative": the forms at the top of Plato's hierarchy are to be found in the "haunted verge" of the mirror. (pp. 33-35) But these recourses fail: enter "Providence" and the "guillotine" ("one of the most apt of metaphors") of political change, which severs Hawthorne from his debilitating dependence upon government office and leaves his "figurative self" in a happily "decapitated state," which permits his becoming again a "full-time" literary man." (pp. 39-41) He could once, had he "the insight and...the cunning to transcribe it," have recorded the daily life of the Custom House and preserved the "picturesque style" of description of one of the old story-tellers, producing what, "I honestly believe, would have been something new in literature"; but he is dead to that world now, "writes from beyond the grave," and the Custom House is no longer "a reality of my life. I am a citizen of somewhere else." (pp. 35, 42-43) He has moved through fall, expiation and redemptive encounter with the power of the symbol, back to the world of "literature"; and his movement from dead record to living romance, the analogy of which is his reconstruction of the character of the old General ("as difficult a task as to trace out and build up anew, in imagination, an old fortress...

from a view of its gray and broken ruins"), is the activity and frame of reference to which the symbol has drawn him.

So it is in the resulting romance: if the utopian vision of the founding colonists has been forced to give way to the necessity for cemeteries and jails, then Hester Prynne's appearance in the door of the prison-house before the "intently fastened" eyes of the onlookers, and her mounting the scaffold (she has later "a sense...too ill-defined to be made a thought...that her whole orb of life...was connected with this spot, as with the one point that gave it unity") in order to endure the "intense consciousness of being the object of severe and universal observation," (pp. 45, 233, 56) is potentially salvatory: figure comes forward from ground, focuses the universal gaze and suggests the possibility of a deeper reality. Just as the town-beadle "prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritan code of law," Hester's ignominy both recalls the defiling of "virgin soil" with prisons and cemeteries and suggests a mode of redemption, for she rose from the bush by the prison-door, which might "symbolize some sweet moral blossom" in the story, is analogous to the symbols on Hester's breast, the infant and the scarlet 'A,' the latter having "the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relation with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself." (pp. 48, 44-45, 50) Hester's isolation is defined in terms of a dualistic separation between objective fact and subjective experience, for the "no great distance" she travels from prison to scaffold, "measured by the prisoner's experience... might be reckoned a journey of some length," a separation which is resolved by her elevated position on the platform, "a point of view that revealed to Hester Prynne the entire track upon which she had been treading since her happy infancy": she escapes "from the cruel weight and hardness of

the reality" of the present into a train of remembered images that lead inevitably back to the present spectacle, her memory of her husband giving place to his deformed shape in the crowd; her epiphany on the platform brings together, makes meaningful, the inner and outer (temporal and spatial) worlds of past and present journeys, symbolizing an overview which, through the narrator's knowledge of her "memory's picture gallery," is also ours. And when she touches the 'A' "to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real," (pp. 51, 54-56) it is as when the photographer in Blow-Up touches the body in order to verify its existence, but for the fact that when he looks again it is gone.

If in this first scene we are presented with what Agee calls "the cruel radiance of what is," (LUNPFM, p. 11) then the moral blossom Hawthorne offers us from the rose-bush, and the pattern of symbolic imagery in which it figures, are destined to place that reality in a context which justifies and from which springs Hester's, and by implication the narrator's, comprehensive and epiphanic point of view. The flower, for example, has its counterpart in the prison, "the black flower of civilization": Hester's sin, to which Chillingworth refers as a "black flower," is what binds her to Salem, "the roots which she had struck into the soil"; passionate red figure and Puritan black ground are Hester's heraldic colours ("On a Field, Sable, the Letter A, Gules"), the rose-bush amid the "unsightly vegetation" in front of the prison. (pp. 44, 165, 74, 251) Roger Chillingworth is a gatherer of herbs "'of a dark and flabby leaf,'" and Hester wonders whether the earth, "quickened to an evil purpose by the sympathy of his eye, [might] greet him with poisonous shrubs"; flowers suggest beauty and morality; Chillingworth, the scholarly analyst and expert at herbal concoction, discourages thoughts of death in Arthur Dimmesdale, which would withdraw



the latter from under his inhuman (he is "an unhumanized mortal") gaze and scrutiny: "'Youthful men, not having taken a deep root, give up their hold of life so easily.'" (pp. 123, 166, 247, 155) Pearl is both the 'A' on Hester's breast (Hester gives "many hours of morbid ingenuity, to create an analogy between the object of her affection and the emblem of her guilt and torture. But in truth Pearl was the one as well as the other; and only in consequence of that identity had Hester contrived so perfectly to represent the scarlet letter in her appearance") and a child of flowers, "a lovely and immortal flower" who cries "for a red-rose" in the Governor's garden; she is named "Red Rose" ~~by~~ John Wilson, and answers his catechistic question "that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door." (pp. 95-96, 83, 100, 103, 105)

Pearl is the demonic result of "lawless passion," a child of the forest whose "'principle of being'" is "'the freedom of a broken law,'" when Dimmesdale confesses his "nameless horror" of Chillingworth, Pearl offers to reveal the old man's identity, whispering a "gibberish" which only "sounded...like human language" into the minister's ear, though she earlier demonstrates that she knows what Chillingworth is up to: "'Come away, mother....or yonder old Black Man will catch you! He hath got hold of the minister already.'" (pp. 158, 126, 148, 127) An aspect of the symbolic 'A,' Pearl knows it is worn for the same reason that Dimmesdale keeps his hand over his heart, her fascination with the symbol seeming "an innate quality of her being"; in the forest she insists that her mother resume it ("'Dost thou know they mother now, child?'"); her function is to embody the hidden, to accost Dimmesdale for not being sufficiently "'bold'" and "'true'" to acknowledge Hester and herself in the light of noon, to

be "the living hieroglyphic in which was revealed the secret they so darkly sought to hide,-- all written in this symbol,-- all plainly manifest, had there been a prophet or magician skilled to read the character of flame! And Pearl was the oneness of their being....how could they doubt that their earthly lives and future destinies were conjoined, when they beheld at once their material union, and the spiritual idea, in whom they met, and were to dwell immortally together?" (pp. 169-171, 202, 149, 197) Pearl transcends the conventions of significance, is a connection with the hidden source of things, and so shares a "kindred wildness" with the forest creatures: her "errand as a messenger of anguish" is "all fulfilled" at the moment when the 'A' on Dimmesdale's breast is revealed, and she proceeds to a happy-ever-after life in Europe. (pp. 197, 244)

Pearl's significance as Word among words, pointing to the source of things as she stands pointing at the spot where Hester's discarded 'A' should be, (p. 200) is the logical extension of her father's role as "'pious minister of the Word'": while other clergymen are more learned or possessed by greater practical understanding, Dimmesdale's is "the gift that descended upon the chosen disciples at Pentecost, in tongues of flames: symbolizing, it would seem, not the power of speech in foreign and unknown languages, but that of addressing the whole human brotherhood in the heart's native language"; he expresses "the highest truths through the humblest medium of words and images," is for the people "the mouthpiece of Heaven's messages." (pp. 230, 134-35) His forte is what Ogden and Richards call the emotive rather than descriptive or small-'s' symbolic use of words: when he publicly exhorts Hester to reveal the name of Pearl's father, "The feeling that [his voice] so evidently manifested, rather than the direct purport of the words, caused it to vibrate within all hearts, and

brought the listeners into one accord of sympathy"; his final sermon has for Hester "a meaning...entirely apart from its indistinguishable words," which, "if more distinctly heard, might only have been a grosser medium, and have clogged the spiritual sense"; his preaching transcends all such mediation, achieves perfect communication, so that his hearers are entranced by "the high spell that [transports] them into the region of another's mind." (pp. 63, 232, 236) Through Dimmesdale, words manifest a prior order, have fixed and ordained meanings; it is a mark of his fallen condition that he publicly addresses Hester in a kind of double talk, to which, when threatened with losing Pearl, she responds in kind: "'Thou wast my pastor, and hadst charge of my soul, and knowest me better than these men can.'" (p. 106) Dimmesdale has fallen into duality, scourges and fights for control of his body, bemoans the "'contrast between what I seem and what I am"; he regards falsehood as "shadowlike," and, like Ahab, must know wherein identity consists: "what was he?-- a substance?-- or the dimmest of shadows?" A life of falsehood such as Dimmesdale's, Hawthorne comments, "steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there are around us....To the untrue man, the whole universe is false,-- it is impalpable,-- it shrinks to nothing within his grasp. And he himself, in so far as he shows himself in a false light, becomes a shadow, or, indeed, ceases to exist" (pp. 182, 135, 138); this is precisely how Melville sets up Ahab's dilemma: substance must be uncovered, its symbol made manifest, verbal meanings brought into proper alignment with things. The empiricist's reality is the romantic's nightmare; Dimmesdale's duplicity, his failure, by keeping his 'A' covered, to give expression to his experience in the forest, has "eaten into the real substance of his character" and made of him, as Mistress Hibbins seems to have guessed, as much

a demon as Chillingworth: "'Once in my life I met the Black Man!'" Hester tells Pearl; "'This scarlet letter is his mark!'" (pp. 205, 176)

It is the function of the literary symbol, in fact, both to suppress and to bring forth, to oppose figure to ground: Dimmesdale is a minister of the Word who, exhilarated by his interview with Hester in the forest, can hardly resist teaching "some very wicked words to a knot of little Puritan children who...had but just begun to talk"; he is a black man with the palest of exteriors, and it is his embodiment of these opposites that fits him as a symbol; "'Be it sin or no,'" says Hester of Chillingworth, "'I hate the man,'" yet hate and love are, according to Hawthorne, "the same thing at bottom." (pp. 210, 167, 248) His inclination toward a redemptive synthesis keeps Dimmesdale from leaving New England, for whereas Chillingworth (alias Master Prynne), like Ishmael, names himself (a demonic act, as is implied by Mistress Hibbins' reference to "'Somebody,'" the nameless one, and by repeated mentions of Hester's and Arthur's "ignominy"), and is charged with a contradiction between his merciful "'acts'" and terrible "'words,'" (pp. 230, 63) the minister rejects Hester's exhortation to "'Give up this name of Arthur Dimmesdale, and make thyself another,'" confesses his sin at the moment of his "very proudest eminence of superiority," and thus keeps and fills in the reference of his identity; redeems signification by anchoring it in substance: the 'A' is literally "imprinted in the flesh" according to some accounts, though the narrator deems it "irreverent to describe" the spectacle. (pp. 189, 237, 245, 243) In the "closing scene" of this "drama," elevated on the scaffold while the people look on "as knowing that some deep life-matter" is revealed, figure comes forward from the ground which it is both opposed to and representative of, symbolizing day of judgement and defeat of Satan which Dimmesdale had prophesied as

"the dark problem of life made plain....the complete solution of that problem.'" (pp. 242, 124) By his act, appearance and reality are reunited.

The symbol transforms contradictions into an emblazoned heraldic poise of ultimately identical opposites; the 'A' is the sympathetic hub of radiating spokes of meaning, standing for adulteress, 'Arthur,' 'Able,' 'Affection' and 'Angel' (pp. 153-55, 150); and if Chillingworth, again like Ishmael, describes himself as "'a stranger, and...a wanderer, sorely against my will,'" he is Cain to Hester's Abel, for she transforms the mark "more intolerable to a woman's heart than that which branded the brow of Cain" into an acceptable sacrifice. (pp. 57, 78) The 'A' offers her the means to "'work out an open triumph over the evil within...and the sorrow without,'" to gain "another" and "more saint-like" purity (pp. 63, 75); less happily, it affords her an "estranged point of view" from which to criticize "human institutions...with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel," an exclusion and freedom from society's approval "which "had made her strong, but taught her much amiss": Hester too is in a dualistic situation, for the "thought" in which she indulges-- the transatlantic "freedom of speculation," a "moral wilderness" in which she wanders-- must suffice "without investing itself in the flesh and blood of action," so that the intellectual energy that might have made her another Anne Hutchinson is channelled into the education of Pearl. Hester later closes the gap between thought and act as a dispenser of counsel, an "angel and apostle," though she denounces the role, of the "new truth" that would rectify relations between the sexes: like Dimmesdale, Pearl and the people of New England, that is, Hester experiences a symbolic closure of the "breach" created by guilt, which is "never, in this mortal state, repaired." (pp. 156, 190, 251, 191)

Only Chillingworth's exclusion is unmitigated. The critical detachment of which Hawthorne disapproves in Hester (Pearl, who exemplifies another kind of disjunction, is finally no more to "do battle with the world, but be a woman in it") corresponds to Chillingworth's learnedness, just as Dimmesdale's duplicity parallels his demonism; Chillingworth is a "scholar," an alchemist and a physician, "a man of skill in all Christian modes of physical science, and likewise familiar with whatever the savage people could teach"; he is a learner of "'secrets,'" both in the forest and in Salem, for there are, he says, "'few things hidden from the man who devotes himself...to the solution of a mystery.'" (pp. 244, 55, 65-68, 70) Dimmesdale, on his part, contemplates the "dark problem of life," and like Hester, on whom the "shadow of the curtain" falls so that she is "partially concealed" during Pearl's catechism exercise, is withdrawn, a man of veils, is "partially concealed" by the same curtain, lives behind the "noontide shadow" of heavy curtains, scourges himself in a "secret closet" and holds his cloak "before his face" as he leaves the forest: the luminous celestial 'A' burns "duskily through a veil of cloud." (pp. 102, 119, 137, 210, 147) Their moments of truth, moreover, are those of deep eye-contact, which Hester dreads with Chillingworth, and which transcend the duplicity of Dimmesdale's public addresses to Hester, who answers Reverend Wilson without removing her eyes from the minister's; the latter "seldom, nowadays, looked straightforth at any object, whether human or inanimate," but must nevertheless "'meet so many eyes,'" which see him as the saint he doubts he is; Hester forces him to "look her sternly in the face," exercises "a magnetic power" through their eye contact: at his final moment of victory he meets Chillingworth's eyes "fearfully, but firmly." (pp. 59, 63-64, 123, 182, 185, 241) But for Chillingworth,

everything is obvious: his "'plainness of speech'" is counterpoised against Dimmesdale's duplicitous eloquence, and he is capable of subjecting the personal to critical examination, of bringing studious attention to bear in a situation of inter-personal involvement: "With calm and intent scrutiny, he felt her pulse, looked into her eyes,-- a gaze...so familiar, and yet so strange and cold,-- and, finally, satisfied with his investigation...." (pp. 128, 68) Eye-contact is not redemptive: Chillingworth is not interested in, in fact seeks to avoid, showdowns. Eye confrontations are associated, in the equations of literature, with mirror imagery, as when Ahab gazes into the water and meets Fedallah's reflected eyes (MD, p. 445): the mirror in "The Custom House" brings Hawthorne from actual to imaginative, and the imagination is a mirror become tarnished; Hester is a youthful mirror gazer, and finds the 'A' disproportionately emphasized in the "convex mirror" of a breast plate, which thus reflects truth rather than distortion; Hester and Arthur mirror one another in eye-contact; but when she contemplates "her own image" reflected in Pearl's eyes, it turns "fiend-like, full of smiling malice." (pp. 55, 69, 181, 91) Godard made Le Petit Soldat, he says, about "a man who finds that the face in the mirror does not correspond to the idea he has of what lies behind it," who "analyzes himself and discovers that he is different from the concept he had of himself"; and he adds, "Personally, when I look at myself in the mirror, I have the same feeling."<sup>12</sup> And one of Burroughs' disembodied characters who cannot escape his body speaks of "someone vague, faded in a mirror."<sup>13</sup> If the demonism embodied in Pearl resists the mirror-image correspondence that Hester and Dimmesdale have in their eye-contact, then it may be wondered, given the satanic imagery with which he is portrayed, whether Chillingworth can be seen in a mirror: having told Hester

of the torture he has inflicted on the minister, Chillingworth "lifted his hands with a look of horror, as if he had beheld some frightful shape, which he could not recognize, usurping the place of his own image in a glass." (p. 163) Chillingworth is an empiricist for whom nothing is hidden; he anticipates Sam Spade's relentlessness and Agee's voyeurism; he is an orphaned Ishmael, comparable to Burroughs' alienated, arch, cruelly wry private investigators, allowing his observations to speak for themselves; like all of these characters, he knows how to wait.

However, Chillingworth's alertness to the obvious is not to be confused with the omniscience of Hawthorne's narrator: occasionally the latter hedges this omniscience, qualifies his speculations with "perchance" or "perhaps," as he does his illustration of Pearl's salvatory effect on Hester with, "if we suppose this interview...to be authentic and not a parable" (pp. 51, 240, 110); he wonders whether Mistress Hibbins, having extinguished the light by which she is visible, "Possibly...went up among the clouds," and suggests that the celestial epiphany of light is due to a meteor, imputing Dimmesdale's vision of the 'A' "solely to the disease of his own eye and heart," though he proceeds to show the vision corroborated by the sexton's report. (pp. 141, 145, 147, 150) But Hawthorne thereby questions, not his own authority, but that of the record contained in Pue's account, through which "we seem to see" a purpose for Hester's ignominy, and which might, should anyone undertake "the unprofitable labour," be "worked up" into a history of Salem; the difference between record and romance is that between the various "theories" of how the letter came to Dimmesdale's breast, along with conflicting reports as to its actual presence there and the substance of the minister's final speech, and its "deep print," due to "long meditation," in the narrator's



brain-- between the "more than one account of what had been witnessed on the scaffold" and the symbolic moral resolution or meta-story which it is the narrator's business to portray. He protests, when a wolf offers his head to be patted by Pearl, that "here the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable," dispensing with the fabulous but gleaning the "truth" of Pearl's "kindred wildness" with the forest. (pp. 191, 29, 246, 245, 195)

"When an uninstructed multitude attempts to see with its eyes," says Hawthorne, "it is extremely apt to be deceived. When, however, it forms its judgement...on the intuition of its great and warm heart, the conclusions thus attained are often so profound and so unerring, as to possess the character of truths supernaturally revealed." (pp. 119-120) The only thorough-going eye-witness is the villain of the piece; Hawthorne, transcending multiplicity and distortion, is spokesman for the heart; Melville, who would also "rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head," (LHM, p. 129) has a strikingly different approach to records, not transcending their limitations but elaborating their ambiguity and the impermeability of appearances, as in "Benito Cereno," suggesting in Moby-Dick that the account is the event, unmitigably distortive of the 'reality' that occasions its taking shape, and emphasizing, at the close of Billy Budd, the incompatibility of event and report-- or more correctly, of event and event, report and report; in Mardi, King Donjololo sends a pair of independent observers, "honest of heart, keen of eye, and shrewd of understanding" to foreign islands, who infuriate him by contradicting each other "'before our very face....How is it? Are the lenses in their eyes diverse-hued, that objects seem different to both? for undeniable is it, that the things they thus clashingly speak of are to be known for the same; though represented with unlike colors and qualities.'"14

Hawthorne's paraphrase of his characters' thoughts, as of Hester's sub-intellectual "sense" of destiny, constitutes a freedom from those documents, which permit him to coyly suggest rather than plainly state his meaning; he is (and the reader is) that "preternaturally gifted observer" or "spiritual seer" who alone would detect the new expression on Hester's face on election day, as well as that "imagination...irreverent enough to surmise" a connection between Hester and the minister. (pp. 233, 216, 235-36) It is Dimmesdale's office to "'hold communion, on your behalf, with the Most High Omniscience"; and when Hawthorne says of the minister, standing on the scaffold, at midnight, that "No eye could see him, save that ever-watchful one which had seen him in his closet, wielding the bloody scourge," there could be no clearer indication that the narrator's eye also communes with that transcendent omniscience. (pp. 136, 139)

On the other hand Chillingworth's point of view is as limited as that of the crowd of "silent and inactive spectators," out of which he does not rise to the overview of the scaffold until the day of judgement (election day, on which the elect come forward): he first appears when Hester, "under the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes," discovers that he has been watching her for "some time" from the midst of the crowd. (pp. 241, 53, 56) Burroughs, describing the indiscriminate police clubbing the "Yippies newsmen and bystanders" at the Chicago '68 riots, comments: "There are no innocent bystanders. What are they doing there in the first place? The worst sin of man is to be born." (E, p. 94) Being watched is the most unbearable kind of punishment: Hester "had always this dreadful urgency in feeling a human eye upon the token," and Dimmesdale lets loose a shriek when, safely in the dark, he is suddenly

"overcome with a great horror of mind, as if the universe were gazing at a scarlet token on his naked breast" (pp. 80, 140); and Chillingworth adopts the role of watcher. "A man burdened with a secret," says Hawthorne, "should especially avoid the intimacy of his physician"; Chillingworth fills that office, is a kind of psychoanalyst digging "into the poor clergyman's heart" in search of the "animal nature" beneath the latter's "all spiritual appearance," urging him to expose "the dead corpse buried in his own heart." (pp. 117, 121-22, 124) Medical men in the colony, we are told, are usually so preoccupied with the "wonderous mechanism" of the body as to have "lost the spiritual view of existence," (pp. 111-12) and Dimmesdale's analyst is no exception:

If the latter possess native sagacity, and a nameless something more,— let us call it intuition: if he show no intrusive egotism, nor disagreeably prominent characteristics of his own; if he have the power, which must be born with him, to bring his mind into such affinity with his patient's, that this last shall unawares have spoken what he imagines himself only to have thought; if such revelations be received without tumult, and acknowledged not so often by an uttered sympathy as by silence, an inarticulate breath, and here and there a word, to indicate that all is understood; if to these qualifications of a confidant be joined the advantages afforded by his recognized character as a physician,— then, at some inevitable moment, will the soul of the sufferer be dissolved, and flow forth in a dark, but transparent stream, bring all its mysteries into the daylight.

Chillingworth scrutinizes every aspect of the minister, lives with him so that all details "might pass under [his] eye," waits for indications to appear on Dimmesdale's "surface" (pp. 118, 116); couched as he is in the language of romance (he has a "penetrating power" of glance, plans to discover Pearl's father by "a sympathy that will make me conscious of him," is associated with the black arts), he nevertheless displays the

skepticism of an empiricist, versed in "the kindly knowledge of simples." (pp. 55, 70, 120, 67) If Hawthorne suggests that eventually "words embody things," Chillingworth refutes any amenability to symbolism: "'Ye that have wronged me are not sinful, save in a kind of typical illusion; neither am I fiend-like, who have snatched a fiend's office from his hands.'" (pp. 214, 165) He is unregenerate, refusing any kind of redemption ("It is our fate. Let the black flower blossom as it may!"), as is appropriate to one limited to the sphere of mechanism, controlling the "engine" of Dimmesdale's tortures, carrying out "machinations," bringing a "terrible machinery...to bear," tampering with "the delicate springs of Mr. Dimmesdale's nature"; but the minister gains "new energy" on the scaffold at midnight, forming with Pearl and Hester "an electric chain." (pp. 132-33, 151, 158, 145)

Again at this point, Chillingworth is discovered watching from ground level, his malevolent expression remaining "painted on the darkness" when the light of the meteor has vanished. (p. 148) The hideous metamorphoses to which he is subject-- horror twisting "across his features, like a snake gliding over them," the "something ugly and evil" in his face after it has studied Dimmesdale, and the "transformation" brought about by several years' devotion to torture (pp. 55, 120, 161)-- are comparable to the contortions through which Agee is put by his guilty voyeurism, and to the hideous and uncontrollable mutations to which Burroughs' characters are subject. Voyeurism and impersonal analysis-- "the constant analysis of a heart full of torture, and deriving his enjoyment thence, and adding fuel to those fiery tortures which he gloated over"-- are the weapons of Chillingworth's "intimate revenge"; Dimmesdale must, says Hester, remove himself from "'under his evil eye.'" And when Chillingworth wonders aloud

if it would be possible "to analyze that child's nature, and, from its make and mould, to give a shrewd guess at the father," he is acting in his capacity as diagnostician, as when he addresses the "symptoms" of Dimmesdale's infected conscience-- is, in the original sense of the word, a semiologist. (pp. 161, 187, 109, 128) Like Ishmael and Agee, Chillingworth is both actor in and viewer of the drama in which he is involved; his finally joining the others on the scaffold is an acknowledgement that Dimmesdale has escaped, for without the suppression of a secret there can be no spy: in the redemptive scheme of the romance, guarded obscurity gives way to sunlit clarity and perfect shamelessness, and dissolves the role of the voyeur. But in the absence of such a scheme, Chillingworth, unlike the other characters, remains interesting: he enters a room in which Dimmesdale lies sleeping before an open work "in the somniferous school of literature" (perhaps it would not be perverse to compare him with the photographer in Blow-Up as he moves among the hypnotized shapes of rock-fans and the stoned inmates of a party: like him, Chillingworth is unquestionably awake), steps directly to his side and uncovers the breast on which he bears the 'A'; the combination of joy and horror in Chillingworth's comportment is comparable to Satan's at the loss of a soul. "But," Hawthorne comments, "what distinguished the physician's ecstasy from Satan's was the trait of wonder in it!" (pp. 130-31)

The remarkable difference between Hawthorne's work and Melville's is that the latter offers no certain pattern of redemption into which to incorporate and by which to justify experience. Whereas Hawthorne, whose narrator partakes of divine omniscience, regards the collector of facts and analyst of appearances as villainous, Melville's narrative personae are often unredeemed voyeurs, and the romantic hero who insists on

ultimate symmetry is, as in Mardi and Moby-Dick, merely mad. The salient example of this narrative voyeurism is Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life (1846), which bears out its subtitle with introductory promises of exciting peeps at "heathenish rites and human sacrifices," and such stories as of the Polynesian natives' stripping and de-deifying a missionary's wife, the immodesty of the native king's consort before the French officers, descriptions of native girls-- their innocence of clothing and enthusiasm for such frolic as reveals "glimpses of their forms," their playful transgression of the narrator's sexual "feelings of propriety," and their enticing dancing-- au National Geographic, and especially the descriptions of Fayaway in "the primitive and summer garb of Eden," and spreading her robe as a sail for Tommo's boat.<sup>15</sup> Non-sexual "visions of outlandish things" are also recorded, such as the numerous visions of beautiful sky- and land-scapes which might not flippantly be compared to post-card scenes, and which make the narrator a "spectator" in the "enchanted gardens" of paradise. (pp. 5, 49) Tommo is something of an anthropological field-observer among the natives, "occupied...either in watching the proceedings of those around me or taking part in them myself," himself submitting to "scrutiny" by the natives who marvel at the whiteness of his unexposed skin, going "so far in their investigations as to apply the olfactory organ"; and like Agee, he feels that his "inquiring, scientific moods" are somehow profane, as when Kory-Kory "whirled the idol about most profanely, so as to give me the opportunity of examining it on all sides." (pp. 151, 71, 73-74, 178-79) Repeatedly reminding us of his status as an eye-witness, Tommo provides a geographical description of Nukuheva and accounts of its "natural history" (climate, animal population, vegetation, diseases), the medicinal waters of Arva Wai (though, "As I am no chemist, I cannot give a scientific analysis of the water"), and the mysterious arrangement of huge and apparently

antique blocks of stone into a graduation of terraces. (pp. 23-24, 210-213, 153-55) He gives extensive attention to the food and culinary skills of the natives, to their language (including frequent glosses translating and elaborating particular terms, and a description of the "vocal telegraph" system of information conveyance), to details of their physical formation and "traces" of European-introduced diseases, and to their political, economic, sexual and religious forms of practice, concentrating especially on the observance of "taboo" people and situations-- for the observer, at least, not governed by any predictable system, and thus impossible not to bungle against. (pp. 73, 224-25, 105, 180-83) A chapter is devoted to "the history of a day" in the valley. (pp. 149-52) A notable amount of prescriptive information appears in Famous Men (steal out in the middle of the night, take a certain path, and this will happen; pick cotton in a certain posture for so long, and see if this happens); Burroughs refers to Naked Lunch as "a blueprint, a How-To Book....Abstract concepts, bare as algebra, narrow down to a black turd or a pair of aging cajones" (Naked Lunch, p. 224); Moby-Dick is such a book, telling how to find, catch and process whales; and in Typee we learn how to make a fire Typee-style, how to manufacture "tappa," the native cloth, how to prepare "arva"-root juice, how to prepare bread-fruit, how to climb coconut trees, how to tattoo and how to obtain coconut oil. (pp. 111, 147-48, 165, 114-17, 21-315, 217, 229-30) But while Tommo misses nothing obvious to inspection, he is "baffled in...attempts to learn the origin" of particular festive customs, and does not know "what to make of the religion of the valley," daily ceremonies being "very much like seeing a parcel of 'Freemasons' making secret signs to each other; I saw everything but could comprehend nothing"; and the Typees' concealment from him of evidence of their cannibalism leaves him dubious as to what they

intend for him. What is not obvious, that is (and this applies also perhaps to the Typees, whose indecisive behaviour on the day of his escape makes dubious whether they know what they want to do with Tommo, who is also "inclined to believe" that they have "no fixed and definite ideas whatever on the subject of religion"), is intention, purpose, a stable context of meaning. (pp. 169, 177) And his ambiguous situation includes his report on it, and his editorial comments: "those things which I have stated as facts will remain facts," he says in defence of his denunciation of missionary practices; "any reflections, however, on those facts may not be free from error." (p. 199)

The problem of the limited point of view is the subject of the book, and the source of the excitement of the adventure: as the sounds of shouting and musket-fire in the hills reach their ears, Kory-Kory interprets them "as if he were gifted with second sight, [going] through a variety of pantomimic illustrations, showing me the precise manner in which the redoubtable Typees were at that very moment chastising the insolence of the enemy"; Tommo subsequently discovers that the Typee leader had "rather inclined to the Fabian than to the Bonapartian tactics," and reports the issue of the skirmish "as far as its results came under my observation." (pp. 129-30) Melville constantly denies his narrator a comprehensive point of view, involving him in a subjective struggle with details, the attempt to configure ideas meaningfully. From his first thoughts of desertion he is deluded, "picturing myself seated beneath a cocoanut-tree on the brow of the mountain, with a cluster of plantains within easy reach"; he and Toby successively find themselves "shut...out from the view of surrounding objects" by a forest of reeds, and so unable to determine their direction, attaining the "lofty elevation" of a mountain crest and a corresponding "sense of security,"



but seeing therefrom, not a valley like the one they have left, but a "series of ridges and inter-vales, which as far as the eye could reach stretched away from us," and which provide the setting for subsequent misconstructions of the terrain, and of each other's behaviour. (pp. 31, 38-41)

The "Important Question" of their geographical position, relative to the inhabitants of the valley below, is a bi-valued one: "Typee or Happar?"; annihilation or friendly reception? Pointing out that "it was impossible for us to know anything with certainty," Tommo persuades Toby to avoid the valley, the country offering them "little choice" but by turn to descend into the canyons in their path and climb the intervening ridges, Tommo suffering alternately from "ague and fever," and thus driven alternately by thirst and repulsion from water, descending from each rise not knowing "whether I was helplessly falling from the heights above, or whether his speed is an act of my own volition." (pp. 50-53) Deciding to risk the valley and agreeing (Toby is "overjoyed at my verification of his theory"), that all the canyons must lead there, they arrive at a sheer precipice down which they lower themselves by long roots, Tommo "taking care to test their strength before I trusted my weight to them," but finally reaching a point at which all the roots within reach snap off at being tried, so that he must take the "frightful risk" of jumping for an untested root; descending a second cliff and again faced with "'no other alternative,'" he must follow Toby's example ("I could scarcely credit the evidence of my senses") and leap from cliff to precarious tree-top. (pp. 54-63) When they approach two natives of the valley with the question "Typee or Happar?" and then put "together in the form of a question the words 'Happar' and 'Mortarkee,' the latter being equivalent to the word 'good,'" they proceed on the assumption that they are addressing the friendly Happers and receive emphatic affirmation of

their formulation: in fact the natives are Typees, frightened by the strangers' use of their enemies' name; moreover, their basic assumption is false, for the Typees are gentle, while the Happars later seriously wound Toby. (p. 69)

The suspicion persists, however, "that beneath their fair appearances the islanders covered some perfidious design, and that their friendly reception of us might precede some horrible catastrophe"; nor, given the "fickle disposition of the savages," is the answer to questions formulated by two-valued logic ever binding: death is an immanent possibility "under all these smiling appearances." (pp. 76, 97) Tommo is frightened by the ambiguous ("What can all this mean, Toby?"), repeatedly finds Typee behaviour "unaccountable," "unpredictable," suspects by taste that he is eating human flesh, only to discover by taper that it is pork, and forms his "conclusion ...from my own observations, and, as far as I could understand, from the explanation which Kory-Kory gave me": about Toby's disappearance, "All their accounts were contradictory," and with narrative hindsight Tommo notes that all his "speculations were in vain." (pp. 93-97, 107, 109, 128, 235) As for his own motives, when he remembers "the numberless proofs of kindness and respect" on the part of the natives he can "scarcely understand how it was" that he should indulge "dismal forebodings," though he acknowledges the "mysterious disease" in his leg, an "unaccountable malady" that comes and goes unpredictably until after he has left; as for those of the Typees, while Tommo has some evidence of their "intention" to keep him prisoner (is jerked alert out of his eagerness to meet a European ship: "It was at this moment, when fifty savage countenances were glaring upon me, that I first truly experienced I was indeed a captive...I was overwhelmed by the confirmation of my worst fears"), he knows nothing of

their "object," the possible "treacherous scheme" behind their kindness. (pp. 118-20, 142, 239) He is continually, that is, hanging by an untested root, just as his report must exclude knowledge of the "purpose" behind some customs (pp. 160, 167-68, 220-21, 224, 227); and he closes the account with a confession of ignorance as to the "mystery" of Toby's fate. (p. 253) Ultimate proof, the confirmation or not of all his suspicions, is unavailable: his understanding is confined to sets of words and gestures with only the most precariously guessed contexts, and is undercut by further observations.

Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (1837), while it does not record a non-literary event, is a comparable work in that it relates a series of episodes, each involving a shift in perspective which undeceives the narrator by modifying his point of view. "In no affairs of mere prejudice, pro or con," he says, "do we deduce inferences with entire certainty, even from the most simple data": awakening from a dream of being devoured by a lion, he discovers his dog's paws on his chest; stowed away in the hold of a ship, he forms "a thousand surmises" as to why he has been deserted, only to learn that a mutiny has occurred above deck; marooned at mid-ocean, he is approached by a brig over the bow of which leans a man making "encouraging" gestures, "nodding to us in a cheerful although rather odd way, and smiling constantly so as to display the most brilliantly white teeth"-- a lipless corpse, in fact, shaken from behind by a gull devouring his liver. But Pym's narrative differs from Tommo's peep in pointing toward a resolution of the ambiguous in perception: the suggestion in the appended editor's "Note" that the Antarctic fissures mapped by Pym have the form of Ethiopian, Arabic and Egyptian words takes us from a close-up of the confusion and "utter darkness" of the chasm to an

elevated and meaningful overview<sup>16</sup> — the point of view of the "earth-angels," as it is put in "The Domain of Arnheim" (1847), that "'class of beings, human once, but now invisible to humanity, to whom, from afar, our disorder may seem order-- our unpicturesqueness picturesque.'"<sup>17</sup> No such point of view is suggested in Typee; Kory-Kory's invocation of a creation myth to explain the ancient stone structures on the island "at once convinced me that neither he nor the rest of his countrymen knew anything about them"; Tommo reckons that the "monument" is "doubtless the work of an extinct and forgotten race," though there are "no inscriptions, no sculpture, no clue, by which to conjecture its history"; they do "establish the great age of the island" and eliminate the possibility that it is the work of "the coral insect." It is "as possible as anything else" that the island, and for that matter the whole of America, has been thrown up by volcanic eruption: "No one can make an affidavit to the contrary, and therefore I will say nothing against the supposition." (pp. 154-55) The ambiguity of a situation uncontrolled by an informing myth is most vividly illustrated by the effigy of the dead warrior-chief, seated in a canoe and "holding his paddle...in the act of rowing, leaning forward and inclining his head, as if eager to hurry on his voyage," the direction of which is commented on by the "polished human skull, which crowned the prow of the canoe," so as to glare "face to face" at the warrior (p. 172): the illustration is repeated in "Benito Cereno" (1856) by the mutinous Babo, who replaces the San Dominick's figure-head of Christopher Columbus with a skeleton, beneath which is inscribed, "Follow your leader."<sup>18</sup>

Marheyo's use of Tommo's old shoes as a pendant necklace illustrates this lack of fixed context or meaning, the fact that "things unserviceable in one way, may with advantage be applied in another...if one have genius

enough for the purpose" (p. 146): the students 'in La Chinoise, having discarded their Picasso-esque toy, remark the cleverness of a passer-by who makes "handle-bars and a bicycle seat out of our bull's head." This is consonant with Tommo's account of the Typee language, similar to other Polynesian dialects in that it features the duplication of some words, and in "the different senses in which one and the same word is employed," so that "one brisk, lively little word is obliged...to perform all sorts of duties... the particular meaning being shown chiefly by a variety of gestures and the eloquent expression of the countenance"; and while he regards these dialects as less sophisticated than civilized languages ("the imperfections of their oral languages are more than compensated for by the nervous eloquence of their looks and gestures"), he notes their extreme "intricacy," the complete black-board conjugation of a Hawaiian verb covering "the side of a considerable apartment." (pp. 224-25, 142) Here as elsewhere, Tommo treats words simply as other things, as visible tabulated marks or as sounds, noting the "labial melody with which the Typee girls carry on an ordinary conversation, giving a musical prolongation to the final syllable of every sentence," and the "rough-sided sounds" issuing from the men when in the midst of their peculiar sort of "wordy paroxysm." (p. 227) And he gives similar descriptions of gestures, Toby on various occasions "throwing himself into all the attitudes of a posture-master, vainly [trying] to expostulate with the natives by signs and gestures," at one point "opening his mouth from ear to ear, and thrusting his fingers down his throat, gnashing his teeth and rolling his eyes about" in order to indicate hunger (pp. 80, 69): the problem with which Tommo and Toby consistently struggle is how messages are communicated, how things are known. Names are arbitrarily connected with things: the Washington Group of islands is "arbitrarily distinguished"

from the Marquesas, for inclusion within which Tommo offers an argument based on dialect, laws, religion and customs; the name 'Typee' means "a lover of flesh," remarkable in its application to one single tribe "inasmuch as the natives of all this group are unreclaimable cannibals," and in fact Marnoo points out that, with reference to the French, "as yet the terror of their name had preserved them from attack." Tommo repeatedly deplores the exposure of the natives to Europeans in order to become "nominal Christians," "enjoy the mere name of Christians without experiencing any of the vital operations of true religion"; he notes that "the term 'Savage' is...often misapplied," and suggests that it is by civilized intruders that the Polynesians "are made to deserve the title." (pp. 11, 24-25, 138, 195, 182, 125, 26) References are ostensive ("Ned, pointing with his hand in the direction of the treacherous valley, exclaimed, 'There-- there's Typee.'") and language learned by association: establishing that his dinner is not human flesh but 'puarkee,' Tommo declares that "from that day to this I have never forgotten that such is the designation of a pig in the Typee lingo." (pp. 25, 95) Thus the language of the descriptive report does not embody but refers to things, just as (as in Berkeley) physiognomy is "indicative" of emotion, which is "depicted" in the countenance. (pp. 214, 351, 142) It is emphasized that "description" is inadequate to "beauty" ("but that beauty was not lost to me then"), to "a scene of confusion," to "a sensation of horror," to the feeling of "wretchedness" and to the vividness of recollections (pp. 12, 15, 13, 125, 237, 120, 91): as in Locke, simple ideas, in these instances entering "by all the ways of sensation and reflection," (Essay II, vii, 1) must speak for themselves; "I may succeed," says Tommo, "in particularizing some of the individual features of Fayaway's beauty, but that general loveliness of appearance which they all contributed to produce I will not

attempt to describe." (p. 86) Like Agee, Tommo offers lists of particulars, records of events and fallible calculations, leaving their realization to his reader: when, in Chapter 31, he proposes "to string together, without any attempt at order, a few odds and ends not hitherto mentioned," (p. 226) he displays that insouciance as to an organizing superstructure that also characterizes Famous Men and Naked Lunch. Tommo is a kind of Adam bestowing his own names on the "'Feast of the Calabashes'" and on "'Fayaway's Lake,'" and on Mehevi "the title of king" (pp. 160, 171, 189); and like Chillingworth and Ishmael, Tommo and Toby name themselves: 'Toby' is "the name by which he went among us, for his real name he never would tell us"; and since 'Toby' is the name actually used by Melville's companion, there is no reason not to assume that when the narrator says he "hesitated for an instant, thinking that it might be difficult for him to pronounce my real name, and then with the most praiseworthy intentions intimated that I was known as 'Tom,'" he is withholding from Mehevi the name 'Herman.' (pp. 31, 72)

This attitude toward words is to be distinguished from that of the captain from whom they escape, who "has registered a vow" not to return home without a full cargo of sperm oil, and at the writing of Typee is still in the Pacific, and from that of Christian navies who "burn, slaughter, and destroy, according to the tenor of written instructions." (pp. 22-23, 27) Both are associated with oratory, the captain delivering a specious harangue on the evils of Nukuheva, and the replacement by merciless subjugation of native idolatry with a disinterested mercantilism making a fit "subject for an eloquent Bible-meeting orator." (pp. 34-35, 196) The taboo Marnoo gives a "powerful...exhibition of natural eloquence...during the course of his oration," exhorting the Typees to resist the French by suggesting that

their ferocious "name" has real meaning-- addressing their faith in words: by speaking "a few words of their language" to the first frightened Typees he meets, Tommo instills in them "a little confidence"; and when he finally succeeds in formulating the desirable message, "'Typee Mortar-kee,'" his hosts are suddenly ecstatic, shouting "again and again the talismanic syllables, the utterances of which appeared to have settled everything." (pp. 137-38, 68, 71) While singing is unknown to them, they are "remarkably fond of chanting," the rhythmic and hypnotic repetition of patterns which Agee, when he speaks of Gudger's adopting "a saving rhythm" of movement (whereas Famous Men is a "dissonant prologue") defines as a psychological security device. Words and forms have immutable significance for the Typees, and "An exchange of names is equivalent to a ratification of good will and amity among these simple people"; they live in an unquestioned world of analogy, describe heaven in terms of finer mats, lovelier women and more plentiful breadfruit. (pp. 227, 72, 172)

"The penalty of the Fall presses very lightly upon the valley of Typee," for there is no strenuous labour and an admirable "social order" without the aid of "municipal police" or "established law"-- an "enigma" which Tommo can "explain" only by supposing an "indwelling" and "universally diffused perception of what is just and noble," pre-civilized and "distorted by arbitrary codes": "It must have been by an inherent principle of honesty and charity towards each other....that sort of common-sense law which, say what they will of the inborn lawlessness of the human race, has its precepts graven on every breast." (pp. 200-1) Locke rejects the idea of any such innate principle, (Essay I, i-ii) allowing for a "law of nature" (a law, as opposed to a right, is "what enjoins or forbids")



which is "implanted by nature in all men," discoverable in each independently of his fellows by the rational "arranging together of the images of things derived from sense perception," and evidenced by the presence of conscience and men's regard for virtue; but, while he holds that the law of nature is "perpetual and universal" in its "binding force," he denies that it is "inscribed in our hearts" (or derived from "tradition") and holds that human society is impossible without "a definite constitution of the state and form of government"<sup>19</sup>: so that Tommo is describing a form of original myth of identity with some hold on him, and thus comparable to that of the White Whale which at times captivates Ishmael, to Agee's communal experience and feeling, with the Gddgers, of having come home, and to the manic phase of Burroughs' fantasies. While Locke rejects the notion of "golden ages in the past" and the obscuring of an innate law by a "Fall,"<sup>20</sup> the honesty and fraternal feeling of the Typees suggests to Tommo an edenic alternative to the disparity fostered by arbitrary codes, life as it was meant ('intended') to be lived; repeatedly the European intruders are denounced for their corrupting influence on the "unsophisticated and confiding" natives, political manipulations resulting in "outrages and massacres," the introduction of the mosquito and syphilis, and the hypocritical championship of "the progress of the Truth." (pp. 15, 18, 105, 192, 212, 195) In Typee there are no snakes, birds do not fear men, and "the whole year is the long tropical month of June just melting into July"; Mehevi is twice referred to as "the noble savage," and Rousseau is invoked as an authority on "the mere buoyant sense of a healthful physical existence"; Malthusian theories are inapplicable here, for there are none "of those large families in arithmetical or step-ladder progression which one often meets with at home." (pp. 211-13, 90, 189, 127, 192) If, early in his

adventure, Tommo finds sleep a "state of happy forgetfulness," for the Marquesans "it might almost be styled the great business of life....To many of them, indeed, life is little else than an often interrupted nap"; the myth of paradise is the possibility of somnolence, the young girls living "in one merry round of thoughtless happiness," the Polynesian enjoying "an infinitely happier, though certainly a less intellectual existence, than the self-complacent European" (pp. 48, 152, 204, 125): Tommo is a man awake confronted by a vision of sleep, a recorder of events who is in that interstitial space in which Burroughs and Godard locate the reporter figure, between two contexts or languages, able to identify with neither. Tommo speaks of his supposition of an innate principle as theoretical-- how else "are we to account for the social condition of the Typees?"-- and subject to contradiction by further experience: "I formed a higher estimate of human nature than I had ever before entertained. But alas! since then I have been one of the crew of a man-of-war, and the pent-up wickedness of five hundred men has nearly overturned all my previous theories." (p. 203) And he must argue that the Marquesan belligerence toward whites has "ample provocation," except inter-tribal enmities as outlets for "evil passions" and mitigate cannibalism as a bellicose practice among people otherwise "humane and virtuous": "Truth," he says, criticizing both complete incredulity and the exaggeration of accounts of cannibalism, "who loves to be centrally located, is again found between the two extremes." (p. 205) His ambivalence is focused on the effigy of the warrior-chief, paddling his canoe to the undiscover'd country, his "impatient attitude" mocked by the reversed skull: "I loved to yield myself up to the fanciful superstition of the islanders, and could almost believe that the grim warrior was bound homeward"; Tommo sees "with the eye of faith" the

"shores of Paradise" towards which the canoist paddles; but he immediately dispels the enchanting fantasy with the anthropological remark, "This strange superstition affords another evidence of the fact, that however ignorant man may be, he still feels within him his immortal spirit yearning after the unknown future." (p. 173) Faith is both vision and "superstition," the "evidence" of an attitude; and Typee suggests but does not perfectly correspond to Paradise, never completely resolves Tommo's ambivalence: if he wonders how he could ever have thought of leaving, he also recalls clutching at "a chance of deliverance" and striking Mow Mow with a boat-hook-- "Even at the moment I felt horror at the act I was about to commit"-- in order to make good his escape. (pp. 246, 252) Like Chillingworth, he is an observer who is not absorbed by the myth of redemption.

Written words function, according to Burroughs, "as extension of our senses to witness and experience through the writer's eyes."<sup>21</sup> In his lengthy accounts of the outrages perpetrated by whites in Polynesia ("These things are seldom proclaimed at home; they happen at the very ends of the earth; they are done in a corner and there are none to reveal them." -- pp. 26-27) Tommo is certainly the writer of an exposé; but more pertinent is the distance between his personal contact and involvement with the natives and the written text which records them, in which they are present to us (Tommo frequently uses the present tense in extended accounts, especially pp. 175-76), occasionally in the form of straightforward catalogue, and of which the Typees are innocent. The reader's point of view, the shape of his experience, the itemized elements of his subjective consciousness, are, while he attends to his reading, encoded upon the arbitrary marks of that written text which, encoding also the experience of the narrator, fails to make any fixed, unambiguous connection with the

reality it describes. What Tommo calls his "interest" (pp. 131, 141) and "curiosity" (pp. 41, 45) guides the reader's attention to the details of Typee habits and environment, posing only the most tentative relations or contexts to the understanding: it is this blueprint of attention, together with frequent reminders of its instability, which constitutes the record of the experience, the vicarious reconstruction of something remote.<sup>22</sup>

According to Leon Howard, Melville spent four weeks rather than four months in the Typee valley; explorers have been unable to find evidence of Fayaway's Lake; a contemporary chart shows a coral beach which would have made impossible Mow-Mow's final attempt to head Tommo off; however Melville's desertion is corroborated by Toby's story, by an affidavit registered by his captain in Honolulu, and by the ship's log; and many of the observations of the valley were in fact "recorded by Melville for the first time"--not, that is, derived from other accounts--and show a familiarity "which could only have been gained by personal experience."<sup>23</sup> F. O. Matthiessen has pointed out that White-Jacket's weirdly subjective account of his fall from the mast-head is not a description of one of Melville's experiences but the embellishment of a passage from Nathaniel Ames's A Mariner's Sketches (1830).<sup>24</sup> Melville himself, in "The Encantadas" (1856), refers those "who may be disposed to question the possibility of the character above depicted...to the second volume of Porter's Voyage into the Pacific, where they will recognize many sentences, for expedition's sake derived verbatim from thence, and incorporated here; the main difference...being, that the present writer has added to Porter's facts accessory ones picked up from reliable sources; and where facts conflict has naturally preferred his own authorities to Porter's." (GSW, p. 146) Billy Budd (1924), Howard says, incorporates facts concerning the hanging of

three mutineers on the U.S.S. Somers in 1842 by a captain under whom Melville's first cousin, Guert Gansevoort, served as Lieutenant, persuaded by his captain that the security of command and the protection of commerce were at stake, Gansevoort "had practically compelled a reluctant court-martial" over which he presided "to render a sentence of 'guilty,'" an action which had a "devastating and lasting effect on him"; one of the mutineers was said to have exclaimed, "'God bless the flag," before dying; and while an inquiry cleared Gansevoort of blame, it "had not fully resolved the mystery of the circumstances."<sup>25</sup> Melville briefly refers to the Somers incident in Billy Budd as "History, and here cited without comment"<sup>26</sup>: there is no question of offering the reader a secure grip on the facts, what 'really' happened. And just as Ishmael insists that his report is not, despite its improbability, "a monstrous fable, or ...a hideous and intolerable allegory," (MD, p. 177) and the narrator of The Confidence Man despairs of any "consistency" in "fiction based on fact,"<sup>27</sup> the narrator of Billy Budd notes that "The symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot so readily be achieved in a narration essentially having less to do with fable than with fact. Truth uncompromisingly told will have its ragged edges." (MBB, p. 274) The anticlimactic terminations of Moby-Dick and Billy Budd work against the closed symmetry of fiction; yet facts have no pristine integrity apart from being reported or experienced-- being arranged, that is, in a narrative: a fact, for Melville, is textual, contextual, linguistic.

Poe's attitude toward newspaper accounts is an illustrative contrast: Auguste Dupin solves the case of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" by doing no more than reading the newspaper account and the published statements of the witnesses; the 'facts' are all there, and it remains

only for Dupin to form them into the hypothesis that must inevitably prove true; just as the coded instructions in "The Gold Bug" lead to "a definite point of view, admitting no variation,"<sup>28</sup> journalistic reports represent to Dupin's unerring eye, in some disguised way, the truth. The difference between Dupin's "intuitive" and "calculating" power and mere ingenuity is related, as Poe says, to that between Coleridge's Imagination and Fancy; Dupin is concerned only with such "deductions" as are "the sole proper ones," is guided by "suspicions" which "arise inevitably from them as the single result." "'The material world,'" he says, "'abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument as well as to embellish a description."<sup>29</sup> Whereas Melville, like the empiricists, treats motive and intention as problematic, as in the case of Claggart's accusation and Billy's blow, and regards, with Vere, the only necessity to be a logical necessity, Dupin in each case formulates a logic that bears fruit in reality, searches for the proper chain of connections between cause and effect-- between motive, or intention, and act. Like Holmes, with whom he shares a fondness for obscurity and, (though not opium-induced) reverie, and whose violin is the counterpart of his "doggerel," Dupin combines sharpness of observation with a talent for inference, "reasons the matter throughout," bringing his mind into perfect correspondence with reality<sup>30</sup>; more empirical detectives-- Chillingworth, Spade, Marlowe-- rely on implication rather than inference, learn the game as they go along and often as not, stumble on the truth rather than being guided there by an infallible method.

"I'm not Sherlock Holmes," Marlowe says in The Big Sleep; "I don't expect to go over ground the police have covered and pick up a broken pen point and build a case from it."<sup>31</sup> Dupin does: "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" consists of the analysis of a number of newspaper accounts of an unsolved murder, Dupin demonstrating the fallaciousness of each argument and liberating misinterpreted facts to arrange them in the proper order. His own argument depends, among other things, on his analysis of the intention behind other versions ("but it is material that we go behind the mere words, for an idea which these words have obviously intended, and failed to convey"), the "design entertained" by Marie Rogêt ("We may imagine her thinking thus..."), the "design" behind the rope around the corpse. But most important, Poe's story follows "in minute detail" the "essential" facts of the murder of Mary Rogers in New York, using authentic reports from the New York papers and the Saturday Evening Post (Philadelphia), so that "all argument founded upon the fiction is applicable to the truth; and the investigation of the truth was the object"; moreover, confessions made "long subsequent to the publication, confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely all the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained."<sup>32</sup> A fictional detective solves a real case: words, employed by the poet-mathematician, can be made to have an exact correspondence with things.

However if Dupin's solution of cases at a distance and mediated by printed reports does not correspond to Melville's treatment of facts, neither does Walt Whitman's boast of experience: "I am the man, I suffer'd. I was there." The important thing about that statement is that it simply is not the case: Melville went whaling, Agee lived with the Gudgers in Alabama, Burroughs was fifteen years a heroin addict, but Whitman had

never been to a quarter of the places he celebrates; his identifications ("I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs")<sup>33</sup> are possible only through the suspension of the reader's critical disbelief. Tommo on the other hand, repeatedly cites an "impression produced upon my mind" so as never to be "effaced" (T, pp. 28, 29, 40, 45, 49, 207, 243, 252) as the source of his descriptions: "the image...seems to come as vividly before my eyes as if they were actually present." (p. 244) He traces each "idea" to "seeing": "no one who has not beheld them can form any adequate idea"; "from all I saw...I was induced to believe"; "as none of [the natives] was so accommodating as to die and be buried in order to gratify my curiosity with regard to their funeral rites, I was reluctantly obliged to remain in ignorance of them." (pp. 189, 183-85, 193) And he insists that his accounts, while he does not regard them as infallible, are based on experience: "This picture is no fancy sketch; it is drawn from the most vivid recollections"; "Let it not be supposed that I have overdrawn this picture"; "Incredible as this may seem, it is a fact." (pp. 86, 204, 186) While he invokes the records made by Mendanna, Cook, Stewart, Fanning and Porter in support of his appraisal of the beauty of the islanders, and cites Cook, Carteret, Byron, Kotzebue and Vancouver on the unavailability of data on Polynesian religion, he is constantly questioning "the truth of...reports" that don't tally with observation, attacks the "unintentional humbuggery in some of the accounts we have from scientific men concerning the religious institutions of Polynesia," and the deceptive write-ups of native conditions which "are sometimes copied into English and American journals" ("Not until I visited Honolulu was I aware of the fact...."); and he adds an appendix, arguing from his eye-witness experience of the behaviour of the English commander Paulet against "the distorted accounts



and fabrications" which circulated in Boston. (pp. 183-84, 177, 170, 188, 196) The shortage of reliable reports is indeed one of the sources of Tommo's suspense: "It is a singular fact, that in all our accounts of cannibal tribes we have seldom received the testimony of an eye-witness to the revolting practice," the only "evidence" being either "second-hand" or based on admissions of civilized natives; Tommo's "suspicions" are strengthened by his catching sight of three shrunken heads and by the circumstances surrounding a victory celebration following a battle, but it is not until he actually sees-- "the slight glimpse sufficed; my eyes fell on the disordered members of a human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture and with particles of flesh clinging to them here and there"-- that he can be said to know: "the full sense of my condition rushed upon my mind with a force I had never before experienced." (pp. 232-38) Still, he is left wondering whether or not the Typees intend to make a meal of him, and even from the vantage point of retelling Toby's story qualifies his surmises as "only my own supposition...for as to all their strange conduct, it is still a mystery." (p. 267)

An eye-witness report, that is, does not yield unambiguous knowledge; there is no necessary correspondence between what Melville refers to as the "skeleton of actual reality to [be built] about with fulness & veins & beauty" (LHM, p. 157) and the text in which it is represented, such as the symbol guarantees between Poe's records and Hawthorne's romance. The subject of the reports, in Typee and Moby-Dick, and of the factually based narratives of "Benito Cereno" and Billy Budd, is the limitation of subjective consciousness, the distortiveness and incompleteness of available information: each asks the question, "how do you know?" To pretend to supply all of the items would be to claim either the geometric perspective

of Descartes and Dupin (that of the latter's "Reason...seeking the truth in detail"<sup>34</sup>) or Whitman's bardic status as an omnipresent eye-witness. Agee, emphasizing that what he is doing in Famous Men is not "'naturalism,' 'realism,'" discusses the problem of describing a city street, of how to represent one's experience of it:

You abjure all metaphor, symbol, selection and above all, of course, all temptation to invent, as obstructive, 'false, artistic. As nearly as possible in words (which even by grace of genius, 'would not be very near) you try to give the street in its own terms: that is to say, either in the terms in which you (or an imagined character) see it, or in a reduction and depersonalization into terms which will as nearly as possible be the 'private,' singular terms of that asphalt, those neon letters, those and all other items combined, into that alternation, that simultaneity, of flat blank tremendously constructed chords and of immensely elaborate counterpoint which is the street itself. You hold then strictly to materials, forms, colors, bulks, textures, space relations, shapes of light and shade, peculiarities, specializations, 'of architecture and of lettering, noises of motors and brakes and shoes, odors of exhausts: all this gathers time and weightiness which the street does not of itself have: it sags with this length and weight: and what have you in the end but a somewhat overblown passage from a naturalistic novel: which in important ways is at the opposite pole from your intentions, from what you have seen, from the fact itself. (LUNPFM, p. 235)

Interestingly enough, Walker Evans has recently denied that there is any truth to Agee's description of a shared consciousness of frustrated sexual urgency between Emma and each of Gudger, Evans and Agee before her departure: Evans' contradiction points up Agee's subjective limitations and the tenuous nature of proof, the question how either of them knows. The "loose, light, casual, totally actual" state of mind which Agee regards as susceptible to a maximum awareness partakes of "some combination, some generalizing, some art, and science; but none of the close-kneed priggishness of science, and none of the formalism and straining and lily-gilding of art"; it is a non-transcendent, joyful condition,

"almost purely a matter of chance," which recognizes the arbitrariness of the line between investigation and revelation, and which, in its unexplained motility, has affinities with Richards' notion of a readiness for action; and it is the difference between "conscious consciousness" and "unconscious consciousness," definable only by negation-- the giving of measured and itemized co-ordinates which it neither transcends nor is-- the awareness of context and its immanent rupture (as implied in Agee's use of the colon), the subject's awareness of the grounds or groundlessness of his understanding. (LUNPFM, pp. 225-26) The point can be made by the stylistic use of suspense (Tommo suspended from his untested root), and Hitchcock, for example, utilizes suspense in precisely that way; in Famous Men it is made in accounts of intensely embarrassing situations, guilty self-examination and misconceived intentions; in Naked Lunch by horrific and unpredictable metamorphoses, the puncturing of fantasy and outrageous challenges to the reader's expectations. The narrator of "The Encantadas," remarking the manner in which "feline Fate" dallies with the hopes of her victims, comments, "Unwittingly I imp this cat-like thing, sporting with the heart of him who reads; for if he fell not he reads in vain" (GSW, p. 132); Tommo's resolution "to regard the future without flinching" (T, p. 144) anticipates Ishmael's "cool, collected dive at death and destruction" (MD, p. 197) and the more varied manners in which Melville pulls the rug out from under us, as he pulls the Pequod from under Ishmael, thereby directing our attention to the forms of our understanding. The "anxious desire to speak the unvarnished truth" which he avers in the preface to Typee (p. xiv) thus involves alerting us to our circumstances as readers with sets of expectations: like the reader, Tommo is caught in a subjective world of language and impressions in which anything can happen, the whole shell of experience

slips into an unforeseen meaning; his attempts to understand, and ours, are the subject of the book. In the absence of a stabilizing symbolism, there can be no more unambiguous contact with things than the impulse to survive. It is the extent of Melville's realism, as of Locke's, that we may credit a substantial reality behind Tommo's report, for he is the eye-witness who has been there to see and touch it, and come back to tell; but his account emphasizes spatial or descriptive formulations of experience, the exploration of individual sequential situations, rather than their narrative or temporal context. His narrative is a stringing together of events, sometimes in list form, no one of which necessarily implies the next; and there is nothing in Typee, or anywhere in Melville (despite the host of critical opinion to the contrary, especially regarding Ishmael and Pierre), that can be called 'character development.' Time points in no necessary direction-- is, as the warrior-chief's effigy in Typee and the skeletal figure-head in "Benito Cereno" suggest, only metaphorically spatial; like Chillingworth, Agee and Burroughs, Tommo must learn to wait. And he too is a voyeur, for inconclusive evidence is evidence for its own sake.

The handling of empirical data in Typee, stabilized by no final conclusion, anticipates the modes of dealing with Sperm Whales, economically depressed cotton farmers and heroin addiction: the reporter thus limited is by definition in a voyeuristic situation, that of Locke's unspeakable understanding, which can only be indicated in the invalid terms of metaphor, as the eye which cannot be inferred from the visual field. Moby-Dick makes of Locke's two-fold notion of substance, that which supports material qualities and that which supports attention, a single problem; when Ishmael names himself he names the text, the visible 'form' of that

attention upon which the 'content' of its substance is encoded. The name, as has frequently been pointed out, is appropriate to a dispossessed orphan: as a child he is already an orphan, sent to bed for the day by a "step-mother" and awakening in the dark, though still "half steeped in dreams," to an unverifiable sense of touch-- "nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard; but a supernatural hand seemed placed in mine"-- and unable, in his fearful paralysis, to disengage from "the nameless, unimaginable, silent form or phantom" which "seemed" seated beside him; in Mardi, Yillah is the veiled figure of whiteness, the suggestion of substance and object of a relentless quest, and "the hand of Yillah in mine seemed no hand, but a touch."<sup>35</sup> Ishmael's problem, like that of Hobbes, Descartes and Locke, is to distinguish dream from waking reality: "afterwards I lost myself in confounding attempts to explain the mystery. Nay, to this very hour I often puzzle myself with it." (MD, p. 33) Ishmael is cut off from unambiguous knowledge of what his impressions mean, is without a firm context: "Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in the grave, and we must there to learn it"; Ahab's quest resolves nothing for Ishmael, who remains, when the Pequod has gone down, "another orphan" to be found by the Rachel. (pp. 406, 470) It is to be noticed, however, that Ahab is also an orphan, son of a "'crazy widowed mother, who died when he was only a twelve-month old'"; he addresses the corposants, "But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother I know not": the difference between their responses to this lack of context, to being "'turned round and round in this world,'" as Ahab says, gives shape to the book-- the difference, that is, between Ishmael's acceptance of "the universal thump" and Ahab's rage against it. (pp. 77, 417, 445, 15)

Ishmael's name, then, has also the import of its Hebrew meaning, 'God hears,' in the sense of 'overhears,' wordplays on which occur in Genesis<sup>36</sup>: Hagar is given Ishmael "because the Lord hath heard thy affliction....And she called the name of the Lord that spoke unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also looked after him that seeth me?" (16: 11-13); "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee" (17: 20); "And God heard the voice of the lad." (21: 17) Ishmael's narrative function is that of a hearer or eavesdropper, and by implication of a voyeur, who, unlike Hawthorne's narrator, does not transcend but reflects upon the limits of his world: he is the formulation of his experience, the record of what he has seen and overheard. The ironies of narrative convention are a pronounced issue in Melville: in Mardi, Babbalanja points out that the belief that God "is not merely a universal onlooker, but occupies and fills all space" yields the conclusion that "he cannot be perfectly good" (M II, pp. 90-91); White-Jacket attributes it "to the fact of my having been a maintop-man...that I am now enabled to give such a free, broad, off-hand bird's-eye, and, more than all, impartial account of our man-of-war world; withholding nothing; inventing nothing"-- so that he qualifies his paraphrase of Claret's thoughts with the postscript, "there is no knowing, indeed, whether these were the very words in which the captain meditated that night; for it is yet a mooted point among metaphysicians, whether we think in words, or whether we think in thoughts"<sup>37</sup>; the same limitation is noted in "Bartleby," for "What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him, except indeed one vague report..."<sup>38</sup>; and the narrator of The Confidence Man regards the empirical stance as simultaneously limiting and indispensable: "Experience is the only guide here; but as no man can be co-extensive with what is, it may be unwise in every case to rest upon it.

When the duck-billed beaver of Australia was first brought stuffed to England, the naturalists, appealing to their classifications, maintained that there was, in reality, no such creature." (pp. 107-8)

Moby-Dick teaches the distinction between restriction to and reliance upon experience: like White-Jacket, Ishmael regards the mast-head as an "almost omniscient" vantage-point, borne aloft by whale-ships that search "into the remotest secret drawers and lockers of the world," though the dreaming sailor is apt to be shocked by its instability. (p. 382) In Melville, as in Burroughs, the reader witnesses and experiences vicariously through the writer's eyes: "where, I should like to know, will you obtain a better chance to study practical cetology than here?" "have a peep down the mouth"; "Look at that hanging lower lip!" "Look your last, now..."; "But mark....See...." He speaks to the contingencies of viewpoint, presenting a "Contrasted View" of each whale-head, estimating oil yield "at a passing glance," noting that "as you come nearer to this great head it begins to assume different aspects, according to your point of view....Then, again, if you fix your eye...." (pp. 278-84) Nor is his narrative function distinct from his scopophilia and its aural counterpart: from the beginning we find him peeking through the windows of inns-- "Too expensive and jolly, again thought I, pausing one minute to watch the broad glare in the street, and hear the sounds of the tinkling glasses within. But go on, Ishmael, said I at last..."-- and confessing to rudely "staring" at Queequeg "and watching all his toilette motions; for the time my curiosity getting the better of my breeding." (pp. 17-18, 34) He goes whaling "'to see the world'" (p. 69) and is, as he suggests in chapter one, a veritable tourist at sea, catching sight of such marvels as the giant squid: "we now gazed at the most wondrous phenomenon which the

secret seas have hitherto revealed to mankind" (p. 237); his "quick observant eye" notes the hieroglyphic aspect of the marks on the whale's skin, though it suggests no interpretation; and at the heart of the whale community, "Some of the subtlest secrets of the sea seemed divulged to us....We watched young Leviathan amours in the deep." (pp. 260, 326) Our view of what Ishmael sees is vicarious, for his "special chance to observe," as when he is fastened to the monkey-rope by which he keeps Queequeg clear of the sharks among which he works, involves an exposure to danger; but even here Ishmael's experience is mediated and indirect, the description of an unstable situation, a point of view which might at any moment be undercut (p. 271); if Ahab insists on a face-to-face showdown relationship with the elements ("Forehead to forehead I meet thee... Moby Dick!"), the sailors rowing toward "the life and death peril so close to them ahead" sit backward and are forbidden to turn their heads, reading the immanence of danger "on the intense countenance of the mate in the stern" (pp. 461, 193-94); like Ishmael, they are stabbed from behind with the thought of annihilation. (pp. 527, 223-24, 196) Ahab covets omniscience; he leans over the Sperm Whale's head so as to face it and deplores his exclusion from its knowledge: "'O head! though hast seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham, and not one syllable is thine!'" (p. 264) And he demands of the sun, "'Where is Moby Dick?...These eyes of mine look into the very eye that is even now beholding him; aye, and into the eye that is even now equally beholding the objects on the unknown, thither side of thee, thou sun!'" (pp. 411-12) Ishmael too would find out, by mounting the constellation Cetus, "whether the fabled heavens with all their countless tents really lie encamped beyond my mortal sight," (p. 234) but neither can he transcend his eyes.



Voyeurism is impossible, moreover, in a face-to-face situation (unless, like old Roger, one returns diagnostic scrutiny for a soul-searching glance): Ishmael is in the background, or rather in the extreme foreground, and unobserved, as is the narrator of "The Encantadas" when, prompted not by "curiosity alone, but, it seems to me, something different mingled with it," he watches Hunilla's prayer at her husband's grave: "She did not see me, and I made no noise, but slid aside and left the spot." (GSW, p. 136) And there is a similar furtiveness attached to the "terrific, most pitiable, and maddening sight" of the dying old whale, for it has no relation to the merciless slaughter: "pitiable to see. But pity there was none." (pp. 298, 301) An extended shame game, however, requires two players: on the one hand, the witness is detached yet parasitic, critical and uninvolved-- is left "floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it" in an embarrassed anticlimax to the conclusion of the heroic quest. (p. 470) "'Dost thou then so much as dare to critically think of me?'" Ahab demands of Starbuck. (p. 392) Ishmael does: with "greedy ears" he absorbs the story of the "monstrous monster" and partakes in the enthusiastic oath, but he listens to what he hears, and finally is not true to his word to hunt Noby Dick to the death. (p. 155) There are no conclusions to be drawn from his experience: like the narrator of "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," like Agée among the cotton tenants, and like the bystanders who, Burroughs asserts, are never innocent, Ishmael is without justification for his presence as an observer; his only reliable contact with reality, or context, is the survival imperative; he searches the empirical world in vain for an alibi. On the other hand, the only person liable to demand an alibi is one who resents being observed, who has something to hide: when Radney of the

Town-Ho's story, for example, flinches at Steelkilt's drawing attention to his mulish ugliness-- "'Damn your eyes! what's that pump stopping for?'"-- he anticipates the latter's revenge on him as Moby Dick devours him before Steelkilt's eyes: "'calmly looking on, he thought his own thoughts.'" (pp. 212, 222) Ahab is just such a one, a man of obscurity and secrets, like Dimmesdale, knowing "that to mankind he did long dissemble, in some sort, did still": when Starbuck interrupts his rallying the crew to ask if it "'was not Moby Dick that took off thy leg,'" Ahab cries, "'Who told thee that?'" before acknowledging the fact. From the first he is closeted from view, neither sick nor well, but since the loss of his leg "desperate moody, and savage sometimes," so that Ishmael's attempt merely "'to see him'" is frustrated, and he feels "impatience at what seemed like mystery in him" (pp. 162-63, 76-77); Ahab does not appear until the cruise is well under way, and keeps Fedallah and his boat crew out of sight until the first whale-hunt; but his groin injury, the "secret" behind Ahab's reclusiveness-- his associates "~~had~~ all conspired... to muffle up the knowledge of this thing from others"-- finally reaches the ears of the crew, and is "divulged" by Ishmael. (pp. 385-86) Accordingly, like Dimmesdale, Ahab cannot bear to be watched; "'Take off thine eye!'" he commands Starbuck when the latter objects to his plan of vengeance: "'more intolerable than fiends' glarings is a doltish stare!'" (p. 144) Ishmael, however, not only sees Fedallah when he is otherwise "Unobserved" and hears what Stubb has "soliloquized," but watches Ahab's most private moments: "did you deeply scan him in his more secret confidential hours; when he thought no glance but one was upon him; then you would have seen that even as Ahab's eyes so awed the crew's, the inscrutable Parsee's glance awed his." (pp. 412, 359, 438) And Ishmael

explores the implications of listening in when he describes the vast busy noise of life, "the message-carrying air," as the hum of the weaver-god's loom, by which we "are deafened; and only when we escape it shall we hear the thousand voices that speak through it....Ah, mortal! then be heedful; for so in all this din of the great world's loom, thy subtlest thinkings may be overheard afar." (pp. 374-75) This is precisely Ahab's terror; when he invites the carpenter to place his leg where Ahab's is no more, so that "here is only one distinct leg to the eye, yet two to the soul," he suggests that there might therefore be an invisible interpenetrating and unfriendly "thinking thing" standing also in the carpenter's place: "In thy most solitary hours, then, does thou not fear eavesdroppers?" (p. 391) Ishmael, whose name means 'God hears,' hears.

Interest may be defined as the suspicion of story or pattern, a speculation (in Mardi all thought is represented as speculation) on the shape of things; the Confidence Man solicits interest by suggesting that one must hold to a "'symmetrical view of the universe," "'have confidence in man'" and those "fixed principles" of human nature which the narrator of that book rejects. (pp. 290, 367, 110) But for the empiricist, the relation between consecutive events, between cause and effect, motive or intention, and act-- the existence, that is, of a story-- is problematic: for Locke, causality and identity are ideas of relation, and no episode of experience necessarily implies another. "However baby man may brag of his science and skill," Ishmael warns, "and however much, in a flattering future, that science and skill may augment; yet for ever and for ever, to the crack of dawn, the sea will insult and murder him, and pulverize the stateliest, stiffest frigate he can make." (p. 235) Without the support of a possible story, the explanation supplied by motive, interest

is voyeuristic, unjustified, without alibi-- the plea of having been elsewhere when something is done: on the contrary, the voyeur is unmitigably present.

That the story of Moby-Dick, which is held together by Ahab's insane belief in intention and the causal nexus, breaks into the unconnected episodes and styles of Ishmael's account, is a major preoccupation of Melville's critics. Robert Zoellner argues against the "Traditional opinion...that the Ishmaelian, first-person point of view 'breaks down,' the collapse getting under way in Chapter 29, where Stubb and Ahab have a conversation which Ishmael could not possibly hear, and becoming unmistakable by Chapter 37, where Ahab, alone in his cabin, delivers a brooding monologue which Ishmael could report to us only if he were hidden under Ahab's cabin-table," by pointing out that "Chapter 46...is a sustained mass of surmises (the title of the chapter), by means of which Ishmael deals in the most explicit and detailed way with his Captain's inner thoughts, motives and plans," so that "if Ishmael can give us conjectural material in expository form, he can also give us conjectural material in dramatic form."<sup>39</sup> Glauco Cambon regards the shifts from past-tense narration to present-tense dramatic monologue and dialogue as "a rhetorical device very common in the classical poets and historians... the historical present, whereby the author who is telling his story of past events suddenly adopts the present tense to bring home to his audience the poignancy of some particular experience relived now."<sup>40</sup> And H. L. Golenba sees no essential narrative discontinuity, for "Ahab is never completely alone. In his 'monologue' in 37, Melville is careful to station him near the window; in 44 he rushes from his room. Ishmael's rich imagination, prodded by Elijah's dark hints and fed by the ship's effective

grapevine, sufficiently explains the narrator's 'omniscience.'<sup>41</sup> But such syntheses presuppose that symmetrically consistent model of self which is the maniacal insistence of Ahab-- "'In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best... yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her rights'" (p. 417)-- rather than the form of Ishmael's experience: the latter's participation in an enthusiastic hunt for a monster, his vision of peace at the heart of the whale colony and the ghostly vision which overtakes him as he stares into the try-works exemplify the variety of his unconnected postures relative to the fact of the whale, just as he represents Ahab both as woven in "tragic graces" and "in all his Nantucket grimness and shagginess...a poor old whale-hunter" (pp. 104, 130); if the business of dealing with a slain whale involves a chaotic "running back and forth among the crew" and "no staying in any one place....it is much the same with him who endeavors the description of the scene." (p. 270)

Ishmael's narrative self varies as and is not abstractable from the grammar and style that is at any point employed: Melville echoes Ahab's exaltation of the personality when he writes Hawthorne in admiration of that "tragicalness of human thought" whereby a man "declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth... insists upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis. If any of those other Powers choose to withhold certain secrets, let them; that does not impair my sovereignty in myself." (LHM, pp. 124-25) But whereas Ahab insists upon demonstrative proof of that sovereignty, the working out of a reality analogous to what he feels to be a spiritual truth, Ishmael's personal sovereignty involves letting go rather than making fast, a willingness to criticize any of his postures. He speaks of the soul as an

"insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!" (p. 236): Ishmael continually pushes off, self-destructs, just as first-person self-reference ceases at the confrontation with Moby Dick, only to reformulate in the epilogue. Likewise, Pip's glimpse of the weaver-god source of things, his speaking a truth alien to "mortal reason," involves the destruction of his conscious identity-- "The intense concentration of self in the middle of such heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it?"-- so that he, like Ishmael in the final chapter, thenceforward speaks of himself in the third person: "and in the sequel of the narrative, it will be seen what like abandonment befel myself." (p. 348) And if the serenity at the centre of the whale school reminds Ishmael of the verbally unamenable "mute calm" at the centre of "the tornadoed Atlantic of my being," then that sight, as in all such incidents in Moby-Dick, is broken up by the runaway whale who slaughters his fellows with the careening cutting-spade. (p. 327) Unlike Ahab, that is, who commands the whale-head to "tell us the secret thing that is in thee," Ishmael does not try to establish that which is "but a point at best" on a fixed basis of analogy. (p. 264) The sense of self, moreover, is always accompanied by "sleep," "dream," "unconscious reverie," as when the sailor dreams in the mast-head, or when each of the idle sailors seems "resolved into his own invisible self"; it is at odds both with being awake and with seeing; that illustration of attention recurrent among the empiricists, for "no man can ever feel his identity aright except his eyes be closed." (pp. 140, 185, 55) Melville speaks of the state of reverie in a letter to Hawthorne, in which he abominates

Goethe's notion of "the all feeling" of oneness with nature, though it has some validity when one is lying in the grass on a warm day: "what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion"; and a few months later he writes Hawthorne that if the latter answers his letter "and direct it to Herman Melville, you will missend it-- for the very fingers that now guide this pen are not precisely the same that just took it up and put it on this paper. Lord, when shall be be done changing?" (LHM, pp. 131, 143)

Locke's position of a universal liability to change, and his definition of self as that consciousness which accompanies thinking, become in Melville a textual concern addressed in the self-reflexive act of writing, as when Ishmael declares that the nature of the spout has remained problematic "down to this blessed minute (fifteen and a quarter minutes past one o'clock P.M. of this sixteenth day of December, A.D. 1851)" (p. 310); similarly in White-Jacket, "I owe this right hand, that is at this moment flying over my sheet, and all my present being to Mad Jack" (p. 112): the text records the precise location of the self, is both what the self is not and what it does not transcend. For Locke personal self is a forensic device, bounded by memory, and appropriating to itself and thereby responsible for past actions: "if Socrates and the present mayor of Quinborough agree, they are the same person: if the same Socrates waking and sleeping do not partake of the same consciousness, Socrates waking and sleeping is not the same person" (Essay II, xxvii, 19); for Melville it is a narrative device, whether intra- or extra-textual, whereby experience is organized (ideas related) and presented to the understanding, and which, as in Locke,

cannot be perfectly consistent with substance, "what is." Personal identity exists, as Locke says, "not in the identity of substance, but...in the identity of consciousness" (II, xxvii, 19): just as in Hitchcock's Psycho, for example; two personalities are encoded on the same body, various personae-- styles, grammars-- are encoded on the text called Ishmael. "Who but a fool," asks the Maltese sailor, "would take his left hand by his right, and say to himself, how d'ye do?" (p. 148) The same situation occurs in Naked Lunch: "Last night I woke up with someone squeezing my hand. It was my other hand." (NL, p. 66)

A text which attempts to report the facts breaks down into inconsistent and limited fragments; the first words of Moby-Dick speak of the consumptive usher to a grammar school and "his old lexicons and grammars.... mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world. He loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow reminded him of his mortality." (MD, p. 1) Vocabulary and grammar are limited and limiting; Ishmael's fragmented and voyeuristic subjectivity is so limited, as Pip's conjugation-- "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look" (p. 362)-- suggests: point of view is grammar. Thus the subtitle of White-Jacket or The World in a Man-of-War suggests both an allegorical, microcosm-macrocosm significance and the account of a literal and linguistic World of "established laws and usages" (WJ, p. 1), such as is indicated in Peleg's comment: "Marchant service be damned. Talk not that lingo to me." (MD, p. 68) Moby-Dick is itself a lexicon, glossing whale- and sea-terms and Queequeg's language, defining the terms of cetology ("The classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less is here essayed"-- p. 116), producing statistics, quoting and questioning other sources, as in the comment on the "elegant language" of an ancient account of the Right Whale's



whiskers, and supplying an etymology, a survey of all known writings and a catalogue of experiences pertinent to whales (pp. 380, 283): an exhaustive consideration of vocabulary. If Famous Men includes photographs, Ishmael describes Leviathan's "pre-adamite traces in the stereotype plates of nature," (p. 380) criticizes painted and carved representations and notes that the Sperm Whale, "scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature," that completeness itself is "faulty"; he is both the sub-sub-librarian's "commentator," criticizing the gathered extracts, and a purveyor of his own "researches," for he has "swam through libraries and sailed through oceans" (pp. 118, 2, 304); he regards his subject, as he does the whale's possible extinction, "in every possible light" (p. 383): in his strenuous attempt to clarify the meaning of the language of whaling, he is frequently in the critical posture of pointing out what it does not mean, of rejecting inadequate terms and descriptions. Pip suggests "'Murray's Grammar'"; the Pequod identifies herself to other vessels by means of reference to a signal book; Ishmael staggers "under the weightiest words" of Johnson's dictionary; his chirography expounding to "placard capitals" in his vain attempt to comprehend the whale. (pp. 362, 265, 379) He is limited, that is, by his codes of vocabulary and grammar; while he covers all recorded time and space (his thoughts stretch "as if to include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come" (p. 379) and himself reduces a living whale to clear oil, his knowledge remains superficial, confined to ideas derived from experience and related in a text-- lexicographical, grammatical and mortal.

Melville elsewhere suggests the textual nature of 'self' or 'experience': Babbalanja speaks of "'a new leaf in my experience'";

Lemsford remarks to a more fortunate sailor, "'you have peaceful times; you never opened the book I ~~read~~ in'" (WJ, p. 397); and Pierre dies proclaiming "'Life's last chapter well stitched into the middle,'" Lucy shrinking at his feet "like a scroll."<sup>42</sup> The implications are more fully worked out in Moby-Dick; Ishmael has the dimensions of the whale's skeleton tattooed on his right arm, exclusive of the odd inches "as I was crowded for space and wished the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing-- at least, what untattooed parts might remain" (p. 376): he is, his joke suggests, a walking text. Queequeg is a "living parchment," "in his own proper person...a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume" which cannot be read, even by himself. (p. 399) A text has the status of a record, is itself evidential, so that Ishmael puts the oral story of the Town-Ho "on lasting record" (p. 208); his censorship of Ahab's urgent words to his boat-crew and deigning only to hint at the groin injury reflect a sense of delicacy about what is committed to record, (pp. 192-93, 385) as does the narrator's refusal in "The Encantadas," regarding Huni-lla's mishap, "to file this thing complete for scoffing souls to quote, and call it firm proof upon their side." (GSW, p. 133) Ahab's injury renders him such a record, for if he will "'Clap eye on Captain Ahab,'" Peleg says, Ishmael will find out what whaling is. (MD, p. 69) And the whale too is a textual record, with "hieroglyphical" marks visible through the isinglass surface, which also bears "numerous rude scratches" marking "hostile contact with other whales"; one carries embedded in its flesh a prehistoric "lance-head of stone"; whales are divided into "three primary BOOKS (subdivided into Chapters)," folio, octavo and duodecimo; "Leviathin," as Ishmael says, "is the text" upon which he comments. (pp. 260, 302, 119, 378)

A text is the apparent form or soma (Ishmael calls his fictitious classical writer "old black-letter") on which is encoded understanding, the consciousness that accompanies thinking; referring to the doubloon as a book, Stubb remarks, "The fact is, you books must know your places. You'll do to give us the bare words and facts, but we come in to supply the thoughts" (pp. 19, 360): but as Locke's example of the amputated finger (Essay II, xxvii, 17) and Ahab's discussion of his missing leg show, no precise correlation can be made on that basis. The quest for the white whale is a search for the substance (for Locke it is moot whether that substance is "spiritual or material, simple or compound"-- Essay II, xxvii, 17) that underlies understanding: Ahab seeks to restore the symmetry of his former self, to confront the intention behind the act which has outraged him, and sees Moby Dick as the mirror image at which he grasps like Narcissus; Ishmael, absorbed by no such anthropomorphism ("I say again, he has no face"— p. 318), able to make no correlation between self and reflected image, describes the whale in detail, and finds his experience, his text, as anatomized and remote from life as is the boiled-down whale from the living fish. And just as understanding is itself unknowable, "For whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books," (p. 396) so the life of the whale, which may or may not be analogous to that of man, is unamenable to any text: "Only in the heart of quickest perils...can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out." (p. 378) Thus Ishmael, who neither transcends nor identifies with the text, opposes the "foolish pride of reason" to the "miraculous," is "neither believer nor infidel" but regards earthly doubts and heavenly intuitions "with equal eye." (pp. 308, 314)

The text may be regarded as a kind of map, for Chapter 45, "The Chart," is "as important a one as will be found in this volume" concerning "what there may be of a narrative in this book": Ahab's chart is a two-dimensional analog which pretends to correspond to the precise movements of Moby Dick, to reach ~~below the~~ ocean surface, just as his markings on it correspond to "some invisible pencil...also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead." (pp. 175, 171) But "true places," Ishmael says of Queequeg's home, are never "down on any map"; and "This whole book is but a draught-- nay, but a draught of a draught," schematic, incomplete, arbitrary, making no final connection. (pp. 56, 128) Words are the marks on this map, the marks of ideas, as Locke says, without necessary or fixed meanings: the whale is arbitrarily denominated a fish, its isinglass surface "the skin"; Peleg insists that Queequeg is "Queequeg"; the funeral ship is "most miserably misnamed the Delight"; an etymological study of the term "Specksynder" shows how far "usage" strays from original meaning; and "wild rumours" abound with only a modicum of "reality for them to cling to." (pp. 259, 84, 441, 128, 156) Words, as Locke says, hold ideas together, just as the text forms them into propositions which, whether true or false, ~~can be understood~~; they give that symmetrical shape to the world which is understanding, yet if the world, as Stubb speculates, "is anchored anywhere...she swings with an uncommon long cable." (p. 420) If tragedy is an event in language, the breakdown of the symmetry of fixed verbal meanings, then Ahab's tragic trappings are appropriate to his mission, for he goes forward "to lay the world's grievances before that bar" from which he ~~never~~ returns (p. 108); he is quite literally out of joint, but since he finally does penetrate the verbal mask of the text, it remains questionable whether he has put things right.

As in Locke's Essay, experience is the only teacher of verbal meaning: Starbuck is reputed one of the most "'careful'" men in the fishery, but the experience of rowing "'back foremost into death's jaws" teaches Ishmael "what that word 'careful' precisely means when used" by a whale-hunter. (pp. 103, 196) Experience of the whale is experience which threatens (or for Ahab, defies) symmetrical formulation as self, or text; the organization of ideas derived from experience into a comprehensible, if fragmented, relation or pattern, operates as a veil covering an incomprehensible substance. Ishmael quotes John Hunter on the "'Impenetrable veil covering our knowledge of cetacea,'" and describes an engraving which depicts "one single incomputable flash of time" during a Sperm Whale's tantrum, at which an oarsman appears "half shrouded by the intense boiling spout...in the act of leaping, as if from a precipice"; Radney too is "'for an instant...dimly seen through that veil, wildly seeking to remove himself from the eye of Moby Dick,'" who makes his final appearance "Shrouded in a thick drooping veil of mist" (pp. 117, 229, 222, 464): the image of the whale, the focal representation in Moby-Dick of the source of things, the substance behind appearances, is accompanied by that of a veil or shroud through which can be glimpsed only the panic-stricken gestures of threatened survival, Locke's single source of the certain knowledge of substance; the skeptic who wishes a glimpse through the veil may position himself in the vicinity of an angry Sperm Whale and observe the rapidity of his own movements. A parallel incident is related in "The Two Temples" (1854): the narrator is a tourist who has entered by stealth the tower of a modern church, "a gorgeous dungeon" which allegorizes the subjective bubble, equipped with bells for communicating with the outside ("Some undreamed-of mechanism") and admitting only coloured light through "richly

died glass" ("Though an insider in one respect, yet I am but an outsider in another"). He scratches "a minute opening" to peer through and catches a glimpse of the man who had refused him entrance, and who eventually seizes and delivers him to the police: "how could I help trembling at the apprehension of his discovering a rebellious caitiff like me peering down on him...?" (GSW, pp. 153, 157) What his white-light glimpse through the coloured veil shows him, that is, is the precariousness of his subjective situation. Ahab would strike through the veil and do face-to-face battle with the author of that precariousness: he dashes his quadrant, "furnished with colored glasses," to the deck and tramples on it. (pp. 411-12) The specific relevance of Ahab's attitude to the fact of the text is suggested by his declaration that he "'never thinks; he only feels, feels; that's tingling enough for mortal man! to think's audacity. God only has that right and privilege." (p. 460) But a text encodes the movement of thought (Richards calls it a machine for thinking), arranging feelings (impressions) into sense or order, and thereby exhibits their habitual configuration in patterns of expectation: in the "six-inch chapter" which is "the stoneless grave of Bulkington" Ishmael offers the reader a glimpse of "that mortally intollerable truth; that all deep earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea" and avoid "the treacherous slavish shore," the "safety, comfort" and "hospitality" of the port; Bulkington, like Ishmael, must always "unrestingly push off." (p. 97) If Ahab challenges the survival imperative in order to return the blow on behalf of his insulted feelings, Ishmael clings unfailingly to no such formulation, for the only real certainty about his report is its contingency upon the reporter's survival.

The influence of Locke and his followers is present in Melville's work, not only in terms of overall strategies and the shapes of particular episodes, but also by virtue of more specific allusion. The narrator of Mardi compares Jarl, in his practical attitude toward what he considers a phantom ship, to "my Right Reverend friend, Bishop Berkeley-- truly one of your lords spiritual-- who metaphysically speaking, holding all objects to be mere optical delusions, was, notwithstanding, extremely matter-of-fact in all matters touching matter itself"; Berkeley is the source of Babbalanja's argument that "'during my absence, my wife would have more reason to conclude that I was not living, than that I was....To me it is not, except when I am there. If it be, prove it. To prove it, you carry me thither; but you only prove that to its substantive existence, as cognisant to me, my presence is indispensable.'" Babbalanja also quotes a Mardian philosopher who, like Hume, maintains that "'We are bundles of comical sensations,'" argues against the illusion of free will and the supremacy of any "'moral sense'" over circumstances, and poses the limits of empirical investigation regarding personal identity:

"What art thou, mortal?"

"My worshipful lord, a man."

"And what is a man?"

"My lord, before thee is a specimen."

(M.I, p. 157; II, pp. 145, 119, 116, 96)

White-Jacket, who echoes Locke's critique of "what is called glory" and his position on the relativity of good and evil ("in other planets, perhaps, what we deem wrong, may there be deemed right; even as some substances, without undergoing any mutations in themselves, utterly change their colour, according to the light thrown upon them"), notes that "Locke's Essays-- incomparable essays, everybody knows, but miserable reading at sea," are part of the ship's library, and attacks the chaplain (who "drank at the

mystic fountain of Plato; his head had been turned by the Germans; and... White-Jacket himself saw him with Coleridge's Biographia Litteraria in his hand") for prancing "on Coleridge's High German horse" rather than addressing the day-to-day state of affairs on the man-of-war. White-Jacket protests against flogging as "religiously, morally, and immutably wrong," but is "ready to come down from the lofty mast-head of an eternal principle" and argue on the basis of experience that flogging is a substitute for leadership: "I myself, in several instances, know to have been the case...." (WJ, pp. 118, 194, 175, 62-63, 174, 152-54; Essay III, x, 3; xx, xxi, 43)

Pierre reads in Plotinus Plinlimmon's pamphlet a tirade against those who pretend to have found the "Talismanic Secret" of reconciliation with the world: "Plato, and Spinoza, and Goethe, and many more belong to this guild of self-impostors, with a preposterous rabble of Muggletonian Scots and Yankees, whose vile brogue still the more bespeaks the stripedness of their Greek or German Neoplatonical originals." Pierre is repeatedly in the position of contemplating paintings, so that when he visits the gallery with Lucy and Isabel he reflects that "All the walls of the world seemed thickly hung with the empty and impotent scope of pictures, grandly outlined but miserably filled." In the first chapter of Book XXV, Lucy sits drawing at her easel in a closed room in which "one window had been considerably elevated, while by a singular arrangement of the interior shutters, the light could in any direction be thrown about at will"; Isabel, jealous of his attention to Lucy, solicits a display of Pierre's affection and "at the instant of his embrace" contrives to open the door to the studio; "Before the eyes of seated Lucy, Pierre and Isabel stood locked; Pierre's lips on her cheek": as in Locke's Essay, the mind is represented as a camera obscura in which replicas are made of inwardly impelled images.



But there is no conscious coming to terms with the incestuous nature of that image, for Pierre knows Lucy's "expertness in catching likenesses, and judiciously and truthfully beautifying them; not by altering the features so much, as by steeping them in a beautifying atmosphere"; the atmosphere and habitual postures of romance are similarly proof against Pierre's awareness. Isabel had described to Pierre the series of subjective impressions that is the history of her childhood, and he suddenly wonders whether the story "might have been...forged for her...and craftily impressed upon her youthful mind," for "Tested by anything real, practical, and reasonable," her lack of knowledge that the sea is salt belies her recollection of an early ocean-crossing; his original conviction had been based on Isabel's resemblance to a portrait of his father (which had been painted on the sly, by a singularly voyeuristic image-thief), but he now sees a similar resemblance in the portrait of a foreigner, one which is "just as strong an evidence as the other," and for which there is "perhaps...no original at all": the pictures hung in the subjective gallery have no necessary connection with the substance beyond. With the two women "bodily touching his sides as he walked," Pierre turns over the empirical question: "coming to the plain, palpable facts,-- how did he know that Isabel was his sister?" Unfortunately for the aroused lover, corroboration comes with experience: their ferry ride carries them over waves that roll in from the Atlantic and Isabel convulsively affirms, "'I feel it! I feel it! It is! It is!'" Knowledge is the agreement or disagreement of ideas; if the existence of the paintings is a mere 'coincidence,' then, says Isabel, "'by that word... we but vainly seek to explain the inexplicable.'" (P, pp. 290, 487, 459-60, 465, 491-94).

The narrator of "Bartleby" also experiences an undermining of his "authority," finds his every assumption about Bartleby's behaviour negated by his ambiguous substantial presence ("In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air"), and resorts to "Edwards on the Will, and Priestly on Necessity" in order to obtain a short-lived and similarly ousted comfort with Bartleby's persistence behind his screen: "At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestined purpose of my life." (PM, pp. 501, 497, 500) Like the White Whale, Bartleby represents the intractable substance behind appearances and out of reach of the understanding; the corresponding illustration in "The Encantadas" is that of the tortoises, whose chief impression on the narrator is "that of age:-- dateless indefinite endurance": his description of their first appearance on the deck-- "They seemed newly crawled forth from beneath the foundations of the world. Yea, they seemed the identical tortoises whereon the Hindoo plants his total sphere" (GSW, pp. 104-5)-- echoes Locke's comparisons of the notion of substance to the Indian philosopher's tortoise. (Essay II, xiii, 19; xxiii, 2) The descriptions of Amassa Delano's in "Benito Cereno," like the narrator's struggles in "Bartleby," question the authority of any subjective account of appearances, which must be formulated according to habitual associations: "From no train of thought did these fancies come; not from within, but from without, ...yet as soon to vanish as the wild run of Captain Delano's good nature regained its meridian"; "innocence and guilt...through casual association with mental pain, stamping any visible impress, uses one seal-- a hacked one"; "the sight...evoked a thousand trustful associations"; "he felt a slight twinge, from a sudden indefinite association in his mind..." (GSW, pp. 258, 266, 271, 289) Locke's

definition of the understanding by negation, his invalidation of metaphor and analogy, consistently inform Melville's model, so that, in Pierre, the orphaned soul "still clamours for the support of his mother the world, and its father the Deity. But it shall yet learn to stand independent, though not without many a bitter wail, and many a miserable fall." (P, p. 412)

Empirical facts offer no more hold on subjectivity than statistics or descriptions do on Moby Dick, or than the text called Ishmael does on Ishmael's attention: after everything has been told about Pierre, Isabel gasps, "'All's o'er, and ye know him not!'" (p. 505); and the narrator of "Bartleby" remarks that "it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach." (PM, p. 489) Like Bulkington, the individual subject is neither amenable to, nor can he rely upon, the dry-land hospitality of symmetry and analogy suggested by verbal formulation; part of Delano's problem is his unwavering confidence in "the ever-watchful Providence above" (p. 293): his point of view, like Pierre's, is limited by the rigidity of its grammar. While there are frequent allusions to the terminology of empiricism in The Confidence Man (a shoemaker's calling "is to defend the understandings of men from naked contact with the substance of things"), more central is the critique of the "doctrine of analogies....Fallacious enough doctrine when wielded against one's prejudices, but in corroboration of cherished suspicions not without likelihood": "'analogy,'" one of the wiser marks point out, is not "argument,"; he accuses the confidence man of punning "'with ideas as another man may with words.'" Like Ishmael, this man names himself: "my name it Pitch; I stick to what I say"; though just as Ishmael is hypnotized by Ahab, Pitch is soon pried loose. (CM, pp. 315, 200, 189)

Locke's Essay contributes to Moby-Dick the model of the mind as mediator between corporeal and spiritual substances, and the appropriate

terminology: Ahab identifies with the whale "not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations"; his "intellect," which had been an "agent," is now an "instrument" of his madness, though to describe a mental faculty is to speak in metaphor: "If such a furious trope may stand, his special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its concentrated cannon on its own mad mark." (Essay II, xxi, 19; MD, pp. 159-61) Starbuck, whose "stubbornness of life" is continually asserting itself against Ahab, is not proof against him, but while Ahab dominates Starbuck's body and intellect, "the chief mate, in his soul, abhorred his captain's quest." (p. 183) Ahab confuses Starbuck's objections by invoking the doctrine of analogies, the existence of "the little lower layer" (p. 144): like Dimmesdale, Ahab is powerfully eloquent and spurred by his own secret agony; Ishmael, on the other hand, remarks of the customary calculation of the Right Whale's age by counting the markings on certain bones, that "the certainty of this criterion is far from demonstrable, yet has the savor of analogical probability." (p. 282) While "the mind does not exist unless leagued with the soul," Ahab's "living principle or soul" has been so thoroughly subdued by the "characterizing mind" that it seeks escape when he sleeps; he insists, that is, that words have meaning ("I like to feel something in this slippery world that can hold"), that substance, physical or spiritual, conform to intellectual design: told of Fedallah's disappearance, he exclaims, "'Gone?-- gone? What means that little word?'" (pp. 175, 390, 458) Ahab and Fedallah, in fact, are silent together "as one man," gaze at each other "as if in the Parsee Ahab saw his forethrown shadow, in Ahab the Parsee his abandoned substance" (pp. 411, 439); and if Fedallah is repeatedly a "shadow" rather than "mortal substance," then Ahab deplores his inability to transcend his vulnerable

physical condition, referring to his "'body'" as his "'craven mate'": "be this Parsee what he may, all rib and keel was solid Ahab." (pp. 438, 458-60) He employs dualistic terms, opposes "'man's old age'" to "'matter's,'" and considers his flesh a debt or fallen form: "I would be free as air; and, I'm down in the whole world's books." He also opposes sensual pleasure, "the low enjoying power," to his "high perception," finding himself, as such terms dictate, "damned in the midst of Paradise." He is obsessed with an inscrutable intelligence behind and distinct from intractable appearances: "'all the things that most exasperate and outrage mortal man, all these things are bodiless, but only bodiless as objects, not as agents. There's a most special, a most cunning, oh, a most malicious difference.'" (pp. 461-62, 392, 147)

In Ishmael we have the mediating intellect, the encoded presence of understanding which attains to no unambiguous knowledge of substances: "hell," he tells Queequeg, "is an idea first born on an undigested apple-dumpling." (p. 63) If Ishmael would throw both Kant and Locke overboard in order to float light and right, he, like Starbuck, is "held to knowledge," and he employs the vocabulary of the empiricists in setting forth what he knows: "there is no quality in the world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself." (pp. 148, 55) He echoes Locke and Berkeley in his discussion of vision, noting its passivity and delineating the problem of attention:

So long as a man's eyes are open in the light, the act of seeing is involuntary; that is, he cannot then help mechanically seeing whatever objects are before him. Nevertheless, any one's experience will teach him, that though he can take in an indiscriminating sweep of things at one glance, it is quite impossible for him, attentively, and completely, to examine any two things --however large or however small-- at one and the same instant of time; never mind if they lie side by side

and touch each other. But if you now come to separate these two objects, and surround each by a circle of profound darkness; then, in order to see one of them, in such a manner as to bring your mind to bear on it, the other will be utterly excluded from your contemporary consciousness. How is it, then, with the whale? True, both his eyes, in themselves, must simultaneously act; but is his brain so much more comprehensive, combining, and subtle than man's that he can at the same moment of time attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on one side of him, and the other in an exactly opposite direction? If he can, then is it as marvellous a thing in him, as if a man were able simultaneously to go through the demonstrations of two distinct problems in Euclid. Nor, strictly investigated, is there any incongruity in this comparison. (pp. 279-80)

The association of ideas derived from experience accounts for attitudes:

Steelkilt is "nurtured by...agrarian free-booting impressions" (p. 209);

"by the continual repetition of...impressions" of the sea's power, "man has lost the sense of the full awfulness" (p. 235); Ahab lowers for

the squid, perhaps, because "he was now prepared to connect the ideas of mildness and repose with the first sight of the particular whale he pursued" (pp. 236-37); and his symbolizing imagination combines arbitrary

associations, as when he transfers "the idea" of the Christian formulation of evil "to the abhorred White Whale," or when, watching the homeward-bound Bachelor, he holds a vial of sand, and "looking from the ship to the vial seemed thereby bringing two remote associations together, for that vial was filled with Nantucket soundings." (pp. 160, 408) Whereas Ahab resents

"The dead blind wall [that] butts all inquiring heads at least," Ishmael investigates the wall, insists that all ideas are derived from experience

("the only way in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself"), refers to what "has been proved

by experiment," checks his opinion concerning the whale's skin with "experienced whaleman afloat and learned naturalists ashore," though "it is only

an opinion," and distinguishes the "anatomical fact" of the whale's breathing apparatus, which is "indisputable," from "the supposition founded upon it," which may be "reasonable and true" (pp. 427, 229, 259-61, 311); his scholarship is likewise tentative, the organization of data into a probable picture, for if "you properly put these statements together, and reason upon them a bit, you will clearly perceive that...Procopius' sea-monster... must in all probability have been a Sperm Whale." (p. 182) He finds insoluble the problem whether the "mistifying" spout is water or vapour, for the substance dissolves human skin ("The wisest thing the investigator can do then...is to let this deadly spout alone"), though he puts forth the unsubstantiated "hypothesis...that the spout is nothing but mist." (pp. 310, 313-14) It "hypothetically" occurs to him that the "lung-celled honeycombs" in the whale's head serve for buoyancy (p. 289); hypothesis is the recurrent condition of the human mind, which develops towards "manhood's pondering repose of If" only to give way again to faith, skepticism and disbelief (p. 406); Peleg fishes for Ishmael's interest with an hypothesis-- "'Supposing it be the Captain of the Pequod, what doest thou want of him?'"-- and Ahab sneers at the carpenter, "pudding-heads should never grant premises" (pp. 68, 391): to grant a premise is to suspend disbelief, to accept and pursue the consequences of what might be true-- a task, Ahab implies, appropriate to those of exceptional stature.

Ishmael's humbler approach is to insist upon his experience, however ambiguous: he offers "something like the form of the whale as he actually appears to the eye," is a "veritable witness" who records the circumstances of his "exact knowledge," has "had to do with whales with these visible hands," and will himself only accept the evidence of a witness: "Here, then, from three impartial witnesses, I had a deliberate statement

of the entire case." (pp. 224, 373, 118, 196) He refers to "well-authenticated" instances, points out that "there are skeleton authorities you can refer to, to test my accuracy," supplies excerpts from "testimony entirely independent of my own," and jokingly remarks of Scoresby's facsimiles of Arctic snow crystals, the "over-sight not to have procured for every crystal a sworn affidavit." (pp. 208, 375, 178, 231) Authenticity is an empirical problem; Ishmael's final recourse against his report's being received as "a monstrous fable, or...a hideous allegory," is his word, that which he has given to Ahab and not kept, and which, as his self-introduction indicates, he regards as arbitrary: "Such things may seem incredible; but however wondrous, they are true"; "take my word for it." (pp. 177, 267) In "The Affidavit" he repeats, "I have personally known three instances....I say I, myself, have known....Here are three instances, then, which I personally know the truth of"; when his hearers demand to know if the Town-Ho's story "'is in substance really true,'" Ishmael sends out for the largest available bible on which to swear that it "'is in substance and its great items true.... I have seen and talked with Steerkilt since the death of Radney.'" (pp. 175-76, 224) The uncertainty of Ishmael's credibility has to do with the empirical critique of language and its relation to substance: to speak, Burroughs says, is to lie. The narrator of "Bartleby" cannot guess the reliability of the "report" he hears about the scrivener's identity: "Upon what basis it rested, I could never ascertain, and hence how true it is I cannot tell" (PM, p. 511); as Vere knows, to pronounce sentence is to employ an arbitrary code.

In his inconsistency, Ishmael does not present his proofs "methodically," but is "content to produce the desired impression by separate citations of items practically or reliably known to me as a whaleman; and from



these citations, I take it-- the conclusion aimed at will naturally follow of itself" (p. 175): this is how Agee defines his effort in human actuality, the setting forth of discontinuous fragments and leaving their realization to the reader; realization, or understanding, is as unspeakable and as self-interrogating as the notion of substance, and is to the text what the living whale is to his skeleton. The reader must assume a critical attitude, must constantly consider the question, "how do you know...?" which occurs three times in the discussion of the substantial nature of the spout (p. 313); unlike Starbuck, who prays, "'Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory,'" Ishmael rails against "precedents...traditions...old beliefs never bottomed on earth, and now not even hovering in the air... [and] orthodoxy," and declares himself "a savage, owing no allegiance but to the King of the Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him." (pp. 262, 232) And since "all men's minds and opinions [and] ...the thoughts of thinkers" are Loose-Fish, apt to be captured by "ostentatious smuggling verbalists," the reader, who is both "a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too," must beware of being captured by any particular formulation. (p. 334)

This is consonant with Ishmael's allegorical mode, as opposed to Ahab's symbolism; the former frequently ends a description by giving his material an allegorical signification, as he converts whales' heads to Kant and Locke, or to "Plato's honey head." (p. 291) While, with reference to the "presumed congeniality" between the dense elastic head of the beached sturgeon and that of the English king to whom the law awards it, Ishmael uses the words "allegorical" and "symbolically" as if they were interchangeable, he elsewhere uses 'symbol' in a more specialized sense: symbols are the means of communication, such as perhaps are the gestures of the tail, which some say are "akin to Freemason signs and symbols; that the

whale indeed, by these methods, intelligently conversed with the world"; they generalize a particular situation, as Queequeg holding aloft the light of the swamped boat is both "the sign and symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair"; and they suggest a transcendent reality, so that the wind seems "the symbol of that unseen agency which so enslaved them to the race" after *Moby Dick*. (pp. 336, 318, 195, 454) But whereas Ahab, for whom *Moby Dick* is a symbol, regards meaning as immanent and discoverable, for Ishmael it is delegated and casual, a passing and not necessarily related comment. Melville doubts, he writes Hawthorne, that symbols have any meaning beyond themselves: "We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out...to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron,-- nothing more!" Even within the depths of symbolization, that is, there are only constituent signs; and the understanding, which works against synthesis and ultimate significance, proceeds by negation: "all men who say yes, lie; and all men who say no-- why, they are in the happy condition of judicious, unencumbered travellers in Europe; they cross the frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpet-bag-- that is to say, the Ego." (LHM, p. 125) In the absence of symbolic purchase, the text itself is as liable to rupture as the *Pequod*, the serial situations of *Typee*, and the disconnected grammatical stances of Agee and Burroughs, and abounds with situations of poised suspense and sudden surprise: before he dies Starbuck is "'deadly calm, yet expectant,-- fixed at the top of a shudder'" (p. 463); the great squid disrupts a "profound hush," just as *Moby Dick* at last "bodily burst into view" (p. 236, 455); the Wordsworthian "dreamy quietude" which converts waves to rolling hills, so that "fact and fancy, half-way meeting, interpenetrate and form one

seamless whole," is a calm to be disrupted, for there is "a storm for every calm" (p. 406); and just as "the profound calm which only apparently precedes and prophecies of the storm, is perhaps more awful than the storm itself," so the gracefully serpentine whale line, before it is in "actual play," is the most terrible aspect of the hunt, suggesting the line around all men's necks: "but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life," a terror felt as intensely by the philosopher at his fire-side as by the men in the whale-boat. (p. 271)

Anti-pattern is the only pattern Ishmael finds useful, hence his notion of metempsychosis: hardly has the crew stowed down and cleared up after processing one whale, and hardly has a man "learned to live in the clean tabernacles of the soul...when-- There she blows!-- the ghost is spouted up and away we sail to fight some other world" (pp. 357-58); death ("explosive death," as Benito Cereno calls it-- GSW, p. 313) is defined negatively as a rupture of context, and thus has everything to do with the Sperm Whale, for "Not the raw recruit, marching from the bosom of his wife...not the dead man's ghost encountering the first unknown phantom in the other world;-- neither of these can feel stranger and stronger emotions than that man does, who for the first time finds himself, pulling into the charmed, churned circle of the hunted Sperm Whale," (MD, p. 193) Locke regards the supposition of metempsychosis as having "no apparent absurdity in it," pointing out that since "those who place thought in a purely material, animal constitution, void of an immaterial substance," must conceive of "personal identity [as] preserved in something else than identity of substance" (for the particles of the organism are always changing), it is equally conceivable that it be "preserved in the change of immaterial substance"; and since "the word I"

refers to the identity of the same "man," and it is "possible for the same man to have a distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times, it is past doubt the same man would at different times make different persons." (Essay II, xxvii, 14, 12, 20) The notion of metempsychosis, that is, has implications for the inconsistencies of Ishmael's narrative, which encodes or interweaves the thousand voices which can only be heard when the loom is escaped (pp. 374-75); "'in one lifetime we live a hundred lives,'" says Babbalanja: "'By the incomprehensible stranger in me, I say this body of mine has been rented out scores of times, though always one dark chamber in me is retained by the old mystery.'" (CM II, p. 116) White-Jacket's speculation as to whether we think in words or thoughts is interesting in this regard; Agee, referring to the metonymic "shaded room" of psychoanalysis, says, "Night is, for some, that shaded room; and in this room these talk of themselves to themselves in silence, and may sometimes profit of it, and may sometimes break the paralysis of their parentage" (LUNPFM, p. 223); as in Hitchcock's Psycho, more than one voice is encoded on a single larynx, each voice programming the behaviour of the subject. Brion Gysin, the originator of Burroughs' cut-up method and collaborator with him in Minutes to Go, speaks of the various contradictory "voices" or grammars that make up any text or subjective consciousness, and argues with other voices in his text: "Just talk to yourself for a minute. You hear that little voice? Well, now argue with yourself: take two sides of a question....I hesitate to advise, because I know only for me, that something pretty saucy will often get you a sharp answer. Realize it is an answer when you hear it and not just you.... This ain't no monopoly, lady. Shove off, you! Well, as I was saying before I was so brashly interrupted...Stop and Listen."<sup>43</sup> Attention itself is a submissive and salutary tool, and metempsychotic notions provide no

explanatory myths that guarantee its security or validity; the dissolution of verbal context provides the subject with knowledge by negation, of what he is not but does not transcend.

Melville's use of Locke is most clearly evident in his treatment of whiteness, the dumb blankness full of meaning which stabs from behind with the thought of annihilation; a colorless all-color, it suggests that substance which, Locke says, is "only an uncertain supposition of we know not what, i.e. of something whereof we have no particular distinct positive idea, which we take to be the substratum, or support, of those ideas we do know" (Essay I, iii, 19): of the colourless substantial world and its associated terror, Ishmael says, "the Albino Whale was the symbol." (MD, p. 170) Whiteness has a similar function in Mardi: Yillah, whose "snow-white skin" sets her apart from the Polynesians among whom she is found, is, like Moby Dick, an elusive and veiled dream apparition-- "hence the impulse which had sent me roving after the substance of this spiritual image." (M I, pp. 125, 145) White-Jacket's jacket is his name and identity, "an outlandish garment of my own devising," the "storehouse" of his possessions, a "burden" to him when wet and very nearly his "shroud"; it also suggests the text, for its material is slit in the making "much as you would cut a leaf in the last new novel," and by means of it the narrator "became a universal absorber": when he falls from the mast into the sea ("the feeling of death crept over me with the billows") he arrives at a "life-and-death poise," and discards the jacket which drags him down-- the substance upon which his identity is encoded-- and is reborn, whereupon the jacket is harpooned by his comrades, who take it for a "white shark." (WJ, pp. 3-4, 40, 414-15) Pierre, upon recognizing that he has "no paternity and no past," speaks of "the Future" as "one blank to all" (P, p. 277); and Babo regards Don Alexandro's skeleton,

mounted on a "bleached hull as a chalky comment on the chalked words below, 'Follow your leader,' " as a "whiteness" which is common to both caucasian and negro. (GSW, pp. 296, 304-5) It is Ishmael's fear of the future, his concern for survival, that informs his prolonged meditation on the whale's whiteness; the whale leaves such a wake, according to Job, "One would think the deep to be hoary" (MD, p. 2); Moby Dick is an "object remote and blank in the pursuit," and absence or negativity-- a "broad white shadow" rising from the sea-- rather than a positive presence, who presents his negating "blank forehead" to the ship he is about to smash; he is the possible manifestation of the "big white God aloft there somewhere" to whom Pip prays. (MD, pp. 183, 268, 466, 155) That Moby Dick's whiteness is associated with spiritual as well as corporeal substance is indicated by the initial reference to him as a "grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air"; the spout, the substantial nature of which is a pointedly insoluble mystery, is not only a manifestation of whiteness-- Ishmael lodges under a sign "with a white painting upon it, faintly representing a tall straight jet of misty spray, and these words underneath-- 'The Spouter Inn:-- Peter Coffin' "-- but is an allegorical representation of the soul (death occurs when "the ghost is spouted up"; Stubb declares himself "'as good a fellow as ever spouted up his ghost!"), which in Ahab is "a ray of living light...but without an object to color, and therefore a blankness in itself." (pp. 16, 18, 358, 467, 175) And death, as Coffin's name suggests, is also connected with whiteness, the dead whale turning up "the white secrets of his belly," the dying Queequeg preparing to sail "the white breakers of the milky way" (pp. 301, 396); the uncoloured substantial world wears a "white shroud" which is finally penetrated by Ahab and the Pequod (just as Radney approaches Moby Dick "through a blinding foam that blent two whitenesses together"), "a sullen white surf"

beating the tide of the gulf until "the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago." (pp. 170, 222, 469) Whiteness stands for that which cannot be spoken about, transcends subjective experience.

The most complete treatment is in "The Tartarus of Maids" (1855), an allegory of the mechanism of birth: the narrator, a seed salesman, journeys to a paper-mill to contract for the production of envelopes for the dissemination of his seeds; the "whitewashed" mill stands near the bottom of a hollow through which runs a "brick-colored stream" called "Blood River," and which leads through "Black Notch" into "Mad Maid's Bellows-pipe"; the whole uterine set-up faces west. The narrator sets out in January and finds frosty "white vapours" curling up from the "white-wooded top" of Woedolor Mountain; his horse "Black" is "Flaked all over with frozen sweat, white as a milky ram"; in the "white" hollow and amid buildings with a "cheap, blank air"--a "snow-white hamlet amidst the snows"--the narrator has difficulty seeing the mill. The associations are both of birth and of death, for the forests groan with "the same all-stiffening influence" and the mountains are "pinned in shrouds-- a pass of Alpine corpses"; moreover, the rocky nature of the ground forbids "all method in their [the buildings'] relative arrangement," so that the narrator is entering a region which is allegorically both pre- and post-conscious, outside methodical arrangement. Inside the "intollerably lighted" factory, "At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper"; since the human voice is "banished" by the hum of the machinery, "Not a syllable" is spoken. The two men in the mill are "dark-complexioned" and "red-cheeked," the former attending to "Two white spots" of frost-bite on the narrator's cheeks, and the power that runs it comes from a "dark, colossal water-wheel, grim with one immutable purpose." But the women who

process rags "washed white" for conversion into paper are all "pale" with labour. Guided by red-cheeked "Cupid," the attendant of the machines, the narrator follows the course of some "white pulp" into a room "stifling with a strange, blood-like abdominal heat, as if here, true enough, were being finally developed the germinous particles," and on to its completion as paper (usually "'foolscap,'" but sometimes "'finer stuff'"), a process which takes "'Nine minutes to a second,'" rather than nine months; it is "delivered in-to" the hands of a woman who had formerly been a "nurse." The machinery, "a miracle of inscrutable intricacy," is compared, not to Leviathan, but to "some living, panting Behemoth," though it operates with the Sperm Whale's "metallic necessity... [and] unbudging fatality": it "'must go....just that very way, and at that very pace you there plainly see it go,'" and the pulp, passively maneuvered by the machine, "'can't help going.'" (GSW, pp. 210-22)

The birth that eventuates, of course, is Locke's "white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas" (Essay II, i, 2): whiteness is that which substantiates the text-- Ishmael speaks of the untattooed parts of his body as "a blank page" (MD, p. 429)-- and the narrator's reflections on the textual nature of consciousness suggest the "pallid hopelessness" engendered in Bartleby by his work in the dead-letter office (PM, p. 512):

Looking at that blank paper continually dropping, dropping, dropping, my mind ran on in wonderings of those strange uses to which those thousand sheets eventually would be put. All sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things-- sermons, lawyers' briefs, physicians' prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of births, death-warrants, and so on, without end. Then, recurring back to them as they here lay all blank, I could not but bethink me of that celebrated comparison of John Locke, who, in demonstration of his theory that man had no innate ideas, compared the human mind at birth to a sheet of blank paper; something destined to be scribbled on, but what sort of characters no soul might tell. (GSW, pp. 220-21)



Substance, or context, is finally the problem of motive and intention: where am I and how did I get here? The hunt for Moby Dick is both a projection of intention and a search for motive, the hidden source of the images which appear on the walls of the subjective jar, and of the language which relates them. Melville notes in his preface to *Typee* that "in describing their customs, [he] refrains in most cases from entering into their origin and purposes"; Tommo's making up his mind to jump ship is taking stock of his "circumstances" and the formulation of an appropriate plan-- an intention-- which is confuted at every step; the "bloodthirsty disposition of some of the islanders is mainly to be ascribed to the influence of [European] examples"-- that is, to a model or plan (T, pp. xiii, 23, 27); Tommo is repeatedly ignorant of the "cause" of Toby's disposition, of the Happar attack, of the failure of some bread-fruit trees to bear fruit, of the disease in his leg, of its healing, of the variety of complexions in the valley, of the melancholy feelings associated with a certain sight, of the taboo and of the chanting ceremony (pp. 32, 101, 117, 118, 123, 182, 216, 274, 226-27); his movement are the consequences of having "little choice," "no alternative," and his intention to leave the island is as circumstantial as that to leave the ship: "There was no one with whom I could freely converse; no one to whom I could communicate my thoughts; no one who could sympathize with my suffering." He has no reliable knowledge as to his captors' "intention," is constantly forced to "supposition." (pp. 51, 63, 231, 143, 267)

The narrator of *Mardi* has a similar reason, as distinguished from a cause, for quitting the ship: "There was no soul a magnet to mine; none with whom to mingle sympathies." He suffers "lost and leaden hours," and like Tommo, who charges his captain with violating their contract, regards his captain's course as "a tacit contravention of the agreement between us." (M I, pp. 3-5;

T, p. 20) These are circumstances which point those who live them in a certain direction, but do not necessarily lead to the actions taken, actions which, as the title, "The Watery World Is All Before Them," suggests, constitute a kind of death and rebirth, the foresaking a predictable context for the instability of chance. Taji's assertion that "Those who boldly launch cast off all cables....Hug the shore naught new is seen," suggests that the new is visible only with the breaking up of old habits of thought: Babo's substitution of a skeleton for the image of Columbus aligns with Taji's statement that the "new world here sought....is the world of the mind; wherein wanderers may gaze around with more of wonder than Balboa's band." (M I, p. 27; II, p. 207) For Taji, however, who does not name himself, discovery becomes a compulsive quest for paradise rather than a letting go: with Taji's reception of his name, Ishmael becomes Ahab, and the book changes direction. In Naked Lunch, a book about literary and linguistic and well as heroin habits, Burroughs refers to being "Obsessed with codes....Man contracts a series of diseases which spell out a code message"; Agee also, speaks of the "disease" of "symmetry" present in "the deity the race has erected to shield it from the horror of the heavens, in the pressed wall of a small Greek restaurant where some of the Greek disease persists through the persistence of a Renaissance disease" (LUNPFM, pp. 229-30): "Cure," Burroughs says, "is always: Let go! Jump!" (NL, pp. 66, 222)

A code is an analog device<sup>44</sup>: to let go is to test it, to bring in- to play an unaccountable, unsupported, discontinuous and digital awareness; the difference is between Ahab's map, his imposition of a story with a symmetrical plot, his demand for justice and the restoration of symmetry, and Ishmael's counting up the pieces of evidence. Letting go is associated in Melville with the westerly direction in which the machinery of birth faces

in "The Tartarus of Maids" and towards which move the frontier explorers of The Confidence Man and the Pequod, the symbol of civilization; Jarl and the narrator of Mardi set off on a "western voyage" ("Though America be discovered, the Cathays of the deep are unknown"); and Ishmael speaks of the Pacific as "uncivilized," "terra incognita," a grave-yard and finally the home of Moby Dick (M I, pp. 24, 35; MD, pp. 180, 269, 456-57): while for Ahab it is a direction towards, for Ishmael it is a direction away, allegorizing the movement of the intellect away from an implicit acceptance of codes. Babbalanja's formulation sums up the problem of motive: "'I am a blind man pushed from behind; in vain I turn about to see what propels me'; he seems 'not so much to live of myself, as to be a mere apprehension of the unaccountable being that is in me. Yet all the time this being is I myself.'" (M II, pp. 114-15, 116) White-Jacket, who like Ishmael must "surmise" the motive of his captain, likewise speaks of men as "sailing with sealed orders...the repositories of the secret packet, whose mysterious contents we long to learn....but let us not give ear to the superstitious, gun-deck gossip about whither we may be gliding, for, as yet, not a soul on board of us knows-- not even the commodore himself; assuredly not the Chaplain; even our professor's scientific surmisings are in vain"; his protest against flogging is a critique of habitual rationalization, a suggestion that depravity among the men is, "in a large degree, the effect, and not the cause and justification of oppression." (WJ, pp. 117, 419, 148) The narrator of Pierre notes that "In their precise tracings out and subtile causations, the strangest and fiercest emotions of life defy all analytical insight. We see the cloud and feel its bolt; but meteorology only idly essays a critical scrutiny as to how that cloud became charged, and how this bolt so stuns." (P, p. 92) Bartleby, too, simply appears on the scene without story or

context: "'And what is the reason?'" demands the narrator; "'Do you not see the reason for yourself?' he indifferently replied," an answer which his employer proceeds to misconstrue (PM, p. 429); like Locke Bartleby points to the presence of the self-evident, the futility of explanation. The narrator of "The Encantadas" says of the attainment of the point of view from Rock Rodondo, "How we get there, we alone know. If we sought to tell others, what wiser were they? Suffice it that here at the summit you and I stand" (GSW, p. 111); but the narrator of "The Two Temples" is not so comfortable about his unaccountable presence at his point of view: "Explanation will be in vain. Circumstances are against me." (GSW, p. 157) Whereas these two stories play with what is to be known about attention, "Benito Cereno" emphasizes the ambiguity of what is attended to: Delano regards a series of gestures, at first "Thinking he divined the cause," and becomes progressively less certain about the motive or intention indicated: "suddenly he thought that one or two of them returned the glance with a sort of meaning"; "the idea flashed across him, that possibly master and man, for some unknown purpose, were acting out, both in word and deed, nay, to the very tremor of Don Benito's limbs, some juggling play before him." He becomes aware, that is, that his ideas occur in "coincidence," that their meaning ("What meant this? ...had some random unintentional motion...been mistaken for a significant beckoning?") is ambiguous, that causality, intention and motive are neither abstractable from nor necessarily inherent in them; "Absurd then, to suppose that [Cereno's] questions had been prompted by evil designs"; the narrator, who pieces the story together from the court records, must similarly use words like "perhaps" and "Possibly" when speculating about Delano. (GSW, pp. 254, 265, 282, 261, 269, 263, 288-29) Realizing that he has been taken in by the Confidence Man, Pitch likewise "revolves, but cannot

comprehend, the operation, still less the operator....Two or three dollars the motive to so many nice wives?" (CM, pp. 199-200) Like the reader, who constructs a continuity out of the episodic textual information and assumes a single actor or causal agent behind the mask (though the final chapter implies that he is legion), Pitch seeks the explanatory motive, and is thereby duped.

Billy Budd, finally, is a study in the nature of judgement: Billy's bidding good-bye to the "Rights-of-Man," his spilling soup in Claggart's path ("'Handsomely done....And handsome is as handsome did it too!'", and the blow with which he kills Claggart, followed by his "impassioned disclaimer of mutinous intent," are all pointed instances of the ambiguity and possible misconstruction of "intention," as, at the moment of Billy's crime, are Vere's words which, "contrary to the effect intended...prompted yet more violent efforts at utterance" (MBB, pp. 142, 180, 239); the ensuing blow, "Whether intentionally or but owing to the young athlete's superior height," strikes Claggart's forehead and kills him. (p. 226) Like Bartleby, Billy simply appears, is "dropped into a world" dangerous to his innocence, without explanation: "'Don't you know where you were born?-- Who was your father?'" "God knows, Sir.'" (pp. 177, 146) So does Claggart, concerning whom, in "the dearth of exact knowledge," the crew circulates reports which "nobody could substantiate," for "About as much was known...of the Master-at-Arms' career before entering the service as an astronomer knows about a comet's travels prior to its first observable appearance in the sky." (pp. 169, 172). Romance, as is implied by the crew's aptness "to exaggerate or romance it" concerning Claggart's origin, invokes an explanatory context or nexus, but Billy is not the "conventional hero" of a "romance" (pp. 172, 149); and the narrator refuses "to invent something [which] might avail...to account for

whatever enigma may appear to lurk in the case" of Claggart's "spontaneous and profound" antipathy toward Billy, "the cause" of his being "down on him;" which is "in its very realism as much charged with that prime element of Radcliffian romance, the mysterious...as any that the ingenuity of [that] author...could devise." (p. 183) There is no clearing up this mystery: in the ensuing discussion of motive the narrator quotes an old scholar, "the adherent of no organized religion, much less of any philosophy built into a system," who has nevertheless advised him that experience can supply "but a superficial knowledge" of the workings of human nature, and that "for anything deeper" something else is required, "that fine spiritual insight" whereby a young girl, for example, has been known to get the better of an old lawyer; and since "that lexicon which is based on Holy Writ" has fallen into disfavour (again, ~~the~~ problem is of vocabulary and grammar), the narrator applies Plato's definition of "Natural Depravity," the phrase which critics invariably emphasize, to Claggart's peculiar "mania." (p. 184-87)

If Ahab is fated to live out the implications of a name which he did not give himself (and precisely as Ahab is drawn to Moby Dick, experiencing him as "all a magnet," Claggart "magnetically" feels "that ineffability" which is "the spirit lodged within Billy," is left "apprehending the good, but powerless to be it"), Claggart's nature also exemplifies a words-before-things situation, must, "like the scorpion for which the Creator alone is responsible, act out to the end the part allotted to it," since he cannot do other than identify with his own designs. (MD, p. 368; MBB, p. 192) But the narrator's recourse to Plato, like his comments on the decreasing confidence in the Bible-- they occur twice and without qualification of tone, (MBB, pp. 185, 189) and are comparable to that of the eavesdropper, "Awake in his sleep," who, when the Confidence Man describes the gospel as "good news,"

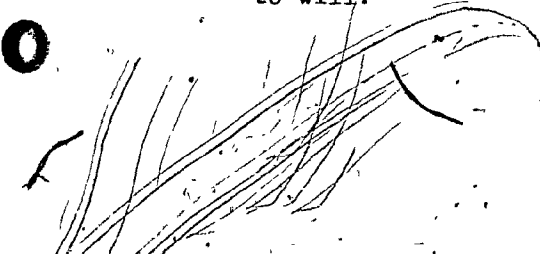
mutters "'Too good to be true!'" (CM, pp. 366-67)-- suggest irony. In "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville states the wish to glorify excellent books "without including their ostensible authors," for "the names of all fine authors are fictitious ones"; the problem of authority so put is to be connected with Melville's refusal to mythologize Shakespeare into one of the "Anglo-Saxon superstitions," (PM, pp. 400, 409) with Ishmael's savagely rebellious critical stance, with attempts to resist the Confidence Man, and with Vere's awareness of the arbitrary nature of authority; it is also to be connected with the final source of error with which Locke deals in the Essay, that of authority, whether of "friends or party, neighbourhood or country," or of "reverend antiquity," for "All men are liable to error, and most men are in many points, by passion or interest, under temptation to it." (Essay IV, xx, 17) Since "one must turn to some authority," says the narrator of Billy Budd (thereby summarizing the argument of the novel), he will refer to "the authentic" translation of Plato; but he notes that in more usual cases neither lawyers nor "remunerated medical experts" can agree on questions of moral responsibility; nor, were they asked, could "clerical proficientes." (MBB, pp. 185, 188-89) The ship's surgeon has the last word on classical authority, with reference to Billy's final motive: "'Euthanasia, Mr. Purser, is something like your will-power; I doubt its authenticity as a scientific term....It is at once imaginative and metaphysical,-- in short, Greek!" (p. 268) Claggart's "nature," despite the use of Plato's lexicon, remains hidden, the narrator tentatively referring to his "monomania...if that indeed it were" (p. 211); Vere, moreover, answers on Billy's behalf the question, "unintentionally touching on a spiritual sphere wholly obscure to Billy's thoughts," what could have motivated Claggart's making a false charge:

"The question you put to him comes naturally enough. But how can he rightly answer it? or anybody else? unless indeed it be he who lies within there," designating the compartment where lay the corpse. "But the prone one there will not rise to our summons. In effect though, as it seems to me, the point you make is hardly material. Quite aside from any conceivable motive actuating the Master-at-Arms, and irrespective of the provocation to the blow, a martial court must needs in the present case confine its attention to the blow's consequence, which consequence justly is to be deemed not otherwise than as the striker's deed." (pp. 240-41)

Just as Claggart's "motive" cannot be considered, neither can the intention behind the "prisoner's deed," for "War looks but to the frontage, the appearance" (here might be recalled *Moby Dick's* unreadable brow, and Claggart's stricken forehead): "Budd's intent is nothing to the purpose." (pp. 241, 247) Like Ishmael, and like the narrator of *Billy Budd*, Vere operates within the confines of a conventional code, and cannot strike through the mask as Claggart pretends to: the latter's "conscience being but the lawyer to his will" builds a "strong case" on the basis of "the motive imputed to Billy in spilling the soup" (p. 195); he argues to Vere that Billy is "'a deep one'" and offers to produce "'substantiating proof,'" which is but his own fiction. (pp. 219, 221) It is for Vere to judge Claggart's "'foggy'" tale: a Fairfax, he must do fairly; a Vere, he must seek truth, as he insists that the doctor "'verify'" that Claggart is dead. (p. 228) Aware that he is "not authorized" to act in any way but according to the martial code, and being "no lover of authority for authority's sake," Vere knows that the implications of his name are arbitrary, that there is no Justice beyond codified law, no Truth beyond "'facts.'" (pp. 235-36, 246) "'Who's to doom,'" demands Ahab, "'when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?'" (MD, p. 445); Burroughs is more cheerful: "As one judge said to the other: 'Be just and if you can't be just, be arbitrary.'" (NL, p. 4) It is



in the adherence to an arbitrary code, in fact, that Vere's situation is comparable to that of Melville's cousin, who pressed for conviction, though in quite different circumstances, under "Articles modeled on the English Mutiny Act": motive again is irrelevant, for "the urgency felt, well warranted or otherwise, was much the same." (MBB, p. 249) Vere acts, he says, in "'military necessity'" under "'heavy...compulsion,'" since the officers, like such impressed men as Billy, are not "'natural free agents'"; the code must be enforced because the sailors, "'long moulded by arbitrary discipline,'" will, however they feel about Billy, expect such enforcement of efficient commanders (pp. 248, 245): the only justification for any course of action consists in habitual patterns of association and expectation -- the basis, for Locke, of language and thought. The official "'code,'" of course, is digital: "'We must do; and one of two things we must do-- condemn or let go'"; and just as it limits the field of consideration, we are excluded from knowledge of what passes between Billy and Vere during the "communication of the sentence," though the narrator ventures "some conjectures." (pp. 246-47, 251) The code having been followed, the ships company echoes Billy's blessing of Vere "Without volition as it were," murmuring something "inarticulate...dubious in significance" after his death, but eventually "yielding to the mechanism of discipline." (pp. 265, 269-70) The awesome 'symbolism' of Billy's ascension at sunrise is undercut by the intrusion at that moment of the later comic scene in which the Purser attributes the remarkable motionlessness of Billy's body to "'the force lodged in will-power,'" and is rudely contradicted by the surgeon's denial that the absence of "'mechanical spasm in the muscular system'" is attributable to will:



"How then, my good Sir, do you account for its absence in this instance?"

"Mr. Purser, it is clear that your sense of the singularity in this matter equals not mine. You account for it by what you call will-power, a term not yet included in the lexicon of science. For me I do not, with my present knowledge, pretend to account for it at all. Even should one assume the hypothesis that at the first touch of the holyards the action of Budd's heart, intensified by extraordinary emotion at its climax, abruptly stopped-- much like a watch when in carelessly winding it up you strain at the finish, thus snapping the chain-- even under that hypothesis how account for the phenomenon that followed?"

"You admit then that the absence of spasmodic movement was phenomenal."

"It was phenomenal, Mr. Purser, in the sense that it was an appearance the cause of which is not immediately to be assigned." (p. 268)

Ishmael's status as a record of empirical data makes sense of the fact that he spends the first chapter of Moby-Dick-- "Loomings," or indistinct appearances-- trying to formulate his motive for going to sea, which is "a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation"; he lists four "whenever" conditions-- symptoms like grimness about the mouth, dreary weather in the soul, funeral attendance, the urge to knock hats off-- of which the sequel is, "then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can": "whenever" I see the alphabet written up to K, "then" I know that L comes next. Ishmael, that is, is "in the habit of going to sea"; arbitrary habit is his, as it is Vere's, sole explanation: "With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship." There is evidence in Manhattan that things are set up that way, where "Right and left, the streets take you waterward"; and one must explain why so many people stand gazing out to sea ("What do they here?"), why a walk in the country invariably leads to water, why a landscape painting is incomplete without it, "Why" poets place the sea above practical needs, "Why" the Greeks deified it with the brother of Jove, if one is to explain Ishmael's motive.

(MD, pp. 13-14) Later on Peleg demands that explanation of Ishmael, who answers that he wants "'to see what whaling is....to see the world'"; for the former, says Peleg, it is necessary only to clap eye on Ahab; for the latter, "'just step forward there, and take a peep over the weather bow'": Ishmael is forced to acknowledge that he does in fact see the world-- "'Well, what's the report?'-- and cannot explain why he wants to see more of it; "I was a little staggered, but go a-whaling I must and I would." (p. 70) His list of reasons for going as a "simple sailor" rather than as passenger or officer reinforce his wise-guy personality, are witty rationalizations, that is, of a situation over which he has no control, and emphasize his consenting passivity before "the universal thump"; but he cannot explain why he goes as a whaleman rather than a merchant sailor, and parodies the notion of a program drawn up by the Fates, wedging "WHALING VOYAGE BY ONE ISHMAEL" between a presidential election and a battle in Afghanistan. While he "cannot tell why it was exactly," his recollection of "all the circumstances" affords him a limited and retrospective glimpse into the then "cunningly" disguised "springs and motives" of his becoming a whaleman, which not only directed him but cajoled him "into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased free will and discriminating judgement"; these are the desire to witness "a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds" and the lure of danger and of the sea, but "Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the whale himself," dominated in turn by, of all whales, "one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air." The formula, 'whale, especially Moby Dick, equals motive,' sets up the empirical boundary of investigation: if the Narcissus story of "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life" is "the key to it all," (pp. 14-16) then Ishmael, whose questioning of his own motive leads him to envision the White Whale, joins the search for it.

in order to find out what, finally, can be known of motive. Whales are ostensive motives to action, whale-hunts providing oil "for almost all the tapers, lamps, and candles that burn round the globe," though it is ironic that the pitiful old whale must cruelly "be murdered...to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all" (pp. 99, 301); and Ahab identifies his tenacity-- "'Ahab's hawser tows his purpose yet'"-- with the motive force of harpooned Sperm Whales, which tow boats at terrifying speed: "'Here we go like three tin kettles at the tail of a mad cougar!...this is the way a fellow feels when he's going to Davy Jones.'" (pp. 459, 299) Ishmael's investigation of what moves Ahab, the crew and himself is his investigation of what moves the whale, a search for the substance behind appearances; "there is death in this business of whaling," he says, but perhaps "we have largely mistaken this matter of Life and Death" banishing his morbid thoughts in the chapel he opines that his "true substance" hearkens to "Delightful inducements to embark," for death is an event of the body which, like the text, can neither be transcended nor identified with; "take it I say, it is not me." (p. 41)

Although Ishmael gives us a chapter of surmises on Ahab's motives for continuing to lower for whales while hunting Moby Dick, all he can certainly report-- "Be all this as it may..."-- are Ahab's orders for vigilance (p. 185); whether he follows an associative pattern or whether simply "betrayed" by his eagerness, "whichever way it might have been," what Ahab perceptibly does is lower for the squid (p. 237); as to his conciliating gesture to Starbuck, "It were perhaps vain to surmise exactly why it was that...Ahab thus acted," whether out of "honesty" or "mere prudential policy": "However it was, his orders were executed." (p. 394) Compulsively identifying himself with the design which, except at night when he rushes from his state room, is all-

consuming, Ahab helplessly acknowledges that "all my means are sane, my motive mad"; his actions from the loss of his leg forward are a successful but unwilling "dissembling" his mad motive, so that the "report of his undeniable delirium" on the return voyage and his subsequent "moodiness" are mistakenly "ascribed to a kindred cause," natural grief at his casualty (pp. 161-62): Ishmael can only guess at which might be behind Ahab's gestures as he carries on according to normal "forms and usages...incidentally making use of them for other and more private ends than they were legitimately intended to subserve." (p. 129) At the first appearance of Fedallah and his crew, the men, owing to Archy's having overheard them, are "for the time freed from superstitious surmisings; though the affair still left an abundant room for all manner of conjectures as to dark Ahab's precise agency in the matter from the beginning": Stubb's comment that "'The White Whale's at the bottom of it'" suggests the limit of understanding on that score. (p. 189) Ishmael is equally in the dark as to "with what intent" Elijah might be following him, as he seems to be, after their interview (p. 88); what "possessed Radney to meddle with such a man in that corporeally exasperated state, I know not; but so it happened" (p. 212); and he cannot guess the content of the threat which stays the captain's hand from Steerkilt, and gives even Radney pause (p. 219) He merely speculates as to the owners' motives for sending Ahab back to sea (again, "be all this as it may..."), and renounces any knowledge of what motivates the crew, including himself, to chase Ahab's whale: "all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. The subterranean miner that works in us all, how can one tell whither leads his shaft by the ever shifting, muffled noise of his pick?...What skiff in tow of a seventy-four can stand still? For one, I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the place; but while yet all rush to encounter the whale,

could see naught in that brute but the deadliest ill." (pp 162-63)

Disencumbered of the illusion of free will, Ishmael remains a witness; while Ahab, who posits a world of metaphor and "linked analogies," identifies with his will and insists upon its integrity-- "What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed I'll do!"-- Ishmael remarks of his position at the end of the monkey-rope that "my free will had received a mortal wound," and moreover that "this situation of mine was the precise situation of every man that breathes." (pp. 147, 271) In the chapter immediately following his surmises of Ahab's motives, Ishmael sits weaving a mat, threading the shuttle of free will among the fixed threads of necessity, stretched on the "Loom of Time," Queequeg's careless manipulation of his sword functioning as chance, which "has the last featuring blow at events"; chance, free will and necessity are neither incompatible nor abstractable one from another. at the moment that Tashtego sings out at the sight of the first Sperm Whale of the voyage-- "you would have thought him some prophet or seer beholding the shadows of Fate"-- Ishmael leaps to his feet and "the ball of free will dropped from my hand." The Sperm Whale pre-empts notions of free will; like the threads of necessity, "subject to but one single, ever returning, unchanging vibration," and like the Behemoth machinery of birth in "The Tartarus of Maids," the "Sperm Whale blows as a clock ticks, with the same undeviating and reliable uniformity" (pp. 185-86): whether that necessity assumes the anthropomorphic proportions of "Fate" appropriate to Ahab's tragic stature, or does not transcend the observation of constant conjunction, as in Locke and Hume, is a central question in Moby-Dick.

The idea of weaving is recurrent: when Stubb abandons Pip ("he did not mean to") at mid-ocean, the latter sees "strange shapes of the unwarped primal world...the multitudinous, God-omnipresent coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon

the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad." (p. 347) The "weaver-god" is again linked with the Sperm Whale when Ishmael measures the skeleton: "as the ever-woven verdant warp and woof intermixed and hummed around him, the mighty idler seemed the cunning weaver; himself all woven over with vines"; Ishmael's threading his way among the bones of the overgrown skeleton, marking his path by unravelling a ball of twine, makes him a weaver, or rather a shuttle in search of the weaver, just as the whale is both "weaver" and "woven"; examining the whale from head to tail-- here, as throughout the book-- he searches in vain among the anatomized fragments for the ungraspable phantom of life: "I saw no living thing within; naught was there but bones." Empirical investigation becomes a thoroughly self-reflexive interrogation of subjectivity; "only when we escape" the deafening hum of the loom "shall we hear the thousand voices that speak through it" (pp. 374-75): Ishmael does not escape, is a text which encodes and inter-weaves many voices, just as he weaves "tragic graces" around his characters. (p. 104) The word, 'text,' appropriately enough, is derived from the Latin for 'that which is woven' (OED): Ishmael is a text without a context, for like the whale, he is both weaver and woven.

His later reference to "the mingled, mingling threads of life... woven on warp and woof" reinforces this self-reflexiveness, the inseparability of weaver and woven, intention and gesture, motive and act, as does Ahab's reflection, with the school of whales, among whom "Moby Dick himself" might swim, before him, and Malay pirates behind, that he is "both chasing and being chased to his deadly end" (pp. 406, 321): but unlike Ishmael, Ahab will not accept that what is before his eyes is the limit of what can be known about what is behind them. Ishmael describes the Sperm Whale as

"a mass of tremendous life...and all obedient to one volition, as the smallest insect" (though he repeatedly wonders "that such bulky masses...can possibly be instinct, in all parts, with the same sort of life that lives in a dog or a horse"; "Think you not that brains, like yoked cattle, should be put to this Leviathan...?"), noting that "his tail is the sole means of propulsion"; he theorizes, but "cannot demonstrate," that "the sense of touch is concentrated in the tail," and doubts that "any sensation lurks" in the head. (pp. 234, 376, 285, 316) He is barred, that is, from the whale's subjectivity, "his incommunicable contemplations" and the possible symbolism of his tail gestures: "But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head?"; "'think,'" says Stubb, "'of having half an acre of stomach-ache.'" (pp. 314, 318, 296)

Just as Ishmael does not know the cause of Tashtego's falling into the Sperm Whale's head, so that it throbs "as if that moment seized with some momentous idea," or whether ambergris is the "cause" or the "effect" of the whale's dyspepsia, he does not know to what degree the whale is an intelligent agent capable of intention: the "resemblance" of his skull to a human's is sufficiently close that, "scaled down...among a plate of human skulls...you would involuntarily confound it with them," though neither its shape nor its size gives any indication of "his true brain." (pp. 288, 342, 293) The puzzle of what motivates the whale-- "I put that brow before you. Read it if you can" (p. 293)-- is the puzzle of Ishmael's own motive: the whale is spoken of in the Shaster as the avatar of "Vishnoo," and in Stubb's song as "a joker" (pp. 306, 413); it is rumoured by "the superstitiously inclined... that Moby Dick was ubiquitous; that he had actually been encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant of time" (p. 158); he is characterized as an "'immortal'" tool of fate, a dream apparition, "the Shaker



God incarnate" and "the old great-grandfather." (pp. 221, 224-24, 267, 365) If death is "speechlessly quick," approaching with "a last revelation, which only an author from the dead could adequately tell" (in Mardi it is "voiceless as a calm"-- I, p. 217), the whale also "has no voice....But then again, what has the whale to say? Seldom have I known any profound being that had anything to say to this world" (pp. 41, 396, 312): death, which might be a slumbering dream or an "eternal unstirring paralysis, and deadly, hopeless trance," is an "endless end" and cannot be witnessed (Ahab is "voicelessly... shot out of the boat, ere the crew he was gone"), is observably only an inanimate gesture, Tashtego's hammer "frozen" to the mast as the sky-hawk is dragged down. (MD, pp. 399, 395, 468-69) And just as Ahab's brow is dented with "the foot-prints of his one unsleeping, ever-pacing thought," and the "shades" of thought sweep over Queequeg's face, so the birds are "the gentle thoughts" of the air, and whales, swordfish and sharks "the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings" of the sea (pp. 140, 442); but the intention behind these visible manifestations, cannot be deduced, for the calm swelling of the sea is both the lulling of "the seductive god...Pan" and a treacherous surface hiding "the tiger's heart that pants beneath it": Queequeg's remark that "'de god wat made shark must be one dam ingin'" epitomizes Ishmael's puzzlement as to the motive source of things. (pp. 400, 405, 257)

Locke suggests that the problem of cosmic causality is subordinate to the more obvious one of the subjective phenomenon of will: "my thought only changing, the right hand rests, and the left hand moves....explain this and make it intelligible, and then the next step will be to understand creation." (Essay IV, x, 19) Ahab too focuses on the problem of voluntary action: "What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing it is; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel remorseless emperor commands me.

...Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (p. 445)

But unlike Locke, he insists on a continuous and consistent identity, and regards necessity as something more than the observed conjunction of ideas: "'Ahab is forever Ahab, man. This whol act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fathers' lieutenant; I act under orders.'" (p. 459) His personification of necessity as Fate invests every event with intention, so that his groin injury is "but the direct issue of another woe" (p. 385); words come before things: the causal nexus has the force of a predetermined gesture.

"But in each event-- in the living act, the undoubted deed-- there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the un-reasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him." (p. 144)

A prisoner, like Ishmael, of his subjectivity, Ahab insists upon regarding his uniqueness as a punishment or exile, and thrusts through the wall of experience by projecting his compulsively autonomous sense of purpose or intention ("Swerve me? The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run"-- p. 148) onto the empirical appearance of things, investing them with the depth of fixed significance: for him Moby Dick's assault is a rational and intentional gesture. Nor, Ishmael points out, is this belief an anomaly: maritime rumours incorporate "all manner of morbid hints, and half-formed foetal suggestions of supernatural agencies, which eventually invested Moby Dick with new terrors unborrowed from anything that visibly appears." (p. 156) While accidents in the fishery are frequent,

"such seemed the White Whale's infernal aforethought of ferocity that every dismembering or death that he caused was not wholly regarded as having been inflicted by an unintelligent agent." (p. 159) When Ishmael demonstrates that "the most marvellous event in this book is corroborated by plain facts of the present day" by citing Owen Chace's "plain and faithful narrative" of his ship's having been rammed and sunk by a Sperm Whale, he notes Chace's mention that "'Every fact seemed to warrant me in concluding that it was anything but chance which directed his operations....He came...as if fired with revenge...producing...impressions in my mind of decided, calculating mischief, on the part of the whale.'" (pp. 179-80) Ishmael himself expects the reader to renounce "all ignorant incredulity" regarding some of the Sperm Whale's "more inconsiderable braining feats." (p. 285)

However, whereas Ahab seeks a showdown with Moby Dick, that "set time or place...when all possibilities would become probabilities, and, as Ahab fondly thought, ever possibility the next thing to a certainty," Ishmael's vision is obviated by the blank brow: "I say again he has no face." Narcissistic Ahab sees to the exclusion of all else his own image in the depth of the pool, but Ishmael, who does not identify with-- know the meaning of-- his own image, is left on the surface of rumour and report, the text, just as his knowledge of the whale is irremediably superficial: "Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not and never will." (p. 318) Despite Ahab's being told by the surgeon of the Samuel Enderby that "'what you take for the White Whale's malice is only his awkwardness,'" despite Starbuck's outrage at the blasphemy of "'Vengeance on a dumb brute...that simply smote thee from blindest instinct,'" and despite the latter's insistence, as the whale swims away, that "'Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him,'" Ahab immovably believes in the whale's reputed

"intelligent malignity." (pp. 368, 144, 465, 159) At his own coming into the presence of Moby Dick, Ishmael describes his movements in tentative, conditional terms: "as if perceiving this strategem, Moby Dick, with that malicious intelligence ascribed to him..." (p. 448); he "seemed only intent on annihilating every separate plank" (p. 456); "whether fagged by three days' running chase...or whether it was some latent deceitfulness and malice in him: whichever was true..." (p. 465); "catching sight of the nearing black hull of the ship, seemingly seeing in it the source of all his persecutions; bethinking it-- it may be-- a larger and nobler foe..." (p. 466); Ishmael simply doesn't know. Whether the "Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice" in Moby Dick's "whole aspect" as he charges the Pequod indicate the intentional gesture of a mirror-image intelligence, or are the figments of a limited, fictive vocabulary, remains moot (p. 468); there is finally no ground for an anthropomorphic vision, or possibility of making things amenable to words: symbols are without ultimate purchase. Unlike Billy Budd, Ahab is the hero of a romance, but Ishmael's curtain-speech prevents Moby-Dick from being a romance, works against the symmetrical resolution towards which a story presided over by Fate should proceed, and questions the inevitability of the redemptive pattern suggested thereby; as in Billy Budd, the conclusion of a narrative "having less to do with fable than with fact....is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial." (MBB, p. 274). In his episodic narration, his taking things apart for close investigation rather than drawing them towards the hub of a single comprehensive point of view, Ishmael does the opposite of the narrator of The Scarlet Letter-- turns a romance, that is, into a digital, discontinuous record: whereas that book tells of the working out of the redemptive plan, the final realization of divine intention, Ishmael's experience is of what

he politely and ironically calls an "interregnum in Providence." (MD, p. 271) Ahab's romantic promise to break through the empirical surface remains immanent, but like Ishmael we are left floating on it.

According to Tommo, "As wise a man as Shakespeare has said, that the bearer of evil tidings hath but a losing office" (T, p. 198); like the reporters who return to Job, Ishmael brings bad news, for no news is good news: Chillingworth-style, he has watched and listened, but his very presence, his commission of what Agee describes as the faux pas of anticlimax, testifies that he has not been absorbed into the ritual last act: "The Drama's done. Why then does one step forth?" Like David Locke, he has left his tape-recorder running, and replays it-- retells the event-- for our consideration; but there are things that the text will not compute-- "awe," for example (pp. 78, 395-96); and if there is "an aesthetic," it is "in all things" (p. 238): in the course of the ongoing translation that we witness, what does not compute is lost, for "however peculiar...any chance whale may be, they soon put an end to his peculiarities by killing him, and boiling him down into a peculiarly valuable oil." (p. 176) Given all the possible co-ordinates, the knowledge of what a whale is, or who Ishmael is, is unavailable; "though of real knowledge there be little, yet of books there are a plenty." (p. 117) There is a message in evidence, but there is no empirically detectable sender or receiver: it is the Confidence Man who deals in "'communication.'" (CM, p. 367) The shape of the story of Moby-Dick is finally a joke, the mad gesture of a transcendental symbolist, for the critique of metaphysics and the anthropomorphic vision leave the reader in a voyeuristic situation, observing (literally, adhering to) without alibi, data without context. It is possible, Moby-Dick suggests, to escape one's habitual terms only by means of a kind of violence, so that the White Whale

smashes the romantic shape of the text, by smashing the Pequod, leaving a baseless and unlikely post-script. As the quotation heading that post-script implies, the reader is finally in the position of Job, to whom messengers report the news that everything has been destroyed: "But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of the understanding?...The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me." (Job 28: 12-14) God's chastisement of Job— "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding" (38: 4)— does not clear up the mystery, but compounds it with a catalogue of inexplicable wonders: "Canst thou draw out Leviathan with an hook?...Will he make a covenant with thee?...Who can open the doors of his face?" (41: 4, 14) Words do not grasp the ungraspable phantom of life— neither the understanding, nor what is understood. "A word," says Godard's voice-over in La Chinoise, "is what remains unsaid."

smashes the romantic shape of the text by smashing the Pequod, leaving a baseless and unlikely post-script. As the quotation heading that post-script implies, the reader is finally in the position of Job, to whom messengers report the news that everything has been destroyed: "But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of the understanding?...The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me." (Job 28: 12-14) God's chastisement of Job-- "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding" (38: 4)-- does not clear up the mystery, but compounds it with a catalogue of inexplicable wonders: "Canst thou draw out Leviathan with an hook?...Will he make a covenant with thee?...Who can open the doors of his face?" (41: 4, 14) Words do not grasp the ungraspable phantom of life-- neither the understanding, nor what is understood. "A word," says Godard's voice-over in La Chinoise, "is what remains unsaid."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Hartley, Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations, ed. T. H. Huguelet (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966), I, i, 2, prop. 12, cor. 7; iii, 1, prop. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 34-36, 41.

<sup>3</sup>Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature; trans. W. R. Trask, (Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 116, 317.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Statesman's Manual," Appendix B, Complete Works, ed. G. T. Shedd (New York, 1884), Vol. 1, pp. 437-38.

<sup>5</sup>T. S. Eliot, "Henry James," Literature in America, ed. Philip Rahv, pp. 227-28.

<sup>6</sup>Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics; trans. W. Baskin (Glasgow: Collins, 1974), p. 68.

<sup>7</sup>Newton Arvin, "The Whale," Literature in America, ed. Philip Rahv (New York: Meridian, 1957), pp. 168-69.

<sup>8</sup>Northrop Frye, The Educated Imagination (CBC, 1974), pp. 21, 15-16, 18.

<sup>9</sup>Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 71, 73-74, 123-25.

<sup>10</sup>Burroughs, The Soft Machine (New York: Ballantine, 1966), p. 173. Subsequent references are noted in the text (SM).

<sup>11</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (New York: Rinehart, 1960), pp. 8, 6-7, 9, 10. Subsequent references are noted in the text (SL).

<sup>12</sup>Godard, Le Petit Soldat; trans. Nicholas Garnham (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), pp. 8, 12. Subsequent references are noted in the text.

<sup>13</sup>Burroughs, Exterminator! (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 168. Subsequent references are noted in the text (E).

<sup>14</sup>Melville, Mardi and A Voyage Thither (London: Chapman and Dodd, 1923), Vol. I, pp. 225-27. Subsequent references are noted in the text (M).



<sup>15</sup> Melville, Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life, ed. H. Hayford, H. Parker, G. T. Tanselle (Chicago: Newberry Library, 1968), pp. 5-8, 14-15, 90, 110, 131, 77, 152, 134. Subsequent references are noted in the text (T).

<sup>16</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket," The Complete Poems and Stories of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. A. H. Quinn and E. H. Oneill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), Vol. II, pp. 732, 738-39, 745-48, 782-83, 832, 853-54.

<sup>17</sup> Poe, "The Domain of Arnheim," Introduction to Poe: A Thematic Reader, ed. E. W. Carlson (Atlanta: Scott, Foresman, 1967), p. 315.

<sup>18</sup> Melville, "Benito Cereno," Great Short Works of Herman Melville, ed. W. Berthoff (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 241. Subsequent references are noted in the text (GSW).

<sup>19</sup> Locke, Essays on the Law of Nature, ed. W. von Leyden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 111, 117, 119-21, 127-29, 133, 147, 193.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 227, 139.

<sup>21</sup> Burroughs, The Job (New York: Grove, 1974), p. 104. Subsequent references are noted in the text (J).

<sup>22</sup> For a reading of Typee which suggests that Melville imposes a distance between himself and his morally reprehensible narrator, see David Williams, "Peeping Tommo: Typee as Satire," Canadian Review of American Studies, 1975, VI, pp. 36-49.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951), pp. 82, 90-91, 324-27.

<sup>24</sup> Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 390-95.

<sup>25</sup> Howard, pp. 82, 90-91, 324-27.

<sup>26</sup> Melville, "Billy Budd, Foretopman," Melville's Billy Budd, ed. F. Barron Freeman (Harvard Univ. Press, 1948), p. 249. Subsequent references are noted in the text (MBB).

<sup>27</sup> Melville, The Confidence Man (New York: Lancer, 1968), p. 107. Subsequent references are noted in the text (CM).

<sup>28</sup> Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Purloined Letter," Introduction to Poe, pp. 329-30, 344, 400.

<sup>29</sup>Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Purloined Letter," Ibid., pp. 329-30, 344, 400.

<sup>30</sup>Poe, "To Dr. J. E. Snodgrass," "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," The Portable Poe, ed. Philip Van Doren Stern (New York: Viking, 1968), pp. 331, 378, 383; "The Purloined Letter," Introduction to Poe, p. 392.

<sup>31</sup>Raymond Chandler, The Big Sleep (New York: Ballantine, 1971), p. 199.

<sup>32</sup>Poe, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," pp. 397, 429, 417-18, 377. John Walsh, in Poe the Detective: The Curious Circumstances behind "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1968), argues that Poe's claim is a conscious hoax.

<sup>33</sup>Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," "Leaves of Grass" and Selected Prose, ed. Sculley Bradley (San Francisco: Rinehart, 1949), pp. 56, 57.

<sup>34</sup>Poe, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," p. 439.

<sup>35</sup>Melville, Mardi and A Voyage Thither (London: Chapman and Dodd, 1923), Vol. I, p. 132. Subsequent references are noted in the text.

<sup>36</sup>Encyclopaedia Judaica (New York: Macmillan, 1971), Vol. 9, pp. 80-82.

<sup>37</sup>Melville, White-Jacket or The World in a Man-of-War, ed. A. R. Humphreys (Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 51, 373. Subsequent references are noted in the text (WJ).

<sup>38</sup>Melville, "Bartleby," The Portable Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Viking, 1974), p. 466. Subsequent references are noted in the text (PM).

<sup>39</sup>Robert Zoellner, The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972, p. xi.

<sup>40</sup>Glauco Cambon, "Ishmael and the Problem of Formal Discontinuities in Moby Dick," Modern Language Notes, Vol. 76, 1961, p. 522.

<sup>41</sup>H. L. Golemba, "The Shape of Moby-Dick," Studies in the Novel, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1973, p. 210.

<sup>42</sup>Melville, Pierre or, The Ambiguities (New York: Grove, 1957), pp. 502-3. Subsequent references are noted in the text (P).

<sup>43</sup>Bryon Gysin "Cut Me Up," Minutes to Go (San Francisco: City Lights, 1968), pp. 43-44.

<sup>44</sup>Anthony Wilden, "Analog and Digital Communication: On the Relationship between Negation, Signification, and the Emergence of the Discrete Element," Semiotica, 1972, VI, 1, p. 52.

"Look here, this is a book he had when he was a boy. It just shows you."

He opened it at the back cover and turned it around for me to see. On the last fly-leaf was printed the word SCHEDULE, and the date September 12, 1906. And underneath:

Rise from bed .....	6.00	A.M.
Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling.	6.15-6.30	A.M.
Study electricity, etc. ....	7.15-8.15	A.M.
Work .....	8.30-4.30	P.M.
Baseball and sports .....	4.30-5.00	P.M.
Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it .....	5.00-6.00	P.M.
Study needed inventions .....	7.00-9.00	P.M.

#### GENERAL RESOLVES

No wasting time at Shafter's or [a name, inde-  
cipherable]  
No more smoking or chewing  
Bath every other day  
Read one improving book or magazine per week  
Save \$5.00 [crossed out] \$3.00 per week  
Be better to parents.

"I come across this book by accident," said the old man. "It just shows you, don't it?"  
"It just shows you."

F. Scott Fitzgerald,  
The Great Gatsby

### CHAPTER III. The Print and the Paupers: Narcissism as Nostalgia

Following the extensive preliminaries, James Agee begins Book Two of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men by questioning the motives and intentions of the project as set up by Fortune magazine:

'I spoke of this piece of work we were doing as "curious." I had better amplify this.

It seems to me curious, not to say obscene and thoroughly terrifying, that it could occur to an association of human beings drawn together through need and chance and for profit into a company, an organ of journalism, to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, an ignorant and helpless rural family, for the purpose of parading the nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings, in the name of science, of "honest journalism" (whatever that paradox may mean), of humanity, of social fearlessness, for money, and for a reputation for crusading and for unbiased which, when skillfully enough qualified, is exchangeable at any bank for money (and in politics, for votes, job patronage, abelincolnism, etc.<sup>1</sup>[<sup>1</sup>money] ); and that these people could be capable of meditating this prospect without the slightest doubt of their qualification to do an "honest" piece of work, and with a conscience better than clear, and in the virtual certitude of almost unanimous public approval.

That Agee and Evans have "so extremely different a form of respect for the subject and responsibility towards it" (LUNPFM, p. 7) mitigates neither their involvement in this exposure nor their hope that their publishers will recover their investment and "a little of your money might fall to poor little us." (LUNPFM, p. 15) The passage sets up the self-interrogative themes of the prose, for without recourse to the excuse of respectable motives and intentions the book is an act of unredeemed voyeurism. Agee described it to Father Flye, in fact, as a "piece of spiritual burglary," "a sinful book at least in all degrees, of 'falling short of the mark' and I think in more corrupt ways as well." (LFF, pp. 117, 135)

The status of the witness as voyeur is a major issue throughout Agee's work. The early story, "Death in the Desert" (1930), offers the image, mediated by a car window, of a marooned and desperate Negro gesturing wildly for help on a south-western desert highway-- "For some shameful reason the effect was grotesquely funny, if indeed there was any effect" (CSP, p. 80)-- who is abandoned; the narrator, by definition a teller of stories, and a liar even to those with whom he collaborates by his silence, finishes by struggling to arrange his thoughts into a credible order, a story by which that collusion might be extenuated. The narrator of "They That Sow in Sorrow Shall Reap" (1931), who gives the Richardsian meditation on epistemology quoted earlier, regards himself as "a horrible failure" at carrying any "one idea through," getting "at the bottom of anything": at writing a coherent story. His fellow lodgers, like him "myopic" in their limited points of view, are unaware of his taking note of their mundane attitudes: "when, caught in these flimsy inescapable cogs, they are contemplated in their unrealized relation to the timeless severance of the vast radiance of life, and the enormous shadow of death, they become magnificent, and tragic, and beautiful." (CSP, pp. 96-98) "1928 Story" "written in the late 1940's, published 1968) describes the tentative recollection of a phase of his youth by a middle-aged writer, who feels that his reconstruction is "Very likely...completely subjective"; this self-examination unfolds like a telescope, for this early phase is itself given over to intense self-contemplation; fascinated, at that time, by the image of a girl he has seen only once, he seeks her family's cottage at dusk and watches through the window:

Taking care to stay out of the light, he came closer. She read in a way that fascinated and satisfied him, detachedly, yet in complete absorption. Each time she turned a page, it was like watching someone take

another mouthful of food, with perfect elegance. Then, with the same elegance, she put her finger tip into one nostril, and worked, patiently, without interrupting her reading, until she had extracted the annoyance. Still reading she rolled it between the tips of her forefinger and thumb, until it was dry, smelled of it, and flicked it to the jute carpet. God, Irvine thought: she's wonderful! He felt ashamed of himself; for now he waited, hoping that she would do this or something like it again; and when he became sufficiently aware of his shame, he withdrew, to past the rear of the cottage. There on the line, he could see bathing suits. He struck a match so that he might enjoy the cedar color. Suddenly we [sic] wanted to smell the suit. What sort of a Peeping Tom am I, he said to himself, touched it-- it was a fine silk-wool-- and walked away.<sup>1</sup>

"A Mother's Tale" (1952) describes a cow's relation to an audience of calves of the apocryphal story ("'It was my great-grandmother who told me....She was told by her great-grandmother, who claimed she saw it with her own eyes, though of course I can't vouch for that'") of the one who came back from the stockyards bearing "the mark of the Hammer...like the socket for a third eye," having been hung up and flayed before actually dead, inviting his bearers "to examine his wounded heels...as closely as they pleased," (CSP, pp. 255-56, 250) and telling of the fate that awaits all cattle: Ishmael, escaped alone to tell us; Christ as reporter.

Just as the prose in Famous Men is Agee's investigation of his own memory images and states of emotional poise, The Morning Watch (1951) and A Death in the Family (1957) are progressive extensions into and researches of his more remote subjective past, much as is suggested by Irvine's meditation in "1928 Story": Father Flye remarks of A Death in the Family that, with a few modifications, the circumstances of Agee's father's death and the portraits of the characters involved "are just taken literally from fact; that is, they're practically photographic."<sup>2</sup> In 1937 Agee proposed

to the Guggenheim foundation the writing of an autobiographical novel of which "Only relatively small portions would be fiction (though the techniques of fiction might be used); and these would be subjected to non-fictional analysis" ("Plans for Work," CSP, p. 165); and he later wrote, "I find that I value my childhood and my father as they were, as well and as exactly as I can remember and represent them, far beyond any transmutation of these matters...into poetry or fiction." ("Four Fragments," CSP, p. 142) The title, The Morning Watch, connects the idea of self-investigation with looking, and portrays the child's effort to fix his attention during the ritual vigil of Good Friday morning ("Could ye not watch with me one hour?" "Pay attention, he told himself. Mind your own business") as the vision of "his mind's eye,"<sup>3</sup> before which images appear against his volition: of Christ, in a maudlin portrait of affected passion (MW, p. 31); of Christ's wounds profanely compared, via the line, "he saw more wounds than one" in Venus and Adonis, with a "rawly intimate glimpse" of a female playmate (p. 56); and of his father's corpse, (p. 49) the same image which is the final meditation of A Death in the Family. Whereas Agee's act of devotion, his watching or concentration of attention, is to his minutely remembered past, Richard's memories are an impious interruption of his vigil. Richard himself is watched by God ("remembering Thou God seest me"-- p. 27), by Father Whitman ("Don't think I won't be watching for you"-- p. 25), by the forest ("each separate blossom enlarging like an eye"-- p. 27); by the locust shell ("the eyes looked into his"-- p. 130), by the snake ("the eye seemed to meet Richard's"-- p. 144), by his companions as they undress to swim, by Agee, and by the reader: his own coming to manhood is a movement away from his naive sense of piety and

anxiety for precedent, and a defiance of watchful authority, by an awakening attention that strains against the "silly rules" of the school. (p. 40) Agee's idea of God, like Nabbalanja's, requires that "either he delivers autonomy to all his creation and creatures and in compassion and ultimate confidence watches and awaits the results, or he is a second-rate God, a sort of celestial back-seat driver." (LFF, p. 180); In A Death in the Family, Rufus struggles with the idea that "'God wants us to make up our own minds'": "'Even to do bad things right under his nose?'"<sup>4</sup> To watch and wait is to endure the ambiguous without the guarantee of precedent, as Richard does when he overstays his watch and goes truant from school, an act which affords him his unprecedented vision of a brilliantly coloured snake: "for a few seconds he saw perfected before him, royally dangerous and to be adored and to be feared, all that is alien in nature and in beauty: and stood becharmed." (MW, p. 141)

Whereas Richard's attention ought to be an agent of discipline ("you just watch your mouth"-- p. 44), it is sacrilegious in its uncontrolled wandering, furtively deployed in a giddy, unsteady freedom: with his companions, "their six eyes emphatic in the sleepless light," he admires senior students at work, their own eyes "fixed in the profound attentiveness of great scientists," (pp. 36-37) particularly relishing "this surprising chance to be so near [the athlete Willard] and to watch him so closely," especially the hump between his shoulders, which Richard "had never yet had the chance to examine so privately." (pp. 41, 42) Later he eavesdrops as these seniors discuss him, becoming suddenly "frightened because he was spying." (p. 101) His attention is limited by, but not to be identified with, the position of his eyes, which can disguise his inspections: "along



the side of his eye Jimmy advanced" (p. 51); "he opened his eyes...and without turning his head glanced narrowly around him through his lashes." (p. 78) When he surveys the apparently empty mannerisms of Claude, he feels it "as shameful to be watching him this way, so unaware that he was being watched, or that he might look in the least silly, so defenseless, as it would be to peer at him through a keyhole." (p. 81) Meditating Christ's sufferings at the hands of the soldiers, Richard "can see him only as if he spied down on what was happening through a cellar window," a point of view comparable to that of Peter the Betrayer, "hiding on the outskirts, spying through the window. He was afraid to show himself and he couldn't stand to go away." (pp. 113-14) Just as Peter strikes an ear from the servant of the serpentine Judas, (p. 22) Richard strikes the head of a potentially venomous snake; a contrite voyeur, he too confronts his terrifying solitude, intensified both for Richard and for the narrator by the lack of unambiguous connection between the subjective image and 'reality' ("he began to wonder whether these tricks of visualization were not mere tricks and temptations of emptiness"-- p. 105), by the sense of having "failed" in the meditative quest for knowledge, respectively, of God ("make me to know thy suffering"-- p. 23), and of self, the nature of attention. "My cup runneth over, something whispered within him, yet what he saw in his mind's eye was a dry chalice, an empty Grail." (p. 119)

"Dream Sequence," unpublished until 1968 and apparently written as an introduction to A Death in the Family, is set in Knoxville, Tennessee, Agee's home town; a frightened dreamer awakens in doubt "that the meaning of any dream could ever be known," but "sure that that was where the dream indicated he should go. He should go back into those years. As far as he

could remember; and everything he could remember...nothing except...what he had seen with his own eyes and supposed with his own mind." As for trying to "understand" the experience, he will "make the journey, as he had dreamed the dream, for its own sake, without trying to interpret." Suddenly he is aware of his father's presence in the room, a witness "who also knew the dream, and no more knew or hoped ever to know its meaning than the son," a ghost similar to one of Hitchcock's, whose function, like that of the camera, is to look on. Comforted by the presence of his father-- "God keep you. Or whatever it is that keeps you"<sup>5</sup>-- the dreamer takes up the third-person narration of the events surrounding the death of Rufus Follet's father, including such scenes as are built around words and noises heard by Rufus in the night through sleep, and so forgotten "that years later, when he remembered them, he could never be sure that he was not making them up." (DF, p. 29) The empirical problem of distinguishing dream from reality is identified, again as so often in Hitchcock, as a problem of reconstruction, as is illustrated by the long family argument over whether or not it has been visited by Jay Follet's ghost (pp. 76-85); the existence of ghosts is problematic for Rufus, who cannot sleep for fear of a darkness which is alternately gentle, "hollowed, all one taking ear," "all one guardian eye," and protective of a menacing and abysmal "creature...which watched him."<sup>ff</sup> (pp. 82, 84) Like Richard, Rufus feels spied in upon, ashamed of his inappropriate behaviour before the ghost of his father: "But if his father's soul was around, always, watching over them, then he knew. And that was worst of anything because there was no way to hide from a soul, and no way to talk to it, either. He just knows, and it couldn't say anything to him either, but it could sit and look at him and be ashamed of him." (pp. 264-65)

Rufus himself is an indefinable attention, struggling with the meanings of words and of his father's death: the narrator of "Knoxville: Summer, 1915" (written in 1938 and added by the publishers as an introduction), speaks of "the time when I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child," and of the sound of the blood "which you realize you are hearing only when you catch yourself listening" (pp. 11, 13); there is a painfully hilarious scene of panic when Rufus and his sister are almost caught eavesdropping on their Mother's conversation with the minister (p. 281); and in that view of his father's body which climaxes the book-- given in a series of descriptions beginning "He could see..." "He watched..." "He watched..." "He gazed..."-- the body is "actual" as is nothing else in the room, and Rufus is able, in his hushed wonder, to see him "much more clearly than he had ever seen him before." (pp. 290-91)

W. M. Frohock has pointed out that Agee brings to A Death in the Family the techniques of script-writing, moving his narrative vision over the details he describes like the view-finder of a camera<sup>6</sup>; we are notified of this method, in fact, in the description in chapter one of Rufus and his father sitting twice through a William S. Hart movie, the sequence of scenes connected only by a recurrent "and then," and the dynamized rectangle viewed as if by a detached analyst, so that "the great country rode away behind [Hart] as wide as the world": the appearance of Charlie Chaplin, hooking a woman's skirt up with his cane and "looking very eagerly at her legs," (pp. 19-20) suggests the nature of that watching. Agee's screen-plays consistently portray the camera as interloper and spy, entering and exploring a Victorian house so that the "whole quality of emotion should be that of a microscopic slide drawn into razor focus and from now on totally at the

mercy of the lens," and pausing to look "at itself close and hard in the mirror." ("The House," 1937, CSP, pp. 184, 187) The camera in "Man's Fate" (1939) is regarded by a Chinese soldier "sternly, and with a kind of cold tragic scorn, as if into the leaning and questioning eyes of a likewise doomed comrade who does not fully understand the situation" (CSP, p. 233); in "Noa Noa" (1953, 1960), which makes repeated use of Gauguin's painting, "The Spirit of the Dead Watches," it advances with other onlookers to gaze at Gauguin's corpse, reads his mail over his shoulder, is caught intruding on his privacy-- "Then for a moment he seems to catch sight of us, staring at us"-- and receives the resentful glances of a half-dressed model.<sup>7</sup> In his "Introduction" (1940, 1966) to a series of photographs taken by Walker Evans with a concealed camera on the New York subway, Agee speaks of them as privileged moments comparable to that which ends City Lights, at which the subject's guard is down: "The simplest or the strongest of these beings has been so designed upon by his experience that he has a wound and nakedness to conceal, and guards and disguises by which he conceals it"<sup>8</sup>; the series is rhythmically punctuated, in fact, by the startled glares of those who catch the camera at work. As a film critic, Agee praises a war-time report composed of captured film for presenting "an image of a world, a phase, which we shall never see by any other means, since it will be wholly altered by the mere presence of our fighters, cameramen, and observers, once they get there," and recommends it "to anyone who would like to be walking in Europe, invisibly, today"<sup>9</sup>; and scenes in Rossellini's Open City are "as shatteringly uninvented-looking as if they had been shot by invisible news-reel cameras." (AF I, p. 195) Some scenes in the war-record film Attack! are of such power as to have "made me doubt my right to be aware of the

beauty at all," and Agee recommends, for the "communicating" rather than just the "recording" of war, "a still more intrusive use of the camera in places where cameras are most unwelcome...since the reaction of those who resent the prying would react in turn upon the consciousness and conscience of the audience." (pp. 99-100) He likes The Raider, played by sailors re-enacting actual experiences, for its realization that "you have no right to record the sufferings and honor the fortitude of men exposed in a life-boat unless you make those sufferings at least real enough in swollen features and livid coloring, feebleness of motion and obvious crushing headaches, to hurt an audience and hurt it badly" (p. 224); and he qualifies his praise for two editions, by Paramount and Fox, of film recording the Battle of Iwo Jima:

Very uneasily, I am beginning to believe that, for all that may be said in favor of our seeing these terrible records of war, we have no business seeing this sort of experience except through our presence and participation. I have neither space nor mind yet, to try to explain why I believe this is so but...I cannot avoid mentioning my perplexity....If at an incurable distance from participation, hopelessly incapable of reactions adequate to the event, we watch men killing each other, we may be quite as profoundly degrading ourselves and, in the process, betraying and separating ourselves the farther from those we are trying to identify ourselves with; none the less because we tell ourselves sincerely that we sit in comfort and watch carnage in order to nurture our patriotism, our conscience, our understanding, and our sympathies. (p. 152)

Motive and declared intention do not mitigate the vicarious nature of the voyeuristic experience.

This is the central anxiety addressed in Famous Men: Agee is a "northern investigator" in depression Alabama, "a spy, travelling as a journalist"; and Evans is "a counter-spy, travelling as a photographer." (LUNPFM, pp. 377, xxii) Agee regards "aspects of [a young couple] which

are less easily seen...when one's own eyes and face and the eyes and face of another are mutually visible and appraising"; Agee and Evans are, "in spite of our knowledge of our own meanings, ashamed and insecure in our wish to break into" and examine a Negro church; and Agee agonizes over his unworthiness of Emma Wood's declaration, "we don't have to act any different from what it comes natural to act, and we don't have to worry what you're thinking about us, it's just like you was our own people." (pp. 40, 64) In all such situations he plays his "part through," rehearses and re-rehearses "my demeanors and my words," is "unable to communicate to them at all what my feelings were"(pp. 31, 32, 37); yet he takes every opportunity to observe-- "While we talked I was looking around slowly"-- and finds "even the lightest betrayal of our full reactions unwise." (pp. 431, 470) It is "most important of all," he says, to realize that those of whom he writes are actual human beings, "living in their world, innocent of such twistings as these which are taking place over their heads... [who] were dwelt among, investigated, spied upon, revered, and loved, by still others, still more alien; and...are now being looked into by still others, who have picked up their living as casually as if it were a book." (p. 13) The prose in Famous Men is a verbal transcript, "simply an effort to use words in such a way that they will tell as much as I want to and can make them tell of a thing which happened and which, of course, you have no other way of knowing," and as such is comparable to the war-record films he later reviews for its implication of the reader in his voyeurism: "Who are you who will read these words and study these photographs, and by what right do you qualify to...?" (pp. 246, 9) The presence of the reader's attention, emphasized by Agee's use of the first person plural as he explores the

deserted Gudger house, (pp. 137, 171) is of questionable motive, "actuated toward this reading by various possible reflexes of sympathy, curiosity, idleness, et cetera, and almost certainly in a lack of consciousness, and conscience, remotely appropriate to the enormity of what [he is] doing." (p. 13) Involved in his perception of the beauty of the tenant's world, "best discernible to those who by economic advantages of training have only a shameful and a thief's right to it," is the interrogation of the "'sense of beauty,'" of his own perspective: "but by what chance have I this 'opinion' or 'perception' or, I might say, 'knowledge'?" (pp. 203, 314) Agee is fiercely defensive against his own and his reader's prying, and celebrative of that about the tenants which cannot be described, their own condition as crippled and deprived witnesses or subjective "centers"; his "effort," he says, "is to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording, communication, analysis, and defense. More essentially, this is an independent inquiry into certain normal predicaments of human divinity." (p. xiv) He defines this divinity, and his own attention, empirically-- that is, by negation-- dealing only with recorded data and its mode of availability: the record. He self-reflexively addresses the medium of this exposure, the word and the photographic and remembered image: his subject, like Ishmael's, is himself, who "must mediate, must attempt to record, you warm-weird human lives" (p. 99): "The immediate instruments are two: the motionless camera and the sprinted word. The governing instrument-- which is also one of the centers of the subject-- is individual, anti-authoritative human consciousness." (p. xiv)

Like The Morning Watch, Famous Men abounds in images of eyes and

watching: a sky which "held herself away from us and watched us" (p. 21); Negro workers "watching carefully to catch the landowner's eyes, should they be glanced after" (p. 27); a child's "repeated witness" of his parents' intercourse, which "he lifts his head and hears and sees and fears and is torn open by" (p. 109); the knee-high details of "the earliest and profoundest absorptions of a very young child" (p. 149); the freshness of light in a shuttered room "as if the objects were blinking or had been surprised in secret acts" (pp. 157-58); the floors, roof, walls and furniture of a room as "all watch upon one hollow center" (p. 220); the "wild blind eyes of the cotton staring in twilight" as the work day ends, and surveying "like the eyes of an overseer" the daily picking (pp. 344, 327); Ricketts compulsively talking and laughing "while, out of the back of his eyes, he watched me" (p. 388); and the tenant women undressing, "turned part away from each other and careful not to look." (p. 71) Most disturbing are "the eyes of the streets" of the Alabama town, "(eyes, eyes on us, of men, from beneath hat brims)," of people who "slowed as they passed and lingered their eyes upon us," and of people on farmhouse porches, visible in the rearview as the car passes. (pp. 9, 67, 25, 32) Agee deals with the eyes of bystanders in "They That Sow in Sorrow Shall Reap" and in two fragments describing mobs who witness gory deaths and respond with "the craziest, gayest sort of laughter" (CSP, pp. 137-40); and the Knoxville townspeople of "Dream Sequence" exhibit an impassive "interest...strangely out of ratio to the thing they were looking at."<sup>10</sup> But the "following, the swerving, of the slow blue dangerous and secret small-town eyes" in Alabama, with which he must cope at his first meeting with the tenant farmers, is that of the potential southern mob salient in the American imagination from Huckleberry Finn to Easy Rider, "mean white faces that turned slowly after me watching



me and wishing to God I would do something that would give them the excuse."  
(pp. 373, 362, 377)

An equally dangerous and impersonal kind of watching is that of the camera, "an ice-cold, some ways limited, some ways more capable eye," (p. 234) the danger of which is the "so nearly universal a corruption of sight" resulting from its misuse." (p. 11) Appended to Famous Men is a New York Post interview with Margaret Bourke-White about her collaboration with Erskine Caldwell on You Have Seen Their Faces (1937), another photo-prose coverage of impoverished farmers: her statement that "One photograph might lie, but a group of pictures can't," (p. 453) is at odds with Agee's, in his introduction to Helen Levitt's "A Way of Seeing" (1965; written in the late 1940's), that "'The camera never lies' is a foolish statement....The camera is just a machine, which records with impressive and as a rule very cruel faithfulness precisely what is in the eye, mind, spirit, and skill of its operators to make it record."<sup>11</sup> In this sense, as an instrument of subjectivity sharply limited in its relation to any exterior 'reality,' the camera, "handled cleanly and literally in its own terms...is, like the phonograph record and like scientific instruments and unlike any other leverage of art, incapable of recording anything but absolute, dry truth." (LUNPFM, p. 234) And Agee regards as central to his "sense of the importance and dignity of actuality and the attempt to reproduce and analyze the actual... a sense of 'reality' and of 'values' held by more and more people, and the beginnings of somewhat new forms of, call it art if you must, of which the still and moving cameras are the strongest instruments and symbols." (p. 245) Thus much of the description in Famous Men is in terms proper to the camera: the quality of withdrawal in the dead of night is compared to "the lifted

foot arrested in stopshot" before completing its step (p. 52); details of the countryside emerge at dawn "like a print in a tank" (p. 87); light in a dark-walled room is "restricted, fragile and chemical like that of a flash bulb" (p. 198); leaves twitter in heavy rain "as under the scathe of machinegun fire, or alternate frames cut from a stretch of film" (p. 394); the erosive action of a river is conceived as if "by sped up use of the moving camera" (p. 251); the geometry of furniture legs and the grains and scars of a bare wood floor are such as "a moving camera might know" (p. 149); and the various gestures of work are seen as "the grave mutations of a dance whose business is the genius of a moving camera, and which it is not my hope ever to record." (p. 324) The image of Mrs. Gudger and her family as they diminish in the distance and disappear over the horizon is set up as a lingering shot in a filmic memory, and dissolves into the present tense-- "They are gone"-- with Agee alone in their undefended house: "upon this house the whole of heaven is drawn into one lens; and this house itself, in each of its objects, it, too, is one lens." Agee's clandestine exploration of the dwelling, his "being made witness to matters no human being may see," (pp. 135-36) his thorough itemization and description of its contents and their arrangements, his "knowledge of those hidden places...those griefs, beauties, those garments whom I took out, held to my lips, took odor of, and folded and restored so orderly," (p. 188) his activity as a "cold-laboring spy," (p. 134) is paralleled by the "cold absorption" of the camera, "a witchcraft...colder than keenest ice," used secretly and repeatedly under the guise of "testing around" or "using the angle finder": "(you never caught on; I notice how much slower white people are to catch on than negroes, who understand the meaning of a camera, a weapon, a stealer of images and souls, a gun, an evil eye.)" (pp. 362-65) Among the objects

Agee examines is a photograph of Annie Mae's mother, the face faded "as if in her death and by some secret touching the image itself of the fine head... had softly withered, which even while they stood there had begun its blossoming inheritance in the young daughter at her side" (p. 164): death at work.

The photograph, which records the "triple convergence" of sun, object and lens, (p. 39) is a two-dimensional grid or map describing one aspect of an arrangement; the book is a series of such maps, like the cartographical representations of non-Euclidian space called for by the Theory of Relativity-- a series of notes, plans and tangential comments on a loose skeletal structure. For Agee "a contour map is at least as considerably an image of absolute 'beauty' as the counterpoints of Bach which it happens to resemble" (p. 233); he supplies a precise floor-plan of the Gudger house, (p. 138) speaks of "having examined scientifically or as if by blueprint how such a house is made from the ground up," (p. 184) finds maps in wood grain, (p. 142) rain-shaped ground (p. 406) and the surrounding landscape, (p. 111) and recommends "Road maps and contour maps of the middle south" as supplements to his study. (p. 449) A map is a descriptive record in terms of given co-ordinates, is the limit, within those terms, of what can be known; so that "a new suit of overalls has among its beauties those of a blueprint: and they are the map of a working man." (p. 266)

Mechanisms and instruments are related concerns: leaves tremble "as delicately as that needle which records a minute disturbance on the far side of the thick planet" (p. 85); the tenant families, their cotton "depersonalized forever" by the monstrous gin, are "sown once more at large upon the slow breadths of their country, in the precision of some mechanic

and superhuman hand" (p. 347); flexing the hand as it is flexed in picking cotton will demonstrate "how this can very quickly tire, cramp and deteriorate the whole instrument." (p. 399) Just as, in "They That Sow," the eight roomers are "endowed with as many different machines for attacking existence, and defending themselves against it," (CSP, p. 97) subjectivity is described in Famous Men as mechanism, the carried child's head swiveling "mildly upon the world's globe, a periscope" (p. 135): while the senses can be assisted "by dream, by reason, and by those strictures of diamond glass and light whereby we punch steep holes in the bowels of the gliding heavens... and step measurements upon the grand estate of being," the tenant child is deprived of "instruments" whereby even to recognize complex moral issues, for "the lenses of these are smashed in his infancy, the adjustment screws are blocked." (pp. 105, 108) The universe can be seen in the Blakian grain of sand, "as good a lens as any and a much more practicable one than the universe," though Agee declines its use (p. 242); words are the "instruments" of the writers art. (p. 236) In "1928 Story," as in The Passenger, memory is connected with the replaying of a phonograph record; in Famous Men it is connected with all recording devices, but chiefly with the camera: "the child, the photographic plate receiving: These are women, I am a woman... this is how women are, and how they talk." (p. 72) Such comparisons emphasize the passivity of the witness before his experience, the impossibility of abstracting himself from it, and of any exhaustive, self-consistent mode of representing it; the "taking" of the senses

is titanic beyond exhaustion of count or valuation, and is all but infinitely populous beyond the knowledge of each moment or a lifetime: and that which we receive yet do not recognize, nor hold in the moment's focus, is nevertheless and continuously and strengthfully planted upon our brains, upon our blood: it holds:

it holds: each cuts its little mark: each blown leaf of a woodland a quarter-mile distant while I am absorbed in some close exactitude: each of these registers, cuts his mark: not one of these is negligible: (pp. 106-07)

Agee refers to this vast and cumulative transcript as the "record in the body" (p. 10): like Gauguin, whose corpse is found "savagely paint-marked," (AF II, p. 145) and like Ishmael, Agee's body is a text, a record or piece of exposed film. And he insists upon a maximum exposure: to hear Beethoven's Seventh or Schubert's C-Major Symphony, you must turn the sound up and "get down on the floor and jam your ear as close to the loudspeaker as you can get it and stay there, breathing as lightly as possible....As near as you will ever get you are inside the music; not only inside it, you are it; your body is not longer your shape and substance, it is the shape and substance of the music." (pp. 15-16) He becomes "entirely focused" (p. 49) on an object he describes, defines himself as a focus unabstractable from what is observed. A detailed present-tense description of Ivy Wood's clothing, as she waits under the stares of some town men to see a doctor, finishes with the observation that "her dark sweated nipples are stuck to the material and show through, and it is at her nipples, mainly, that the men keep looking" (p. 285); "Two Images" also comprises detailed present-tense descriptions, one of Squinchy Gudger being breast-fed, centered upon his partly erect penis, the other of Ellen Woods asleep under a flour sack, a celebration of her vulva (pp. 441-42): each description holds in focus and explores an image, and each excludes mention of the watcher, who stares at Mrs. Woods as surely as do the Cookstown men. Agee's contempt for himself as a voyeur and his reverence for his victims involve him in a problematic self-negation which aligns with the implications of his epistemology:

If I were not here; and I am alien: a bodyless eye; ~this would never have existence in human perception.

It has none. I do not make myself welcome here. My whole flesh; my whole being; is withdrawn upon nothingness....What is taking place here, and it happens daily in this silence, is intimately transacted between this home and eternal space; and consciousness has no residence in nor pertinence to it save only that, privileged by stealth to behold, we fear this legend: withdraw; bow down; nor dare the pride to seek to decipher it:

The wasp who cruises the roof, on the other hand, "is not unwelcome here:

he is a builder; a tenant. He does not notice; he is no reader of signs."

(pp. 187-88) More positively, watching is the metaphor for attention, alert and joyfully participating in the actual, "the whole realm of what our bodies lay in and our minds in silence wandered, walked in, swam in, watched upon," the body "inseparable from the mind, identical with it": "at such time we have knowledge that we are witnessing, taking part in, being, a phenomenon analogous to that shrewd complex of the equations of infinite chance which become, on this early earth, out of lifelessness, life." To watch, to be conscious and know it, is literally wonderful, but wonder is perhaps, like beauty, merely a linguistic "sense," part of a provincial and transient vocabulary:

the difference tween a conjunction of time, place and unconscious consciousness and a conjunction of time, place and conscious consciousness is, so far as we are concerned, the difference between joy and truth and the lack of joy and truth. Unless wonder is nothing in itself, but only a moon which glows only in the mercy of a sense of wonder, and unless the sense of wonder is peculiar to consciousness and is moreover an emotion which, as it matures, consciousness will learn the juvenility of, and discard, or only gratefully refresh itself under the power of as under the power of sleep and the healing vitality of dreams, and all this seems a little more likely than not, the materials which people any intersection of time and place are at all times marvelous, regardless of consciousness: (pp. 225-27)

The question, as always, is whether we may project past the data of experience.

Like Antonioni's camera within a camera, Agee's bodiless eye is inexpressible except by invalid analogy; similarly, what it regards can be described only in tentative, subjective terms, for there is no striking through the mask of appearances to an unambiguous hold on reality: as for the narrator of "They That Sow," it is impossible to get at the bottom of anything. In The Morning Watch, Richard prays in his Dedalus-like fervour to "know" Christ's suffering, pictures himself crucified with a reporter's flash-bulb popping in his face, and tries "to imagine how it would feel to be scourged ...and to wear a crown of thorns." (MW, pp. 75, 152) His attempts to communicate with Christ, to realize his suffering, are guided by the liturgical forms which control and limit experience: it is sinful "to be so unaware of where you were that...a thought could occur spontaneously." (p. 50) Time is "a power of measure upon the darkness," (p. 87) and Richard tries to reach Christ in a way analogous to that in which he alters his visual focus to eliminate the hands and numbers of a clock, the face appearing as "the great Host in a monstrance." (p. 87) But like Wittgenstein and Godard, Richard finds that he cannot take another's place, experiences Christ as an absence, for there is "Nothing at all" on the altar during this "dead time between," (pp. 46, 116) and contemplates the words, "God: Death; so that the two were one" (p. 48); his own hookey-playing hiatus, his solitary death, rebirth and defeat of the serpent, are meaningful only to Richard, though their shape is liturgically derived. His acceptance of the failure of communication reduces the mythic power of those events over him: "Bet it doesn't hurt any worse than that," he says of the locust's struggle with its shell, "to be crucified." (p. 131) Similarly, in A Death in the Family,

( ) a realistic epistemology is portrayed as to be outgrown. Mary Follet spends all her time trying to make her thoughts appropriate-- to her father-in-law's illness, to her husband's lack of religious faith, and chiefly to the possibility of the latter's death, during an anxiously ambiguous time between. She prays that God will make her right, (DF, p. 57) and is shocked when Rufus' elders tease him with untruths. (p. 232) Her aunt suspects "something mistaken, unbearably piteous, infinitely malign" about her faith (p. 129); and her father comments on the naivety of her care to learn every detail of Jay's death, and her summing it up in a terse epitaph: "So you feel you've got some control over the death, you own it, you choose a name for it. The same with wanting to know all you can about how it happened. And trying to imagine it as Mary was." Such knowledge is finally a "subterfuge." (p. 166)

Commenters have chiefly found in Agee's film criticism a 'realist' aesthetic,<sup>12</sup> although Edward Murray alone troubles over the definition of the term, deciding that Agee uses it too variously to make precise definition possible.<sup>13</sup> While 'realism' in the philosophic sense, one which informs Agee's aesthetic requirements, is built into the empiricism he derives from Richards, it is a realism which presumes an unknowable world of substantial things, unamenable to comprehensive formulation, knowable only in terms of the language with which it is explored. While he opposes images to spoken or written words, especially in his recurrent defence of silent comedy, (AF I, pp. 3, 4, 6, 24, 84) he refers to its "language," "vocabulary" and "idiom," (p. 3) to Harold Lloyd's "thesaurus of smiles," (p. 10) to Chaplin's "lexicon" of emotions, (p. 13) and to "the basic vocabulary of conventional movies," "the movie alphabet" and "the documentary manner" (pp. 263, 266); a



"situation" is a "logic" which can be incredibly extended by a comic genius-- indeed, all humour is ruthlessly logical (pp. 11, 18); a captured German film "moves...in resonant sentences, which construct irreducible paragraphs," becoming at times "small fine poems" (p. 34); certain shots are "basic to decent film grammar." (p. 79) 'Realism' is an aspect of this grammar, "'reality' in its conventional camera sense," (p. 191) the rules of which may be violated by Mack Sennett, and less happily by Hollywood's use of professional actors to portray "'real' people," (pp. 31, 129) or attempts to represent the speech of peasant farmers: "I think that finding a diction proper to so-called simple folk is one of the most embarrassing, not to say hopeless, literary problems we have set ourselves." (p. 109) Agee manipulates these rules himself when he calls, in "Noah Noah," for "'documentary' noonday sunlight," in "The Blue Hotel," for a shot "heightened above realism" by the use of every third frame and simulation on the sound-track, (AF II, pp. 146, 464) and, in "Man's Fate," for film that is "grainy, hard black and white, flat focus, the stock and tone of film in war newsreels....It should not seem to be fiction." (CSP, p. 244) And he admires Open City and The Raider, "not because they use non-actors, or are semi-documentary, or are 'realistic,'" but for their "aesthetic and moral respect for reality-- which 'realism' can as readily smother as liberate"; "most documentaries," in fact, "are as dismally hostile to reality as most fiction films" (AF I, p. 237): The Raider succeeds by virtue of an understanding "of what, artistically, is more 'real' than the actual and what is less real." (p. 233)

The camera is uniquely able to "record unaltered reality," (p. 296) and Agee is interested in an alert use of details, "little things which brilliantly lock men and their efforts and feelings into the exact real

place and time of day," (p. 240) in films which have "approached and honored rather than flouted and improved on reality." (p. 127) In Helen Levitt's still photography, "the actual world constantly brings to the surface its own signals and mysteries": the strenuous perception of actuality involves resisting the impingement of habitual grammars, for "The mind and the spirit are constantly formed by, and as constantly form, the senses."<sup>14</sup> If, as Richards says, our hold on reality consists in patterns of expectation, Agee disparages film sets which "seem over-prepared, with nothing left to chance," (p. 174) "the utterly controlled and utterly worthless effect," (p. 137) the stultifications of "rigor artis" (p. 66) and the timid use, in "straight record films," of the idiom of "American commercial romanticism, as taught, for example, by the Life school" (p. 65); he praises a concern with "what happens inside real and particular people among real and particular objects," (p. 118) and the feeling, in da Sica's Shoeshine, "that almost anything could happen, and that the reasons why any given thing happens are exceedingly complex and constantly shifting their weight." (p. 280) The intricately detailed sets of A Tree Grows in Brooklyn prove "that the best you can do in that way is as dead as an inch-by-inch description or a perfectly naturalistic painting, compared with accepting instead the still-scarcely imagined difficulties and the enormous advantage of submerging your actors in the real thing, full of its irreducible present tense and its unpredictable proliferations of energy and beauty"; the makers miss the chance to move a subjective camera through the streets of New York, "the free-gliding, picaresque, and perfect eye for a Saturday school-child's cruising of the city" (p. 142)-- precisely what Agee gives us in his script for The Quiet One (1948). The subjective camera is repeatedly recommended, (pp. 174, 184) and

Hitchcock is a frequently cited standard: Walsh's Background to Danger illustrates "the unconquerable difference between a good job by Hitchcock and a good job of the Hitchcock type" (p. 49); he is adept at "establishers of casual reality, and oblique cutting edges of ironic or sensuous detail," (p. 150) at "communicating the exact place, weather and time of day," (p. 214) and is "abreast of all but the few best writers of his time" (p. 72); among his excellences is the fact that he is "nearly the only living man I can think of who knows just when and how" to use the subjective camera. (p. 214) It has recently been pointed out that the kidnapping sequence in Hitchcock's Family Plot, a rapid series of images of motion, takes place in a much shorter time on the screen than it possibly could in reality, and is true to our dislocated sense of time, to our unquestioning acceptance of things that happen in a flash<sup>15</sup>; Agee similarly commends the "timing" of several shots in Vincente Minelli's The Clock as "boldly and successfully unrealistic," (AF I, pp. 166-67) remarks of The Lost Weekend that a few deft signals of a subjectively experienced hangover state "might have told the audience as much in an instant as an hour of pure objectivity could," (p. 184) and condemns An Ideal Husband as "too slow and realistic." (p. 294) He advocates, that is, a subjectivistic rather than a realistic handling of materials. Famous Men incorporates the "forms...of motion pictures," (LUNPFM, p. 244) particularly those recommendations Agee makes for "record films-- "Stop-shots, slow-motion repetitions, and blow-ups...unrehearsed interviews...intensive use" of the "unwelcome" camera (AF I, pp. 99-100)-- which we recognize as the methods of cinema vérité: the book aims at an empirical subjectivism of this sort, though Agee has yet, he says, "to attempt proper treatment":

It seems likely at this stage that the truest way to treat a piece of the past is as such: as if it were no longer the present. In other words, the 'truest' thing about the experience is now neither that it was from hour to hour thus and so; nor is it my fairly accurate 'memory' of how it was from hour to hour in chronological progression; but is rather as it turns up in recall, in no such order, casting its lights and associations forward and backward upon the then past and the then future, across that expanse of experience. (LUNPFM, pp. 243-44)

This subjective mode of presentation is musical rather than narrative, he says, and is not "'naturalism,' 'realism,'" though this is a "slippery watershed": the "straight 'naturalist'" shows little understanding of "music and poetry," and his best work is "never much more than documentary"; naturalistic description "sags with...length and weight," is remote "from what you have seen, from the fact itself"; the "language of 'reality'" is "the heaviest of all languages," incapable of imparting "the deftness, keenness, immediacy, speed and subtlety of the 'reality' it tries to reproduce." (pp. 235-37) Whereas American naturalistic writing, from Crane and Dreiser to Faulkner, Baldwin and Mailer, shares with philosophical Pragmatism its dependence upon Darwin's hypothesis, is concerned, that is, with the destruction of illusion, usually through an evolution or development in character, and arrival at an alignment of thought appropriate to the movement of natural forces in the causal continuum, Agee despairs of any such ultimate propriety of form and attitude. And he rejects the realism of dialect and vernacular idiom, the "professional-Americanism" of Twain and the "'talk-American'" writing of Steinbeck.<sup>16</sup> He incorporates tenant dialect rarely, and unquoted, into his description: "Clair Bell sprints in affrighted: that her father has left for work without kissing her good-bye. They take her on their laps assuring her that he would never do no such a thang." (p. 89) In 1935, Agee

proposed a style of writing which would mix the idioms and jargons conventionally thought of as special to particular groups, and thus liberate writer and reader from the "'anthropological' correctness" and "scientific-journalistic-scrupulousness" of contemporary naturalism. (LFF, p. 77) Like Tommo on the Typees, Ishmael on whales and Burroughs on drug addiction, Agee is exhaustive on the food, shelter and clothing of the tenants (classifications derived from Louise Gudger's third-grade geography text, and to that degree their own terms), and the work by which they have them; but like Tommo, Ishmael and Burroughs, he repeatedly sets up, reflects upon and undercuts a limited point of view. Gudger is a 'real' human being rather than a fictional character, living in a world "irrelevant to imagination" and works of art:

But obviously, in the effort to tell of him (by example) as truthfully as I can, I am limited. I know him only so far as I know him, and only in those terms in which I know him; and all of that depends as fully on who I am as on who he is.

I am confident of being able to get at a certain form of the truth about him, only if I am as faithful as possible to Gudger as I know him, to Gudger as, in his actual flesh and life (but there again always in my mind's and memory's eye) he is. But of course it will be only a relative truth.

Name me one truth within human range that is not relative and I will feel a shade more apologetic of that. (LUNPFM, pp. 233, 239)

Empirical analysis in no way transcends the subjective viewpoint to become 'realism,' though the aspiration to an unambiguous hold on reality is indefatigable: "Human beings may be more and more aware of being awake, but they are still incapable of not dreaming"; that is, the attempt to "embody" or become identical with the truth is "one of the strongest laws of language," despite the fact that "Words cannot embody; they can only describe." (pp. 237-39) Agee's task is to examine the forms of his linguistic exertion.

He often refers, in fact, to his role as analyst and "skeptic" (one of his frequent words): in his Guggenheim application he speaks of Famous Men as a "record" which is "not journalistic; nor on the other hand is any of it to be invented. It can perhaps most nearly be described as 'scientific,' but not in a sense acceptable to scientists, only in the sense that it is ultimately skeptical and analytic." (CSP, pp. 149-50) He also plans to compile a dictionary of key words to be "examined skeptically," along the lines of one that I. A. Richards was compiling, with which Agee's would not "be at all in conflict"; speaks of a "Non-supernatural, non-exaggerative" story (twenty years before Robbe-Grillet) about "the horror that can come of objects and of their relationships, and of tones of voice," concentrating "on what the senses receive and the memory and context does with it"; of "Analyses of the 'unreality' of 'realistic' color photography," of contemporary communist literature, of the corruption and miscommunication of ideas ("In one strong sense ideas rule all conduct and experience"), of myths of sexual love ("tentative, questioning and destructive of crystallized ideas and attitudes"), and of images that have never been experienced in 'reality': "In these terms, Buenos Aires itself is neither more nor less actual than my, or your, careful imagination of it told as pure imaginative fact." (CSP, pp. 154-57, 164, 161) 'Actuality' has no necessary relation to a 'reality' external to the subject: in "1928 Story," Irvine contemplates "a distinct image of a place he had never known. When he tried to take the image apart he realized that nothing much like it was...likely to exist," though he later decides that "of course it did exist, and so did ten thousand other things...in just such music."<sup>17</sup> Agee also speaks of the word-by-word analysis of personal letters, which are "in every word and phrase immediate to and revealing of,"

in precision and complex detail, the sender and receiver and the whole world and context each is of"; the analysis should "help to shift and destroy various habits and certitudes of the 'creative' and of the 'reading,' and so of the daily 'functioning' mind." (CSP, pp. 151, 153) He was an early enthusiast for home-mode photography, and suggested that "Some of the best photographs we are ever likely to see are innocent domestic snapshots, city postcards, and news and scientific photographs."<sup>18</sup> As a film critic, he frequently operates in the capacity of "diagnostician" (AF I, p. 53): "every piece of entertainment, like every political speech or swatch of advertising copy, has nightmarish accuracy as a triple-distilled image of a collective dream, habit, or desire," and Stage Door Canteen "is a gold mine for those who are willing to go to it in the wrong spirit"; Frenchman's Creek is "masturbation fantasy...infallible as any real-life dream and as viciously fascinating as reading such a dream over the terrible dreamer's shoulder"; Hail the Conquering Hero is an "elaborately counterpointed image" of the American "neurosis"; Birth of a Nation is "a perfect realization of a collective dream of what the Civil War was like." (AF I, pp. 41-42, 120, 117, 313) The image has meaning, not in itself, but in context or use, so that to regard the criticism of films which incorporate superb records of war as "vulgar, small and irrelevant....is like being moved by words like love, death, blood, sweat, tears, regardless of how well or ill they are used." (AF I, p. 51) And just as Bogart's slaughter of helpless German airmen in Passage to Marseilles is dangerous to that uncritical "majority who will accordingly accept advice on what to do with Germany," (AF I, p. 80) advertising is "a kind of bourgeois folk-art" to which, nevertheless, all classes are "vulnerable"<sup>19</sup>; Agee planned a magazine which would treat all aspects

of popular culture in an effort "to undeceive readers of their own-- and the editors'-- conditioned reflexes."<sup>20</sup> In Famous Men, he emphasizes that in an important sense nothing is untrue, for "A falsehood is entirely true to those derangements which produced it and which made it impossible that it should emerge in truth; and an examination of it may reveal more of the 'true' 'truth' than any more direct attempt upon the 'true' 'truth' itself"; so that while journalism is merely "a broad and successful form of lying," and no part of Agee's method, "a page of newspaper can have all the wealth of a sheet of fossils, or a painting." (LUNPFM, pp. 230, 234) The task of education, he writes Father Flye, is to be "medical and surgical of mental habits, inherited prejudices, lacks of questioning"; and he proposes "a whole method and science of mere skepticism," epitomized by his own aspiration to "the coolness and truth of the camera's...eye." (LFF, pp. 111-12, 134)

Famous Men, he says, "is perhaps chiefly a skeptical study of the nature of reality and of the false nature of recreation and communication." (CSP, p. 151) Since Agee can report about the tenants "only what I saw, only so accurately as in my terms I know how," (LUNPFM, p. 12) the book addresses the limitations of the subjective point of view and the written word: "I would do just as badly to simplify or eliminate myself from this picture as to simplify or invent character, places or atmosphere." (p. 240) Agee portrays himself as a recording device, "searching out and registering in myself all the lines, planes, stresses of relationship" in a country church, or running a fingertip along the grain of a wood floor. (p. 39) He is restricted to and preoccupied with "surfaces"-- another recurrent word: "What is the use?...Let me just try a few surfaces instead" (p. 417)-- of his body, so that for a while he judges a bed-bug attack to be "my own nerve-ends"



(p. 425); of other people, Mrs. Gudger "smiling sleepily and sadly in a way I cannot deduce" (p. 419); and of things, such as the odour and feel of the moisture covering the outer surfaces of a lamp: "I do not understand nor try to deduce this, but I like it." (p. 50) His memory preserves images removed from their context-- "All that I see now is this picture..." (p. 398)-- and perceived "distinctly, yet coldly as through reversed field-glasses," no longer "at least immediate in my senses," so that he must "'describe' what I would like to 'describe,' as a second remove, and that poorly" (p. 403): as in the description of the movie screen which opens A Death in the Family, we see, not 'through' the image, but the image itself-- "not," as Godard says, "in terms of what it signifies, but what signifies it."<sup>21</sup>

The text, given Agee's lack of "warmth or traction or faith in words," (LUNPFM, p. 403) is to be regarded likewise skeptically, for "if, anti-artistically, you desire not only to present but to talk about what you present and how you try to present it," you must continually make your failure to represent reality clear. (p. 238) Agee does, and indicates in his account of the four planes from which he handles the experience-- recall and contemplation in medias res ("On the porch"), "'As it happened,'" "recall and memory from the present" and "As I try to write it: problems of recording" (p. 243)-- that the self-reflexive is a major aspect of the work.<sup>22</sup> He describes himself "working out my notes" (p. 63) and quotes them verbatim, (p. 422) shifts time and tense "to a thing which is to happen, or which happened, the next morning (you musn't be puzzled by this, I'm writing in a continuum)," and back again, (pp. 62, 69) uses phrases in the text to mark his place and revise his effort, (p. 372) and shifts planes suddenly: "(It occurs to me now as I write..)." (p. 368) While he permits himself "imagination" on the

third plane, he scrupulously footnotes its use: "Invention here: I did not make inventory, there was more than I could remember"; "These are in part by memory, in part composited out of other memory, in part improvised." (pp. 133, 201) He reiterates that Famous Men is not "Art," does not require "the killing insult of 'suspension of disbelief,'" (p. 240) and discusses at length his "antagonism towards art," based on his belief that its "clarifying" power is so frequently accompanied by its "muddying" power "that we may suspect a law in ambush." (pp. 245, 232)

The skeptically, reflexively treated concerns of self and text merge in the act of writing. While, in Richards' terms, mental reference is not necessarily linguistic, thinking is: one might watch the changes of pine boards in sunlight for "speechless days on end merely for the variety and distinction of their beauty, without thought or any relative room for thinking" (p. 131); but to think is to symbolize a reference by placing it in a context, a text. To write is to sort, and while words could "be made to do or tell anything within human conceit," they cannot "communicat  simultaneity with any immediacy" (pp. 236-37): Agee lists the ingredients of an odour "more subtle than it can seem in analysis." (p. 154) The wealth of detail which "so intensely surrounds and takes meaning from" any one subjective "center...should be tested, calculated, analyzed, conjectured upon, as if all in one sentence and spread suspension and flight or fugue of music," a perfect vehicle of simultaneity which Agee finds himself incapable of sustaining, for "one can write only one word at a time." (p. 111) Excerpts from Louise Gudger's school books, quotations of Shakespeare and Marx, advertising slogans, a tenant sign reading "PLEAS! be Quite!" (p. 197) and inscriptions in the Gudger bible are presented as vehicles, manipulative

and symptomatic, of verbal meaning; a scissored piece of newsprint lining a drawer is quoted in full, including its fragments of words, sentences and photographs, and is held against the light so that "the contents of both sides of the paper are visible at once" (p. 169): as in Burroughs' cutup method, the attention is to the status of words and images as sensory signs, the fragments of arbitrary symbols or conventions of meaning. 'Sense' becomes self-interrogative. The formulation,

(            (?)            ).            :)

How were we caught? (p. 81)

diagrams the presence of a puzzled and possibly inquiring attention, bounded by marks of signification which it can neither transcend nor identify with, the colon indicating impending change in the form of elaboration, qualification or contradiction. Understanding is limited by its form, and, in the absence of ultimate context, involves obviation rather than insight. As he sits writing by lamplight, Agee is a "center" in the midst of a frightening darkness, at the edge, as it were, of his thinking:

so that I muse what not quiet creatures and what not quite forms are suspended like bats above and behind my bent head; and how far down in their clustered weight they are stealing while my eyes are on this writing; and how skillfully swiftly they suck themselves back upward into the dark when I turn my head: and above all, why they should be so coy, with one slather of cold membranes drooping, could slap out light and have me: and who own me since all time's beginning. Yet this mere fact of thinking holds them at distance, as crucifixes demons, so lightly and well that I am almost persuaded of being merely fanciful; in which exercise I would be theirs most profoundly beyond rescue, not knowing, and not fearing, I am theirs.

As he expands his meditation to the infinite and impersonal darkness beyond the ceiling, in which "no one so much as laughs at us," he questions, "do we really exist at all?" (pp. 52-53) The text itself, the on-going arrangement of words which encodes his questioning, is the only evidence.

Like Ishmael, Agee uses the metaphor of weaving to describe the matrix or nexus of events: the tenant child is "brought forth on a chain of weaving, a texture of sorrowful and demented flesh" (p. 102); "rather than resort to narrative device, Agee wishes to represent the "texture" or "chain of truths [which] did actually weave itself and run through." (p. 240) The history of a family is a series of drawings together-- under shelter, on a bed-- and being held by the "magnetic center" of the economic unit (pp. 55-56); that of an individual unfolds as the crucifixions of personal existence, of sexual love, of egg and sperm (pp. 100, 102-03); the section "Recessional and Vortex" describes spatial arrangement, each family a center "drawn-round with animals," each animal a different kind of "center and leverage," and lists the rings of animal, vegetable and mineral existence and the surrounding geography, in the middle of which "the floor, the roof, the opposed walls, the furniture...all watch upon one hollow center" (pp. 212-20): all these "flexions" have the form of musical theme and variation, and "are the classical patterns, and this is the weaving, of human living." (p. 56) The matrix involves necessity, "the plainest cruelties and needs of human existence in this uncured time," (p. 134) but only in the limited sense that there is nothing particularly necessary about human existence itself, "that life and consciousness are only the special crutches of the living and the conscious." (p. 226) It involves chance: like "those subtlest of all chances" whereby the oak shapes itself out of the acorn, river systems, "among whose spider lacings by chance we live," branch over the planet, human dwellings altering the chance pattern of the landscape "by chance." (pp. 252, 147) And it involves will: while "it is our own consciousness alone, in the end, that we have to thank" for the joy of actuality, it is "almost purely a matter of

chance," a "lucky situation" which Agee and Evans could not "for an instant have escaped...even if we had wished to" (pp. 225-28); Agee's scuttling the car ("I didn't know then, and don't know now...whether or not it was by my will"), donning sneakers ("there was no sense in this and I don't understand why") and "passive waiting" before the Gudger house in hope "that 'something shall happen,' as it 'happened' that the car lost to the mud," (pp. 409-11) illustrate his skepticism as to the precise agency of will. The "causes" of cruelty to Negroes and animals can only be expressed as "traits, needs, diseases, and above all mere natural habits differing from our own" (pp. 216-17); the "sources" of economic disadvantage are "psychological, semantic, traditional, perhaps glandular"; and the "wrong assignment of causes," by indicting such over-simplifications as "tenantry," is dangerously glib. (pp. 207-08)

The nexus of events has for Agee the subtlety and "symmetry of a disease: the literal symmetry of the literal disease of which they were literally so essential a part"; the sore and scab of this disease comprise "all substance" and "fill out...the most intangible reaches of thought, deduction and imagination." (p. 229) This symmetry is visible in tenant-farm dwellings, which exhibit a "classicism created of economic need, of local availability, and of local-primitive tradition" (p. 203); in clothing which, with the exception of overalls, "a relatively new and local garment," is probably indistinguishable from peasant clothing in ancient Greece (pp. 265, 277); and "in everything within and probably in anything outside human conception." (p. 230) Symmetry is this disease, a spare and stingy classicism complicated and subtilized in its pliancy before the irregularities "of chance (all of which proceeded inevitably out of chances which were inevitable)": chance and necessity complement and undercut each other, are inextricably

interwoven. Symmetry, as Richards points out, is perceptibility, and is ultimately linguistic, as is the "language" in which "the name and destiny of water" is written on the earth's surface. Conscious consciousness is being awake to what we are present before, and thus to the form by which it is present, "hearing...a complex music in every effect and in causes of every effect and in the effects of which this effect will be part cause," which "'gets' us perhaps nowhere" simply because we are, in fact, "already there." The irregular syncopations of chance which issue in the various and impermanent phases of symmetry are imagined as "complex equations" (pp. 230-31, 252): marriage and conception occur "in obedience to...pressures" of economy, (p. 103) as a wall in the Ricketts house is decorated "in obedience of [particular] equations" (p. 199) and nailheads are arranged in wood "according to geometric need." (p. 143) Famous Men is written in the conviction that nothing is "more moving, significant or true" than that "every force and hidden chance in the universe has so combined that a certain thing was the way it was," (p. 241) and derives its truth from its status as evidence rather than the success of Agee's attempts "to take what hold I can of any reality," which attempts "cannot be otherwise than true to their conditions." (p. 10)

Agee's assertion that "the unimagined world is in its own terms an artist"<sup>23</sup> is consistent with Richards' feed-back model of the act of drawing a circle, and renders irrelevant the idea of intention: to the question whether things are "'beautiful' which are not intended as such, but which are created in convergences of chance, need, innocence or ignorance," Agee answers,

first, that intended beauty is far more a matter of chance and need than the power of intention, and that 'chance' beauty of 'irrelevances' is deeply formed by instincts and needs popularly held to be the property

of 'art' alone: second, that matters of 'chance' and 'nonintention' can be and are 'beautiful' and are a whole universe to themselves. Or: the Beethoven piano concerto #4 IS importantly, among other things, a 'blind' work of 'nature,' of the world and of the human race; and the partition wall of the Gudger's front bedroom IS importantly, among other things, a great tragic poem. (pp. 203-04)

Intention is a recurrent issue in Agee's work: the narrator of "They That Sow," who muses, "to some extent we guide our lives, to some extent are guided by them," (CSP, p. 97) is concerned with the degree of his agency in a disastrous event; Richard struggles both to bring his thoughts into line with a hopelessly corrupt and elusive intention, and against the vanity of his devotion ("not that you mean it of course"); and he defends the rashness of a companion with: "he just wasn't thinking"... 'He didn't mean anything.'" (MW, pp. 66, 44) A Death in the Family is filled with instances of misinterpreted intention and questions of meaning, both among the adults ("She was never to realize his intention..."-- DF, p. 53), and between adults and children: "'You mean so well, but the child may just turn out to hate it.'" <sup>24</sup> While, as Michael Sragow points out, Agee never indulges in "trade secrets or 'creative intentions'" in his film criticism, <sup>25</sup> he does frequently cite what he gathers to be the "sober" or "decent" or "general" intention of a film, usually to mitigate utter rejection: of the makers of Sunday Dinner for a Soldier, "The confused but genuine sweetness of their intention is as visible through all the mawkish formulas, and as disturbing, as a drowned corpse, never quite surfacing." (AF I, pp. 92, 95, 126, 140) But intention has no such necessary relation to final product as those who defy the dictum of Beardsley and Wimsatt must assume; Agee's status as an amateur critic serves him well, he says, since he needs "feel no apology for what my eyes tell me as I watch any given screen, where the proof is caught irrelevant to excuse,

and available in proportion to the eye which sees it, and the mind which uses it." (AF I, p. 23) In response to a newspaper account of his "'intentionally clumsy, almost wild manner,'" Agee's Gauguin sneers, "That's what I call an intelligent critic; he knows art is intentional." (AF II, p. 99) The failed intentions recorded in Famous Men-- "tenderly intended" but destructive parental love, (p. 105) a piece of middle-class furniture which "has picked up tenant-kitchen redolences for which it was never intended," (p. 179) houses which look even "'poorer'...than...by original design," (p. 207) the failed "intention" of teachers and school texts, (pp. 294, 299) plans of action gone awry (p. 374)-- complement the repeated failed intentions to describe: "But there must be an end to this...a new and more succinct beginning" (p. 99); "But somehow I have lost hold of the reality of all this." (p. 414) With its various plans and descriptions of overall design, Famous Men is a compilation of Agee's unrealized intentions, listed as casually as if by a conceptual artist: "This volume is designed in two intentions: as the beginning of a larger piece of work, and to stand of itself"; "Ultimately, it is intended that this record and analysis be exhaustive," but "Of this ultimate intention the present volume is merely portent and fragment, experiment, dissonant prologue" (p. xv); "The text was written with reading aloud in mind. That cannot be recommended"; "It was intended also that the text be read continually, as music is listened to or film is watched" (p. xv); "If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs...fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement" (p. 13);

Let me say...how I wish this account might be constructed.

I might suggest, its structure should be globular: or should be eighteen or twenty intersected spheres, the interlockings of bubbles on the face of a stream; one of these globes is each of you. (p. 101)



Like Naked Lunch, Famous Men is a blue-print, a how-to book. Finally, to allow description to sag into naturalism, which is "at the opposite pole from your intentions, from what you have seen, from the fact itself," is to fail; but Agee can only say of the remedies he discusses that "Failure...is almost as strongly an obligation as an inevitability, in such work: and therein sits the deadliest trap of the exhausted conscience." (pp. 236, 238) While he exalts and credits his "best intention" he, like Ishmael, must acknowledge that "Performance, in which the whole fate and terror rests, is another matter." (p. 16)

In his concern for the "cleansing and rectification of language," (p. 237) Agee gives constant attention to the clarification of terms: "The tenants' idiom has been used ad nauseam by the more unspeakable of the northern journalists but it happens to be accurate: that picking goes on each day from can to can't." (p. 340) While he does not, like the naturalist, abjure metaphor, he comments on and undercuts it, reducing it, for example to the terms of physiology in his discussion of cotton farming:

I can conceive of little else which could be so inevitably destructive of the appetite for living, of the spirit, of the being, or by whatever name the centers of individuals are to be called: and this very literally for just as there are deep chemical or electrical changes in all the body under, anger, or love, or fear, so there must certainly be at the center of these meanings and their directed emotions; perhaps most essentially, an incalculably somber and heavy weight and dark knotted iron of sub-nausea at the peak of the diaphragm, darkening and weakening the whole body and being, the literal feeling by which the words a broken heart are no longer poetic, but are merely the most accurate possible description. (p. 327)

This inability to name or define the centers of individuals is a central issue: "What is it, profound behind the outward windows of each one of you, beneath touch even of your own suspecting, drawing tightly back at bay

against the backward wall and blackness of its prison cave, so that the eyes alone shine of their own angry glory, but the eyes of a trapped wild animal, or of a furious angel nailed to the ground by his wings, or however else one may faintly designate the human 'soul.' " (p. 99) Unable to establish its origin and identity, subjectivity, like Ahab and Ishmael, is orphaned: in A Death in the Family, Rufus naively exults in his status as an orphan, (though the darkness has taunted him as he lies awake (like the writer of Famous Men, fighting off horrid imaginings), "You hear the man you call your father: how can you ever fear?" (DF, pp. 294, 84); and Agee finishes "Dream Sequence" by acknowledging that his life "had been shaped by his father and by his father's absence."<sup>26</sup> The woven chain of flesh does not imply an unambiguous identity; in "The House," Agee details a shot of swastikaed uniformed midgets, their feet "grinding faces of Negroes, Jews," and carrying the effigy of a crucified woman under the legend, "MOTHER," her head "a schoolboy globe of the earth" (CSP, p. 173): as in Burroughs' story, "The Coming of the Purple Better One," the evolution myth is portrayed as a form of Nazism. Agee's skepticism about myths of origin is clearest in his rejection of anthropomorphic description:

We bask in our lavish little sun as children in the protective sphere of their parents: and perhaps can never outgrow, or can never dare afford to outgrow, our delusions of his strength and wisdom and of our intelligence, competence and safety; and we carry over from him, like a green glow in the eyeballs, these daytime delusions, so inescapably that we can not only never detach ourselves from the earth, even in the perception of our minds, but cannot even face the fact of nature without either stone blindness or sentimentality....

We have known, or have been told that we know, for some centuries now that the sun does not 'set' or 'rise': the earth twists its surface into and out of the light of the sun.

In its twisting the earth also cradles back and forth, somewhat like a bobbin, and leans through a very slightly eccentric course, and it is this retirement out of and a return into a certain proximity to the sun which causes the change of seasons....Just how much poetry, or art, or plain human consciousness, has taken this into account. You have only to look at all the autumn art about death and at all the spring art about life to get an idea....

No doubt we are sensible in giving names to places: Canada; the Argentine. But we would also be sensible to remember that the land we have given these names to, and all but the relatively very small human population, wear these names lightly. (LUNPFM, pp. 247-49)

He nevertheless frequently describes anthropomorphically, projects what he calls "local fact" (p. 248) onto unknowable objects and landscapes, so that a silent glade "seems to be conscious and to await the repetition of a signal," (p. 130) and a hill under rain is "trenched and seamed "as if" it were an exposed human brain. (p. 139) However the anthropomorphism is pointedly self-interrogative in such comparisons as of the earth to a sleeping human head, "yielded over to the profound influences and memories...of its early childhood, before man became a part of its experience." (p. 247) It is used, as the phrase "as if" is frequently used, to isolate and clarify an image by vivid comparison, so that a roof beyond the "bones of rafters" is "a stomach sucked against the spine in fear." (p. 52) Conditional similes introduced by "as if" are tentative but sharply drawn comparisons, which tersely wrench an impression away from any necessary connection with its source into a jarring, unrelated but illustrative context-- "Miss-Molly, chopping wood as if in each blow of the axe she held captured in focus the vengeance of all time," (p. 324) a deranged old man restrained "as if he were a dog masturbating on a caller" (p. 35): the precision of such renderings has to do, not with the object, but with its appearance, so that the symmetry of a wooden church is as strong "as if it were an earnest description,

better than the intended object." (p. 38) Descriptions are the forms and limits of understanding: "The peace of God surpasses all understanding; Mrs. Ricketts and her youngest child do, too." (p. 289) Although he prescribes exercises and gives extended descriptions of labour in the second person, (p. 339) like Godard, who has Jane Fonda and Yves Montand do actual work in a sausage factory in Tout Va Bien, the implication of Agee's skepticism is that no matter how much is known of a tenant woman's life, "you cannot for one moment exchange places with her." (p. 321) That skepticism assumes, at times, Berkeleian proportions, as in recurrent allusions to the sounds of night, which "have perhaps at no time ceased, but that will never surely be known...one hears them once again with a quiet sort of surprise, that only slowly becomes the realization, or near certainty, that they have been there all the while" (p. 84); in his meditation on chance and necessity he entertains "the more than reasonable suspicion that there is at all times further music...beyond the simple equipment of our senses and their powers of reflection and deduction to apprehend" (p. 231); and while he contemplates an event's "ramified kinship and probable hidden identification with everything else," he can himself offer only "a series of careful but tentative, rudely experimental, and fragmentary renderings of some of the salient aspects of a real experience," (pp. 245-46) cannot do "better than blankly suggest, or lay down, a few possible laws." (p. 105) Like the tenant child, "this center, soul, nerve," Agee is the center of a subjective "bubble and sutureless globe," (p. 104) unable to penetrate the screen of his own experience.

It is Richards' form of skepticism, the distinction between the 'what' and 'how' of events, that is chiefly exhibited: the distinction between use and intention in meaning; the concern to develop intellectual

weapons against advertisement and propaganda (a drawback, Agee feels, in Birth of a Nation and Open City); the by-product account of a consciousness which is not a unique relation; the rejection of the evolutionary model of cognition and the notion that a naturalistic (or any other) account can be a complete one; and the use, nevertheless, of causal language and a physiological hypothesis. Agee's plan for a multiple-definition dictionary complementary to Richards', (CSP, pp. 154-55) his promotion of Basic English in The Nation (AF I, p. 38) and his comparison of text to machine ("Screen comedies used...to be machines as delicately, annihilatingly designed for their purpose as any machines that have ever been constructed out of words or tones"-- AF I, p. 202), are salient pointers to a more comprehensive influence: Agee too describes the experience of beauty and complex emotion in terms of an individual's "fully 'realizing' his potentialities" (LUNPFM, p. 307); Richards' notion of the fusion of clearly defined and more subtle reports of the senses "with the whole mass of internal sensations to form the coenesthesia, the whole bodily consciousness," (PLC, p. 95) reappears in such descriptions as of "a quality in the night itself not truly apparent to any one of the senses, yet, by some indirection, to every sense in one," (LUNPFM, p. 51) and in Agee's insistence upon realization, "not merely with the counting mind, nor with the imagination of the eye, which is not realization at all, but with the whole of the body and being." (p. 183) Like Richards, Agee distinguishes between "meaning" and "emotion" (pp. 236-37) in language use, between "knowledge" and "attitude," or objectless belief, (p. 293) and attends to "variations of tone, pace, shape, and dynamics" as integral to and not to be abstracted from the "meaning" of the text (p. xv): so that he describes the singing of three men in terms, not of the lyrics, but of the rhythmic and melodic interplay of voice, (pp. 29-30) eavesdrops

on talk that "is not really talking, but another and profounder kind of communication, a rhythm to be completed by answer and made whole by silence, a lyric song," (p. 71) and engages in conversation "which means little in itself, but much in its inflections." (p. 417)

While Agee does not reject the existence of evil,<sup>27</sup> he portrays the projection of an absolute separation of Good and Evil as a form of hypocrisy, as represented by the Bishop in "Noa Noa," (AF II, p. 145) or of mania, as by the Preacher in The Night of the Hunter, with "LOVE" and "HATE" tattooed on each fist: "Shall I tell you the little story of Right-Hand-Left-Hand-- the tale of Good and Evil?" (p. 280) Accordingly, a symbol does not embody a transcendent moral order but is an arbitrary substitution, meaning with a small 'm': a mule is badly treated "because he is the immediate symbol of this work, and because by transference he is the farmer himself, and...is the one creature in front of this farmer" (LUNPFM, p. 216); symbols are representative portions of larger contexts, so that there are complex "symbolisms" of head-gear among the men of the country, (p. 272) Richetts' spectacles are "symbolic" of his status as a reader in Church, (p. 261) cotton is the "central leverage and symbol" of the tenant's "privation," (p. 326) and still and moving cameras are the "instruments and symbols" of Agee's analytical style. (p. 245) As for Richards, symbolic belief is connected with a relatively primitive state of consciousness-- children, for example, "like figures of speech or are, if you like, natural symbolists and poets" (p. 300) and Agee repeatedly refers to the tenants' "propitiative prayer" before the elements, (p. 129) the utter fear of storms "which is apparently common to all primitive peoples," (p. 336) and their planting, "like the most ancient peoples of the earth...in the un pitying pieties of the moon." (p. 325) That

thought, as Richards says, is metaphoric, and that perfect analogy is not possible (only "adequate" references and symbols), imply not only that propriety of description and attitude is impossible, but that the requirement of symmetry or repeatability in the primitive mind, as exemplified by Gudger's attempt "to create a saving rhythm against the unpredictable thunder," (p. 398) is clutching at an illusory sense of control: Agee speaks repeatedly of "unprecedented" beauty, (p. 253) of patterns of grain in wood which are "unrepeatable from inch to inch," its variations in light and weather "subtly unrepeatable and probably infinite" (p. 146); experiences and those who witness are never "quite to be duplicated, nor repeated, nor have they ever quite had precedent" (p. 56); each person "is not quite like any other," is a "single, unrepeatable, holy individual." (p. 321)

Meaning, or sense, depends upon context: context is symmetrical--based, that is, on the assumption of repeatability-- and habitual: understanding, the grasp of context, is simultaneously "the one weapon against the world's bombardment, the one medicine, the one instrument, by which liberty, health, and joy may be shaped or shaped toward," and "its own, and hope's, most dangerous enemy" (p. 289) by dint of being based upon, and thus subject to, habit. It is no exaggeration to say that Agee's major preoccupation is with overcoming the paralysis of habit, destroying the "crystallized ideas and attitudes" which "rule all conduct and experience" (CSP, p. 164); just as, in "Dedication," he dismisses myths, or "false and previous visions," of political and scientific progress and "love of the fatherland,"<sup>28</sup> he attacks, in the film criticism, Negro stereotypes, (AF I, p. 80) nationalism, (p. 284) the Stalinist myth of the future which involves "contempt for present humanity," (p. 286) Hollywood's "cruel, ferid, criminal little myths about death" (p. 92) and "cherished pseudo-folk beliefs about bright-lipped

youth, childhood sweethearts, Mister Right, and the glamor of war." (p. 74)

And habit is defined as central in Famous Men: the tenants are "saturated in harm and habit, unteachable beliefs" (LUNPFM, p. 102); "the deepest and most honest and incontrovertible rationalization of the middle-class southerner is that the tenants are 'used' to it" (p. 210); children are born into a "physical, sensual, emotional world whereof...not the least detail whose imposition and whose power to trench and habituate is not intense beyond calculation" (p. 109); sexual freedom in all classes is stifled by "the conditioned and inferior parts of each of our beings" (p. 62); and as a reporter of experience Agee must call self-conscious attention to "Every deadly habit in the use of the senses and of language; every 'artistic' habit of distortion in the evaluation of experience." (p. 241) Habit is challenged by change, the new, as when Richard confronts a snake "more splendid than he had ever seen before," (MW, p. 140) or when Rufus contemplates his father's body: Gudger's "emotions and his mind are slow to catch up with any quick change in the actuality of a situation" (LUNPFM, p. 412); the joyful perception of actuality occurs "in any rare situation which breaks down our habitual impatience, superficial vitality, overeagerness to clinch conclusions, and laziness." (p. 228) If, as Richards says, good poetry breaks up habitual patterns of response and promotes a readiness for action, Agee submits that "any new light on anything, if the light has integrity, is a revolution"<sup>29</sup>; the ear-to-speaker experience of Beethoven is as "savage and dangerous and murderous to all equilibrium in human life as human life is; and nothing can equal the rape it does on all that death; nothing except anything, anything in existence or dream, perceived anywhere remotely toward its true dimension." (LUNPFM, p. 16) In his resistance to habitual context, Agee insists that



"no picture needs or should have a caption," ("Plans for Work," CSP, p. 159) that photographs be examined "without the interference of words,"<sup>30</sup> and that films be made without voice-over commentary or music; the quotations of Shakespeare and Marx in Famous Men "mean, not what the reader may care to think they mean, but what they say," and the Lord's Prayer is recited, "not by its captive but by its utmost meanings" (LUNPFM, pp. xix, 439); when he examines the cluster of calendars and advertisements over the Ricketts fireplace, Agee lists and describes the pictures exhaustively, and separately from his list of the political, commercial and religious slogans which are their captions. (pp. 199-201) He speaks of himself as "essentially an anarchist," a "frenetic enemy against authority and against obedience for obedience's sake," (LFF, 100, 105) admires the bravery of Huey Long's assassin and would approve both an organization designed to eliminate "the 300 key sonsofbitches of the earth," and laws which "interdicted the used of all words to which the reader cannot give a referent" and "disbarred any lawyer or judge who made use of precedent." (LFF, pp. 83-84, 106) Against the War Department's suppression of Huston's Let There Be Light, "if dynamite is required, then dynamite is indicated" (AF I, p. 200): like Melville, Burroughs, Antonioni and Leone, Agee admires the potential of the explosion, and speaks, despite his horror at its use against living creatures, of the atom bomb's having split "all thoughts and things," "split open the universe and revealed the prospect of the infinitely extraordinary."<sup>31</sup>

On the individual level, this means that the understanding, the unknowable witness of experience, has no identity-- cannot be identified, as Richards says, with sub-vocal speech, with the nervous system or with any context: as in Melville, birth and maturation is a process of letting go, of rejecting identity, so that Gauguin experiences "a steady stripping away."

like the taking apart of an onion to its center," ("Noa Noa," AF II, p. 139) and the bull who returns from the slaughterhouse, his hide partially stripped, is no longer "one with all his race," knows "what it is to be himself alone, a creature separate and different from any other, who had never been before and would never be again." ("A Mother's Tale," CSP, p. 264) The Follet family, together for the first time after Catherine's birth, are similarly aware of themselves: "'Well, little Rufus...here we are'"<sup>32</sup>; the tenant child, naked of experience, bursts into existence "to find himself" (LUNPFM, p. 103); and in his truancy, Richard strips and dives to the bottom of a chilling lake, waiting past safety and endurance until he springs to the surface shouting within himself, "Here I am!" (MW, p. 139) Here, but who? and where is here? Agee ends "Knoxville: Summer, 1915" with the narrator being put to bed by beings "who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am"; in the night, the darkness taunts Rufus: "when is this meeting, child, where are we, who are you, child; are you?" (DF, pp. 15, 184) Gauguin's painting, "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" is a leading motif in "Noa Noa" (AF II, p. 111); the painter's struggle against convention, and especially his treatment of the Polynesian islanders as a subject of study, suggest Agee's defiance, in Famous Men, of the "safe world" of the accepted in literature, and his determination, with Evans, to treat their subject "not as journalists, sociologists, politicians, entertainers, humanitarians, priests, or artists, but seriously." (LUNPFM, pp. 16, xv) Safety, as defined by the elder cow in "A Mother's Tale," is where "we know what happens, and what's going to happen, and there's never any reason to doubt about it, never any reason to wonder" (CSP, p. 255) Agee expresses contempt both for "any

organization or Group or Movement or Affiliation" whereby his effort might be identified, and for any excuse for writing extensive descriptive prose, which is "chronically relegated to a menial level of decoration or at best illumination, distortion, apology": "Cocteau...remarks that the subject is merely the excuse for the painting, and Picasso does away with the excuse."

(LUNPFM, pp. 354, 239) Like Melville, Agee says no; like Richards, he is without Beliefs. This mythless condition applies to existence, the beginning of which is "before stars" and "no one knows where it will end" (p. 55); to the human situation, for "we can no longer with any exactitude picture ourselves as an egregiously complicated flurry and convolved cloud of chance sustained between two simplicities" (p. 231); and to his own predicament as an "anomaly" before the tenants: "just say I am from Mars and let it go at that." (pp. 412, 405) It is the sense of strain involved in this last implication that gives into the only story-shaped, conclusion-directed episode in the book.

"Part Three," entitled "Inductions" and prefaced by the Introit of the Mass-- which is also quoted to preface the discussion, "SHELTER," (p. 123) involving approaches to the "altar" of a table with precisely arranged objects and its "Tabernacle," a drawer and its contents-- narrates the progression from a first meeting with the three farmers in Cookstown to Agee's penetration of a center, "Six sides of me all pine," (p. 420) a room in the Gudger house in which he reads and examines the family bible. The section, "First," concerns their being taken to the Ricketts house to photograph the three families and the anticlimax-- "which, you must understand, is just not quite nice....this is just one of several reasons why I don't care for art" (p. 366)-- wherein Agee falls in love with Louise Gudger and conceives

the aim of establishing "ultimate trust" and "love" between the tenants and the reporters. (p. 370) "Second" moves through "Gradual," arranging with Woods to stay among the families, "Reversion," a shift back to the events leading up to Agee's first night with the Gudgers, and "Introit," his entrance of the Gudger house during an afternoon storm: having retired to Birmingham for refreshment, Agee and Evans experience themselves as tourists, consuming in detail the sights of the city, and as voyeurs, watching an opposite window as "a woman is shifting from nightgown through nakedness to day clothing but the sun is spread strongly enough on that tall windowed wall that we can scarcely see anything." (p. 374) Agee takes the car, leaves without Evans and without specific destination, laying "down into the driving as if into a hot bath," passively "watching the road disinvolve itself from the concealing country and run under me" (p. 375); it is as if the windshield were the dynamized rectangle of a movie screen, and with similar implications of peeping: "Through windows could be seen details of rooms...and at the same time the window surfaces gave back pieces of street and patterns of leaves on light." (p. 379) Agee, that is, is behind the glass-- the windshield, the camera lens, the sutureless subjective bubble-- an impermeable surface which mediates all experience: when he compares his secret exploration of the Gudger house to his pubescent masturbation, he recalls having "planted my obscenities in the cold hearts of every mirror in foreknowledge"; but as a voyeur rather than a narcissist, Ishmael rather than Ahab, his attention is to the naked body of the house, which is itself "one lens," and computes surface rather than depth, the corrupted mirror "rashed with gray, iridescent in parts, and in all its reflections a deeply sad zinc-to-platinum." (pp. 136-37, 161) Agee elsewhere uses the image of glass to illustrate the same

point, speaking in "Permit me Voyage" (1934) of air that is "passionless as glass"<sup>33</sup>; and the destruction in "The House" is paralleled by the smashing of a fish-bowl which leaves a gold-fish gasping on the carpet. (CSP, p. 192) The breaking of glass in some form, or the removal of spectacles (as when Degas examines Gauguin's painting in "Noa Noa"—AF II, p. 97), so as to suggest penetration and contact, are stock devices in the vocabulary of the cinema, and frequently accompany eye-contact and sexual or otherwise violent occurrences: Agee's slowing his car, the speed of which "had walled me away as though with the glass of a bathosphere from the reality of this heat; but now the glass was broken and...I was a part once more of the pace and nature of this country," (LUNPFM, p. 378) indicates the shape of this episode, its movement from seeing through a glass, darkly, to an attempt to see face to face.

Like Ahab, Agee is crippled, cut off from any sense of identity, and bent on some form of resolution: his sense of sexual urgency crystallizes as a fantasy, as he sits "unable to move...looking out through the windshield," of an ideal girl with whom perfect communication might briefly be established, for which he ridicules himself as a "fantast." (pp. 382-84) Since, despite the importance of breaking down the identification of word and thing, human beings are incapable of not dreaming, Agee has come in search of identity, of meaning; his period in the city has brought him "terrible frustration, which had in its turn drawn me along these roads and to this place scarce knowing why I came, to the heart's blood and business of my need." (p. 389) The voyeur has again become a narcissist: like Ahab, Agee raises his personal need for an identity—"who am I, who in Jesus' name am I" (p. 284)—to the status of a necessity. And it is satisfied,

he says, "twice over...two 'dreams,' 'come true,'" which are compared in their fulfilling power, to an adolescent fantasy of love, this perfect sharing involving enthusiasm for a marching song of rescue, "though our images were different," hers of World War I prisoners, his, via daguerrotypes and Brady photographs, of a Civil War prison-camp and deserted loved ones; the comparison is not inappropriate, Agee says, since those of whom he writes are likewise "imprisoned" and waiting, though he doubts whether rescue will come in the form of Russian Communism. He also compares his fulfillment to refreshment at a forest spring, "so cold, so clear, so living, it breaks on the mouth like glass," and to drinking at a "human" springhouse, staring into the "broad affronted eyes" of a bullfrog. (pp. 389-93) The first dream come true comprises Agee's visit to the Gudgers, withdrawn into their darkened house in terror of a storm, a powerful experience of eye contact with Louise Gudger, and a movement out after the rain, which has ended a long drought and seems to Gudger "sure enough to have been an answer to a prayer," into the communal work effort of mending damaged trees and sorting fruit, which brings Agee close to tears: "and there was a movement and noise all round me where at length I found myself." (pp. 406-07) The "Second Introit" involves his return, after his car has become stuck in the mud, to stand "silently...vertical to the front center of the house" (p. 411)-- Ahab confronting his whale-- until the Gudgers are awakened by their dog and take him in: as the Tennessee-born Agee sits talking and eating the meal Mrs. Gudger has prepared,

the feeling increased itself upon me that at the end, of a wandering and seeking, so long it had begun before I was born, I had apprehended and now sat at rest in my own home, between two who were my brother and my sister, yet less that than something else; these, the wife my age exactly, the husband four years older, seemed not

other than my own parents, in whose patience I was so different, so diverged, so strange as I was; and all that surrounded me, that silently strove in through my senses and stretched me full, was familiar and dear to me as nothing else on earth, and as if well known in a deep past and long years lost, so that I could wish that all my chance life was in truth the betrayal, the curable delusion, that it seemed, and that this was my right home, right earth, right blood, to which I would never have true right. For half my blood is just this; and half my right of speech; and by bland chance alone is my life so softened and sophisticated in the years of my defenselessness, and I am robbed of a royalty I can not only never claim, but never properly much desire or regret. And so in this quiet introit, and in all the time we have stayed in this house, and in all we have sought, and in each detail of it, there is so keen, sad, and precious a nostalgia as I can scarcely otherwise know; a knowledge of brief truancy into the sources of my life, whereto I have no rightful access, having paid no price beyond love and sorrow. (p. 415)

Without transition he turns to an impersonal, unflattering listing and description of the foods and their tastes, and his efforts to keep it down and appear pleased by it, undercutting by anticlimax the most powerful passage of communion in the book: as in Moby-Dick and throughout Agee's work, the struggle is between dreamer and cold critic. Agee is given a room, examines the record of marriage, births and death inscribed in the family bible, with its "strong cold stench of human excrement," (p. 424) and struggles to sleep in a vermin-ridden bed; the next morning the car is reclaimed and he drives Gudger to work, again experiencing the world through a windshield. The northern reporter on the tenant situation and harbinger of help, who advises Emma Woods and apostrophizes the Ricketts children, "(Jesus, what could I ever do for you that would be enough)," (p. 386) sits talking with Gudger in the car "about what the tenant farmer could do to help himself out of the hole he is in," until Gudger gets out to go to work: "I told him I sure was obliged to him for taking me in last night and he said

he was glad to have help me." (pp. 431-32) The communal experience is such that Gudger assumes his own role, is helper rather than helped; despite shared food and louse-bites, and the most strenuous observation and description, he is unique, alien, ultimately unknowable: the White Whale disappears uncaptured, taking Ahab with him and leaving Ishmael afloat on the surface--ambiguous, unexplained, somewhat embarrassed.

This is knowledge by negation, a rendering of Agee's attitudes or states of emotional equilibrium and upset before Gudger, and a description of the forms of Gudger's life, which never quite reach Gudger. "On the Porch: 3," which ends the book, diagrams Agee's effort to perceive and communicate and bears out his declaration of respect for "any experience whatever...because it turns out that going through, remembering, and trying to tell of anything is of itself...interesting and important to me." (p. 244) At this time of night Agee and Evans usually "compare and analyze" those "reactions" which they must conceal by day; as they contemplate their surroundings, "there now came a sound that was new to us," communicating to them "a new opening of delight"-- habit challenged by the unprecedented-- and to which they give complete attention, engaging "in mutual listening and in analysis of what we heard, so strongly, that in all the body and in the whole range of mind and memory, each of us became all one hollowed and listening ear." The noise is "most nearly like" that of hydrogen ignited in a test-tube, "soprano, with a strong alto illusion," but "colder," running "eight identical notes...in this rhythm and accent:

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Each note is precisely described; a paragraph is spent on its spacial location, so that "after a little we got it in range within say twenty degrees of the ninety on the horizontal circle which at first it could have occupied any part of....between an eighth and a quarter mile away"; they are assisted in their "geometry" by the signal of a second caller, which also makes possible distinctions of "personality," the "illusion" of seeker and sought, identification with the seeker, the perception of call played against silence and of the mutual interenhancements of calls, and of calls and other night sounds "which, now that we were listening so intently, became once more a part of the reality of hearing." The calls proceed "through any number of rhythmic-dramatic devices of delays in question and answer," like a vaudeville act repeating the same word in different tones, "but at all times beyond even the illusion of full comprehension"; it is conjectured that they are fox calls, though "we had no clue, no anchorage in knowledge" by which that might be verified. The calls are considered in terms of dramatic and musical structure; a call a fraction away from the pattern of expectation "computed" by the ear breaks the listeners open into "a laughter that destroyed and restored us," and which is connected with passages from Mozart and Shakespeare, and with a variety of personal experiences including that of the initial phase of romantic love, which is expounded at length. A particular stable poise, that is, yields that pattern of associations with which it is alone possible to come to terms with the new; the experience of this sound derives its value from the maximal organization of Agee's impulses, a full coenesthetic response and readiness for action, with which it is met; description in no way reaches what it is, but records the play of interests in the perceiver. It is impossible to assign any change to the series of calls "save through the changefulness and human sentimentality of us who

were listening and making what we could of it"; and the communication gap, "the frightening joy of hearing the world talk to itself, and the grief of incommunicability," is not only between sound and hearer, but between the describer's "useless" and "utterly hopeless effort" and the reader's understanding, for "communication of such a thing is not only beyond possibility but irrelevant to it." The book closes as Agee and Evans lay "thinking, analyzing, remembering, in the human artist's sense praying...until at length we fell asleep" (pp. 463-71): like all of this prose, and like Antonioni's Blow-Up, Famous Men addresses the simple and ambiguous fact of being awake.

Agee's empiricism consists in his holding to the spatial relationships of objects and to evidence which speaks for itself, his conviction "that much can be implied out of little: that everything to do with tenant education, for instance, is fairly indicated in the mere list of textbooks," (p. 308) his care in pointing out "unsupported statements," (p. 202) his skepticism about the possibility of "communication" (p. 12) and his attention to definition, and to the fact of the text itself; it is counter-balanced by his ardent humanism, his location of the "elementary beginnings of true reason...in the ability to recognize oneself, and others, primarily as human beings, and to recognize the ultimate absoluteness of responsibility of each human being." (AF I, p. 278) The unformulable human core of the onion consistently, in Agee's work, synthesizes evidence to arrive at human recognition: the narrator of "They That Sow" recreates the life of his landlord in "fragments, and by implication" (CSP, p. 95); "Noa Noa" opens with a group of men in the dead Gauguin's house "summing up a man's nature, through what he has left," (AF II, p. 5) just as Rufus contemplates his dead father's chair, smells its surfaces, tastes the smudges in the ash tray (DF, p. 265); in an unfinished screen-play written for Chaplin, "Scientists and Tramps,"

Charlie appears after a nuclear explosion, "wandering in a dead metropolis, examining a dead civilization"<sup>34</sup>; one of the last shots in "The Blue Hotel" is of the patterns of sand on the barroom floor which record the Swede's fight (Agee, of course, has made Crane's Easterner, the man whose prejudices have not kept him from seeing what happened, a reporter), similar to the "changed surface" of Gudger's front yard, the only evidence of Agee's intense experience there. (LUNPFM, p. 407) Famous Men, too, is an evidential "fragment" (p. xv) out of which much might be implied, displaying and listing unsynthesized socio-economic details:

Granted-- more, insisted upon-- that it is in all these particularities that each of you is that which he is; that particularities, and matters ordinary and obvious, are exactly themselves beyond designation of words, are the members of your sum total most obligatory to the human searching of perception: nevertheless to name these things and fail to yield their stature, meaning, power of hurt, seems impious, seems criminal, seems impudent, seems traitorous in the deepest: and to do less badly seems impossible: yet in withholdings of specification I could but betray you still worse. (pp. 100-01)

A related consideration is Agee's use of more than one description to record a situation: if Richards calls for a General Theory of Critical Relativity, it is not inappropriate to borrow Niels Bohr's concept of complementarity to describe the method of Famous Men-- the use, that is, of mutually exclusive and contradictory pictures of atomic systems, each legitimate in its place, logical contradiction being avoided by "the uncertainty relation," the fact that incomplete knowledge of a system is an essential part of every quantum formulation.<sup>35</sup> Just as, in A Death in the Family, several modes of interpreting facts are portrayed in interrelation, Famous Men consists not only of several forms-- epistle, drama, verse, scripture, prayer, sentence, notes, appendices, "forms...of music, of motion pictures, and of improvisations and

recordings of states of emotion, and of belief" (LUNPFM, p. 244)-- but of several styles and modes, what Agee calls "art devices." (p. 242) He speaks of "Every good artist" as "Usable," (p. 353) and uses his models against one another: if "we should dare to be 'teaching' what Marx began to open...we should do so only in the light of the terrible researches of Kafka and in the opposed identities of Blake and Céline." (p. 294) As he eavesdrops through the partition wall, Agee's listening assumes a Whitmanesque shape, "as if I were in each one of these seven bodies, whose sleeping I can almost touch through this wall, and which in the darkness I so clearly see," so that "I lie down inside each one as if exhausted in a bed," only to be shattered into alien lucidity by the sudden "Burt half-woke, whimpering before he was awake...." (pp. 57-58) Each situation is perceived as a convention of representation, the darkened, storm-beseiged house "as 'rembrandt,' deeplighted in gold, in each integer colossally heavily planted," becoming in sunshine "a photograph, a record in clean, staring, colorless light, almost without shadow" (p. 404); as he drives through Alabama he indulges in Faulknerian renderings of hot Sunday paralysis: "Not even a negress cook stole out delicately by the back way in her white slippers on the lawn and her hat and her white sunday dress...." (p. 379) The absence of necessary relation among various aspects of the same event permits, and seems to demand, various attempts at rendition: Agee's refreshment by his experience with the Gudgers is "as if" a personified sky rained on a thirsting man, and "secondly, quite different," as if refreshed at a forest spring, "or better," as if at a springhouse (pp. 392-93): the structure of the Gudger house is described at length in terms of its stark symmetries in sunlight, the record of its construction, "Or by another saying," of its esthetic simplicity, "Or by a few further notes," of its Doric sobriety

and evidence of manual talent, "Or again by materials," a study of the geometry of wood grain, and "By most brief suggestion" a list of salient colours under four varieties of light (pp. 142-46): these aspects overlap, repeat details in different contexts, and are mutually oblivious. "On the Porch" functions as the "center of action, in relation to which all other parts of this volume are intended as flashbacks, foretastes, illuminations and contradictions" (p. 245); the four planes on which the book is written "are in strong conflict. So is any piece of human experience. So, then, inevitably, is any partially accurate attempt to give any experience as a whole." (p. 243)

The problem is to connect, to give human realization to the details of an experience recorded in a self-contradictory fashion. The deluded narrator of "Death in the Desert," for whom "the ego is inconsequent manure," is bothered at first by his "responsibility" for a stranded man-- "These thoughts, disconnected at first, in time took a substance and form"-- but concludes in retrospect that "I thought too much," (CSP, pp. 83-85) whereas the teller of "They That Sow" tries, albeit in vain, "to clarify his ideas, to give them some proper connection." (CSP, p. 97) Rufus' prudish mother does not explain her pregnancy to him because "I just have a feeling he might m-make see-oh-en-en-ee-sue-tee-eye-oh-en-ess, between-- between one thing and another" (DF, p. 102); A Death in the Family is an account of his learning to think-- "Rufus began to see the connection between all this and the bath..." (p. 266)-- his becoming human, though there is pointedly no accounting for the acquisition of habits: "'Some people just learn more slowly than others,'" his grandmother assures him over his bed-wetting, though he knows the cautionary procedure, his mother has taught him "by heart and he knew there was no use in it."<sup>36</sup> To be human is not only to connect, but to be aware of the arbitrary nature of

connection, to embrace and hold in mutually oblivious suspension the disparate aspects of experience: democracy, Agee says in his column on the Hollywood ten, must be able to "contain all its enemies" (AF I, p. 285); Monsieur Verdoux is the supreme portrayal of one's personality's, and modern civilization's, failure to keep its soul "intact" by communicating honestly with both its best and worst elements, its living in a "broken and segregated" condition, whereas, in Lifeboat, Hitchcock becomes "so engrossed in the solution of pure problems of technique that he has lost some of his sensitiveness toward the purely human aspects of what he is doing." (AF I, pp. 257, 72) As a critic, Agee typically qualifies exuberant praise, as for the film New Orleans, with statements like, "All the same, the movie is a crime," (AF I, p. 271) or finishes a point-by-point comparison of Faulkner with Shakespeare, in a review of The Hamlet, with, "there is nevertheless not one sentence without its share of amateurishness, its stain of inexcusable cheapness"<sup>37</sup>: the human critic exhibits a versatility of attitude parallel to, and made possible by, his linguistic dexterity.

The mind, according to Richards, is a fiction, to be spoken of only as an inexplicable connecting organ; language, the ordering of references, is the mind itself at work, and the interdependencies of words are those of our being. But the adult cotton tenant "is incapable of any save the manifest meanings of any but the simplest few hundred words and is all but totally incapable of absorbing, far less correlating, far less critically examining, any 'ideas' whether true or false," (LUNPFM, p. 306) is restricted to an almost purely "tactile...fragrant, visible, physical world," (p. 108) and is all but excluded from the realm of the human (for human equality is a matter of "potentiality"-- LFF, p. 149), as, for example, from an appreciation of beauty, out

of "Habit. No basis of comparison. No 'sophistication' (there can be a good meaning of the word)":

It is true that in what little they can obtain of them, they use and respect the rotted prettinesses of 'luckier' classes; in such naivety that these are given beauty: but by and large it seems fairly accurate to say that being so profoundly members in nature, among man-built things and functions which are almost as scarcely complicated 'beyond' nature as such things can be, and exist on a 'human' plane, they are little if at all more aware of 'beauty,' nor of themselves as 'beautiful,' than any other member in nature, any animal, anyhow. (pp. 314-15)

Agee's shame at his own privileged skills of perception is the ultimate self-interrogation of his point of view. Lacking a linguistic sophistication that would facilitate an efficient organization of impulses, the tenant cannot realize-- relate, hold in value-suspended focus-- as the reader must:

The most I can do-- the most I can hope to do-- is to make a number of physical entities as plain and vivid as possible, and to make a few guesses, a few conjectures; and to leave to you much of the burden of realizing in each of them what I have wanted to make clear of them as a whole: how each is itself; and how each is a shapener. (p. 110)

...if these seem lists and inventories merely, things dead unto themselves, devoid of mutual magnetisms, and if they sink, lose impetus, meter, intension, then bear in mind at least my wish, and perceive in them and restore them what strength you can of yourself: for I must say to you, this is not a work of art or of entertainment, nor will I assume the obligations of the artist or entertainer, but is a human effort which must require human co-operation. (p. 111)

Though Godard is no humanist, Agee's problem is similar in that he embraces on the one hand empirical data, and on the other an insistent faith in and prayer for resolution: "let us know, let us know there is cure, there is to be an end to it." (p. 439) Like Melville, Agee strives to hold Narcissus and the voyeur in balance; and he insists upon a human significance which William Burroughs regards as superfluous.

The most inviting point of comparison between peeping Tommo and Agee as reporter-spy among the tenants is Agee's Gauguin, who also goes to live "intimately with the natives of the wilderness...gradually gain their confidence and come to know them," and is accused by the Tahitian governor of being a "spy." (AF II, pp. 66-67) The painting, "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" which is Gauguin's record of the experience, "isn't the ordinary thing-- studies from nature, preliminary cartoon, and so on: it's all boldly done, directly with the brush, on a sackcloth full of knots and rugosities, and so, it looks terribly rough...They'll say it's loose...unfinished. But I believe not only that it outdoes my earlier paintings, but also that I shall never paint a better one." (AF II, p. 112) Whether or not, as is tempting to believe, this is Agee commenting on Famous Men, the book, like the painting, is a skeletal, diagrammatic cluster, unfinished in appearance, of sketches, studies and preliminaries. In terms, that is, both of his abstention from any attempt to resolve complementary modes of description, and of his moral effort, Famous Men is the least he could do.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Agee, "1928 Story," ed. Victor A. Kramer, Texas Quarterly, XI, 1, Spring 1968, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Father J. H. Flye, James Agee: A Portrait. . (New York: Caedmon Records, 1971), Side 4.

<sup>3</sup> Agee, The Morning Watch (New York: Ballantine, 1969), pp. 22, 52, 24. Subsequent references are noted in the text (MW).

<sup>4</sup> Agee, A Death in the Family (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 60. Subsequent references are noted in the text (DF).

<sup>5</sup> Agee, "Dream Sequence," in Victor A. Kramer, "Agee in the Forties: The Struggle to be a Writer," Texas Quarterly, XI, 1, Spring 1968, 45-46.

<sup>6</sup> W. M. Frohock, "James Agee: The Question of Wasted Talent," The Novel of Violence in America (London: Aurthur Barker Limited, 1959), pp. 228-29.

<sup>7</sup> Agee, "Noa Noa," Agee on Film, Vol. II (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1969), pp. 5, 42, 72, 102. Subsequent references are noted in the text (AF II).

<sup>8</sup> Agee, "Introduction," Walker Evans, Many Are Called (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> Agee, Agee on Film, Vol. 1 (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1968), p. 95. Subsequent references are noted in the text (AF I).

<sup>10</sup> Agee, "Dream Sequence," p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Agee, "An Essay by James Agee," Helen Levitt, A Way of Seeing (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> See particularly Norman N. Holland, "Agee on Film: Reviewer Re-Viewed," The Hudson Review, XII (Spring 1959), 148-51; John S. Snyder, James Agee: A Study of his Film Criticism, unpublished dissertation, St. John's University, 1969; and Michael Sragow, "Agee and Film," The Harvard Advocate, CV, 4 (February 1972), 39.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Murray, Nine American Film Critics: A Study of Theory and Practice (New York: Ungar, 1975), pp. 8-12.

- <sup>14</sup> Agee, A Way of Seeing, pp. 6, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> John Russell Taylor, "The Last Great Silent Director," Take One, V, 2, 13.
- <sup>16</sup> Agee, "Pseudo-Folk," Partisan Review, XI, 2 (Spring 1944), 221.
- <sup>17</sup> Agee, "1928 Story," pp. 28, 30.
- <sup>18</sup> Agee, A Way of Seeing, p. 3.
- <sup>19</sup> Agee, "Pseudo-Folk," p. 220.
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Victor A. Kramer, "Agee and Plans for the Criticism of Popular Culture," Journal of Popular Culture, V, 4 (Spring 1972), p. 763.
- <sup>21</sup> Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts," p. 23.
- <sup>22</sup> For an analysis of the book according to this distinction of "levels," see Peter Ohlin, Agee (New York: Oblensky, 1966), pp. 49-107.
- <sup>23</sup> Agee, A Way of Seeing, p. 7.
- <sup>24</sup> Agee, "'Surprise,' An Unused Chapter for A Death in the Family," in Kramer, "Agee in the Forties," 53.
- <sup>25</sup> Sragow, p. 38.
- <sup>26</sup> Agee, "Dream Sequence," p. 46.
- <sup>27</sup> Agee, "Religion and the Intellectuals," Partisan Review, XVII (February 1950), 109.
- <sup>28</sup> Agee, "Dedication," The Collected Poems of James Agee, ed. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Ballantine, 1970), pp. 15-16, 18.
- <sup>29</sup> Agee, "Art for What's Sake," New Masses, XXI, 12 (December 19, 1936), 48.
- <sup>30</sup> Agee, A Way of Seeing, p. 78.
- <sup>31</sup> Agee, "The Nation," Time XLVI, 8 (August 20, 1945), 19.

<sup>32</sup>Agee, "Surprise," 55.

<sup>33</sup>Agee, Sonnet XX, "Permit Me Voyage: 1934," The Collected Poems of James Agee (New York: Ballantine, 1970), 1.8, p. 56.

<sup>34</sup>Agee, "Scientists and Tramps," quoted in Victor A. Kramer, "Agee in the Forties: The Struggle to be a Writer," Texas Quarterly, XI, 1 (Spring 1968), 12.

<sup>35</sup>Werner Heisenberg, The Physicist's Conception of Nature, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (London: Hutchinson, 1958), pp. 40-41.

<sup>36</sup>Agee, "Surprise," 49, 47.

<sup>37</sup>Agee, "Genius-à-la-King," Time (April 1, 1947), 74-75.

"Say 'rich, chocolaty goodness.'"

"Rich, chocolaty, goodness," said Oedipa.

"Yes," said Mucho; and fell silent.

"Well, what?" Oedipa asked after a couple minutes, with an edge to her voice.

"I noticed it the other night hearing Rabbit do a commercial. No matter who's talking, the different power spectra are the same, give or take a small percentage. So you and Rabbit have something in common now. More than that. Everybody who says the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time, you dig? But the time is arbitrary. You pick your zero point anywhere you want, that way you can shuffle each person's time line sideways till they all coincide. Then you'd have this big, God, maybe a couple hundred million chorus saying 'rich, chocolaty goodness' together, and it would all be the same voice."

"Mucho," she said, impatient but also flirting with a wild suspicion. "Is this what Funch means when he says you're coming on like a whole roomful of people?"

"That's what I am," said Mucho, "right. Everybody is."

Thomas Pynchon,  
The Crying of Lot 49

#### CHAPTER IV. Watch Your Language: Narcissus as Addict

Although Naked Lunch is remarkably similar, in its tactics and epistemological approach, to Famous Men, William Burroughs does not share Agee's humanism. When, in Nova Express (1964), the Nova Police wish to question someone, they "send out a series of agents-- (usually in the guise of journalists)-- to contact Winkhorst and expose him to a battery of stimulus units-- the contact agents talk and record the response on all levels to the word units while a photographer takes pictures-- this material is passed along to the Art Department-- Writers write 'Winkhorst,' painters paint 'Winkhorst,' a method actor becomes 'Winkhorst,' and then 'Winkhorst' will answer our questions."<sup>1</sup> Whereas Agee enjoins upon his reader the task of human realization, Burroughs regards the assembly of data and habits to be Winkhorst: call me Ishmael. As Godard's Alpha-60 and Kubrick's Hal demonstrate, the human element is unspeakable, negligible, finally an encumbrance-- "'a sort of fifth wheel to a wagon,'" as Elijah tells Ishmael. (MD, p. 86) "Man," Burroughs says in Minutes to Go (1960), "is virus. Kick the virus habit MAN."<sup>2</sup> Among the various forms of habit dealt with in Naked Lunch is man's narcissistic addiction to his own image:

The broken image of man moves in minute by minute  
and cell by cell....Poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals,  
bureaucracy, insanity, all symptoms of The Human Virus.  
The Human Virus can now be isolated and treated. (NL,  
pp. 168-69)

The attack, in Naked Lunch, on the Family-of-Man style of humanism includes reports on the "virus venereal disease indigenous to Ethiopia," (p. 42) the grey and brown pigments found in mulatto skin because "the mixture did not come off and the colors separated like oil and water," (p. 57) the disease Bang-utot, peculiar to "males of S.E. Asiatic extraction," (p. 71) the "rutting

season" of Eskimos (p. 83) and the spontaneous amputation of the little toe "in a West African disease confined to the Negro race" (p. 224)-- all of which suggests, as Locke and Berkeley suggest, that Man cannot be abstracted from individual men or racial characteristics: the heroin addict, in fact, "needs more and more junk" to maintain a human form." (p. vi) As the Public Agent puts it in The Soft Machine (1961), 'human' is a rigid formula, a "'mold'" or "'die'" (SM, p. 34); and the Professor warns his students, "'it being only remain to establish you male humans, positively no Transitionals in either direction will be allowed in this deceit hall." (NL, p. 85) William Lee, the principal narrator of Naked Lunch (and Burroughs' early pen name), is a pusher who controls a clientèle of boys ("He force me to commit all kinda awful sex acts in return for junk"-- p. 7) and who hides his stash from sick fellow junkies in jail (p. 9); his associate, Dr. Benway, is "a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control," who describes himself as "'an anti-human enemy'" of his victim's "'personal identity'" (p. 21): they are a delightfully comic and brutally inhuman team, addicts to control and to heroin, which is defined as a form of control, who manipulate the addictions of others, whether to heroin or to symbol systems (again, forms of control), and whose peculiar freedom resides in their non-addiction to the human image, their inability to be degraded: "In the words of total need: 'Wouldn't you?' Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do anything to satisfy total need." (p. vii) When an attendant in his hospital summons squealing and grunting junkies with a hog call, Benway comments, "Wise guy....No respect for human dignity." (p. 35)

The wisdom of the wise guy is that of the witness, of one who has been

around and come back to tell-- wry, disillusioned, detached but not transcendent-- whose comments are casual but brilliantly succinct, delivered as if out of an incapacity for surprise, shot from the hip rather than deliberated or sophistic: wise cracks. Since he has no existential or prophetic message, he is not related to the Shakespearean fool or to such derivative figures as Pap; he has no religious message, and so is not related to the Elizabethan punster; urbane and travelled, he has little in common with the regionally located teller of tall tales, though like him he puts his audience on; his closest relative and match for speed and apparent irrelevance is the Restoration wit, though the wise guy is never a gentleman unless, as in Naked Lunch, "by an act of Congress....nothing else could have done such a thing." (p. 92) Ishmael, who sits in a Lima bar telling a tale without demonstrable substance, swearing to its truth on the biggest bible in town, offering casual, passing, semi-serious allegorical comments (as does William Lee: "And let me say in passing, and I am always passing like a sincere Spade...."-- p. 230), and ending inconclusively ("Conclude?" says Benway; "Nothing whatever. Just a passing observation."-- p. 36), is, though his icy and hilarious sarcasm is anticipated in some early passages of Typee, arguably the first wise guy, typifying the cool but not invulnerable stances of successive reporters, detectives and spies. When Agee calls an actress's mugging before the camera "as ungratifying, as if a particularly cute monkey, instead of merely holding his hand out for a penny...insisted that he was working his way through Harvard," when he responds to Lauren Bacall by "getting caught in a dilemma between a low whistle and a bellylaugh," (AE I, pp. 42, 121) and when he affects aggressive Brooklynese in Famous Men-- "if you think 'da' dialectic is going to ring in any conceivably worthwhile changes, you can stick that and yourself up after. Just an individualizing intellectual....And you too"-- he is

speaking the language of the wise guy, the baggy-suited reporter, as Evans describes him, (LUNPFM, pp. ix, 385) who has the facts but doubts his audience's ability to comprehend their significance, and so bullies, kids, insults and leads it on.

Burroughs' wise guys are occasionally confidence men, like the priests who control the Mayan calendar, (SM, p. 24) the "smart operators" who think they are conning "The Rube," a Nova agent who has perfected the gestures of a naive mark ("There's a wise guy born every minute"-- NE, p. 70); pliers of The Bill, "a short change con" (NL, p. 199); "Itinerant short con and corny hyp men [who] have burned down the croakers of Texas" (NL, p. 13)-- talked doctors into writing prescriptions; Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius and Leo-Tze, of whom the vicious fruity old saint remarks, "why should we let some old brokedown ham tell us what wisdom is?" (NL, p. 115); Benway, who claims to be "a reputable scientist, not a charlatan, a lunatic, or a pretended worker of miracles" (NL, pp. 20-21); and "Lee the Agent," laying down the game of the text, offering the "Tentative half-impressions" on his memory track as photographs, "vibrating in the silent winds of accelerated Time....Pick a shot....Any shot...." (NL, p. 218) But the con man can never be a thorough-going wise guy by virtue of his own addiction to control. Norman Mailer has opined that "The hustler's dignity is that he controls the flow of experience. He considers it obscene if he doesn't."<sup>3</sup> Burroughs' con men, like Melville's, claim to represent authority in some form-- a psychoanalyst, like Benway, (NL, p. 36) or a policeman, like Bradley the Buyer, a narcotics agent "so anonymous, grey and spectral" that he can score from and "twist" any pusher before the latter knows what has happened, but who himself needs to be fixed by rubbing up against junkies:



Nonusing pushers have a contact habit, and that's one you can't kick. Agents get it too." (NL, p. 15) In fact, the most frequently appearing con man is half of the tough-cop-con-cop team which alternately softens and bullies a suspect, (NL, p. 195; NE, p. 26) which, Burroughs speculates, is a strategic form of virus attack, (J, p. 187) and which is the mode in which engrams are formed: an event or formula is associated with contemporaneous pain and thus rendered unavailable to conscious attention except through strenuous analysis. The verbal virus, which has taken up residence in the larynx and proceeded to control and direct attention ("First it's symbiosis, then parasitism-- The old symbiosis con"<sup>4</sup>), involves the analogy pitch employed by Melville's Confidence Man, the encouragement of the mark's belief that verbal meaning is both fixed and indispensable: "In the beginning was the word and the word was bullshit. The beginning words come out on the con clawing for traction-- Yes sir, boys, it's hard to stop that old writing arm-- more of a habit than using." (TE, p. 85) At the end of Naked Lunch we are told that the narrator, "Lee The Agent...is taking the junk cure," (NL, p. 218) But Burroughs has also suggested that the writer, who merely transcribes, is a con man only "In a sense. You see, a real con man is a creator. He creates a set. No, a con man is more a movie director than a writer."<sup>5</sup> In their addiction to control, con men exhibit a rigid horror of change, so that they "don't change, they break, shatter-- explosions of matter in cold interstellar space." (NL, p. 10)

The wise guy, a critical agent who must learn to deploy his attention, is pitted against the con man's game:

Now learn to sit back and watch-- Don't talk don't play  
 just watch.... Learn to watch and you will see all the  
 cards.... The house know every card you will be dealt and  
 Now you will play all your cards-- And if some wise guy

does get a glimmer and maybe plays an unwritten card:

"Green Tony...Show this character the Ovens--  
This is a wise guy." (TE, p. 159)

The controllers of information perpetuate myths, habits of belief, arguments--  
"That's what they call it: 'making a case'" (SM, p. 45)-- which the wise guy  
analyzes, and against which he guards his independence; "A word," Burroughs  
finishes his introductory remarks on addiction, "to the wise guy." (NL, p. xvi)  
Burroughs has himself worked as a reporter and as a private detective, (WW, p.  
167)<sup>6</sup> and appears in Nova Express as an agent of the Nova Police: "One of  
our agents is posing as a writer. He has written a so-called pornographic  
novel called Naked Lunch." (NE, p. 54) The Nova Police is to "the parasitic  
excrescence that often travels under the name 'Police'" what apomorphine is to  
morphine, a non-addictive antidote to a state of metabolic need, (NE, p. 50)  
and is comparable to the organization joined by William Lee in The Ticket  
that Exploded (1962), supervised by a man who talks

in a voice without accent or inflection, a voice that  
no one could connect to the speaker or recognize on  
hearing it again. The man who used that voice had no  
native language. He had learned the use of an alien  
tool. The words floated in the air behind him as he  
walked.

"In this organization, Mr Lee, we do not encourage  
togetherness, esprit de corps. We do not give our  
agents the impression of belonging. As you know most  
existing organizations stress such primitive reactions  
as unquestioning obedience. Their agents become addic-  
ted to orders. You will receive orders of course and  
in some cases you will be well-advised not to carry out  
the orders you receive....You will receive your instruc-  
tions in many ways. From books, street signs, films in  
some cases from agents who purport to be and may actually  
be members of the organization. There is no certainty.  
Those who need certainty are of no interest to this  
department. This is in point of fact a non-organization.  
(TE, pp. 9-10)

The non-addicted free agent and critic of verbal habits appears throughout  
Burroughs' writing in various wise guises, his narrators referring to

themselves as "Your Reporter," (NL, p. 73) "Inspector Lee," "this investigator," (NE, pp. 54, 137) and Joe Brundige of The Evening News-- like Agee, a spy travelling as a journalist (SM, p. 85); "The name is Clem Snide-- I am a Private Ass Hole," and "Private Eye," "'Dick Tracy in the flesh'" (SM, pp. 71, 79-80); in The Wild Boys (1971), he is "'Fred Flash from St. Louis. Photographer.'" <sup>7</sup> The wise guy spies out and exposes the secrets of control organizations, is out, as Burroughs puts it, "to wise up the marks," (WW, p. 174) so that Uranian Willy's program calls "for total exposure-- Wise up the marks everywhere. Show them the rigged wheel-- Storm the Reality Studio...." (SM, p. 155)

The description of Lee harassed by the authorities in Naked Lunch suggests Spade or Marlowe dealing with pushy policemen:

"And how do we know that?"

"I gota affidavit."

"Wise guy. Take off your clothes."

"Yeah. Maybe he got dirty tattoos." (NL, p. 171)

In the only episode with extended narrative shape in the book, Hauser and O'Brien, a tough-cop-con-cop "vaudeville team," ordered to bring in all the texts they find in Lee's hotel room-- "all books, letters, manuscripts. Anything typed or written"-- walk in on him as he is preparing a fix; he stalls by promising to betray a pusher, takes his shot, squirts alcohol into Hauser's eyes with the syringe, reaches his gun and eliminates the policemen, rescues the "notebooks" they had been about to seize, and escapes. Like Agee, Burroughs regards the press as a device of control rather than dissemination: the incident is not reported in the next day's newspaper, and when Lee calls the Narcotics bureau and asks for Hauser and O'Brien he is told that there are no such men in the department; the policeman on the phone repeats, "'Who are you?' " "Now who is this calling?"-- a question that Lee is beginning to

realize he cannot answer, for "I had been occluded from space-time....Locked out...Never again would I have a point of intersection....relegated with Hauser and O'Brien to a landlocked junk past where heroin is always twenty-eight dollars an ounce....Far side of the world's mirror...." (NL, pp. 209-17) The point of intersection is the text: Lee has been occluded from plot or continuity, from knowledge of ultimate context or identity, and confined to a specific set of fragmented textual circumstances which he, like the reader, looks in upon, can neither transcend nor identify with.

The occlusion episode, as of which "The heat was off me from here on out," (p. 217) ends the book proper, to which are added an "Atrophied Preface" and an "Appendix": the book begins with Lee on the run from a narcotics agent-- "I can feel the heat closing in"-- whom he eludes when someone holds a subway-train door for him, "A square wants to come on hip," rewarded by Lee with the illusion of camaraderie: "Thanks kid...I can see you're one of our own." His face lights up like a pinball machine with stupid, pink effect." Lee proceeds to lay down a shared-human-experience con, pointing out and explicating scenes in the subway and relating anecdotes until he leaves the square and continues his routine minus quotation marks. The square, that is, "Young, good looking, crew cut, Ivy League, advertizing exec type fruit.... A real asshole," (pp. 1-4) stands in for the reader, sympathetic, eager, unreachable-- so that the text is from the beginning a wry comment on itself, on the impossibility of communication, until it finally occludes both Lee and the reader: like Wittgenstein's propositions, it is a ladder which, once climbed, is thrown away. The Forms of Naked Lunch include those of film and of the vaudeville act: jokes and drawn out anecdotes for which even Lee must stand still. (p. 172) Talking on without possibility of communication, Lee

is throughout a wise guy, performing for and putting on an audience too stupid to see through the game of language, like that other wise guy and spy who has to restrain himself from methodically knocking people's hats off in the street: "Call me Ishmael. Some years ago-- never mind how long precisely-- having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world...."

The wise guy is a seasoned witness and examiner of his experience, from whom nothing empirically knowable is secret; typically, in Burroughs' writing, he is a voyeur. If Lee winds up on the opposite side of the world's mirror looking in, he begins by describing to the square a hot shot-- a syringe full of strichnine, which resembles heroin-- watched from a similar point of view: "We rigged his room with a one-way whorehouse mirror and charged a sawski to watch it....The look in his eyes when it hit-- Kid, it was tasty." (NL, p. 2) In the wise guy's survival-oriented world, details are rapidly computed, as Lee reads the personality of his latter-day Wedding Guest in the items of his appearances, (p. 2) state police lay down "practiced apologetic patter [while] electronic eyes weigh your car and luggage, clothes and face," (p. 11) and Fats's "blank, periscope eyes [sweep] the world's surface." (p. 206) A customs inspector freezes forever when he comes across "Medusa's head in a hatbox." (SM, p. 73) Burroughs' characters repeatedly watch "squirming at a keyhole," (NL, p. 143; SM, p. 137) peruse pornographic pictures, (SM, pp. 68-69) view "actual films" of war and torture, (SM, p. 83) and watch schoolboys with "eight-power field glasses....I project myself out through the glasses and across the street, a ghost torn with disembodied lust" (NL, p. 59): a fifteenth-century sorcerer, accused of conjuring a succubus who impregnates a young woman, is "indicted as an accomplice and rampant voyeur before during and after the fact" (NL, p. 112); the attendant at the Ever

Hard Baths spies in "the dormitory with infra red see in the dark field glasses" (NL, p. 216); "'Now I want you boys to wear shorts....Decent women with telescopes can see you'" (SM, p. 172); Billy Budd's hanging is an "'exhibit,'" for the delectation of all hands, and reveals Billy to have been a transvestite, so that the "'medical fact'" of her physical response is explained by a matron (SM, pp. 169-70); Colonel Bradley witnesses a murder and gets "'some good pictures from a closet where I had prudently taken refuge'" (WB, p. 143); in Exterminator! (1973) "The Telstar lingers lovingly on the ass of a young soldier," and "Audrey rapes a young soldier at gunpoint while Lee impassively films the action" (E, pp. 87-89); and in The Last Words of Dutch Schultz (1970), both the stenographer who takes down the last words and Schultz's wire-tapper are played by Burroughs.<sup>8</sup> "'There are,'" says the atomic professor in Nova Express, "'no secrets any more'" (NE, p. 76): but there is still shame-- a fact employed by Benway when he takes over Annexia, subjecting citizens to frequent inspection by "the Examiner" and forbidding the use of "shades, curtains, shutters or blinds"; police accompanied by a mentalist may burst into anyone's room in search of something unspecified and subject "the suspect to the most humiliating search of his naked person on which they make sneering and derogatory comments." (NL, pp. 21-23) In Free-land a young man is similarly harassed by Benway's Chillingworth-style "'cold interest '"-- "Eyes without a trace of warmth or hate or any emotion...at once cold and intense, predatory and impersonal"-- and becomes aware that there is "Something...watching his every thought and movement with cold, sneering hate" as he masturbates into a specimen jar. (NL, pp. 189-192)

In "Playback from Eden to Watergate" (1973), Burroughs theorizes that "the spoken word as we know it came after the written word"-- that is, the

recorded word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God-- and the word was flesh...human flesh....in the beginning of writing. Animals talk. They don't write." But the "written word is inferential in human speech." Citing Dr. Kurt Unruh von Steinplatz's theory that speech was made possible by a virus-induced mutation of the inner throat structure in certain primates (called Virus B-23-- hence the proliferation of that number throughout the post-Naked Lunch oeuvre), Burroughs suggests that "in the electronic revolution a virus is a very small unit of word and image," which units "can be biologically activated to act as communicable virus strains." For example, arbitrary "association lines" can be established by splicing together three taperecordings, one of the subject's speech, one of his sexual or defacatory activity, and one of "hateful, disapproving voices"; so that in terms of the edenic myth, taperecorders one, two and three are Adam, Eve and God, who plays back Adam's "disgraceful behavior" to him; for while there is nothing inherently shameful about defecation and intercourse, "Shame is playback: exposure to disapproval." Thus Martin Luther King's enemies bugged his "bedroom. Kiss kiss bang bang. A deadly assassination technique....So the real scandal of Watergate...is not that bedrooms were bugged and the offices of psychiatrists ransacked but the precise use that was made of this sexual material." But the game of manipulative voyeurism is monopolistic, depends on keeping taperecorder three on closed circuit, for "God must be the God"; so that "millions of people carrying out this operation could nullify the control system," each himself becoming God by taking over the splicing of tapes and/creation of associations. (J, pp. 11-20) This is precisely what is accomplished in the cutup method of writing which Burroughs derives from Gysin. Like Melville and Agee, Burroughs conceives of God as voyeur and

eavesdropper: "'never know who's listening in,'" says Benway (NL, p. 28); "'Who is the third that walks beside you?'" (TE, p. 163) The individual can co-opt that function by alerting his own attention to the programmed verbal habits which constitute self, and most readily by cutting up and scrambling a tape of his own voice: "'What used to be me is backward sound track.'" (SM, p. 64) In fact, Burroughs plays with the meaning of 'Ishmael' in his description of an eleventh-century Persian general's hunt (we find him "poring over his maps") for a Muslem leader who "had committed the terrible sin referred to in the Koran of aspiring to be God. The whole Ishmaelian sect was a perfect curse, hidden, lurking, ready to strike, defying all authority"; this very man works for the General, who "has stopped seeing him years ago," as a gardener, and "peers at this through the orange leaves with laughing blue eyes": he who watches and listens becomes God-- Ishmael, 'God who hears.' The General's unseeing madness as he is observed pacing, "Acting out a final confrontation with this Satan," (WB, pp. 169-70) is like that of William Seward in Naked Lunch, about to unlock his "word horde"-- those words which come out clawing for traction, for like Ahab he likes things that hold: he will, as "captain of this lushedup hash-head subway...quell the Lock Ness Monster with rotenone and cowboy the white whale. I will reduce Satan to Automatic Obedience...." (NL, pp. 230, 226)

This recurrent Ahab-Narcissus figure cannot bear to have his self-image threatened: Audrey in Exterminator! and the tourist in The Wild Boys make the identical comment, "'Other people are different from me and I don't like them.'" (E, p. 88; WB, p. 6) And he is, like Dr. John Lee who encounters "living organisms manifesting wills different from and in some cases flatly antagonistic to his own... 'the situation is little short of tolerable,'"



a humanist, "a humane man who did not like to harm anyone because it disturbed him to do so and he was a man who did not like to be disturbed": unlike Ishmael and the multi-faceted texts of Famous Men and Naked Lunch, the doctor is "not a man who argued with himself." (E, pp. 52-54) The mirror image is a virus, for in "all virus the past prerecords your 'future'.... the image past molds your future imposing repetition"; so that "The offer of another image identity is always on virus terms." (TE, pp. 188-89) To the narcissist, the mirror's surface constitutes a barrier between self and image, against the possibility of identity: "Far side of the mirror's surface moving into my past-- Wall of glass you know." (NE, p. 38) Again, the breaking of glass almost invariably accompanies moments of orgasm and death. (NL, pp. 98, 99, 101, 103, 148, 222; E, p. 117) But the voyeur sees only "someone vague faded in a mirror" (E., p. 168): "'Look in the mirror. You face dead soldier. The last human image.'" (TE, p. 188) And there is no meaningful eye contact in his 'relationships,' so that Fred Flash meets the Frisco Kid's "eyes...like I could see through them and out the back of his head." (WB, p. 94) Burroughs uses a passage from Castaneda to illustrate the fact that "no two people can really look at each other and live, and remain people. We can of course biologically defend ourselves against something which we cannot assimilate. But when they'd taken a drug, as in this case, there's no way in which they could defend themselves against the knowledge of what they were and what they represented: the can't look at each other and they can't look in a mirror."<sup>9</sup> In The Job (1969), he remarks, "As the Peeping Tom said, the most frightening thing is fear in your own face." (J, p. 183) Narcissism is the vain wish to stabilize identity, to render experience repetitive, symmetrical, controllable. But Burroughs regards even the intelligence as "a

useful instrument that will probably be laid aside eventually" (J, p. 97); Sinclair Beiles writes, "William Burroughs: No man is worth his salt who does not labour to make himself obsolete." (MG, p. 54) Narcissus' addiction to self-image, a horror of chance and the arbitrary, is parodied in The Wild Boys, which closes with two youths casting dice by a fountain: the loser, in sexual deference to the winner, "bends over looking at his reflection in the pool," and the scene is exploded by orgasm and by laughter which "shakes the sky." (WB, p. 184) Naked Lunch, then, is the record of its writer's struggle with the guilt involved in deviating from his pre-conceived self-image in order actually to look and describe:

The writer sees himself reading to the mirror as always...He must check now and again to reassure himself that The Crime of Separate Action has not, is not, cannot occur....

Anyone who has ever looked into a mirror knows what this crime is and what it means in terms of lost control when the reflection no longer obeys...Too late to dial P o l i c e.... (NL, p. 223)

Like Agee, who considers the text of Famous Men as a surrogate vision--

Edgar, weeping for pity, to the shelf of that sick bluff,  
Bring your blind father, and describe a little;  
Behold him, part wakened... (LUNPFM, p. 5)

--Burroughs treats the printed word "as extension of our senses to witness and experience through the writer's eyes," and supplies a list, comparable to Agee's collection of anglosaxon monosyllables, of "non-pictorial" words and bureaucratic phrases without referents, which confute understanding and render any text "blind prose. It sees nothing and neither does the reader. Not an image in a cement-mixer of this word-paste." (J, p. 103-04) Like Ishmael, Burroughs guides us through the junky's world: "want to take a look around with Honest Bill?" (NL, p. xiv) His text is a paratactic assembly of discrete

phrases, clauses and sentences, sometimes mutually elaborative, but in idiosyncratic rather than necessary relation, solipsistic to the point of autism, and thus parodied in the figure of the cocaine-sniffing policeman who hallucinates being pursued by the "Federal's" and sticks his head in a garbage can: "Get away or I shoot you. I got myself hid good." (NL, p. 19) No overall shape informs its arrangement: "There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing....I am a recording instrument....I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity' ....In sofaras I succeed in Direct recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function....I am not an entertainer." (NL, p. 221)

In 1969, Burroughs commented on this passage, "One tries not to impose story, plot or continuity artificially, but you do have to compose the materials.... So I will retract what I said then. It's simply not really true."<sup>10</sup> But he continues to point out that the imposed control of verbal pattern is at odds with the ability to see, as in "Seeing Red," in which an erotic picture of a red-haired boy "looking at somebody standing in front of the picture," incapacitates the verbal apparatus of customs agents, city police, Texas Rangers and Royal Mounted, all of whom stare with "dumb stricken faces swollen with blood. None of them can articulate a word." (E, p. 141)

The reader of Naked Lunch has everything in common with the audience of the pornographic film-fantasies described in the text: "The guests shush each other, nudge and giggle." (NL, p. 76) The Great Slashtubitch, "impressive of blue movies" in that book (p. 88) handles an actors' strike against undignified working conditions in The Wild Boys by introducing "story, character development and background in which sex scenes are incidental," so that sex will not occur as "a mutilated fragment" (WB, p. 62); but the text of

The Wild Boys is punctuated by recurrent erotic presentations in "The Penny Arcade Peep Show" on four screens surrounding the solipsistic viewer, in discontinuous fragments, or, as one of The Soft Machine's narrator's puts it, "long process in different forms." (SM, pp. 177, 182) Since Burroughs directly records psychic process, the text of Naked Lunch is his thinking, and the reader quite literally looks into his thoughts, shares, or as Burroughs says, 'intersects' the same verbal space, as the ghost of Agee's father looks in on his dream, as Carl's thoughts are watched, and as The Sailor trades heroin for a young junky's "time": "You have something I want ...five minutes here...an hour somewhere else." (NL, p. 204) To be addicted to image sequence is to be addicted to time. Like Agee, Burroughs is pre-occupied with the onlooking crowd-- the children who "stand watching with bestial curiosity" as an idiot is burned to death, (NL, p. 25) jurors who "fall to the floor writhing in orgasms of prurience" at a D.A.'s graphic harangue, (NL, p. 105) diseased citizens who "watch the passerby with evil, knowing eyes" (NL, p. 108) and, in Sidetripping (1975), the photograph of an audience watching a girl masturbate: "Substitute a car wreck, an epileptic convulsion, a lynching and the expressions would be equally appropriate."<sup>11</sup> As for the indiscriminate clubbing by police of "Yippies newsmen and bystanders" in Chicago 1968, "After all there are no innocent bystanders. What are they doing here in the first place? The worst sin of man is to be born." (E, p. 94) Sex, Joe Bunridge learns, is "perhaps the heaviest anchor holding one in present time," (SM, p. 86) and Burroughs cites accounts of recent experiments indicating that "any dream in the male is accompanied by erection" (J, p. 102): the narrator of "The Wild Boys" notes that "The erect phallus ...means...in Egyptian to stand before or in the presence of, to confront

to regard attentively." (WB, p. 151)

That which is voyeuristic, as in Melville and Agee, is the problematically undefinable attention which cannot be identified with the body: "What would believe it?" (J, p. 95) Such identification is regarded as addiction; "In fact all longevity agents have proved addicting in exact ratio to their effectiveness in prolonging life." (NL, p. 54) Reference is made in Nova Express to experiments in sense withdrawal, wherein "the subject floats in water at blood temperature sound and light withdrawn-- loss of body outline, awareness and location of limbs occurs quickly, giving rise to panic in many American subjects" (NE, p. 135); thus the metabolism-regulating function of apomorphine is illustrated by Lee's leaving his body upon ingestion. (NE, p. 86) Burroughs frequently plays with metempsychotic notions; Joe Brundige hires a Mexican doctor to perform an operation, accomplished through photography and orgasm, whereby "'I' was to be moved into the body of this young Mayan": "I came back in other flesh the lookout different, thoughts and memories of the young Mayan drifting through my brain," (SM, pp. 88, 90) the obvious question being "Who lookout different?" (p. 50) A ghost is a watcher, the Vigilante in search of a body. (NL, p. 8) "The Dead Child" is the story of "broken fragments" of consciousness: "What is it that makes a man a man and a cat a cat? It was broken there," "there" indicating both a place described and a point in the text. The narrator is caught with fellow workers in the "magic net" of a Mayan control calendar, and, having "watched and waited" for his chance to escape, (WB, p. 110-11) dies in the forest, leaves his body-- "I could see and hear but I couldn't talk without a throat without a tongue"-- and remains in the treetops for an unknowable duration, descending to watch Indian campers make love (p. 117)

and the son of a tourist family masturbate, entering the latter at the moment of orgasm, "seeing...through his eyes," (WB, p. 119) and from that viewpoint intersecting an earlier point in the text as a different person: "I see myself standing on a street...." (pp. 102-03) Similarly, at the end of Naked Lunch, Burroughs lists his cast of characters, remarking that "Sooner or later they are subject to say the same thing in the same words, to occupy, at that intersection point, the same position in space-time. Using a common vocal apparatus complete with all metabolic appliances that is to be the same person-- a most inaccurate way of expressing Recognition." (NL, pp. 222-23) Like the text or personality called Ishmael, Naked Lunch encodes the movement of more than one attention; there are numerous examples in Burroughs' work of multiple personalities encoded on the same text, larynx or strip of film-- B.J., whose associate's "voice has been spliced in 24 times per second with the sound of my breathing and the beating of my heart," (TE, pp. 2-3) the astronaut Lykin through whom "thousands of voices muttered and pulsed...pulling and teasing" (TE, pp. 87-88)-- programmed by verbal grammar and yielding, when exposed to the deconditioning of the Wild Boys, to a Pip-like reflection on 'person': "I have a thousand faces and a thousand names. I am nobody I am everybody. I am me I am you, I am here there forward back in out...." (WB, p. 140) The exercise is always to render propositions meaningless, to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle, to release the unspeakable witness, the voyeur "at the window that never was mine" (NE, p. 75) from identification with spoken formulation. The recurrent narrative comment, "But then who am I to be critical?" (NE, p. 21; TE, p. 2) indicates precisely that indefinability of critical attention which is emphasized by Wittgenstein.

The unimaginable "content" of verbal "form," of which Wittgenstein speaks in the Tractatus, is both the metaphysical subject, the content of "sense" or understanding, and the "colourless" world of objects; Naked Lunch incorporates Ishmael's formulation of substance as the "colorless all-color" into the recurrent "colorless no-smell of death," (NL, pp. 8, 221; also NE, p. 149) associated with the world through which the Vigilante's ghost moves and indicating the limit of thought, defining substance by negation; so that the Vigilante "winds up in a Federal Nut House specially designed for the containment of ghosts: precise, prosaic impact of objects...washstand...door...toilet...bars...there they are...this is it...all lines cut...nothing beyond...Dead End." (NL, p. 8) The narrator of "My Face," awakening in a strange apartment, likewise suggests that understanding does not transcend the arrangement of objects and sensations: "You understand his room chair by the bed three cigarettes in a shirt pocket garden outside in the afternoon light." (E, p. 31) As in "The Tartarus of Maids," the narrator of Nova Express is shown colorless sheets which "are empty" and which "are what flesh is made from-- Becomes flesh when it has color and writing-- That is Word and Image write the message that is you on colorless sheets." (NE, pp. 25, 30)

With no attempt to reconcile the two views, however, Burroughs also goes beyond the realistic notion of a "substance" which confirms or denies propositions-- that "solipsism" which, in the Tractatus, "coincides with pure realism" (TLP 5.64)-- to Wittgenstein's later position that 'true' and 'false' are merely the components of a particular language game. In his otherwise useful article, "A Picture Is a Fact: Wittgenstein and The Naked Lunch," R. G. Peterson insists that Burroughs' quotation of "Heiderberg," whom Peterson assumes is a combination of Heidegger and Heisenberg, profferers,

he says, of "Ways Out," is a "slighting reference," whereas Wittgenstein is quoted "with appropriate fanfare."<sup>12</sup> Heisenberg, however, reiterates a solipsistic formulation similar to those of Wittgenstein and Burroughs, that scientific investigation is always self-interrogative, that "man...confronts himself alone"<sup>13</sup>; Heisenberg offers no such Way Out, and is accordingly echoed in Naked Lunch: "Defense is meaningless in the present state of our knowledge, said the Defense looking up from an electron microscope." (NL, p. 223) Burroughs insists that "the Aristotelian 'either-or'...does not even correspond to what we now know about the physical universe," (ER, p. 86) and explains his frequent reference to Hassan i Sabbah's dictum, "Nothing Is True-- Everything Is Permitted," as a critique of realism: "if we realize that everything is illusion, then any illusion is permitted. As soon as we say that something is true, real, then immediately things are not permitted." (J, p. 97) Like Wittgenstein, Burroughs holds that memory reaction cannot be abstracted from its verbal formulation, and suggests that splicing unrelated events into a film of someone's actions changes that person's memory, creates a "hole in reality" (ER, p. 79); hence his characters are not always sure of their memories: "I don't know-- Perhaps the boy never existed-- All thought and word from the past" (NE, p. 88); "I don't remember. Maybe it didn't happen like that." (WB, p. 107) A Nova Police agent goes so far as to suggest that by the disintegration of "verbal units" an atomic explosion might be retroactively prevented, "could not take place in effect would never have existed" (NE, p. 41); the voyeuristic ghost of the Dead Child exhibits a Berkeleyan dissociation of sight and touch, registering people as "pictures...that leave footprints" (WB, p. 118); and Burroughs himself opposes notions of levitation founded on a naive realism, regards it as



"a fundamental confusion to think of mental force as exerting any influence or pressure on matter. If I saw this cup in front of me as no more real than what goes on in my mind, then I could move it, or at least I could move the image of it, but I would not be moving the matter of it. That's the contradiction. Science is always being hampered by idealized concepts like this." (P, p. 122) Just as Wittgenstein defines pain as a linguistically derived concept, (PI, 384) Burroughs defines it as "damage to the image-- junk is concentrated image and this accounts for its pain killing action-- Nor could there be pain if there was no image." (NE, p. 49) Visual images are verbally controlled and prerecorded: "Color is trapped in word-- Image is trapped in word-- Do you need words?" (TE, p. 45) Control systems make use of the fact that "Word evokes image," (S) that "What you see is determined largely by what you hear" (ER, p. 41): the human body, for example, "is an image on the screen talking." (TE, p. 178) Subjectivity is verbally determined, caught in a syntactic prison, "a sentence words together in and out...trapped in the sentence with full stop" (TE, p. 12): the verbal habit is a terminal addiction, and "Junk is colorless no-smell of death as punctuation." (TE, p. 176)

Since reality cannot be projected beyond verbal arrangement, "There is no true or real 'reality'-- 'Reality' is simply a more or less constant scanning pattern-- The scanning pattern we accept as 'reality' has been imposed by the controlling power of this planet." (NE, pp. 51-52) The "reality con," or "reality film," is the "instrument and weapon of monopoly": "there is no real thing-- Maya-- Maya-- It's all show business." (TE, pp. 151, 77) Like other viruses-- and Burroughs insists that "this is not an allegorical comparison" (J, p. 201)-- the verbal virus is a code message, "a very

small particle...precisely associated in molecular chains," (NE, p. 40) unscrambled by the body or nervous system, parasitizing the host and reproducing and passing itself on to another host: "Sub-vocal speech is the word organism" (TE, p. 160) which controls the thoughts of the human host; "'Compulsive verbal patterns are actually word viruses that maintain themselves in the central nervous system by manipulation of the speech centers, throat muscles and vocal cords'" (J, p. 228); "Word begets image and image is virus." (NE, p. 48) The verbal virus establishes its image in the human larynx through "simple binary coding systems," (NE, p. 48) language being a scanning pattern or "unscrambling device, western languages tending to unscramble in either-or conflict terms" (J, pp. 181, 184-88); that is, Burroughs extends von Steinplatz' theory that Virus B-23 accidentally made speech possible by postulating a "white word virus," the digital language of western culture (J, pp. 13-14) which has become particularly malignant in the electronic age of mass exposure. Beginning in Naked Lunch, Burroughs exhibits an interest in the "Mayan Codices," (NL, p. 233) which "contain symbols representing all states of thought and feeling possible to human animals living under such limited circumstances," (SM, p. 95) and which constitute the preplanned liturgical cycle or "control racket" whereby the priest caste completely regulated the other ninety-eight per cent of the population: "'they know what everybody will see and hear and smell and taste and that's what thought is and these thought units are represented by symbols in their books and they rotate the symbols around and around on the calendar.'" (SM, p. 23) Using L. Ron Hubbard's notion of the Reactive Mind, an unconscious repository of "propositions that have command value on the automatic level of behavior," Burroughs suggests how the Mayan priests were able to precisely control "what the populace did, thought, and felt on any given day," and thus "to predict the future or reconstruct the

past with considerable accuracy since they could determine what conditioning would be or had been applied on any given date": just as Melville's Confidence Man solicits a due faith in what is above, "All control systems claim to reflect the immutable laws of the universe." Moreover, "the modern ceremonial calendar" constituted by the mass media "is almost as predictable," (ER, pp. 80, 82) so that people like the mathematician Dunne dream about future incidents and read about them the next day: "Point is he discovered that his dream referred not to the event itself but to the account and photos in newspaper." (S)

Just as Wittgenstein asserts that "spatial arrangement" can express the sense of a proposition, (TLP 3.1431) Burroughs suggests that, through layout, emphasis, selection and advertisement (which is "the precise manipulation of word and image"), the mass media establish "lines of association" which, since "all association tracks are obsessional," condition patterns of thought (WW, p. 167; J, pp. 176, 166; ER, p. 82): "A functioning police state," for example, "needs no police. Homosexuality does not occur to anyone as conceivable behaviour." (NL, p. 36) Thus the Time-Life-Fortune complex, "one of the greatest word-and-image banks in the world," is a form of "police organization," (WW, p. 163) programming those thoughts from which the subject cannot be abstracted: "An unreal paper world yet completely real because it is actually happening." (J, p. 176) In Naked Lunch, a pusher makes contact by strolling, around humming a tune which is picked up by those concerned as if "it is their own mind humming the tune," (NL, p. 6) much as "The Whisperer" in Dutch Schultz disseminates opinions by speaking barely audibly, sometimes saying his messages backward or otherwise scrambling them, so that the townspeople assume them to be their own thoughts. (LWDS, pp. 80-85) The reader of a newspaper likewise receives a "scrambled message uncritically and assumes that it reflects his

own opinions independently arrived at" (J, p. 179): daily newspapers are  
 "'largely responsible for the dreary events they describe,'" (J, p. 221)  
 issuing contradictory "reactive" commands "implicit in the layout and juxtaposition of items":

Stop. Go. Wait here. Go there. Come in. Stay out.  
 Be a man. Be a woman. Be white. Be black. Live. Die.  
 Be your real self. Be somebody else. Be a human animal.  
 Be a superman. Yes. No. Rebel. Submit. RIGHT. WRONG.  
 Make a splendid impression. Make an awful impression. Sit  
 down. Stand up. Take your hat off. Put your hat on. Create.  
 Destroy. Live now. Live in the future. Live in the past.  
 Obey the law. Break the law. Be ambitious. Be modest.  
 Accept. Reject. Plan ahead. Be spontaneous. Decide for  
 yourself. Listen to others. TALK. SILENCE. Save money.  
 Spend money. Speed up. Slow down. This way. That way.  
 Right. Left. Present. Absent. Open. Closed. Entrance.  
 Exit. IN. OUT. Etc., round the clock.

This creates a vast pool of statistical newsmakers. It  
 is precisely uncontrollable, automatic reactions that make  
 news. (ER, pp. 82-83)

Understanding is habitual, need not be conscious; but scrambled media messages  
 work on the level of waking suggestion which, while it directly addresses the  
 "unconscious or reactive mind," is "not to be confused with subliminal sugges-  
 tion...below the level of conscious awareness," for it "consists of sounds and  
 images that are not consciously registered since the subject's attention is  
elsewhere. If his attention were directed toward the source he would be able  
 to see or hear it immediately." (ER, p. 80; J, p. 171)

The salutary project which Burroughs shares with Wittgenstein involves  
 the deployment of attention, activation of the agent who analyses the semantic  
 environment: "So I am a Public Agent and don't know who I work for, get my  
 instructions from street signs, newspapers and pieces of conversation I snap  
 out of the air." (SM, p. 31) Agent K9 of the Biologic Police calls in the  
 Technicians because

( )

A Technician learns to think and write in association blocks which can then be manipulated according to the laws of association and juxtaposition. The basic law of association and conditioning is known to college students even in America: Any object, feeling, odor, word, image in juxtaposition with any other object, feeling, odor, word or image will be associated with it-- Our technicians learn to read newspapers and magazines for juxtaposition statements rather than alleged content-- We express these statements in Juxtaposition Formulae-- The Formulae of course control populations of the world-- Yes it is fairly easy to predict what people will think see feel and hear a thousand years from now if you write the Juxtaposition Formulae to be used in that period. (NE, p. 78)

In Naked Lunch, Lee is an agent for the "Factualist" group, which is opposed to attempts to "control, coerce, debase, exploit or annihilate the individuality of another living creature" (NL, pp. 146, 167): control is an addiction, and "can never be a means to any practical end....It can never be a means to anything but more control....Like junk." (p. 164) Naked Lunch, like Famous Men, is about being awake, and begins, "I awoke from the sickness at age forty-five..." (p. v); in that and subsequent books, Burroughs addresses the problem of being "there," in present time, attending to what can be noticed (J, p. 208; E, p. 165, ER, p. 84): as in The Soft Machine, "Total alertness is your card." (SM, p. 40) Since the control machine acts to keep "word and referent as far separated as possible," (J, p. 206) the lunch is naked when the reader can "see what is on the end of that long newspaper spoon." (NL, p. xii)

Peterson's reading of the quotation of Heiderberg in Naked Lunch misleads because it ignores the importance that Burroughs gives to seeing: "In the words of Heiderberg: 'This may not be the best of all possible universes but it may well prove to be one of the simplest.' If man can see." (NL, pp. xii-xiii) Seeing is neither "mystical identification," nor even "familiarity," but a counteraction of the bombardment of "images from passing trucks and

cars and televisions and newspapers" which "makes a permanent haze in front of your eyes" (ER, p. 78); this "grey veil" is finally verbal, "the pre-recorded words of a control machine," (TE, p. 209) and seeing is "decontrol of opinion...being conditioned to look at the facts before formulating any verbal patterns." (J, p. 138) Verbalization is compulsive, silence unattainable: "Try halting your sub-vocal speech....You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk." (TE, p. 149) Of the imagined cures for the verbal virus, including a "powerful variation" of apomorphine (NE, p. 40) and a deconditioning program which, like the control systems, works by "punishment and reward," (ER, p. 83) the most practical is Gysin's cutup method, whereby the individual records, splices, plays back and thus co-opts the function of programming the environment, for "recording devices fix the nature of absolute associations." (TE, p. 170) Burroughs deals extensively with the taperecorder's potential for manipulating a public scene, particularly for programming riots, and Ginsberg reports his creating an uproar in the Convention Hall at Chicago, 1968, with a tape of riot sounds from Tangiers.<sup>14</sup> Burroughs repeatedly quotes Wittgenstein on how this works: "any number can play Wittgenstein said no proposition can contain itself as an argument the only thing not prerecorded on a prerecorded set is the prerecording itself." (TE, pp. 166, 215; J, p. 168) The death con is the splicing together of sub-vocal speech with body sounds, so that "You are convinced by association that your body sounds will stop if sub-vocal speech stops and so it happens" (TE, p. 160); the agent splices his body sounds in with other arbitrary sounds, and with those of other bodies, thereby promoting an unprecedented sense of intimacy: "Communication must become total and conscious before we can stop it." (TE, pp. 50-51) But cutup is chiefly a textual device, the cutting a page of text into pieces which are

rearranged and read as such, which emphasizes the word's status as thing, unidentifiable with sense, just as Academy 23 teaches its students "to stop words to see and touch words to move and use words as objects." (J, p. 91)

Burroughs' extensive use of cutup begins only with Nova Express, which cuts in Joyce, Shakespeare, Rimbaud and Conrad; and such later stories as "The Frisco Kid" (WB) incorporate cut-ups of their own texts. But the idea is formulated in Naked Lunch: "The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an inaresting sex arrangement. This book spill off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes...." (NL, p. 229) This suggests the method of Famous Men, and its treatment of a sheet of newsprint. Since cutup counteracts conventional association patterns, apomorphine is a form of cutup, for it "cuts drug lines from the brain." (NE, p. 50) Showing the fly the way out of the fly-bottle involves the inducement of silence, extending "levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall....Doors that open in Silenece ....Naked Lunch demands Silence from The Reader. Otherwise he is taking his own pulse." (NL, p. 224) Among the possible methods of achieving vocally silent communication-- such as "a Morse code of color flashes-- or odors or music or tactile sensations" (S)-- is the use of heiroglyphic and ideographic script rather than Western syllabic language, which separates words "from objects or observable processes": whereas seeing a picture of a rose allows the subject to "register the image in silence," to see the written word 'ROSE' is to be forced "to repeat the word 'ROSE' to yourself." (J, pp. 103, 59) Syllabic writing also imposes a left-to-right reading pattern, for its meaning depends on word order (J, pp. 205, 207): the Chinese ideograph, which

can be read in many possible ways, is "a script derived from hieroglyphs," (J, p. 199) and thus "is already cut up." (WW, p. 157) The recognition of word as image implicit in cutup counteracts those "follow-falsifications" of syllabic language which Academy 23 proposes to reform:

The IS of Identity: You are an animal. You are a body. Now whatever you may be you are not an "animal," you are not a "body," because these are verbal labels. The IS of identity always carries the implication of that and nothing else, and it also carries the assignment of permanent condition. To stay that way. All naming calling presupposes the IS of identity. This concept is unnecessary in a hieroglyphic language like ancient Egyptian and in fact frequently omitted....

The definite article THE. THE contains the implication of "one and only: THE God, THE universe, THE way, THE right, THE wrong. If there is another, then THAT universe, THAT way is no longer THE universe, THE way. The definite article THE will be deleted and the indefinite article A will take its place.

The whole concept of EITHER/OR. Right or wrong, physical or mental, true or false, the whole concept of OR will be deleted from the language and replaced by juxtaposition, by and. This is done to some extent in any pictorial language where the two concepts stand literally side by side. (J, p. 200)

Watch your language.

The insistence, as in Hobbes and Locke, that "The verb to be can easily be omitted from any language," and the related critique of "the whole concept of a dualistic universe," (J, pp. 200, 96) are aspects of a consistent empiricism: institutional prose places its "thesis beyond the realm of fact since the words used refer to nothing that can be tested...have no referent." (J, p. 107) Burroughs promotes the "scientific investigation" of sex and language, (S; J, pp. 59, 111, 116, 119) experimental attempts to "map" the brain and the orgasm (P, pp. 52, 122); Agent K9 constructs "a physics of the human nervous system or more accurately the human nervous



system defines the physics I have constructed." (NE, p. 79) Like Richards, Burroughs recognizes no 'disease' beyond symptoms: "Eliminate the metabolic symptoms of anxiety and you eliminate anxiety." (ER, p. 83; P, p. 46) His model of memory and conditioning is "compliments of Pavlov": the "human body," he says, "is transient hotel memory pictures" (TE, pp. 179, 181); for him, as for Locke, (Essay II, i, 15) "Memory is not a matter of effort" (J, p. 208); he locates "what we call the ego, the I, or the You...somewhere in the mid-brain," (J, p. 113) and employs the mechanistic language of the empiricists, describing the human body, which is memory, the susceptibility to habit, as the soft machine, "the soft typewriter" on which the message of personal identity is written, (TE, pp. 160-61) and playback or conscious memory as the "Cerebral phonograph." (TE, p. 146) Benway points out that "'The study of thinking machines teaches us more about the brain than we can learn by introspective methods'" (NL, p. 24); and Burroughs advocates the therapeutic use of the machine in order to become aware of one's own association patterns: "You can find out more about your nervous system and gain more control over your reactions by using a tape recorder than you could find out sitting twenty years in the lotus posture." (TE, p. 163) In Naked Lunch Lee compares the mind to "thinking machines," and describes thinking as a "sorting" process; and the Professor's plan to "disconnect" his queen "synapse by synapse" (NL, pp. 215, 84) anticipates the undoing of Hal in 2001.

The word is defined as "an array of calculating machines" (TE, p. 146) with the force of logical tautology, like the Burroughs Adding Machine: "no matter how you jerk the handle result is always the same for given co-ordinates." (NL, p. xvi) Heroin use eventually results in "backbrain depression and a state much like terminal schizophrenia: complete lack of affect, autism,

virtual absence of cerebral event," (NL, p. 34) since the front brain "acts only at second hand with back-brain stimulation, being a vicarious-type citizen"; so that just before taking a shot, having momentarily awakened without connecting with the "hypothalamus, seat of libido and emotion," (NL, pp. 230-31) the junky issues "some flat, factual statement" (p. 120) without affective connotation, is in a space between, a state resembling that of the deconditioned mind, which moves in a "series of blank factual stops." (J, p. 191; WB, p. 102) This suggests an analysis of the emotive and descriptive aspects of language similar to that of Berkeley and Richards: cutting up a tape recording or a text, for example, alters sense but leaves voice tone unchanged and salient (J, p. 178); telepathic communication, "simply a matter of giving your full attention" to non-verbal signs, (P, p. 46) is the mode of interview practiced by a psychoanalyst who has come to realize that "nothing can ever be accomplished on the verbal level." (NL, p. 88) Emotions are "soft spots in the host" whereby the word virus invades and manipulates, so that the Lemur People, who are "All affect...that is blending of beauty and flesh," live and die "in captivity." (NE, pp. 100-01, 118) A black militant who can respond without violent emotion to the image of a Southern sheriff is "infinitely better equipped to deal with" the situation. (ER, p. 84) Factual, descriptive statements are encoded upon, but not to be identified with, configurations of emotion and feeling: "It is a feeling," says the deconditioned ghost of the Dead Child, "by which I am here at all." (WB, p. 106) Deconditioning issues, not in emotionlessness, but in the ability "to identify and control the sources of one's emotions" (P, p. 122); Burroughs expects cutup to lead to "a precise science of words and show how certain word-combinations produce certain effects in the human nervous system" (ER, p. 59): like Agee, he looks forward

to a "merging of art and science." (WW, p. 158)

Burroughs shares a great deal with Melville and Agee: he regards tribal and national units as outgrowths of the family, and rejects their validity as modes of identity, (J, pp. 72, 83, 126) insists that "The apparency of authority is authority," (J, p. 99) denies that good and evil exist in any "absolute sense," (J, p. 75) derives all knowledge from experience-- "'You see I know Mrs. Murphy...experienced along these lines'" (E, p. 5)-- and repeatedly makes the point that "'Frankly we don't pretend to understand-- at least not completely'; 'Our knowledge...incomplete, of course.'" (NL, pp. 187-88) Like Melville, he rejects the "unwholesome states of love and oneness with the all" made available by LSD. (J, p. 134) Like Agee, (CSP, p. 162) he is interested in photographic cutups of the human face, (J, p. 114) and in semiologically "mapping a photo," (NE, p. 33) attacks "'the provincial egotism of earth peoples,'" (E, p. 166) regards symmetry, which is linguistic, as disease, is careful to separate metaphor from fact-- "(Note: this is not a figure...)" (NL, p. 46)-- and rejects the Zola-inspired codes of naturalism of the "social consciousness novels of the 1930's," the "idea that the more brutality, the more poverty, the more real it becomes, which I don't think is necessarily true" (ER, p. 87): In Naked Lunch he ridicules the notion of exact realism in the figure of the "intellectual avant-gardist-- 'Of course the only writing worth considering now is to be found in scientific reports and periodicals.'" (NL, p. 38) Like Agee, he frequently compares subjectivity and the narrative point of view to a camera-- a self-reflexive camera in "Tio Mate smiles" (WB): The Last Words of Dutch Schultz is A Fiction in the Form of a Film Script. One of Agee's most consistent themes is that of waiting: the "dead time between" which is the setting of The Morning Watch, (p. 116); the "'waiting in the

dark," which is the central event in A Death in the Family (p. 121) and parallels the unresolved cognitive tensions of all the characters involved; in Famous Men, he suggests that the trapped subjective condition is one of "prisoners...constantly waiting," (p. 392) and sets up a series of such situations as the "terror and patience of waiting" in the storm, (p. 399) Gudger's saving rhythm against "the fear of waiting," (p. 398) Agee's waiting before the darkened Gudger house, men waiting to begin work, (p. 431) the intense mutual waiting of the animal callers and their listeners, and the long description of the pre-dawn landscape as it awaits the crescendo of rooster crow, "is stretched: stretched: stretched: and waits....: waits." (p. 85) To wait is to submit to the tension of the unresolved, to endure an unpredictable, unstable experience-- in Burroughs' terms, to be "there." Naked Lunch is also about waiting, the Kafka-esque weeks of "waiting around" in the office of the Assistant Arbiter of Explanations, (p. 22) the junky waiting to make a connection, (pp. 55, 56) or for his body to indicate a usable vein, (p. 65) the wise guy deceiving a friend-- "'No matter how long, Rube, wait for me right on that 'corner.' Good-bye, Rube..." (p. 11)-- and the rule of "Delay" in the heroin business (p. ix): "A junky...runs on junk Time and when he makes his importunate irruption into the Time of others, like all petitioners, he must wait." (p. 200) Waiting is experience of one of those spaces between which concern Burroughs as well as Melville and Agee, such as the "languid grey area of hiatus" at the frontier of Freeland, (p. 68) "Interzone," (p. 84) the "cold interstellar space" into which con men explode (p. 10) and "the sex that passes the censor, squeezes through between bureaus, because there's always a space between, in popular songs and Grade B movies..." (p. 133); the point of stepping away from the heroin habit is "a nightmare interlude of cellular panic, life suspended between two ways of being," (p. 57) experience without controlling context or myth: "Cure is always: Let go! Jump!" (p. 222)

Burroughs is constantly attacking myths of love, (TE, pp. 43-49) of nirvana, of death, of the "'wise saviour,'" (P, p. 52) of the Royal Family and the Pope, who "keep the marks paralyzed with grovel rays," (E, pp. 110-11) of Darwinian mutation over long periods of time, (P, p. 122) of an unchangeable past, (ER, p. 78) of a Marxist, technological or science-fiction future, (J, pp. 67-68, 72, 79) of "salvation" and "final resolution" (ER, p. 79) and of history, for "history is fiction." (NE, p. 13) The availability of "attention" depends upon a subject's ability "to move out of his own frame of reference," to put aside "compulsive preoccupations," (ER, p. 79) to reject all certainty which isn't logical-- that is, tautological: "'Pry yourself loose and listen.'" (NE, p. 19) Belief has no necessary relation to "facts," (NL, p. 250) but "once a formula on this planet gets started, gets firmly established, it's very hard to change or replace it" (P, p. 122); like Melville and Agee, Burroughs suggests that "It is probably necessary to resort to physical violence" to destroy unchangeable verbal "premises" (ER, p. 86)-- hence the importance of the explosion, and the sense of the title, Minutes to Go. The Ticket that Exploded is the human body, colourless sheets carrying a coded message of conditioning; more particularly, it is the larynx, "laughing sex words from throat gristle in bloody crystal blobs" (TE, p. 43): "Last man with such explosion of the throat crawling inexorably from something he carried in his flesh." (SM, p. 40) Explosions proliferate throughout the work, (NL, pp. 49, 100, 115, 197; SM, p. 71; NE, pp. 16, 52; J, pp. 86, 87, 88) frequently ending stories and episodes. (SM, p. 97; NE, p. 25; WB, p. 37) Explosion is cutup: when everything "goes up in chunks," identity is disintegrated, the tape fragmented and "word dust" falls from "demagnetized patterns" (NE, pp. 17, 24-25)-- thus, throughout The Soft Machine, Nova Express, and The Ticket that Exploded, the

repeated refrain, "Word falling--photo falling-- time falling," (TE, p. 104) for these are the elements of the "whole structure of reality" going "up in silent explosions." (SM, p. 164) The physiological explosion referred to in Naked Lunch as "the flash bulb of orgasm" (p. 229) likewise detonates context and liberates attention, so that characters are often able to see things at the instant of orgasm which had not previously been visible. (SM, p. 81; TE, p. 77; WB, pp. 91, 107)

Like Melville and Agee, Burroughs addresses the problem of motive and intention. Naked Lunch begins with the heat closing in and ends when the heat is off, a colloquialism which yields a pun in Nova Express: the Crab Nebula observed in 1054 is the result of a nova or exploding star, which Burroughs portrays as the result of Nova criminals sucking "all the charge and air and color" out of a location and then moving across "the wounded galaxies always a few light years ahead of the Nova Heat." (NE, pp. 69-70) When the heat closes in, one moves: motive cannot be abstracted from circumstance, which involves one's own agency. And just as the cops-and-fugitives game proceeds according to rules-- "I can hear the way he would say it holding my outfit in his left hand, right hand on his piece..." (NL, p. 1)-- there is no explaining the motive to opium addiction, an "illness of exposure," (J, pp. 144-45) for there is no "pre-addict personality"; in fact, junk itself "is a personality": "The question, 'Why did you start using narcotics in the first place?' should never be asked. It is quite as irrelevant to treatment as it would be to ask a malarial patient why he went to a malarial area." (J, pp. 149-50, 153-54) Intention, or will power, is as irrelevant to the opium addiction of several million Persians (NL, p. 259) as to Western emotional conditioning. (ER, p. 84) Addicts "do not 'want' to be cured, since it is precisely the centers of

'wanting' that have been taken over by the drug"; nor do they kick out of "will power, whatever that is," (J, pp. 148, 152) but as a result of a "cellular decision,"<sup>15</sup> a rejection on "a deep biological level." (J, pp. 150-51) Do such control agencies as the American Narcotics Department intentionally aggravate the drug problem? "Whether an agent acts deliberately or not is about as interesting as how many angels can dance on the point of a pin." (J, p. 146)

Motive and intention are myths manipulated by control agencies, as the American tourist is conned into a confident appraisal of his motives in "Tío Mate Smiles," (WB, p. 8) and young Dutch Schultz is convicted of "'loitering with intent.'" (LWDS, p. 14) Cutup removes motive and intention-- story and author-- from a text: asked how he created the characters in Naked Lunch, Burroughs responded, "Excuse me, there is no accurate description of the creation of a book, or an event." (WW, p. 160) Like the Ancient Mariner, Naked Lunch is attended to by "those who cannot choose but hear," (p. 87) and notions of authorial intention are treated satirically: "Gentle reader, I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will...." (p. 40) Intention is encoded upon the text as it is upon the writer's other gestures: "I am never here....Never that is fully in possession, but somehow in a position to forestall ill-advised moves....Patrolling is, in fact, my principle [sic] occupation." (p. 221) Like Famous Men, Naked Lunch is a conceptual map of intention, "a blueprint, a How-To-Book...Abstract concepts, bare, as algebra, narrow down to a black turd or a pair of aging cajones." (p. 224) That intention does not necessarily lead anywhere is suggested by the final statement of the narrative section: "'Your plan was unworkable then and useless now....Like DaVinci's flying machine plans." (p. 217) Naked Lunch consists of "many

prefaces" which are unrelated to what follows, "atrophy and amputate spontaneous," (p. 224) and ends, like Famous Men, with a statement of intention in the form of an "Atrophied Preface." (p. 218) While Burroughs employs the language of causality-- unconsciously understood speech, for example, can "cause an effect" (J, p. 181)-- and approves Hubbard's definition of communication as "cause, distance, effect, with intention, attention and duplication," (J, p. 206) he is pointedly tentative with it, speaks of concrete floors as "a usual corollary of abrupt withdrawal," (NL, p. 251) of alpha brain waves as "correlated with a relaxed state" (ER, p. 83): "If we can infer purpose from behaviour...." (J, p. 202) Benway sums up the inexplicable phenomenon of conditioning, "'that's the way it is with the etiology.'" (NL, p. 36) The word virus is a metabolic disturbance, and "'causal thinking never yields accurate description of metabolic process-- limitations of existing language'" (NL, p. 26); as Wittgenstein puts it, "what the law of causality is meant to exclude cannot even be described." (TLP 6.362) The "incompetent" agent piloting the "machine" of the human body (J, p. 115) cannot be spoken about, for metaphysical notions are meaningless in Burroughs' writing:

The razor belonged to a man named Occam and he was not a scar collector. Ludwig Wittgenstein Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: "If a proposition is NOT NECESSARY it is MEANINGLESS and approaching MEANING ZERO."

"And what is More UNNECESSARY than junk if You Don't Need it?"

Answer: "Junkies, if you are not ON JUNK." (NL, p. xiv)

Commitment to necessity is addiction to a sequence which is merely logical, "The Algebra of Need," (NL, p. vii) a metabolic conditioning which is manipulated by control groups: "the needs of our constituents are never out of our mind being their place of residence." (p. 119) And the word virus is as redundant as the heroin virus: "Wind up is you don't have to think anything."

(J, p. 40)



Connected with the critique of necessity, and equally derived from Wittgenstein, is the rejection of continuous time, a myth which, like heroin, is a way of resisting change: old opium smokers, in fact, die "from an overdose of Time." (NL, pp. 6, 208) The addict's "body is his clock, and junk runs through it like an hour-glass," (p. 215) keeping him in "a painless, sexless, timeless state," (p. 249) so that he doesn't have to "move around and waste TIME" (p. xiv); The Sailor has moved on from heroin and is "'buying up TIME.'" (p. 73) Time is a media control device: "the Lord of Time is surrounded by files and calculating machines, word and image banks of a picture planet." (TE, p. 104) Time is a con laid down by The Rube of the Nova Mob: "I am not one in space I am one in time....So of course I tried to keep you all out of space-- That is the end of time." (NE, p. 71) Whereas the myth of continuous time connects man with that "'original nature which imposes itself on any human solution'"-- the killer instinct of the "'aggressive southern ape'" with the survival-of-the-fittest attitude of American expansionists, (E, pp. 103, 109) Burroughs cites evidence for a theory of sudden mutation, (P, p. 122) and ruptures his narratives with "Perhaps something as simple as a hiccup of time: Empty room justlikethat." (WB, p. 136) According to Wittgenstein,

We cannot compare a process with 'the passage of time'-- there is no such thing-- but only with another process (such as the working of a chronometer).

Hence we can describe the lapse of time only by relying on some other process. (TLP 6.3611)

Like Wittgenstein, Burroughs deals with short, not necessarily related time spans, and regards time as verbal: "Without words there is not time." (WB, p. 117) Since "'time is getting dressed and undressed eating sleeping not the actions but the words...what we say about what we do,'" there would be no "'time if we didn't say anything.'" (TE, p. 114) Joe Brundige travels

in time "with old newspapers folding in today with yesterday and typing out composites-- When you skip through a newspaper as most of us do you see a great deal more than you know-- In fact you see it all on a subliminal level-- Now when I fold today's paper in with yesterday's paper and arrange the pictures to form a time section montage, I am literally moving back to the time when I read yesterday's paper, that is travelling in time back to yesterday." (SM, pp. 85-86) Burroughs uses the notion of time-travel, the without which not of all science fiction since Verne, self-reflexively, as a critique of the myth of time: "'All out of time and into space, 'Come out of the time-word 'the' forever. Come out of the body word 'thee' forever. There is nothing to fear....There is no word in space.'" (SM, p. 162) He regards the American space program and space travel as significant of the possibility of leaving "the context of this planet" and its reinforcement of conditioning, of attaining "an entirely different viewpoint," (P, p. 52) though he is impatient with the attitudes of the Houston scientists: "Are these men going to take the step into regions literally unthinkable in verbal terms? To travel in space you must leave the old verbal garbage behind: God talk, country talk, mother talk, love talk, party talk. You must learn to exist with no religion no country no allies. You must learn to live alone in silence. Anyone who prays in space is not there." (J, p. 21) Inter-galactic space, which does not conform to the Euclidian geometry which Kant took to be an innate form of perception,<sup>16</sup> is not amenable to habitual verbal contexts; the experience of space cannot be held together by the notion of a three-dimensional reality-- which is time, the comparison and identification of temporally discrete points of view. "Space is dream. Space is illusion." (J, p. 223) Whereas identification with the cumulative record or "time track" which constitutes self is ipso facto a contraction of "terminal identity," (NE, p. 19)

the General in The Ticket that Exploded advises his men, "'It is time to forget. To forget time....The point where the past touches the future is right where you are sitting now on your dead time ass hatching virus negatives into present time into the picture reality of a picture planet. Get off your ass, boys.'" (TE, p. 196) To be present is not to identify with the present but to attend to it, to be aware of the arbitrary nature of its connection with past and future: "listen to your present time tapes and you will begin to see who you are." (J, p. 167) The old tycoon's obsession with immortality (WB, p. 168) exemplifies that uncritical acceptance of the metaphysical implications of language which Wittgenstein is concerned to combat; "Or is some riddle solved by my surviving forever?" (TLP 6.4312):

If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.

Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limit. (TLP 6.4311)

The present, for Wittgenstein, is spatial and infinite: "A spatial object must be situated in infinite space. (A spatial point is an argument place.)" (TLP 2.0131) Gysin connects this idea with Burroughs' use of space: "It's EVERYBODY'S space and there is plenty of it. A point in space is an argument place says Wittgenstein. 'No two anythings can occupy the same spacetime position,' mutters Burroughs....Who says time?" (MG, p. 45)

Like Moby-Dick and Famous Men, then, Naked Lunch is a text without a context, a report on the rules of a particular form of life which is finally its own subject. It is introduced by an affidavit-- "Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness"-- and ends with an appended exhaustive listing of drugs and their characteristics, also published in The British Journal of Addiction. Like Ishmael on whales and Agee on tenant farming, Burroughs takes great care

with definition, pointing out misuses of the term 'addiction' and restricting it to the description of biological, metabolic need (NL, pp. 240-41): "Because there are many forms of addiction I think that they all obey basic laws." (p. xii) He devotes considerable attention to the argots incorporated in the text-- "'Ever notice how many expressions carry over from queers to con men?'" (p. 3)-- and parenthetically glosses twenty-nine terms: "(Cowboy: New York hoodlum talk means kill the mother fucker wherever you find him...)." (p. 20) Meaning is use in a context-- "'In the immortal words of Father Flanagan there is no such thing as a bad boy'" (p. 152)-- and insistence upon precise verbal reference yields disturbing results, as when a young man pays a prostitute for "'a piece of ass...So I switch my blade and cut a big hunk off her ass, she raise a beef like I am reduce to pull off one shoe and beat her brains out. Then I hump her for kicks.'" (p. 119) Burroughs emphasizes that he does "not presume to pass any final judgements, only to report my own reaction to various drugs and methods of treatment," (p. 224) and pointedly restricts himself to that experience throughout: "The author has observed..." (p. 77) "I saw it happen..." (p. 233) "My own experience suggests..." or "confirms..." (pp. 243, 247) And like Moby-Dick and Famous Men, Naked Lunch is part travelogue, reporting on Ecuador, Sweden, Tangier and various American cities, and particularly on "U.S. drag," the accumulation of American "habits," which can be traced to no source:

But where does it come from?

Not the bartender, not the customers, nor the cream-colored plastic surrounding the bar stools, not the dim neon. Not even the T.V. (pp. 11-13)

These three peculiar books, which analyze forms of life and are pointedly not novels, might conveniently be considered as examples of the form, Menippean satire or anatomy, proposed by Frye, a form which "deals less with

people as such than with mental attitudes," "presents us with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern," is encyclopoedic and provides a "creative treatment of exhaustive erudition"; Frye regards Moby-Dick as a combination of the romance and anatomy forms,<sup>17</sup> and it might be pointed out that both Agee and Burroughs invoke Swift as models for their satiric savagery. But in making explicit use of the intellectual pattern or analytic mode of empiricism, these books are further distinguished by becoming reports on themselves, empirical inquiries into the nature of texts. In the Introduction, in the Atrophied Preface and throughout Naked Lunch, Burroughs, like Ishmael and Agee, discusses the method of the text; he not only regards everything in the empirical environment in terms of codes, providing a lengthy, Agee-style list from "Breathing rhythm of old cardiac, bumps of a belly dancer, put put put of a motorboat" to "cancer...at the door with a singing telegram," (pp. 207-09) but speaks of the text as a code, capitalizing phrases such as "The Reader" which suggest roles in a predictable ritual and attacking literary clichés. (pp. 9-10) Ginsberg describes Naked Lunch as "a collage of routines"<sup>18</sup>; and it both focuses on the "mosaic" of flotsam in the East River, (pp. 4, 5-76) of "sleepless nights and sudden food needs of the kicking addict," (p. 8) of a city layout, (p. 53) of articles in a drawer (p. 116) and of Aztec art, (p. 117) and refers to itself as a composition of "pieces," a "kaleidoscope." (p. 229) Shifts are sudden, as when, using Soneryl, "You shift to sleep without transition, fall abruptly into the middle of a dream ....I have been years in a prison camp suffering from malnutrition," (p. 67) announced by a filmic "Fadeout" (pp. 104, 112) or "Time jump like a broken typewriter" (p. 94): and if the overall sense of the text is undercut, so is the identity of the first-person narrator, who reports as he reads the

paper, "I keep slipping away....I try to focus the words...they separate in meaningless mosaic." (p. 68)

Heroin clicks the user into "junk focus," (p. 204) and textual forms constitute an addiction to habits of configuration: plot, for example, is "continuity, beginning, middle, and end, adherence to a 'logical' sequence and people don't think in logical sequences." (ER, p. 78) Self is a narrative device, a collection of words and images into logical sequence, as examples throughout the work suggest: "Those pictures are yourself" (SM, p. 40); "Remember i was the movies....in the beginning there was no Iam" (TE, p. 102); "Who do you love?-- If I had a talking picture of you would I need you?" (S); in Naked Lunch a man has an affair with his "Latah," a creature which precisely imitates all the words, gestures and mannerisms of anyone in its presence, and "simply sucks all the persona right out of him like a sinister ventriloquist's dummy....'You've taught me everything you are....I need a new amigo.' And poor Bubu can't answer for himself, having no self left." (p. 141) The mythless, unidentifiable condition of attention is illustrated by the predicament of Marty (as in Famous Men, just say he's from Mars and let it go at that), a space man, not a time man, who has been "borned" here as a human, and whose plans to leave are hampered by a policeman who dislikes in him "'a certain furtiveness of person and motive after all where was he escaping to? Who was he escaping to?...Who was he? Could it be that he didn't need friends?" (E, p. 140) The story ("Friends") elaborates an idea nascent in Naked Lunch: "'Where do they go when they walk out and leave the body behind?'" (p. 11)

The text encodes and prerecords the movement of attention, keeps "I-you-me in the pissoir of present time." (SM, p. 126) The exercises outlined by Burroughs to pry attention loose from modes of identity, to direct the subject to "as-is" rather than ignore or "not-is" a problem, (ER, p. 84) to be

"there" during mundane activities, (J, p. 108) to be "on set" in present time, (E, p. 165) are critiques of habitual modes of reading, of understanding.

Similarly, the method of paratactic discontinuity in Naked Lunch scrambles the memory tape of the narrator and mobilizes his liberated attention:

suddenly I don't know where I am. Perhaps I have opened the wrong door and at any moment The Man In Possession, The Owner Who Got There First will rush in and scream:

"What Are You Doing Here? Who Are You?"

And I don't know what I am doing there nor who I am. I decide to play it cool and maybe I will get the orientation before the Owner shows....So instead of yelling "Where Am I?" cool it and look around and you will find out approximately....You were not there for The Beginning. You will not be there for The End....Your knowledge of what is going on can only be superficial and relative. (NL, p. 220)

The text is a memory track subject to lesions; if understanding is knowing how to proceed, then disruption of the memory track obviates understanding, directs the reader to a consideration of its nature. Benway exhibits patients suffering from Irreversible Neural Damage, who retain "'reflexes'" but are otherwise not present: "'Over-liberated, you might say.'" (p. 32) To be there is not to control but to witness. Like Lee ("Last night I woke up with someone squeezing my hand. It was my other hand"-- T, p. 66) like The Professor, "'rudely interrupted by one of my multiple personalities,'" (p. 87) and like "'the man who taught his asshole to talk'" and had to struggle with another personality in the same flesh, (pp. 131-32) Naked Lunch encodes a mosaic of intersecting personae, The Sailor repeating Lee's phrases in his own narration: "Junkies tend to run together into one body." (p. 219) The text is a form of addiction which is continually undercut and used against itself, so that one extended sexual fantasy is followed by a curtain call in which the actors are "not as young as they appear in the Blue Movies....They look tired

and petulant." (p. 103) It is a "mind tape" that can be "wiped clean-- Magnetic word dust falling from old patterns," (NE, p. 168) a blueprint which is perhaps "Craps last map." (E, p. 168) Most frequently, the text is compared to a film, as in The Wild Boys-- "On the screen an old book with gilt edges. Written in golden script The Wild Boys. A cold spring wind ruffles the pages" (WB, p. 184)-- so that stories end with the camera being shot, the camera man joining the gun fight, or with the explosion of the screen. (WB, pp. 18, 184) The text is thereby assigned that "instant present" which, Agee says, is the "tense" of film, (AF I, pp. 321-22) just as, like Ishmael, Burroughs' narrators often date the text-- "'July 1962, Present Time'" (TE, pp. 100, 172)-- indicating the intersection of the reader's present time with that of the persona, the spatial accomplishment of time-travel. The reader comes out of time and into space by destroying the memory tape which, in present time, is his own mode of identity: "Rub out the word" (TE, p. 169); "Rub out the life I led" (TE, p. 177); "Language of virus (which is these experiments) really necessary?" (TE, p. 100) In this fashion, language is made to report on itself in Naked Lunch, to disintegrate habits of narcissistic self-attachment and make a voyeur of the reporter.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Burroughs, Nova Express (New York: Grove, 1965), pp. 37-38. Subsequent references are noted in the text (NE).

<sup>2</sup>Burroughs, "Words Dealth by William Lee Dealer," Minutes to Go (San Francisco: City Lights, 1968), p. 59. Subsequent references are noted in the text (MG).

<sup>3</sup>Norman Mailer, "Aquarius Hustling," Interview by Richard Stratton, Rolling Stone, No. 177 (January 1975), 46.

<sup>4</sup>Burroughs, The Ticket that Exploded (New York: Grove, 1968), p. 85. Subsequent references are noted in the text (TE).

<sup>5</sup>Burroughs, "William Burroughs," Interview, Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews (New York: Viking, 1967), p. 167. Subsequent references are noted in the text (WW).

<sup>6</sup>Ronald Weston, "William Burroughs: High Priest of Hipsterism," Fact (November-December 1965), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Burroughs, The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead (New York: Grove, 1973), p. 94. Subsequent references are noted in the text (WB).

<sup>8</sup>Burroughs, The Last Words of Dutch Schultz: A Fiction in the Form of a Film Script (New York: Viking, 1975), pp. 57-115. Subsequent references are noted in the text (LWDS).

<sup>9</sup>Burroughs, "Penthouse Interview: William Burroughs," Penthouse, III (March 1972), 52. Subsequent references are noted in the text (P).

<sup>10</sup>Burroughs, "Journey through Time-Space: An Interview with William Burroughs by Daniel Odier," Evergreen Review, XIII (June 1969), 85. Subsequent references are noted in the text (ER).

<sup>11</sup>Burroughs, SidetrIPPING, with Charles Gatewood (New York: Strawberry Hill, 1975). Subsequent references are noted in the text (S).

<sup>12</sup>R. G. Peterson, "A Picture Is a Fact: Wittgenstein and The Naked Lunch," Twentieth Century Literature, XII (July 1966), 80.

<sup>13</sup>Werner Heisenberg, The Physicist's Conception of Nature (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Allen Ginsberg, "John Tytell: A Conversation with Allen Ginsberg," Partisan Review XLI, 2 (1974), 261.

<sup>15</sup> Burroughs, Junkie (London: New English Library, 1972), p. 152.

<sup>16</sup> As of the establishment, by Carl Freiderich, János Bolyai and Nikolai Lobachevski that the structure of space could logically be described by a geometry differing from Euclid's, "It was no longer possible to maintain Kant's position that Euclidean geometry was synthetic a priori." J. J. Callahan, "The Curvature of Space in a Finite Universe," Scientific American, CCXXXV, 2 (August 1976), p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 304-13.

<sup>18</sup> Ginsberg, with Burroughs, The Yage Letters (San Francisco: City Lights, 1969), p. 60.

The definite attraction which cinematographic creation exercises upon many new novelists must be sought elsewhere. It is not the camera's objectivity which interests them, but its possibilities in the realm of the subjective, of the imaginary. They do not conceive the cinema as a means of expression, but of exploration, and what most captures their attention is, quite naturally, what has most escaped the powers of literature: which is not so much the image as the sound track-- the sound of voices, noises, atmospheres, music-- and above all the possibility of acting on two senses at once, the eye and the ear; finally, in the image as in the sound, the possibility of presenting with all the appearance of incontestable objectivity what is, also, only dream or memory-- in a word, what is only imagination.

Alain Robbe-Grillet,  
For A New Novel

CHAPTER V. Individuals vs Individualism: Opening the Private Eye

As the camera closes in on coffee being stirred in a cup, swirling shapes form, dissolve and reform on an entirely black screen, while Jean-Luc Godard whispers,

Where does it begin?...Where does what begin? God created the heavens and the earth. Of course...but that's a bit simple, too easy. One should be able to say more...Say that the limits of my language are those of my world. That as I speak, I limit the world, I end it...and when logical and mysterious death comes to abolish this limit...there will be no more questions, no more answers...everything will be amorphous.

The heroine of this film, Two or Three Things I Knew About Her (1966), speaks of "the ABC of existence," defines language as "the house in which man lives" and repeatedly declares: "I am the world." These allusions to and quotations of Wittgenstein point to an epistemological stance which is consistent in Godard's films, and which is thoroughly worked out in Alphaville, or A Strange Adventure of Lemme Caution (1965). Film is a form of analysis, "the truth," as Bruno says in Le Petit Soldat (1960), "twenty-four times a second"; and this analysis is literally, not metaphorically, linguistic. Beginning with his attention to signs, billboards and advertising slogans in Une Femme Mariée (1964), and continuing through the political analyses in La Chinoise (1967) and One Plus One (1968), Godard has directed critical attention to the contemporary environment of word and image; in La Chinoise, for example, Veronique rejects the idea that a revolutionary should burn all the books, since there would then "be nothing left to criticize." Like Agee and Burroughs, Godard is concerned to come to terms with the modern, American-dominated culture machine, more specifically with the languages of film, the Hollywood B-picture vocabulary of plots and attitudes of which several of Godard's early films make use,

and which are those forms of thought which limit the world: "At the cinema we do not think, we are thought."<sup>1</sup> In a political context, Godard regards film as disease, "the virus, 'the capitalist microbe in its present form,'"<sup>2</sup> and like Burroughs recommends the setting up of de-intellectualization schools to combat conditioned mental habits.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Ohlin has suggested that Godard's pre-1968 films employ the strategy of making language into a thing, while the later films treat objects as a language.<sup>4</sup> Language, for Godard, has always the status of an arbitrary habit or skill, and even Tout Va Bien (1972), with its heavily didactic political tone, can only conclude with the advice to "rethink yourself in historical terms," terms which may provide a strenuous and renewing mode of analysis, but which have no ultimate or necessary purchase: "With the probable exception of his view on Vietnam," Susan Sontag comments, "there is no attitude Godard incorporates in his films that is not simultaneously being bracketed, and therefore criticized, by a dramatization of the gap between the elegance and seductiveness of ideas and the...opaqueness of the human condition."<sup>5</sup> The printed definition, in La Chinoise, of "a word" as "what remains unsaid," suggests Wittgenstein's distinction between the "content" of sense and that "form" or arrangement of appearances upon which it is encoded: "the camera that filmed itself in the mirror," Godard has said, "would make the ultimate movie,"<sup>6</sup> would record the mechanics of its own recording, supply all information about itself without giving expression to the 'content' of the record, the collation of distinct frames, the understanding of its sense. An affectless observation and record of what goes on in the mirror is voyeuristic rather than narcissistic, for it presumes no possibility of consummate identity with the image: Godard made Le Petit Soldat, he says, about "a man who finds that the face he sees in

the mirror does not correspond to the idea he has of what lies behind it," "who analyses himself and discovers he is different from the concept he had of himself. Personally, when I look at myself in a mirror I have the same feeling."<sup>7</sup>

Made in U.S.A. dramatizes the problem of identity in terms of language: a dictaphone recording of Paula's voice on the sound track says as she shoots Goodis, "Where am I? Is it me who is speaking? Can I say that I am these words I speak, through which my thoughts slide? Can I say that I am these murders I have committed with my own hands, actions which escape from me not only when I have finished, but before I have even started?" Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who that lifts this arm? Because, as Wittgenstein says, "Language disguises thought....so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it," (TLP 4.002) it is as impossible to identify Paula with her physiological equipment-- "Can I say that I am this life which I feel within me?"-- as with the taperecorder which speaks her words. Godard's idea of ~~filming~~ the camera as it films is related to his declared wish to "show-- just show, not comment on-- the moment when a feeling enters the body and becomes physiologically alive"<sup>8</sup>: meaning is encoded upon physiology-- feelings, laryngeal formations-- as upon the mechanical operation of a camera; it is remarked in Une Femme Mariée, in fact, that "Memory is the first thing we teach a machine." Godard comments on the incomprehensibility of a line from Hölderlin quoted in Contempt, "The difficulty comes because we feel that words must always mean something"<sup>9</sup>: the young intellectuals in La Chinoise, who demonstrate their rejection of dualism by striking the word "DESCARTES" with a suction arrow, recommend the confusion of words and things as a revolutionary activity; similarly, Godard edits his films "on the basis

of what's in the image and on that basis only...not in terms of what it signifies, but what signifies it."<sup>10</sup> By holding to the image and to the shape of the word, he obviates any transcendence of, or, which is the same, identification with the empirically apparent.

Like Paula, we cannot regard speech, or rather the sense which it encodes, as an effect springing from an 'inner' identifiable cause. Godard's remark that Pierrot Le Fou (1965) "is not really a film" but "an attempt at cinema"<sup>11</sup> illustrates this lack of necessary relation between intention and act: like Famous Men and Naked Lunch, it is a plan or blueprint, the record of an unfulfilled intention; and like them, La Chinoise finishes with the announcement, "End of a Beginning." In that same article on Pierrot, Godard elaborates a quotation of Claudel: "'This morrow does not follow the day that was yesterday.' This last sentence in movie terms means: two shots in sequence are not successive. Which also holds for two that aren't in sequence."<sup>12</sup> As Ohlin points out, Godard's use of montage, not as Eisenstein, to produce something greater than the sum of its parts, but to make the shots "strip each other of irrelevant connections," amounts to "the destruction of causality, and implicitly of syntax."<sup>13</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, a key literary figure to what has been called the post-modernist sensibility, has also been concerned to liberate himself from conditioning by "the ideology of causality, continuity,"<sup>14</sup> admires in the work of Alain Resnais "an attempt to construct a purely mental space and time...without worrying too much about the traditional relations of cause and effect, or about an absolute time sequence in the narrative," notes that mental time has no necessary relation to 'objective' time (what Agee calls "time by machine measure"), and regards the film image as occupying the unmitigable present tense of the imagination: thus fragments of film illustrating

contradictory testimonies in a court-room drama, for example, or the 'future' imagined by a character, are equally present and vivid, whether 'true' or 'false.'<sup>15</sup> The myth of continuous time and the causal nexus, a context which reduces the ambiguity of the present, offers the possibility of an account of motive, which in Godard's films, as Sontag points out, is either simplistic or unexplained: "An art which aims at the present tense cannot aspire to this kind of 'depth' or innerness in the portrayal of human beings."<sup>16</sup> Godard dispenses with that belief in causality which Wittgenstein regards as "Superstition" (TLP 5.1361): asked by Georges Franju whether he acknowledged "'the necessity of having a beginning, middle and end in your films,'" Godard is said to have replied, "'Certainly. But not necessarily in that order.'"<sup>17</sup>

If for beginning, middle and end can be substituted past, present and future, it is precisely this scrambling that is carried out in Alphaville, which begins as the computer Alpha 60 issues the self-interrogative statement, "Some things in life are too complex for oral transmission. But legend gives them universal form." The film, originally entitled Tarzan versus IBM, proceeds as the mutual criticism of legends or myths, the past confronting the future. Lemmy Caution, the hero of a French series of detective novels, is rendered as a compendium of individualist myths, and is played by Eddie Constantine, an expatriate American veteran of French detective films; like Burroughs' "American trailing across the wounded galaxies," (NE, p. 31) Lemmy has crossed "intersidereal space" in his Ford Galaxie to reach Alphaville, the totally programmed environment of the future, heralded by the traffic sign, "ALPHAVILLE. SILENCE. LOGIC. SAFETY. PRUDENCE." He wears a wrist radio like Dick Tracy's and behaves as a conventional tough guy, insulting and fighting with his hotel's procurer, smashing no less than four glass walls and a



mirror, and finally shooting him: "I'm too old to sit around discussing the weather. I shoot. It's the only weapon I have against fate." Lemmy loves "women and money" more than anything else and is "afraid of death...but for a humble secret agent fear of death is a cliché...like drinking"; Natasha, daughter of Professor Nosferatu, alias von Braun, and thus a product of the future, knows no such fear, has been taught by Alpha 60 that "death and life exist within the same sphere." Lemmy has, the computer points out, a "tendency to dwell in the past," to "think far too much of what has happened, instead of what is to become"; when an engineer mocks his old-fashioned camera, Lemmy sneers, "Technology-- keep it!" And his susceptibility to past formula is dramatized when, surrounded by the police, he is told joke number 842 and seized when he doubles up with predictable laughter. Lemmy's behaviour, that is, is as programmed as that of the citizens of Alphaville: having instructed his Seductress Third Class to hold a center-fold nude over her head, he lounges on the bed reading The Big Sleep, a novel about the smashing of a pornography ring, and shoots two holes through the breasts of the pin-up; and when Lemmy comments on Natasha's "small pointed teeth," he is echoing Philip Marlowe, who repeatedly, in that book, notices Carmen Sternwood's "little sharp predatory teeth" and the knife-like teeth of Vivian Regan.<sup>18</sup> Not only does Lemmy narrate his adventure in the first person, as Marlowe does, he is associated with the array of tough-guy figures played on the screen by Humphrey Bogart, so that as he ignites his lighter with a shot from across the room, Anna Karina makes her entrance, like Lauren Bacall in To Have and Have Not, with the line, "Got a match?" Lemmy is Secret Agent Number 003, whose mission is to gather information on Alphaville and to "liquidate" von Braun, and who travels as Ivan Johnson, reporter for Figaro-Pravda: "Haven't you noticed," he says to von Braun's

assistant, "that Reporter and Revenger start with the same letter?" Like Agee and many of Burroughs' characters, he is a spy travelling as a journalist, and as such is both an importunate investigator, asking "too many questions" and at one point forcing von Braun into an elevator to interview him, and a rampant voyeur, photographing von Braun's outraged staff, the hidden center of Alpha 60 and anything else that interests him: as Harry Dickson, an agent who has been broken by Alpha 60's control system, enjoys his last dalliance with a Seductress Third Class, Lemmy watches from behind a wardrobe and photographs the scene; and when the old man dies in orgasm, Lemmy photographs the body.

Godard's original treatment calls for Lemmy's reports on his wrist radio "to compile a documentary on the town and its inhabitants," "true documentary images of present-day life" in Paris, altered by "a novel, rather strange, mysterious quality."<sup>19</sup> Three years prior to the making of Alphaville, Godard told an interviewer, "According to Truffaut, the cinema consists of the spectacle...and research. If I analyze myself today I see that I have always wanted, basically, to make a research film in spectacle form. The documentary side is this: a man is in such and such a situation. The spectacle side comes from making the man a gangster or a secret agent."<sup>20</sup> There could be no more succinct summary of each of Moby-Dick, Famous Men and Naked Lunch than as research plus spectacle; in this sense all of Godard's films are reports: Alphaville, self-reflexively, is about a reporter. Like Burroughs, Godard puns on the phrase, "agent secret," which suggests an active critical attention which cannot be spoken about or identified with the logical forms and habits of thought, although the philosophical Pragmatists and behaviourists assume the contrary. Lemmy's subjectivism is regarded by von Braun as an anachronism: "Your ideas are strange, Mr. Caution. Several years ago, in the Age of Ideas,

they would doubtless have been termed...sublime. But look at yourself-- men of your kind will soon no longer exist." The faculty of conscious attention, which distinguishes Lemmy from a computer, and to which he refers when he boasts to Alpha 60 of his "secret," can be defined only negatively, or, as Lemmy defines it, with a riddle: "Something that never changes with the night or the day, as long as the past represents the future, towards which it advances in a straight line, but which finally closes on itself in a circle." For Alpha 60 to find the answer to the riddle would mean its self-destruction, "because you would become my equal, my brother": the throwing away of Wittgenstein's logical ladder. According to Godard, "To look around one's self, that is to be free"<sup>21</sup>: when Lemmy insists that he is a "free man," the Chief Engineer comments, "This reply is meaningless. We know nothing...We record...we calculate...and we draw conclusions....Your replies are difficult to code and sometimes impossible."

Lemmy finds Dickson in a shabby hotel where the clients loiter in the lobby reading detective novels-- individuals who have been occluded, like Lee in Naked Lunch, from the logical system of Alphaville, and who await execution or suicide. Not only, Dickson reports, are Dick Tracy and Flash Gordon dead, but there are no more novelists, musicians or painters. In bed with his Seductress, Dickson speaks the illegal language of romantic love, and his last words are "conscience...conscience...make Alpha 60 destroy itself...tenderness... save those who weep." Weeping, too, is illegal; the last words of a man who is executed for weeping at his wife's death, and thus "behaving illogically," are of love, faith, and tenderness, things which cannot be codified and of which the citizens of Alphaville are ignorant. Like the artists of the past with whom he is associated, Lemmy speaks for what cannot be spoken about:

when he tries to define "love" ostensibly to Natasha, she understands only the "sensuality" which is its form. When someone says "something metaphysical," according to Wittgenstein, it is demonstrable that he has "failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions" (TLP 6.53; the pun is unavoidable):

Propositions can express nothing that is higher.  
It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words.  
Ethics is transcendental.  
(Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.) (TLP 6.42, 6.421)

But if the metaphysical cannot be described, or embodied in the clichéd deportment of the individualist hero, neither can it be negated or reduced to the unambiguously logical: when Natasha defends Alphaville's total commitment to rational structure by remarking, "we minimize the unknown," Lemmy renames the city "Zeroville"; and he sneers at von Braun's opposition of "my moral and even metaphysical sense of destiny with nothing more than a physical and mental existence created and dictated by technocracy." The mythic totalitarian behaviouristic future utterly crushes the independence which Lemmy so grandly overdramatizes: Alpha 60 dwarfs the individual intelligence by formulating problems for itself-- train and plane timetables, electric power supply, war-- which "no one can understand because the methods and data used by Alpha 60 are too complex." Like Burroughs' control machine, it "predicts the data which Alphaville obeys," and eloquently defends those more familiar forms of control which it represents: "Nor is there in the so-called capitalist world, or Communist world, any malicious intent to suppress men through the power of ideology or materialism, but only the natural aim of all organizations to increase their rational structure." Alphaville is the result of continuous growth in time, that evolutionary development to which Wittgenstein assigns the status of "any other hypothesis in natural science," (TLP 4.1122) the logical movement from past, through present, to future, which is the basis of the anti-subjectivist myths

of progress: all of Alpha 60's decisions are directed, it assures Lemmy, toward an "ultimate" and "universal good"; the inhabitants, whom Lemmy regards as "slaves to probability," are "the end-products of a series of mutations"; and those are excluded who "don't manage to adapt." According to the Chief Engineer, one must never say "why," as Lemmy does, but "'because.' In the life of all individuals, as well as in the lives of nations, everything is determined by cause and effect." Like Peirce and the Pragmatists, von Braun's technicians regard final causation as alone primary, the motive impetus from indeterminacy to the complete reign of law.

Those who are convicted of illogical behaviour are executed at the Institute of General Semantics: thought, that is, is linguistically controlled. The hotel bible turns out to be the latest issue of the Alphaville dictionary ("But isn't it the same in the Outer lands, Mr. Johnson?"), continually updated by the deletion and replacement of words. Natasha does not understand 'love' or 'conscience,' and becomes frightened when she knows a word without memory of having heard or read it, for the limits of her language are the limits of her world. Symbols are completely arbitrary-- in Alphaville a shake of the head means 'yes,' a nod, 'no'-- and in this case Alpha 60 arbitrates them; its voice renders each word as a series of distinct metallic sounds without inflection, reducing language, as it is put in La Chinoise, to "sounds and matter." But Lemmy insists that words have meaning, refuses, for example, to "betray the Outerlands"; he commandeers a car as he escapes the police, orders the driver, played by Godard, to "Wait here and don't move," and on second thought shoots him dead: "That's to be sure you'll keep your word, pal." But Lemmy is torn away from his attachment to the archetypal postures of the past in his confrontation with the future, and is left on an uncomfortably ambiguous middle ground,

struggling to derive meaning from arbitrary signs. Having killed von Braun and fired into the computer with the same shot, Lemmy finds himself moving through darkened corridors, "running along a straight line, which reminded me of the Greek labyrinth that Dickson told me about, in which so many philosophers had lost their way, where even a secret agent could stray from his course." Inhabitants of Alphaville, cut off from the source of electrical energy upon which they depend, grope along the walls of these darkened corridors: in an essay written about and contemporaneously with the making of La Chinoise, Alain Jeffroy writes, "Wittgenstein écrit quelque part qu'un homme qui vit dans la confusion philosophique ne sait pas même trouver la porte ouverte pour en sortir. A ce pauvre homme, il conseille de longer les murs, plutôt que se fracasser la tête contre eux: au bout, il trouvera fatalement la porte."<sup>22</sup>

Like Lee the Agent, Lemmy moves toward the door at the end of the long hall; his critical predicament, that is, suggests the Wittgenstein of the Philosophical Investigations, for whom "Language is a labyrinth of paths," (PI 203) and who regards "meaning something" as going "up to the thing we mean... so one is oneself in motion. One is rushing ahead and so cannot see oneself rushing ahead" (PI 455-457)-- hence the straight-line, self-contained movement which Lemmy describes to Alpha 60 as his secret.

Alpha 60: Is there a difference between the mystery of the laws of knowledge and those of love?

Lemmy: In my opinion there is no mystery in love.

But both meaning and love are inexpressible since that which advances cannot be codified or spoken about, must be passed over in silence: the man condemned for weeping urges the necessity of simply advancing "in a straight line towards all that we love"; when Natasha responds to Lemmy with poetry, she says,

One need only advance to live, to go  
Straightforward towards all you love;

and Lemmy taunts Alpha 60 with another paradoxical definition of the human situation: "Take a look at her and me! There's your reply. We are happiness ...and we are making our way towards it." This "reply," of course, does not compute: Alpha 60 had specifically demanded a "yes or no" answer.

If Lemmy is a "Security threat" to the computer's digital logic, he is also threatened, the code of the past endangered by the future, and it is in this context that his fear of death is interesting: "I had the impression," he says "that my life here was becoming a shadow, a twilight memory...of a doubtless awesome destiny." Alpha 60, that is, is not only a futuristic version of the "IBM...Olivetti...General Electric" computers of the 1960's, it is that ultimate memory machine which does turn Lemmy into a shadow, films death at work: the moving camera. If Lemmy is an individual voyeur, Alpha 60's camera eyes observe every act of every citizen in Alphaville, so that it can deduce from his actions that Lemmy is not who he says he is: when Lemmy comments that "News travels fast around here," von Braun replies, "at about 186,000 miles per second," a speed appropriate to the "Civilization of Light" brought about by the film image. In its lecture on itself, Alpha 60 illustrates that the myth of the future has implications for the present:

The Central Memory is given its name because of the fundamental role it plays in the logical organization of Alpha 60. But no one has lived in the past and no one will live in the future. The present is the form of all life, and there are no means by which this can be avoided. Time is a circle which is endlessly revolving. The descending arc is the past and the rising arc is the future. Everything has been said. At least as long as words don't change their meanings and meanings their words....Nothing existed here before us. No one. We are absolutely alone here. We are unique, dreadfully unique. The meaning of words and of expressions is no longer grasped. One isolated word or an isolated detail in a drawing can be understood. But the comprehension of the whole escapes us. Once we know the number 1, we believe we know the number 2, because 1 plus 1 makes 2. But we do not even know what 'plus' means.

That this is a problem of film syntax, of how 'sense' is made of sequence plus sequence, shot plus shot, frame plus frame, is made clear in Godard's later One Plus One: as in Wittgenstein, understanding is linguistic, an ability to add things together into verbal contexts which cannot itself be understood. If the computer must be made to destroy itself, so must the film undercut the narrative context which holds it together, the temporal progression from beginning through middle to end, or in terms of its 'content,' from past through present to future; so that Alpha 60's last words before its destruction are a quotation of Borges' "A New Refutation of Time," an essay on Locke, Berkeley and Hume which rejects the notion of temporal continuity<sup>23</sup>: "The present is terrifying because it is irreversible...because it is shackled, fixed like steel.... Time is the material of which I am made....Time is a stream which carries me along...but I am Time...it is a tiger which tears me apart, but I am the tiger."

Lemmy leaves Alpha 60's lecture on understanding "because I couldn't understand a single word"; but later, when Natasha complains that since his arrival she can no longer understand what is happening, he says, "Me!-- I'm just beginning to understand, I think." Like Famous Men, Naked Lunch and Blow-Up, Alphaville is about being awake; and as in Famous Men, sleep is the boundary bracketing an ineluctably subjective and ambiguous experience: so that when Natasha finally awakens to ask if she has slept for long, Lemmy replies, "No...a mere fraction of time." Of central structural importance is The Big Sleep, the title of which is Marlowe's euphemism for death, and is related to Godard's statements about film; for one falls into dream at the cinema, "But people prefer to dream in the first degree rather than the second which is the true reality": those who cannot see what is in front of them "because they are always attached to what went before" are "not dreamers, they are asleep and



lazy. To dream is to contemplate and to let one's self go,"<sup>24</sup> Many of those who cannot adapt in Alphaville are electrocuted in their seats while watching a film, anaesthetized and passive in the midst of first-degree dream, the seats tipping up and depositing them into huge garbage cans; returning from this spectacle to his hotel, Lemmy declares his wish "to sleep, perchance to dream"--his willingness, despite his fear of death, to liberate his attention by putting aside his stereotypical code, his attachment to what went before: accordingly, he rejects von Braun's offer of all the money and women he wants and escapes into intersidereal space. But there is no transcendence of logic, only an awakening of conscious attention to its limits, a dismantling and rearrangement of its component parts, as in the explosion of Alpha 60. The final scene of Alphaville, in which Lemmy and Natasha drive away from the burning city, is modeled on the corresponding scene in Howard Hawks's film version of The Big Sleep, with Bogart and Bacall, as Marlowe and Vivian Regan, exchanging declarations of love as they drive away from a preliminary showdown at Eddie Mars' farmhouse:

Natasha: I don't know what to say. At least I don't know the words. Please help me....  
Lemmy: Impossible, Princess. You've got to manage by yourself, and only then will you be saved.  
Natasha: I...  
 love...  
 you...  
 I love you.

Like that other spy travelling as a journalist, Lemmy insists upon an effort in human actuality: the addition of "I" plus "love" plus "you" expresses a sense, and, indirectly, the role of the conscious individual in speaking an arbitrary and communal language, as in giving a film cliché meaning. In terms of the temporal triptych, the fact that the prototype is not the last scene of the

Hawks films suggests that Alphaville moves from beginning, through end, to middle: just as the past advances toward the future in a straight line, Lemmy, who represents the individualist past, advances toward Natasha, who inhabits the behaviourist future, so that the two meet on the middle ground of the self-conscious present, the tense of the film image.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Jean Collet, Jean-Luc Godard: An Investigation into his Films and Philosophy (New York: Crown, 1970), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Ohlin, Colours, Dreams, Shadows: Reflexions on the Narrative Crisis in Film 1960-1970 (Unpublished manuscript), p. 85.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>5</sup>Susan Sontag, "Godard," Partisan Review, XXXV, 2 (Spring 1968), 310.

<sup>6</sup>Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts," 23.

<sup>7</sup>Godard, "Shooting Le Petit Soldat" and "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard by Yvonne Baby," Le Petit Soldat, trans. Nicholas Garnham (New York: Simon and Schuster), pp. 8, 12.

<sup>8</sup>Godard, "One or Two Things," Jean-Luc Godard, ed. Toby Mussman (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 282.

<sup>9</sup>Godard, "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard by Jean Collet," trans. Toby Mussman, Jean-Luc Godard, p. 150.

<sup>10</sup>Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts," 23.

<sup>11</sup>Godard, "Pierrot Mon Ami," trans. Joachim Neugroschel, Jean-Luc Godard, p. 244.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ohlin, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup>"Alain Robbe-Grillet," Andy Warhol's Interview (April 1976), 33.

<sup>15</sup>Robbe-Grillet, "Introduction, Robbe-Grillet and Alain Resnais, Last Year at Marienbad (New York: Grove, 1962), p. 9, 13.

<sup>16</sup>Sontag, 291, 307.

<sup>17</sup>Sontag, 290-91.

<sup>18</sup>Raymond Chandler, The Big Sleep (New York: Ballantine, 1975), pp. 3, 205, 130.

<sup>19</sup>Godard, "Original Treatment: A New Adventure of Lemmy Caution," Alphaville, trans. Peter Whitehead (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), pp. 77-78.

<sup>20</sup>Godard, "An Interview with Jean-Luc Godard," trans. Rose Kaplin, Jean-Luc Godard, p. 109.

<sup>21</sup>Godard, "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard by Jean Collet," p. 141.

<sup>22</sup>Alain Jeffroy, "Une Affaire a regler avec la monde entier," La Chinoise (Paris: L'Avant Scène, 1971), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time," Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings, ed. D. A. Yates and J. E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 234.

<sup>24</sup>Godard, "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard by Jean Collet," p. 141.

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