

"JARRING WITNESSES": MODERN FICTION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY

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ABSTRACT/SOMMAIRE

This thesis begins by surveying briefly the discussion in philosophy of history of the function of point of view as a formal, a cognitive, and a cultural determinant in narrative historiography in relation to Bourdieu's theory of doxa and heterodoxy and Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia. With this theoretical framework established, a number of modern novels concerned with history are then explored. Chapters devoted to Conrad's *Nostromo*, Ford's *Parade's End* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* examine the ultimately orthodox historiographical points of view of these novels, while a chapter on the fiction of black American women engages the problem of historiography from the margins of the dominant culture. In the final chapter, Pynchon's *V.* is the focus of a discussion of postmodernism in relation to historiographic discourse.

Cette thèse commence par un bref aperçu d'une discussion qui se présente dans le domaine de la philosophie de l'histoire concernant la fonction du point de vue comme déterminant formel, cognitif et culturel pour l'historiographie narrative, par rapport à la théorie de doxa et l'hétérodoxie proposé par Bourdieu, et au concept de hétéroglossie exprimé par Bakhtin. Plusieurs romans modernes sont ensuite discutés dans le contexte du cadre théorique établi. Les chapitres consacrés à *Nostromo* de Conrad, *Parade's End* de Ford et *Absalom, Absalom!* de Faulkner analysent les points de vue, finalement orthodoxes en termes historiographiques, de ces romans, pendant qu'un chapitre traitant de la fiction des femmes Afro-Américaines examine la question de l'historiographie des marges d'une culture dominatrice. Dans le chapitre final, *V.* de Pynchon fait la mise au point à une discussion traitant du postmodernisme par rapport au discours historiographique.

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Part I

History, Narrative, and "Jarring Witnesses"

The problem discussed in this thesis concerns the function of point of view as an inevitable locus for the organization of narrative representation. While the problem of point of view has been a central one in discussions of fiction at least since Henry James (the work of Percy Lubbock or Wayne Booth being notable instances¹), my own appropriation of the term is less formalist, even less purely literary perhaps, and owes much to the discussion of the function of narrative itself in the representation of history. Indeed, the narratives in question are all twentieth-century novels concerned with historical or pseudo-historical events, and whose characters are depicted against a specifically historical background. For this reason, the problem of point of view in narrative historiography as well as in narrative fiction is important, and I begin with a discussion of the handling of this problem in modern Anglo-American philosophy of history. The line I follow in Part I starts with F.H. Bradley and runs through to Hayden White, and my concern is with how each theorizes the process of making a coherent narrative out of the admittedly diverse materials that comprise the totality of the historical field. Some of the ideas that emerge out of the discussion are then addressed in relation to concepts of the heterodoxic and the heteroglossic in Bourdieu and Bakhtin respectively.

¹ "The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction," writes Percy Lubbock, "I take to be governed by the question of the point of view" (251).

Since the eighteenth century, history has come to be most commonly thought of as an orderly narrative.² More recently however, the academic and scientific respectability of historians has at times been impugned on the basis of the dubious truth-claims that can be made for the works of scholars whose main task often appears to be story-telling, in however erudite a form. Hayden White observes that for some critics

the continued use by historians of a narrative mode of representation is an index of a failure at once methodological and theoretical. A discipline that produces narrative accounts of its subject matter as an end in itself seems methodologically unsound; one that investigates its data in the interest of telling a story about them appears methodologically deficient. (26)

This implies a need for a more rigorous positivist methodology, but historians have also run into problems when applying scientific models to history. The most important attempt of this kind remains Hempel's covering law model,³ but the influence of this theory has waned in recent years.

This is not, however, the place to re-open the long-standing debate over the distinction between nomothetic (general law) and idiographic (individual description) sciences and over the position of history in this

² See White's "The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation" (1987) for a discussion of some of the implications of this development.

³ While much has been written for and against this model, the central statement of the position is Hempel's "The Function of General Laws in History." A number of problems with this model, and with the modified versions of it that have been advanced, are discussed in Mink's essays. See also Ankersmit (1986) for a brief survey of recent developments in the field.

scheme.⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, I will more or less assume the importance of narrative form in historiography. Whether or not the narrative element can be proven to be problematic or even inferior, it persists, both in academic and in more popular works of history. Also, as Gramsci almost says,⁵ all people are in a sense historians to the degree that each person carries a sense of the past in his or her mind, and there is a strong narrative element in the discourse that we all conduct about that past.

⁴ These terms are Windelband's. For a discussion of the applicability of these terms, see Collingwood (1956 166-68).

⁵ Gramsci writes: "It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. It must first be shown that all men are 'philosophers', by defining the limits and characteristics of the 'spontaneous philosophy' which is proper to everybody" (323).

I

Aristotle states in the *Poetics* that a plot "must be an imitation of an action that is one and whole." He acknowledges that there are, however, "many actions in the life of a single person from which no overall unity of action emerges" and which are therefore not appropriate to poetry, but only to history. In poetry

it is necessary that the parts of the action be put together in such a way that if any one part is transposed or removed, the whole will be disordered and disunified. For that whose presence or absence has no evident effect is no part of the whole. (16)

Aristotle is not concerned here with the problem that arises from the fact that judgements involving "evident effect[s]" may be neither absolute nor universal. The task of the historian, he writes, is "to narrate events that have actually happened" rather than, like the poet, to write about "events such as might occur," and "Poetry, therefore, is more philosophical and more significant than history" (16-17). When poetry comes closest to history, presenting the disorder of actuality rather than the unity of art, it is most inferior: "Of the simple plots and actions the episodic are the worst; and I mean by episodic a plot in which the episodes follow each other without regard for the laws of probability or necessity " (18).

Sidney, in a restatement of the Aristotelian position in *The Apology for Poetry*, characterizes the historian as "tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things." As a result, "his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine" (107). Unlike the poet,

the historian, bound to tell things as they were, cannot be liberal (without he will be poetical) of a perfect pattern,

but . . . [must] show doings, some to be liked, some to be
misliked . . . Many times he must tell events whereof he can
yield no cause or, if he do, it must be poetical (110)

Still, without the poet's pattern of artistic unity as a guide, "how will
you discern what to follow, but by your own discretion", he asks (110)

The imposition of order on historical events, or the extraction of meaning
from them is not the function of the historian according to this theory,
and history is to that extent an inferior discipline

One of the founders of modern historiography, Leopold von Ranke,
accepted these strictures with evident satisfaction. In a classic state-
ment on the nature of the historical project, he writes

To history has been given the function of judging the past, of
instructing men for the profit of future years. The present
attempt does not aspire to such a lofty undertaking. It
merely wants to show how, essentially, things happened (132)

Yet whether it is by the discretion of the historian or the discretion of
the reader (or some combination of the two), historical narratives
generally do manifest a sense of order in their representation of the
episodic chaos of temporality. This sense of order is based, at least in
part, on the "discretion" or point of view of the historian, whose task it
is--either implicitly or explicitly--to arbitrate between the various
accounts of the past and decide which episodes have an "evident effect"
and what that effect may be. Historians have not contented themselves
with the mere chronicling of discrete events. Von Ranke and his succes-
sors have continued to recount history in narrative form, bestowing both
significant order and causal logic on the historical field. As von Ranke
himself acknowledges, "The intention of a historian depends on his view-
point," and "writers differ in the positions from which they view the his-
tory" (135, 148). He alters the previous assessment of history as
excessively episodic by balancing the claims of fact and form:

Form results from intent and subject matter. One cannot demand of a historical work the same free development which at least in theory is sought in a poetical work . . . Strict presentation of facts, no matter how conditional and unattractive they might be is the supreme law. The development of the unity and progress of the events [comes] next in order of importance. (137)

"I am convinced," he concludes, "that a historical work may . . . derive its internal logic from the intentions of the author and the nature of the task" (150). Authorial intentionality, narrative point of view, these then are mediating terms between episodic chaos and coherent narrative in the representation of history.

Hegel expresses a contradictory combination of universality and ethnocentrism in his assertion that the "cultured human mind" (1953 21) cannot help distinguishing among the various manifestations of the world spirit "as they appear in the struggle of world-wide historical interests." Some of the interests Hegel cites as examples, however, seem quite specific to nineteenth-century European concerns with nationalism and colonialism.

When we have before us the struggle of the Greeks against the Persians or Alexander's mighty domination, we know very well what interests us. We want to see the Greeks saved from barbarism, we want the Athenian state preserved, and we are interested in the ruler under whose leadership the Greeks subjugated Asia We have here a substantial, an objective interest.

The degree to which this historiographic discretion may truly be termed "objective," or the interests be conceived as "world-wide" or having a "universal aim" is dubious. Hegel, however, bases his claim on an idea of a universal human nature, a concept whose universality appears ultimately to be undermined to some degree by its ascription of normative and deviant status:

In speaking of human nature we mean something permanent. The concept of human nature must fit all men and all ages, past

and present. This universal concept may suffer infinite modifications; but actually the universal is one and the same essence in its most various modifications. Thinking reflection disregards the variations and adheres to the universal, which under all circumstances is active in the same manner and shows itself in the same interest. The universal type appears even in what seems to deviate from it most strongly, in the most distorted figure we can still discern the human. (21)

What begins as descriptive soon becomes prescriptive as the ill-defined norms of human nature are characterized as suffering modification, subject to deviance and distortion. Yet there exists a necessary connection between this positing of a normative human nature and the tacit adoption of a very definite viewpoint on history as a vantage point from which to order events into a coherent narrative.

The similarity of the mediating roles played by concepts such as intentionality and point of view in the discussion of the writing of history as narrative, and the writing of narrative fiction tends to work against the absolute separation of these two genres. Generic differences certainly exist, yet inasmuch as both seek to construct coherent narrative representations of events the similarity is worth examining. As a result, the following discussion of narrative and point of view in the writing of history can be extended to elucidate problems in the writing of fiction as well.

F.H. Bradley

In his early work, *The Presuppositions of Critical History* (1874), Bradley sets out, with brevity and clarity, a problem that has continued to be a major source of difficulty in historiography:

We ask for history, and that means that we ask for the simple record of unadulterated facts; we look, and nowhere do we find the object of our search, but in its stead we see the divergent accounts of a host of jarring witnesses, a chaos of disjointed and discrepant narrations, and yet, while all of

these can by no possibility be received as true, at the same time not one of them can be rejected as false. (85)

It is evident that for Bradley the possibility of accepting without intervention "the divergent accounts of a host of jarring witnesses, a chaos of disjoined and discrepant narrations" is not to be considered. While expressing some reservation concerning the practical consequences, Bradley accepts it as "the task of the historian," even "his mission," to bring order to this chaos. However, as he himself recognizes, this mission runs immediately into a serious obstacle. To admit that the historian has the responsibility to exercise a corrective influence "implies," he observes, "a preconception, and denotes in a sense a foregone conclusion. The straightening of the crooked rests on the knowledge of the straight, and the exercise of criticism requires a canon" (85-86). "Canon" here is used in the sense of rule, model, or law, and the problem of establishing a legitimate canonical authority assumes a central importance in Bradley's discussion.

Bradley attempts to confront the issue of subjectivity in his historiography head on. His title, he explains, "anticipates the result that a history without so-called prejudications is a mere delusion, [and] that what does everywhere exist is history founded upon them." What he hopes to provide is a theory whereby "true preconceptions" may be "consistently developed throughout the entire field" (87). He proceeds to look at the sublime diversity of the historical field, the instability of the historical record, and at difficulty inherent in attempts to stabilize or control it:

If we take the simplest historical fact, and reflect on the complex nature of the transition it attempts to express, it is clear to us that we are concerned with a number of judgements, the multitude of which wearies our attempts at analysis. (90)

Bradley then moves to an admittedly paradoxical resolution: in practice "these many judgements are united, and, as it were, resolved in a single judgement which answers to the whole event [1]n other words it is a conclusion." Historical facts then are conclusions, but

a conclusion, however much it may appear so, is never the fiction of a random invention. We bring to its assertion the formed world of existing beliefs [O]ur realities are built up of explicit or hidden inferences; in a single word, our facts are inferential.

Thus it is possible to get from this episodic chaos to a sense of order through the proper exercise of judgement--the function of discretion described earlier by Aristotle and Sidney. In fact, he concludes, "Such is . . . the constitution of the narrated event." This leaves open a fairly wide door. Two questions regarding Bradley's inferential facts arise: first, what effect does this process of inference have on the 'raw material' of history? Second, how is the inferential orientation grounded?

Bradley asserts that "rightly to observe is not to receive a series of chaotic impressions, but to grasp the course of events as a connected whole" (92). This is the corrective function demanded of the historian earlier. Our ideas of the past

become trustworthy solely through a process of constant and habitual corrected recollection; the correction being in every case the determination of an order by fixing its elements in their proper relations, and its result is a mediated sequence of phenomena. (93)

This mediation or imposition of order is inevitable: "in every case that which is called the fact is in reality a theory"; in short, "all our history is a matter of inference" (94), and "in the realm of history we have and can have no facts whatever which do not hold in their essence and depend for their existence on inferential reasoning" (92). The essential

distinction, according to Bradley, is between the historian who is unaware of his presuppositions and the one "who consciously orders and creates from the known foundation of that which for him is the truth," thus protecting himself "(so far as is possible) from the caprices of fiction" (96). The end result of this corrective inferential act then is the creation of narrative order, continuity, and coherence; it makes sense of history.

But how are the "proper relations" to be defined? Bradley is equally unequivocal regarding the second problem, the specific orientation of inferences: history, he writes, is inevitably a matter of inference:

And this inference furthermore can never start from a background of nothing; it is never a fragmentary isolated act of our mind, but is essentially connected with, and in entire dependence on, the character of our general consciousness. (95-6)

At this point Bradley seems to accept the stability of consciousness as the corrective to the instability of the historical record. To the charge that consciousness may be no more stable, he replies forcefully, alluding to the power of law in two senses of the word. Following a discussion of scientific laws of nature, he turns (as Hegel does) to human nature, dramatically asserting that if

the actions of man are subject to no law, and in this sense irrational, then the possibility of history, I think, must be allowed to disappear, and the past to become a matter of almost entire uncertainty. For, if we are precluded from counting on human nature, our hold on tradition is gone, and with it well nigh our only basis for historical judgement. (99)

There is a kind of shift here from a universal idea of human nature to a particular tradition, from the general to the specific culture whose tradition appears threatened. At the same time the laws of nature, particularly of human nature, begin to merge with the laws of particular

social groups and the exercise of power on behalf of "weightier interests." The laws of human nature, it seems, are strictly enforced:

where the weightiest interests are at stake, and as long as criminals are executed in many cases by right of what comes to a construction of the laws of human action, so long will there be at least no practical necessity for the discarding of historical evidence in favour of the doubts, or perhaps the dogmas, of any man.

As in Hegel, human nature has almost imperceptibly shifted from being a descriptive term to being a prescriptive one. In sum, Bradley argues that the presupposition of critical history "is the uniformity of law"; a law, it might be added, whose coercive power is clear--weighty interests have the power to delineate the boundaries of the laws of human nature and to prescribe and enforce the punishment of transgressors.

The role of critical consciousness recalls the previous reference to capital punishment and the coercive power of law: it demands a "oneness," an "intelligible unity" (102), that separates it from the "chaos of disjointed and discrepant narrations" and the "jarring witnesses." In this newly unified historical world, "Every part here must live, and live in the life of the whole. The dead matter . . . must render an account of its claims" (102-03). In the end, "It is the world of critical observation" then, "which thus in its hands has sentence of life and death" (103), he argues, in a statement echoing his reference to the execution of criminals. While Bradley no doubt does not intend the rather chilling political overtones of his metaphors, they are nonetheless appropriate to the stakes involved in legislating the meaning of history

At any rate, Bradley's principles of exclusion are twofold: the witness must appear to be reliable and to share, to a degree, our point of view on the events under consideration. The criterion of reliability is

certainly far from self-evident, yet it is the second criterion that is the focus of much of Bradley's attention:

wherever the so-called "fact" is made by subsumption under a view of the world different from ours, wherever we fail to make out that the judgement rested (consciously or unconsciously) on an ordered system identical with our own, there the "fact" cannot be affirmed except on analogy; for, since the narrative is based on beliefs different from ours, the facts are affected by the beliefs, or, for anything we know, they may be so; we have no security that they are not affected. And the application of the above is, that any narrative of "facts" which involves judgements proceeding from . . . a view of the world which, as a whole or in respect of the part in question, differs from ours, cannot have such force as to assure us of any event un-analogous to present experience. (107)

As examples of unacceptable narrative agents he cites "The orthodox Catholic" who "gets no hearing for his stories," and "the uneducated" whose "tales . . . concerning witchcraft or spectres do not find much more favour" (109). Although Bradley is addressing himself to an academic problem,⁶ nevertheless, in light of England's imperialist power, a legislation of acceptable historical narrative (and, as Bradley acknowledges, implicitly of human nature) that condemns to death (to use his metaphor) the narratives of other cultural groups has an almost explicit--if not, perhaps deliberate--political relevance.

The function of history then is the creation and enforcement in accounts of the past of a rational order and a unified tradition, not a desire to remain open to the play of cultural difference. "Jarring witnesses" must be silenced, and the "chaos of disjoined and discrepant nar-

⁶ This essay was written partly in response to the debate between Christian supporters of the historical truth of the Bible, and those whose rational positivism tended to make them sceptical of much in the Bible--particularly the accounts of miracles. See Lionel Rubinoff's introduction to the book, as well as Collingwood's discussion of Bradley in *The Idea of History*.

rations" must be made coherent by coercion or, where possible, by simple occlusion of the discrepant elements. While we are interested in studying the past, "where we encounter an alien element which we cannot recognize as akin to our selves, that interest fails, the hope and purpose which inspired us dies, and the endeavor is thwarted" (115). He abandons the "alien element" to the death of hope and purpose, continuing the metaphor of the power of the law over life and death that has run throughout his discussion of cultural difference. The "oneness of humanity" (114) seems to be connected here and throughout with the coherent and continuous orderly narrative pattern which it is the historian's task to create. And the coercive element of legislative power is brought into focus by Bradley's example: historical events, he argues,

form no continuous whole, the series presents gaps which a positive process is necessary to fill It is a sufficient answer to any difficulties which may be raised as to the construction of a past order to point to the procedure of our police courts, where, in addition to the reconstruction of the witnesses by cross-examination, the sequence of events is reached by an active combination from present data. (124)

If the outside limits are prescribed by legal power, within those bounds the unity and coherence of history are guaranteed by the personal experience of the critical historian. "Everything . . . depends on personal experience" (141). If this is so, it follows that everything must be equally dependent on whose "personal experience" is legitimized as the canon or model by which the police courts of history make their judgments:

As is the man, so are his facts. Uneducated persons and children transform to their own likeness all they assimilate: and savages are in many cases literally unable to take in what to us seem simple impressions of passivity, for this sufficient reason that they have no internal world which answers to them, no premises under which to subsume them. (141)

Some accounts of history need not be taken seriously because they are not based on "critical presuppositions." Orthodox Catholics, the uneducated, and now children and savages join the list of jarring witnesses whose narrations may be excluded. Because such groups lack a rational critical system for the appropriation of facts, he claims, their personal observation and actual experience can be discounted. Thus, systematic order is brought to the chaotic field of historical narrative. Yet it remains very much a matter of opinion whose presuppositions are truly systematic and "critical" and whose are superstition and dogma. Bradley's sense of the vulnerability of his position is, perhaps, registered in his repeated appeal to the coercive force of law and the need to disallow such illegitimate transgressive history as can be ruled out of order, to silence jarring witnesses whose narrative testimony can be stricken from the official record and whose agents can be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Early in the essay, Bradley presents a suggestive metaphorical discussion of history. His target is the uncritical historical method that would passively accept testimony and authority at face value, and the metaphor employed is sexual. Throughout the essay Bradley uses, not surprisingly, the masculine pronoun "he" to refer to historians. In this passage he characterizes history as "she", and pursues the metaphor at some length. History can, it seems, be a stern Victorian mistress: her unresponsive body is presented as a "tranquil expanse no breath of thought can ruffle" as "she demands from the historian the surrender of his judgment" and refuses "the projection of his desires and fancies into a region for ever passed from the limit of creation" (85). Desire is not, however, extinguished, and Bradley elucidates the dire consequences of this kind of

erotically charged but unsatisfying relationship. History has many would-be lovers and in effect leaves a trail of historiographical broken hearts behind: "Writer after writer in rapid succession takes up the never-exhausted theme . . . the passion of the mind to be at home in its object, the longing to think the thing as it is in itself, and as all men have failed to think it before" (86). Yet they are not easily discouraged, and the erotic urge returns "[w]ith every fresh standing-ground gained by the growth of experience, with every rise of the spirit." Due to the incommensurable claims made on history by its many suitors, each of whom seems to represent her differently, the uncritical historian faces a dilemma: how can the beloved body truly be possessed? This dilemma then leads to an erotic impasse: "Impotent to deny the existence of these facts, and powerless to explain them, the uncritical consciousness refuses to advance, or advancing loses hold on all reality." The result then is a kind of historiographic detumescence, perhaps premature narration or even an act of narration that violates the available facts.

Without consummation, of course, there can be no reproduction, and in the end the disillusioned historian\lover

is forced to see in the place of its reproduction an origination, in the place of its witness a writer of fiction, in the place of its fact a theory; and its consistent issue is the barren skepticism which sees in history but a weary labyrinth of truth and tangled falsehood, whose clue is buried and lost in the centuries that lie behind.

The product of the relationship then, its offspring, is without even the erotic desire that drove its predecessor, and the body of history no longer possess an erotic attraction. Although some kind of reproductive relationship is clearly called for by Bradley, he finds it absolutely necessary to limit and control the creative relationship within strict

bounds. Having accepted that the chastity of history must be compromised, his dilemma then becomes saving her from promiscuity: history cannot be permitted to have relations with just anyone.

While in the balance of the essay Bradley's central metaphor is legal rather than sexual, nonetheless the stakes remain the same: once the door to the subjective element in the interpretation of history--indeed in all interpretation--has been opened, some rule or law must be invoked to ensure that it does not swing too far open, to regulate who may have the authority to narrate from among the jarring witnesses. History may no longer remain chaste, but she cannot be allowed to become promiscuous.

R.G. Collingwood

Collingwood, in his influential work *The Idea of History* (published posthumously 1946), characterizes Bradley as the greatest English philosopher of his time (238). Like Bradley, Collingwood works his discussion of the philosophy of history from an engagement with the problem of human nature, yet an important difference separates them. The eighteenth-century historians and philosophers, Collingwood writes,

assumed that human nature had existed ever since the creation of the world exactly as it existed among themselves. Human nature was conceived substantialistically as something static and permanent, an unvarying substratum underlying the course of historical changes and all human activities. (82)

The problem of difference could be accounted for only by positing that human nature is "imperfectly developed in children, idiots, and savages" (82), a normative use of the term that recalls Hegel. It was easy for the eighteenth-century philosophers to make this mistake, he argues, "because their historical perspective was so short, and their knowledge of cultures other than their own so limited" (224). Instead, a historicized theory of

human nature is needed to replace the Enlightenment idea of a universal history:

a genuine history of man would have to be a history of how man came to be what he is, and this would imply thinking of human nature, the human nature actually existing in eighteenth century Europe, as the product of an historical process, whereas it was regarded as the unchanging presupposition of any such process. (84-5)

Collingwood pursues this analysis an interesting step further in his subsequent critique of Herder's conception of history. Herder moved beyond a single monolithic human nature; he was, writes Collingwood, "the first thinker to recognize in a systematic way that there are differences between different kinds of men, and that human nature is not uniform but diversified not a datum but a problem" (90-91). Herder does not offer a theory of a historicized human nature, however, but bases cultural difference on the idea that "each race, once formed, is a specific type of humanity which has permanent characteristics of its own" (90). Thus, instead of the Enlightenment "conception of a single fixed human nature we now have the conception of several fixed human natures There is still no conception of a people's character as having been made what it is by that people's historical experience" (91). Collingwood's rejection of this theory, written during the 1930s, becomes scathing as he links it to Eurocentrist apologies for imperialism and racism:

At the present time, we have seen enough of the evil consequences of this theory to be on our guard against it Today we only know it as a sophisticated excuse for national pride and national hatred. The idea that there is a European race whose peculiar virtues render it fit to dominate the rest of the world . . . we know to be scientifically baseless and politically disastrous. (91-92)

"Once Herder's view of race is accepted," Collingwood argues, "there is no escaping the Nazi marriage laws" (92).

What historians should be interested in, according to Collingwood, is the historical specificity of culture, human nature, and social institutions. Historians then find their subject in "the social customs which [people] create by their thought as a framework within which their appetites find satisfaction in ways sanctioned by convention and morality" (216). This casts the problem of subjectivity in history in an interesting light and recalls Bradley's distinction between analogous and non-analogous experiences. Historical inquiry, Collingwood argues, thus not only reveals information about past events but also demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of the historian's own mind:

whenever he finds certain historical matters unintelligible, he has discovered a limitation of his own mind; he has discovered that there are certain ways in which he is not, or no longer, or not yet, able to think. (218)

The problem of what is available to thought, of what is quite literally unthinkable and inconceivable, involves questions of ideology, hegemony, and doxa. Collingwood seems to hover on the brink of this kind of analysis.

Certain historians, sometimes whole generations of historians, find in certain periods of history nothing intelligible, and call them dark ages; but such phrases tell us nothing about those ages themselves, though they tell us a great deal about the persons who use them. (218-19)

Having established the problem of what is or is not thinkable, Collingwood's next move, a move consonant with his desire to historicize the idea of human nature, might have been to examine the political, social, and historical determinations which delineate the horizon of the thinkable. But this is a step he does not take; instead, he works through the individual historian, the "strengths and weaknesses" (219) of whose sensibility determine the scope of any historical account.

Like Bradley, he is engaged in a rear-guard action against positivism, and perhaps it is in response to this pressure that he valorizes the individual consciousness as the unit of history par excellence: for Collingwood, individual consciousness constitutes both the subjectivity of the historian and the historical object to be studied. It is the thoughts of historical agents that form the object of historical attention, not the institutions or social structures within which they lived. Collingwood introduces an almost structuralist theory of a historically variable "*a priori* imagination" (241) structuring individual thoughts and responses at any given time.⁷ Not only is the imagination of the historian framed by these *a priori* structures of thought, the mental habits and cognitive processes of the people studied are similarly shaped. Thus social institutions and conventions articulate, perhaps homologically, the *a priori* imaginations of the people involved in them. As an example, one could cite the idea of hierarchy in medieval society: the position of hierarchy as an organizational principle in philosophy, theology, and social institutions suggests that some implicit concept of hierarchy might be a basic organizational principle in the medieval *a priori* imagination.

Collingwood's insistence on the priority of the individual consciousness separates him from many contemporary thinkers who conversely emphasize the degree to which the thoughts of people are constituted by the institutions within which they live. "Institutions," he argues, "are constituted by the way in which they are thought of by the people living

⁷ W.H. Dray discusses this concept in "R.G. Collingwood and the *A Priori* of History." See Alan Donagan for a full discussion of Collingwood's work.

under them" (1969 175). By accepting the existence of incommensurable systems of *a priori* imaginations (presuppositions), the historian could theorize the gap in what appears as thinkable to different cultures at different times, but Collingwood does not make this connection. While accepting the existence of this gap, as Louis Mink notes⁸, Collingwood omits an analysis of why it exists or what specifically changes in order to make thinkable what had previously not been so. Indeed, this is not even acknowledged as a problem.

Collingwood goes a step beyond Bradley's idea of a "critical" history and speaks of a "constructive history" (240) that "is in no way arbitrary or merely fanciful [O]ur construction involves nothing that is not necessitated by the evidence, it is a legitimate historical construction of a kind without which there can be no history at all" (240-41). He is quite unequivocal about the importance of the imaginative faculty which, "however unconscious we may be of its operation . . . bridg[es] the gaps between what our authorities tell us, gives the historical narrative or description its continuity" (241). He goes on to warn against underestimating "the part played by the historical imagination, which is properly not ornamental but structural. Without it the historian would have no narrative to adorn" (241). One of his examples is the mental connection essential to coherent narrative that occurs when a ship is sighted first at one point at sea, then a bit further on. The imagination fills in the gap by assuming its movement between these

⁸ See Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood*. Mink's study of Collingwood evidently influenced his work in the philosophy of history in the same way that Collingwood himself was influenced by Bradley.

points, thus constituting a narrative. But as Collingwood pursues his theory of historical knowledge, even the stable points of historiographical reference begin to grow tenuous:

The historian's picture of his subject . . . thus appears as a web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of his authorities; and if these points are frequent enough and the threads spun from each to the next are constructed with due care . . . the whole picture is constantly verified by appeal to these data, and runs little risk of losing touch with the reality which it represents. (242)

But this model of the historiographic situation is, as Collingwood observes, seriously flawed in its attribution of excessive stability to the authorities and to the empirical data. The "supposedly fixed points" (243) constituted by facts and authorities are not finally static and should never be accepted without an element of scepticism. If the historical imagination is to "spin[] its web" with clarity, this act must be part of a larger dynamic process of "critical thinking."⁹ It is at this point that Collingwood moves to complete Bradley's "Copernican revolution in the theory of historical knowledge" (240).

I am now driven to confess that there are for historical thought no fixed points thus given: in other words, that in history, just as there are properly speaking no authorities, so there are properly speaking no data. (243)

Collingwood's solution lies in his concept of imagination, which he continues to elaborate.

The web of imaginative construction is something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized. So far from relying for its validity upon the support of given facts, it actually serves as the touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine. (244)

⁹ See Hans Kellner's "Time Out: The Discontinuity of Historical Consciousness" for a discussion of the problem of gaps in historical understanding.

And what are the operating principles of this imagination? The need to make sense, "to incorporate [data] into a coherent and continuous picture of my own" (245). Again, the construction of historical coherence is neither arbitrary nor "the fiction of a random invention," as Bradley phrased it. "Whatever goes into it, goes into it not because [the historian's] imagination passively accepts it, but because it actively demands it" (245). Collingwood argues that the novelist and the historian are alike in that "Each aims at making his picture a coherent whole The novel and the history must both of them make sense" (245). The fundamental difference between them is that the latter also has to "construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened" (246). Certainly, this picture must be constructed through historical evidence, but what is historical evidence? It is, he argues, whatever the historian "can use as evidence."¹⁰

The enlargement of historical knowledge comes about mainly through finding how to use as evidence this or that kind of perceived fact which historians have hitherto thought useless to them Evidence is evidence only when some one contemplates it historically. (246-47)

Unless called into play as evidence, such information remains, he concludes, "historically dumb." Collingwood's insight is supported by the fact that evidence necessary for the writing of women's history, for example, or histories of the lower classes or colonized races was available long before it was considered historically relevant. With this we are

¹⁰ In *The English Historical Novel*, Avrom Fleishman disputes even this limited distinction between the novelist and the historian, arguing that it "breaks down even in his own terms." Since the historian's picture is an imaginative reconstruction, the fact that its coherence is based on documents and artifacts does not necessarily distinguish it markedly from the novelist's coherent picture (5).

almost back to Bradley's sentence of death on those "jarring witnesses" who with their "chaos of disjoined and discrepant narrations" are for whatever reason outside the laws that mark the boundaries of legitimate, coherent and continuous history. Collingwood seems to recognize, rather more sympathetically, the manner in which jarring witnesses have often been rendered speechless, aphasic, by the presuppositions or *a priori* imagination of the historian.

W.H. Walsh

"One of the things that strikes the outsider most when he looks at history," observes Walsh in *Philosophy of History* (1951),

is the plurality of divergent accounts of the same subject differing and apparently inconsistent versions of the same set of events, each of them claiming to give, if not the whole truth about it, at any rate as much of the truth as can now be come by. (98)

This is , of course, very close to the problem described by Bradley, and in response, Walsh distinguishes between historical skepticism in which "subjective attitudes . . . constitute an insurmountable barrier to true knowledge of the past," (108) and a "perspective theory" of historical truth that would "accept the existence of irreducibly different points of view among historians" (109). In terms of the latter position, "objectivity in history must be taken in a weakened sense: a history could be said to be objective if it depicted the facts accurately from its own point of view." With this recognition of point of view and consequent abandonment of universality, Walsh is admitting the "jarring witnesses" and "disjoined and discrepant narrations," albeit reluctantly. This reluctance is registered in his suggestion that "objectivity in a strong sense may after all be attainable by historians, since in principle at any

rate the possibility of developing a point of view which would win universal acceptance cannot be ruled out" (109). But this objectivity can only be accomplished if a single, universal historical point of view can be established, and the establishment of such a transcendental point of view inevitably involves a conception of human nature.

In an argument that looks back to the ideas of presuppositions asserted by both Bradley and Collingwood, Walsh claims that every historian has

a fundamental set of judgements on which all his thinking rests. These judgements concern human nature: they are judgements about the characteristic responses human beings make to the various challenges set them in the course of their lives. (65)

These judgements encompass both trivial and essential aspects of human life, but the importance of the whole body of such judgements must not be underestimated since "it is in the light of his conception of human nature that the historian must finally decide both what to accept as fact and how to understand what he does accept." Walsh discusses three possible sources of such judgements. The first source is located in the historian's study of "human nature in the modern sciences of psychology and sociology" (66), and the third is the genius, talent, or insight of the individual historian whose powers of creative imagination are compared to those of the writers of great literature (67). The middle term is common sense.

The understanding of human nature shown by historians . . . is not different from that which we all display in our daily lives, and comes from the same source. It is part of that vague amalgam of currently recognized generalities, derived from common experience and more or less confirmed by our own, which we all accept for everyday purposes and know by the name of "common sense." (66)

The idea of common sense--*sensus communis*--like that of human nature, is central to the problem under discussion, but finally it does not resolve the difficulties of historical skepticism or perspectivism either. As long as differing accounts of human nature, different versions of common sense, co-exist, there will be jarring witnesses and discrepant narrations, and Walsh realizes that "there is in the last resort nothing anyone else can do about it" (117). It is not possible to "settle the dispute by reference to a body of unassailable fact, because what is fact on one interpretation is not necessarily fact on another." Walsh uses as an example the disputes between Marxist and anti-Marxist historians, and while he does not discuss the political implications of these disputes, his example suggests an awareness of this dimension that is never fully articulated.

Since "appealing to independent facts is thus not possible," Walsh argues that "the ultimate attainment of a single historical point of view, a set of presuppositions which all historians might be prepared to accept" must be hoped for. Such a position would solve the problem of historiographic objectivity or perspective "on Kantian lines, by the development of an historical 'consciousness in general', a standard way of thinking about the matter of history (117). Walsh acknowledges that this single, orthodox, historical point of view, this "historical 'consciousness in general,'" must be "based on a true appreciation of the possibilities of human nature" (118) which is not as yet available. To accomplish this vision,

the historian needs not merely standard knowledge of how people do behave in a variety of situations, but further a standard conception of how they ought to behave. He needs to get straight not merely his factual knowledge, but also his moral and metaphysical ideas. (118)

Thus, knowledge of human nature inevitably involves a larger vision of the world, of the universe, in which those humans live. Walsh admits that many today would not consider such knowledge possible, but he himself refuses to relinquish hope although "the achieving of it is clearly not going to be accomplished in the immediate future." There is for the moment no escaping Bradley's "jarring witnesses," but he maintains his vision of a final unified version of human nature, and

until it is accomplished an objective historical consciousness, whose principles would provide a framework for rational thought in history, must remain no more than a pious aspiration. And if it cannot be accomplished we have no alternative but to fall back on the perspective theory discussed above.
(118)

It is a religious vision to some degree, invoking piety and a sense of a "fall" from a transcendent vision of history (doxa) in which the historian, like Boethius' God, can see and comprehend the totality of human experience, to the secular interpretations and perspectives of finite, heterodox individuals.¹¹

Walsh's best-known contribution to the debate concerning the narrative representation of history is his theory of colligation. Walsh accepts that "the historian's aim [is] to make a coherent whole out of the events he studies" (62), and given the impossibility of doing so (in any final sense) that results from our incomplete understanding of human nature, we are left with the necessity of provisional solutions if we wish to make history coherent. The historian's way of doing this

¹¹ Walter Benjamin's similar formulation is more explicit: "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past--which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments" (254).

is to look for certain dominant concepts or leading ideas by which to illuminate his facts, to trace connections between those ideas themselves, and then to show how the detailed facts become intelligible in the light of them by constructing a "significant" narrative of the events of the period in question. (62)

This colligation procedure is not perfect and makes no claim to the transcendent vision Walsh hopes for; in fact, it "can be carried out with only partial success." The choice of concepts or ideas to be employed and their proper application offers a wide margin of error, and "the intelligibility sought for can only be intelligibility within an arbitrarily delimited period." All these caveats notwithstanding however, Walsh argues that this is essentially what historians do, and he locates the construction of a significant narrative as a central act in the process. A significant narrative (as opposed to a "plain narrative" or chronicle) has two related characteristics: first, it aims not merely at saying what happened but also at (in some sense) explaining why; second, it is "a smooth narrative in which every event falls as it were into its natural place and belongs to an intelligible whole" (31-33).

Like Collingwood, Walsh compares the successful historian to a novelist or dramatist in this respect. As paradigms of significant narrative, these works of art "consist not in a series of isolated episodes, but in the orderly development" of complex situations. Similarly,

good history possesses a certain unity of plot or theme. And where we fail to find such a unity we experience a feeling of dissatisfaction: we believe we have not understood the facts we set out to investigate as well as we should. (33)

For Walsh then, as for Collingwood, literature presents a standard of coherence, a unity of vision and an intelligibility, that can serve as a model for the historian, but one which might prove unacceptable to many post-realist novelists and literary academics.

The function of the historian is to make sense of history, to find in or impose on history a coherence and a narrative form that make it seem at the same time "natural". While Walsh does not interrogate his use of the concept of events in their "natural place[s]", the nature referred to here can only be a reference to the conception of human nature held by the historian. Consequently, the intelligibility and coherence are limited once again to those who share the historian's view of the world-- otherwise, the sense of natural place for the events of the narrative, the smoothness of the narrative flow, is disrupted. Walsh abandons, provisionally at least, the search for a transcendent point of view which might theoretically reconcile or contain all points of view. Instead, he settles for something much more limited, an idea of common sense, of a "fundamental set of judgements," that enables the colligation of historical evidence. A similarity can, to some degree, be recognized between Walsh's terms and Bradley's critical presuppositions or Collingwood's *a priori* imagination. They all attempt to describe the way that the historian, however consciously or unconsciously, makes sense of a historical field that does not initially offer itself as a coherent totality, and they all do so through the focus of a point of view on that field that is based on an already structured sense of reality.

W.B. Gallie:

When Gallie argues in *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (1964), that "to follow" a narrative "is to think--to connect, to appreciate continuities, to feel the forward-movement" (18), the place of jarring witnesses and their disjoined and discrepant narrations is not immediately clear. Nevertheless, "following, in this sense, is an essen-

tial element in, or basis for, other more complicated forms of historical understanding." Gallie is adamant that the process of following a story is not ultimately a rational and conscious one, a characterization that places it, once again, in the category of common sense: "It would better to say that we are pulled along by it, and pulled at by a far more compelling part of our human make-up than our intellectual presumptions and expectations" (45).

The act of following a story requires "the cool application of our general knowledge of human nature" as a means of understanding "continuous and consistent processes" (46), but it is not confined to this. There is as well "the capacity to follow events across discontinuities, contingencies, unpredictabilities of certain kinds." Without this capacity, the possibility of narrative history could not exist. And just as there is not, for Collingwood, a universal historical imagination, for Gallie there are limits to this capacity: the nature of the discontinuities we are able to accept without losing the coherence of the narrative depends in part on "the set or orientation of our sympathy for some particular character . . . and partly upon the intrinsic nature of the kind of sympathy that has been established (46). When the narrative gaps or discontinuities grow too great, the historian has recourse to non-narrative explanation: Gallie uses the example of a commentator at a cricket match who occasionally is forced to interrupt his narrative to explain a rule. But by and large, rational knowledge remains subservient to some more fundamental presuppositions through which the sympathies are engaged. Indeed, unless these sympathies are somehow engaged the story would remain incomprehensible, rational knowledge notwithstanding: "unless we were in

some degree emotionally involved in a story, the point, nay the very existence of its climax would escape us" (47).

Engaging the sympathies depends upon the "human interests" which a given set of events can be conceived to represent, on "their power to enlist certain peculiarly human feelings" (48):

To be studied as history, a set of past human actions must be felt by members of some human group to belong to its past, and to be intelligible and worth understanding from the point of view of its present interests. (52)

This is close to Collingwood's historiographical aphasia or Bradley's sentence of life and death in historiography, and constitutes an admission that followability is specific to particular social groups at particular times. Human nature, for Gallie that "compelling part of our make-up," is not a universal. It is always from a specific location that sense has to be made and that the processes of selection, exclusion, and organization of material must be orchestrated. "Historical understanding of any event involves seeing it in relation to other events that are at once its context and its condition" (54). Some principle of selection, conscious or unconscious, must inevitably be invoked if representation is to take place at all. But, as Gallie argues, the selection of the event to be studied as well as the positing of a relation between it and another event is inevitably deeply embedded in the context of present interests.

At one point Gallie, like Collingwood and Walsh, reflects back on the earlier "historians' dream of a World or Universal history" capable of transcending the specific social and historical situation of the historian and "connecting up all the main historic themes that can be expected to be of interest to any intelligent reader of the age." Such a history would find its subject matter in the achievements of those nations, religions, and cultures that have

served for a period as torch-carriers for the civilization that is now common to "us all", which to Ranke meant common to all intelligent and educated citizens of any of the great nation-states of Europe and North America. But, alas, every such would-be-Universal history, like every narrower history, must be told with certain pre-selected interests to the fore: e.g. for Ranke those of nineteenth-century national civilizations. Even in his day this selectiveness showed a certain sociological lack of imagination; today it would be simply unthinkable. (54)

It might be added that those principles of selection that are accepted as normal or commonsensical here and today may seem equally unthinkable (morally or quite literally) at another point in time or from another point of view. Yet the exigencies of historiography remain: the stories must be told and "in fairness, some selection of viewpoint must be made if history is to be written at all" (54). The whole historical field, then, in its entirety is not a possible starting point:

nothing but confusion can result from equating the idea of history with the idea of the total human past. We need only add here that our ignorance of where the past limit of the proposed slice of space-time should be set, and of the nature and order of importance of the main events that fall within it, is terrifying in its immensity. (57)

No narrative representation can do justice to the sublime scope of history as a whole. Nevertheless, the ideal of a total history or of one historical world, if unrealizable, remains as "a demand laid upon the conscience, a challenge set to the passion, of any and every historian" (61). The paradox persists that

the historian is committed to the search for interconnectedness and is thus drawn on by an ideal demand that expresses his ideal of the whole, of the one historical world. But at the same time, because of the inevitable selectiveness of all historical thinking, it is impossible that he should ever reach, that he could ever have come perceptibly nearer to that ideal goal. (61)

The rhetoric and subject matter here recall Walsh's pious aspiration to achieve objective historical consciousness, but Gallie expresses more

fully, perhaps, the problem inherent in any such aspiration to objective or total history:

But history is not just past human actions, nor just those past human actions that happen to be known by men of a later generation. It is our name for the study of any past human action in so far as it is understood through its inter-connectedness with other actions which a particular community or generation regards as of special interest to *them*. (62)¹²

While Gallie does not discuss the political implications of the point, as is the case with Bradley's "weightiest interests," the political stakes are high, and it is worthwhile underlining the profoundly political nature of the way coherent historical narratives can be shaped by present interest. The point here is not to elaborate a 1984-style conspiracy theory of historiography, but to account for the way coherent historical narrative emerges from jarring witnesses (or communities of witnesses) and their disjoined and discrepant narrations. Nevertheless, as Foucault writes, historical discourse cannot escape its own historical situatedness:

The more History attempts to transcend its own rootedness in historicity, and the greater the efforts it makes to attain, beyond the historical relativity of its origin and its choices, the sphere of universality, the more clearly it bears the marks of its historical birth, and the more evidently there appears through it the history of which it is itself a part. (371)

¹² Gallie here stays close to Collingwood who argues that we use "the present as evidence of its own past . . . and any reconstruction of the past aims at reconstructing the past of this present, the present in which the act of imagination is going on, as here and now preceived" (247). Again, see Walter Benjamin who writes: "As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history....For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (255).

Gallie's assertion that "'our' history is whatever past actions our historians have succeeded in making intelligible to us, whoever 'we' happen to be," calls attention to the importance of the first person pronouns in order to make clear the determining influence, whether conscious or unconscious, of social position and affiliation on the historiographic act.

Louis O. Mink

"[N]othing is more wonderful than common sense," writes Mink, and the "comfortable certainties" (182) of human nature and of universal human experience present him with his first topic in his seminal article "Narrative Form as Cognitive Understanding" (1978). The echoes of Collingwood and of Gallie are clear:

The common sense of an age, we recognize when we compare that age with others, may well be for different times or places beyond the limit of comprehension or even of fantasy. A primary reason for this is that common sense of whatever age has presuppositions which derive not from universal human experience but from a shared conceptual framework, which determines what shall count as experience for its communicants. (182)

Mink does not pursue this suggestive argument at any length, however, but turns instead to a consideration of a few "common sense" notions of historical narrative, a genre that he defines very broadly. Like Paul Ricoeur¹³, he includes under the rubric of narrative a number of works that do not seem truly narrative. "Even histories that are synchronic studies," he argues, "inevitably take into account the larger process of development or change" (184). He uses this expanded notion of narrative in order to annex works, such as Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages*,

¹³ Ricoeur, as well, in *Time and Narrative* (v.1 208-17), gives the example of Braudel's work which is non-narrative but which, according to Ricoeur, covertly retains many properties of formal narrative.

which, strictly speaking, are non-narrative. While the book does not itself have a narrative structure, its insertion into an overall narrative framework is evident from the title.

For Mink, narrative is important not simply as an aspect of history or literature; rather it "is a primary cognitive instrument--an instrument rivaled, in fact, only by theory and by metaphor as irreducible ways of making the flux of experience comprehensible" (185). He formulates two essential modes of understanding this flux, synchronic and diachronic, and as the foremost example of the latter, "narrative as such is not just a technical problem for writers and critics but a primary and irreducible form of human comprehension, an article in the constitution of common sense" (186).

Narratives contain or express the presuppositions and common sense of their authors, presuppositions and articles of common sense which may be very different. It seems clear then, he argues, "that our experience of life does not itself necessarily have the form of narrative, except as we give it that form by making it the subject of stories" (186). The fact that we know how to construct coherent narratives, then, suggests that we are in possession of principles of selection and exclusion which may or may not be consciously held. "Since we do recognize that a given incident is relevant or irrelevant to a certain narrative, it would seem that we must be in possession of implicit criteria of relevance," and, "so it would seem that we should be able to make explicit in a systematic way the criteria implicit in our recognition of relevance and irrelevance" (187). Yet, he adds, this has not proved possible.

While this systematic explication has remained elusive, Mink nevertheless pinpoints a central presupposition behind the writing of narrative history. This is the idea

that historical actuality itself has narrative form, which the historian does not invent but discovers, or attempts to discover. History-as-it-was-lived, that is, is an untold story. The historian's job is to discover that untold story, or part of it, and to retell it even though in abridged or edited form Properly understood, the story of the past needs only to be communicated, not constructed. (187-88).

Mink traces this presupposition to the powerful concept of universal history, especially as formulated by Schiller and Kant. For Schiller, universal history "explains the whole contemporary world by discerning those chains of events that have led up to the present, and displaying them as a single and coherent whole" (189). And Kant argued that "what seems complex and chaotic in the single individual may be seen from the standpoint of the human race as a whole to be a steady and progressive though slow evolution of its original endowment" (1963 190). As Collingwood points out, the enlightenment philosophers felt they had begun to understand universal human nature and could therefore articulate a universal history from the point of view of the race as a whole. This confidence continues in Hegel as well, but a number of more recent philosophers, as we have seen, are notably less sanguine concerning this possibility.

Mink delineates four related concepts common to the idea of universal history: "the ensemble of human events belongs to a single story"; "there is a single central subject or theme in the unfolding of the plot of history"; "the events of the historical process are unintelligible when seen only in terms of their immediate circumstances their beginnings and ends are arbitrary, and their narrative form

not fully determinate, until they are ensconced within the single envisioned story"; and finally, "the great diversity of human events, customs, and institutions . . . [was regarded] as the permutations of a single and unchanging set of human capacities and possibilities" (190-91). Each of these propositions has been discredited in modern philosophy, Mink argues, yet the ideas continue to permeate historical thinking.

After pointing out a number of contradictions in the idea of universal history, Mink begins to conceptualize narrative as a form of cognition rather than of *mimesis* and to unfold some of the implications of such an argument:

The cognitive function of narrative form, then, is not just to relate a succession of events but to body forth an ensemble of interrelationships of many different kinds as a single whole The same event, under the same description or different descriptions, may belong to different stories, and its particular significance will vary with its place in these different--often very different--narratives. (198)

The problems do not end here, however. Mink asserts that "there is something incompatible about our concept of 'event' and our concept of 'narrative'" (200). The concept of an "event" is one borrowed from the physical sciences and becomes awkward when pushed into history. What are the limits of an "event"? Is any event not composed of an infinite number of smaller events? Is it possible to theorize something like an 'eventeme'?

It is clear that we cannot refer to events as such, but only to events under a description: so there can be more than one description of the same event, all of them true but referring to different aspects of the event or describing it at different levels of generality. But what can we possibly mean by "same event"? (199-200).

He then reconceptualizes the relation of the two terms in such a way that narratives are no longer seen as built out of events as Bradley argued. Mink, somewhat in the manner of Collingwood's Copernican revolution, goes a step further and reverses the relation:

"Events" (or more precisely, descriptions of events) are not the raw material out of which narratives are constructed; rather an event is an abstraction from a narrative [and it is] a particular narrative construction which generates the event's appropriate description. (201)

Mink's analysis threatens seriously to destabilize the mind's perceived ability to grasp discrete, concrete historical events. One is returned presumably to an idea of "interest" once again in search of a ground for historical knowledge. What then is the criterion of historiographical acceptability? How can we deal with the jarring witnesses and the disjoined and discrepant narrations? Considering his avoidance of the political implications of his argument, Mink's phrasing is remarkable: "all our experience of narratives suggests that there is no way of settling on standard descriptions other than by arbitrary enforcement" (201). Mink does not address questions of power such as who may be enforcing standard or orthodox versions of events, against whom they might be enforced, what interests might be involved, or what might be at stake.

For Mink, despite the acuteness of his analysis, these problems remain suspended, and he concludes that his theory "does not put the past completely at risk" since individual statements of historical fact are essentially unaffected (202):

But it does mean that the significance of the past is determinate only by virtue of our own disciplined imagination. Insofar as the significance of past occurrences is understandable only as they are locatable in the ensemble of interrelationships that can be grasped only in the construction of narrative form, it is we who make the past determinate in that respect. If the past is not an untold story but can be made intelligible only as the subject of stories we tell, it is still our responsibility to get on with it.¹⁴

¹⁴ In his introduction to Mink's essays, Vann reads this paragraph as a more or less unsuccessful attempt by Mink to shore up the ground of historiographic certainty that he had eroded in his own critique of the event, as though he were not entirely comfortable with the some of the radical consequences of his own analysis (25).

The sense of peril introduced in the idea of historiographic enforcement is extended here with a reference to "our responsibility" and the importance of the duty to continue to narrate the past in such a way as to both construct its significance and maintain its truth claims. "It would be disastrous I believe," he writes, "if common sense were to be routed from its last stronghold on this point." The nature of the threatened disaster is nowhere spelled out, but it is clear that in this case there would be no enforcable standard, no orthodoxy, no *sensus communis* by means of which the heterodox "jarring witnesses" could be controlled.

Hayden White:

In his most recent collection of essays, *The Content of the Form* (1987), White asks a familiar historiographic question: "What is involved, then, in that finding of the 'true story,' that discovery of the 'real story' within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of 'historical records'?" (4). But White's discussion goes a step further than any discussed thus far: instead of limiting himself to an analysis^{of} the method whereby narrative order is imposed on the historical field, he also interrogates the motives for doing so: "What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story?" (4).

White analyses the narrativization of historical events through a comparison with annals and chronicles. The central distinction, one that in some ways removes history from the critiques of Aristotle and Sidney,

is that in a narrative "events must be not only registered in their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, which they do not possess as mere sequence" (5). Since this coherence is not to be found in the events themselves, it must be imposed from a specific narratorial point of view:

It is only from our knowledge of the subsequent history of Western Europe that we can presume to rank events in terms of their world-historical significance, and even that significance is less world-historical than simply Western European, representing a tendency of modern historians to rank events in the record hierarchically from within a perspective that is culture-specific, not universal at all. (9-10)

By implication, the same process is at work both in the general selection of events to be narrated and in the selection of details to be included in the representations of those events: "Every narrative," he observes, "however seemingly 'full,' is constructed on the basis of a set of events which might have been included but were left out" (10).

In the annals and chronicle forms, White argues, there is less emphasis on the ranking (and perhaps on the selectivity) that make up the basis of narrative history. But what is ultimately lacking in these forms to lend them

similar regularity and fullness is a notion of a social center by which to locate them with respect to one another and to charge them with ethical and moral significance. It is the absence of any consciousness of a social center that prohibits the annalist from ranking the events. (11)¹⁵

The key terms in this passage and throughout the article are "social center" and "ethical and moral," related terms for White with a clear connec-

¹⁵ White suggests that the failure of the medieval annalists and chroniclers to fully narrativize the historical accounts is a result of "their failure to represent the moral under the aspect of the aesthetic" (25).

tion to the *sensus communis*, the common sense that provides the epistemological center of gravity of a society. White goes on to elaborate on the relations between these terms within narrative theory, citing Hegel to the effect that the state and its laws provide the social center without which narrative history is not conceivable: "But it is only the state which first presents subject-matter that is not only adapted to the prose of History, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being" (12). Thus, in order for narrative to go on, there must be "some notion of the legal subject that can serve as the agent, agency, and subject of historical narrative" (13).

An "intimate relationship" thus exists, he writes, in a formulation that recalls Bradley's use of legal metaphors, "between law, historicity, and narrativity And this raises the suspicion that narrative in general . . . has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority" (13).¹⁶ The law "is the form in which the subject encounters most immediately the social system" (14), and it is theoretically a codification of the moral or common sense of that system. The intimate relationship between narrativity and law can thus be extended to include morality or ethics as well, and White concludes that "every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats." From this conclusion it is one more small step to the assertion that narrativity "is

¹⁶ Said, for example, persuasively cites this point in his discussion of the need for a Palestinian national narrative in "Permission To Narrate."

intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine" (14).

This social center and moral sense implicit in narrative exists in a complex reciprocal relation to authority, both constituting and constituted by social authority. It constitutes the "authority of reality" to the extent that it "endows this reality with form and thereby makes it desirable by the imposition upon its processes of the formal coherency that stories possess" (20). Thus it seems possible to endow a particular set of social relations with an atmosphere of reality, a sense of being both natural and desirable which thereby establishes a particular distribution of power as normal, morally as well as narratively coherent. The corollary is that legitimate narrative authority is constituted by social authority. White argues that "once we note the presence of the theme of authority" in narrative "we also perceive the extent to which the truth claims of the narrative and indeed the very right to narrate hinge upon a certain relationship to authority per se." In the end, "The authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself" (20). But this sense of reality

attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary. (24)

White paraphrases Barthes and Lacan to the effect that narrative is "the principle instrumentality by which society fashions the narcissistic, infantile consciousness into a 'subjectivity' capable of bearing the 'responsibilities' of an 'object' of the law in all its forms" (36). If rule-governed behavior is a by-product of language-acquisition, then nar-

rativity may be said further to result in the kind of temporal integrity "which every individual must possess if he is to become a 'subject' of (any) system of law, morality, or propriety" (36). The problem of the function of the imagination in historical narrative then returns, as White asserts that

What is 'imaginary' about any narrative representation is the illusion of a centered consciousness capable of looking out on the world, apprehending its structure and processes, and representing them to itself as having all of the formal coherency of narrativity itself (36).

White attempts to dispel this illusion by revealing the pivotal role of the imagination: "The production of meaning, in this case, can be regarded as a performance, because any given set of real events can be emplotted in a number of ways" (44). This performance is not solely a matter of personal artistic preference but an aspect of the way cultures produce meaning, and define the limits of the thinkable (Collingwood) or followable (Gallie). "In the historical narrative the systems of meaning-production peculiar to a culture or society are tested against the capacity of any set of 'real' events to yield to such systems." This interpretation removes narrative history from the dilemma of (true) science versus (false) ideology and recuperates it as part of the social "process of mapping the limit between the imaginary and the real which begins with the invention of fiction itself" (45).

"One can," he points out, "produce an imaginary discourse about real events that may not be less 'true' for being imaginary. It all depends upon how one construes the function of the faculty of imagination in human nature" (57). This position recalls Collingwood's statement that "The imaginary, simply as such, is neither real nor unreal" (1956 241). Instead, it is a function of the apprehension of reality. The relation of

political power and the imagination then becomes explicit in what amounts, at least in part, to a restatement by White of Gramsci's well-known formulation of hegemony as a variable mixture of consent and coercion. The "crucial problem from the perspective of political struggle," he argues,

is not whose story is the best or truest but who has the power to make his story stick as the one that others will choose to live by or in One alternative to 'collective unity' is forced upon us by a combination of master narratives and instruments of control backed by weapons. (167)

The difference between White and Mink regarding the ultimately cognitive (Mink) or moral (White) nature of narrative can thus, perhaps, be resolved by positing a larger term which would contain both, and a number of general theories such as hegemony or ideology might be employed to conceptualize narrativization as a process that is at once a cognitive apprehension and a moral organization of reality. In fact White's own theory of narrative and imagination seems to effect this reconciliation, and with White we have, in a sense, come full circle. His acknowledgement of the central role of political or social power in the determination of legitimate authority in historical narrative is a return (albeit with a very different emphasis) to Bradley's analysis of the social and historiographic authority which is empowered to arbitrate among the "jarring witnesses."

II

Each of the theorists discussed thus far has recourse to some category underlying, or providing a foundation for, the coherence of any given historical narrative. Terms such as "common sense" and "human nature" recur, along with "presuppositions," "a *a priori* imagination," or "fundamental set of judgements," and indeed it has been suggested that narrative history cannot be written unless it is underwritten by some such notion. These are, however, portmanteau terms carrying within them a good deal of ideological baggage. As Fredric Jameson remarks in his essay on historicism, "any statement about 'human nature' is necessarily and irredeemably ideological" (1979 53). And the idea of common sense (*sensus communis*), conflating as it does the sense of ordinary and self-evident truth with the sense of the community, begs equally for ideological analysis. In order to come to a clearer understanding of these formulations, both in themselves and in terms of the ramifications for the novel, it is necessary to turn briefly to a consideration of social theory (in this case, Pierre Bourdieu's work) and sociological literary theory (Bakhtin).

History, as a field of knowledge both in academic and popular culture, is a good example of what sociologist Norbert Elias calls "a means of orientation."¹⁷ Historical knowledge functions as a means of

¹⁷ "[W]hat we call knowledge," writes Elias, "is the social meaning of human-made symbols . . . in its capacity as a means of orientation" (252).

diachronic orientation, a means of plotting the trajectory of a community from one stipulated point in the past to another or to the present or toward an anticipated future. While the possibility of a non-teleological historiography might be considered, there is no doubt that much historical discourse contains a decidedly teleological aspect, functioning as a means of temporal orientation for specific social groups. The social power to influence any means of orientation is, of course, socially contested, and history can be seen as a contributing element in the mixture of coercion and consent that--through provision of a common sense of origins and destinies--characterizes hegemony (Gramsci) or the social cement (Althusser) that binds groups together. As we have seen, theorists from Ranke to White acknowledge that a specific orientation or point of view (and the common sense that is implicit within it) is a *sine qua non* of historiography. This orientation is generally conceived from a particular (often national or racial) position, and the common sense that is authorized must be the common sense of that particular community at a particular historical moment. From this, it is not surprising that in the interest of social cohesion and the reproduction of specific forms of social relations, the legitimate authority to narrate, to author a historical narrative, must be delegated by social institutions to certain individuals and not to others, must be based on certain privileged versions of the past and not on others--as Bradley so clearly understood.

Furthermore, the presuppositions that must be accepted if the coherence of narrative is to overcome the non-coherence of events ought to appear self-evidently true--so true in fact that those presuppositions may be designated common sense in one of the Kantian senses of the term: "a subjective principle which determines what pleases or displeases [as a

criterion of truth in this case] only by feeling and not by concepts, but yet with universal validity" (75).¹⁸ Common sense may thus precede explicit conceptualization, existing in the realm of the taken for granted, yet the claim to universal validity, as we have seen in Collingwood's critique of Universal History, is a variation of the enlightenment claim made on behalf of clearly non-universal cultural positions. Kant also distinguishes another variation of the term "common sense" which "does not judge by feeling but always by concepts, although ordinarily only as by obscurely represented principles" (75). In this sense, presuppositions no longer remain in the realm of the taken for granted but begin to emerge into the realm of the conceivable, the realm of discourse.

While the emphasis in this discussion has at times been more on pre-conceptual presuppositions (to use Bradley's term), the ideas that structure the understanding and writing of narrative history might more accurately be represented as a spectrum moving from unconscious and unformulatable preconceptions to conscious and clearly stated principles, a spectrum of belief that may be elucidated with reference to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *doxa*. Bourdieu writes that since various cultures have found various ways of understanding the world none of those cultural systems is, in an absolute sense, necessary and each is to that degree arbitrary. Yet social groups tend to refuse the arbitrary nature of their interpretations and instead "Every established order tends to produce . . . the naturalization of its own arbitrariness," a naturalization that results in a "sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality"

¹⁸ See Lyotard's "Sensus Communus" (1988) for a discussion of Kant and the concept of common sense.

(164). Bourdieu argues that "in the extreme case" this sense of reality or common sense is absolute and thus "the natural and social world appears as self-evident." Bourdieu distinguishes this state of doxa from orthodoxy or heterodoxy, conditions which imply the possible coexistence of different or antagonistic beliefs. Thus,

the stabler the objective structures and the more fully they reproduce themselves in the agent's dispositions, the greater the extent of the field of doxa, of that which is taken for granted [so that] the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e. as one possible order among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned. (165-66)

Echoing Collingwood's observations on the homology existing between the structure of the *a priori* imagination at a given time in a given society and the social institutions and knowledge that society creates, Bourdieu writes that "The self-evidence of the world [common sense] is reduplicated in the instituted discourses about the world in which the whole group's adherence to that self-evidence is affirmed" (167). Unlike Collingwood however, Bourdieu recognizes both the constituted and constituting function of these discourses and institutions: "Practical taxonomies," he argues, reproduce in a "transformed, misrecognizable form . . . the real divisions of the social order, [and] contribute to the reproduction of that order by producing objectively orchestrated practices adjusted to those divisions" (163).¹⁹ A discourse such as history (as a

¹⁹ As was the case in Collingwood, there emerges here a kind of epistemological circle through which a hierarchical society sees history as the story of great men, thus confirming its belief in hierarchy in its own historical situation. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu relates the hierarchical "opposition between the unique and the multiple [which] lies at the heart of the dominant philosophy of history" (596) to hierarchies of social distinction.

means of social and temporal orientation) would be a prime example of the power of social discourse to define the world in a particular way, affirming a particular point of view:

The specific potency of the explicit statement that brings subjective experiences into the reassuring unanimity of a socially approved and collectively attested sense imposes itself with the authority and necessity of a collective position adopted on data intrinsically amenable to many other structururations. (167)

For a wide variety of reasons, these "other structururations," like the testimonies of Bradley's "jarring witnesses," are not always conceivable or thinkable. As Collingwood observed, there are kinds of evidence, as well as ways of structuring and narrating that evidence that simply remain unavailable, beyond the limits of what can be formulated or conceptualized.

The principles on which such exclusions are based may also lie beyond those limits. Thus, writes Bourdieu, "Because the subjective necessity and self-evidence of the commonsense world are validated by the objective consensus on the sense of the world, what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying." The condition of doxa, strictly defined, "constitutes a perfectly closed world . . . which has no place for *opinion* as liberal ideology understands it, i.e. as one of the different and equally legitimate answers which can be given to an explicit question about the established political order" (167-68). Not only are some "other structururations" of the past excluded from discourse then, but questions leading to those other possible structururations cannot, perhaps, even be posed.

The attempt to establish a foundation for historical presuppositions implies a conflict of witnesses that is evident as well in Bourdieu's observation that

The adherence expressed in the doxic relation to the social world is the absolute form of recognition of legitimacy . . . since it is unaware of the very question of legitimacy, which arises from competition for legitimacy. (168)

The absence of doxic adherence to certain historiographic principles is apparent in Bradley's essay, and yet his rhetoric becomes heated when he confronts competing theories. There is a sense of urgency in his drive to contain and arbitrate among witnesses competing for legitimacy. In general, this competition for legitimacy is, however, a necessary condition for the recognition that a doxic state did in fact previously obtain:

The truth of doxa is only ever fully revealed when negatively constituted by the constitution of a *field of opinion* It is by reference to the universe of opinion that the complementary class is defined, the class of that which is taken for granted, doxa, the sum total of the theses tacitly posited on the higher side of all inquiry, which appear as such only retrospectively, when they come to be suspended practically.

The idea of doxa, then, has much in common with the various theories of fundamental presuppositions or a *priori* imagination which have been posited as the theoretical basis on which practical historical inquiry rests--the "theses tacitly posited on the hither side of all inquiry." But these presupposed theses can only be recognized as such when they shift from the realm of the absolute or pre-conceptual (doxa) to the more relative realm of discourse (ortho- or heterodox). Thus the telling of history, for instance, was for a long time based on an almost total exclusion of the point of view of women, the lower classes and non-Europeans--an exclusion that went largely unquestioned. This particular exclusion is itself a good example of the way in which individual practical taxonomies reproduce larger social divisions.

Gradually, the *sensus communis* has changed on this historiographic issue, but a shift such as this does not occur 'naturally'. Instead, "The

practical questioning of the theses implied in a particular way of living" can occur, Bourdieu suggests, either as a result of cross-cultural contact (potentially including certain kinds of cross-class or cross-gender contacts), or by objective social crisis.²⁰

The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structures [Collingwood's homology], destroys self-evidence practically. It is when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon that the question of the natural or conventional character . . . of social facts can be raised. (168-69)

The idea of an epistemological break in the structure of doxa induced by objective social crisis has great relevance to the philosophy of history because--as theorists as diverse as Bradley and White seem to agree--the authority to narrate and the legitimacy of narration are inevitably tied to social and legal forms of authority and legitimacy. Thus the struggle over the legitimacy of historical narration, over the means of temporal orientation, is one form of a more general social struggle.

A shift out of the condition of doxa does not necessarily entail an absolute loss of meaning or orientation, however. While "Crisis is a necessary condition for a questioning of doxa," still "the would-be most radical critique always has the limits that are assigned to it by the objective conditions" (169). While the established, dominant interpretations and common sense--Kant's pre-conceptual or obscurely represented principles--may be brought into focus, articulated, even dislodged in a time of social crisis, there nevertheless remain horizons of interpreta-

²⁰ Bourdieu distinguishes this from the purely intellectual or conceptual break such as the "intellectual operation which phenomenology designates by the term *epoché*, the deliberate, methodological suspension of naive adherence to the world" (168).

tion beyond which it would be impossible to see or nonsense to peer.

Nevertheless, the definition of this horizon is itself at stake:

In class societies, in which the definition of the social world is at stake in overt or latent class struggle, the drawing of the line between the field of opinion, of that which is explicitly questioned, and the field of *doxa*, of that which is beyond question and which each agent tacitly accords by the mere fact of acting in accord with social convention, is itself a fundamental objective at stake in that form of class struggle which is the struggle for the imposition of the dominant systems of classification. (169)

This struggle over taxonomy and definition has great relevance to the writing of history and to the presuppositions of the historian regarding the selection and arrangement of whatever is constituted as evidence. Once again, obvious examples might be found in the common practice of writing colonial history from the point of view of the colonizer because the definition of the field of history does not always admit the possibility of an independent legitimate point of view for the colonized, or the omission of women or the working classes from history for similar reasons. At one time these presuppositions were more or less tacitly accepted; more recently they have been disputed as part of the social struggle for legitimacy on the part of the various dominated groups who "have an interest in pushing back the limits of *doxa* and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted." Conversely, dominant groups "have an interest in defending the integrity of *doxa* or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, *orthodoxy*." Historical data may, as Bourdieu argues, be intrinsically amenable to other structurations but the dominant groups--Bradley's weighty interests--tend to exert pressure toward an orthodoxy that makes it difficult for jarring witnesses with their disjoined and discrepant narrations to be heard.

Tensions of this sort exist at all times in modern societies, but objective social crisis is one of the necessary conditions of transformation from doxa to orthodoxy and the questioning of the means of orientation that this implies. It is only when dominated groups such as those mentioned above

have the material and symbolic means of rejecting the definition of the real that is imposed on them . . . i.e. when social classifications become the object and instrument of class struggle, that the arbitrary principles of the prevailing classification can appear as such and it therefore becomes necessary to undertake the work of conscious systematization and express rationalization which marks the passage from doxa to orthodoxy. (169)

Orthodoxy may tend toward the preservation of doxa, but that pre-discursive state cannot easily be enforced. In a sense, the passage from doxa to orthodoxy seems to be the stake in Bradley's condemnation of jarring witnesses, Collingwood's speechlessness, the horizon of a transcendental point of view in Walsh and Gallie, or Mink's moment of apparent epistemological despair ("all our experience of narratives suggests that there is no way of settling on standard descriptions other than by arbitrary enforcement" (147)). This move to a protected orthodoxy constitutes the next line of defense in the struggle to contain heterodoxy:

Orthodoxy, straight, or rather *straightened*, opinion, which aims, without ever entirely succeeding, at restoring the primal state of innocence of doxa, exists only in the objective relationship which opposes it to heterodoxy, that is, by reference to the choice--*hairesis*, heresy--made possible by the existence of *competing possibles* and to the explicit critique of the sum total of the alternatives not chosen that the established order implies. (169)

Bourdieu's use of the term heresy here (and blasphemy later) is strong, but it is appropriate to the strong language used, for instance, by Bradley to condemn heretical accounts of historic reality, or the quasi-

religious language used by Walsh and Gallie in their discussions of the possibility of a final authoritative point of view on history.

The writing of history is one form of what Bourdieu calls "the production of symbolic goods" (170) and, as such, constitutes a contribution "to the delimitation of the universe of discourse, that is to say, the universe of the thinkable, and hence to the delimitation of the universe of the unthinkable." When Bourdieu speaks of the "'aphasia' of those who are denied access to the instruments of the struggle for the definition of reality" this loss of the power of speech connects directly to Bra 'ley and Collingwood and their discussion of the silencing of discrepant narrators. The political implications of this "aphasia" are clear:

the boundary between the universe of (orthodox or heterodox) discourse and the universe of doxa, in the twofold sense of what goes without saying and what cannot be said for lack of an available discourse, represents the dividing-line between the most radical form of misrecognition and the awakening of political consciousness. (170)

There is not, of course, a single voice that expresses society's sense of itself. Instead, a society speaks in many, often contradictory, voices and from many points of view. Indeed, the relations of the various social groups constituting those points of view are frequently at issue,²¹ Bourdieu argues, in the various discourses in which the limits of the thinkable are defined, established, maintained, or enforced. "The sense of limits," otherwise known as the sense of reality, Bourdieu writes in *Distinction*, "implies the forgetting of limits" (471). Within those limits, there exists the universe of discourse, of opinion, in which the

²¹ Raymond Williams' discussion of the dominant, residual, and emergent elements in culture (*Marxism and Literature*) is relevant here. See also Ernst Bloch's "Nonsynchronism and Dialectic."

legitimate authority to narrate is contested, in which the struggle for point of view is carried on.

Literature, particularly the novel, is one arena in which the cognitive and ethical limits that bound the *sensus communis* of reality may be affirmed, tested, transgressed, or attacked. An overt or covert debate is carried on in the novel concerning which limits are to remain invisible and which are to be focused on as a site where social struggles over meaning and power are conducted, concerning the definition of the field of doxa (ortho- and hetero-), and concerning the delegation of the power of legitimate speech and the condemnation to aphasia.

A number of these issues have, of course, been explored by Bakhtin. A shift in terminology from heterodoxy (Bourdieu) to heteroglossia (Bakhtin) is not difficult if it is kept in mind that Bakhtin defines language in such a way that the connection to Bourdieu is clear: "We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view" (271). The bond of common sense is introduced into this definition by his insistence that one social function of language is that of "insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life."

Instead of the single inevitable view of the world that goes without saying, the novel, as a site for the struggle over legitimacy, presents "the socially heteroglot multiplicity of its names, definitions and value judgements" (278). The novelist, in representing the world,

witnesses as well the unfolding of social heteroglossia surrounding the object, the Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages that goes on around any object; the dialects of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it . . . the

object is a focal point for heteroglot voices among which his own must also sound.

The representation created by the novelist is, however, neither a simple reproduction of the world nor a random collection of episodes. The novelist, through the creation of a coherent narrative representation from a specific point of view, produces instead "an image that has finished contours . . . he creates artistically calculated nuances on all the fundamental voices and tones of this heteroglossia" (278-79). In the course of this process it is necessary to confront the lack of social consensus, the "alien languages" constituted by "the possibility of another vocabulary, another semantics, other syntactic forms . . . the possibility of other linguistic points of view" (285). And it is in dealing with this problem of a lack of common sense (*sensus communis*) in sorting out the jarring witnesses that the significance of the novel emerges.

The internal politics of style (how the elements are put together) is determined by its external politics (its relationship to alien discourse). Discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context. (284)

According to Bakhtin, the kind of monological tendency that Bradley, for instance, demonstrates in is antithetical to the nature of prose--especially to the novel. The demand for a single unified and authoritative point of view and a coherent language with which to represent determinate events is by this account finally impossible; the jarring witnesses with their discrepant narrations and irreducibly alien languages remain, and their traces can always be located. Like Ernst Bloch, Bakhtin argues that "at any given moment, languages of various epochs and periods

of socio-ideological life cohabit with one another" (291).²² In fact, the very possibility of a single stable unitary language is undermined since

at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages." (291)

At this point Bakhtin once again reminds the reader that he is using the word "language" in a wide sense, as "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values." The various language groups exist in complex relations to each other, relations at times both complementary and contradictory; in Bakhtin's phrase, they are "interrelated dialogically" (291-92).

In Bradley's scheme, there is no room for "jarring witnesses", the view-points must be brought into orthodox line. For Bakhtin, there is, of course, a similar kind of process although his attitude toward it is markedly less draconian. In the colligation (Walsh) of a narrative, the prose writer imposes his or her own intentionality (consciously or unconsciously) on the heteroglossia: "the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at *different angles*, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien" (300).

²² Bloch writes: "Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today" (22).

It is the particular organization of heteroglossia, the orchestration of the languages, not the exclusion of all but a hegemonic language, that is at issue in Bakhtin's theory of the novel. In Bourdieu's terms, the novel maps the orthodox and heterodox social relations of a given period or social group.²³ Once again the word "orientation" comes up and it is useful to keep in mind Elias's use of the term as well. Bakhtin writes:

The orientation of the word amid the utterances and languages of others, and all the specific phenomena connected with this orientation, takes on artistic significance in novel style. Diversity of voices and heteroglossia enter the novel and organize themselves within it into a structured artistic system. This constitutes the distinguishing feature of the novel as a genre. (300)

As Bourdieu notes, the existence of heterodoxy does not imply some kind of total epistemological chaos; there are social and historical limits governing what may be articulated and by whom. And for Bakhtin, the development of the novel has been "a function of the deepening of dialogic essence," the replacement of "neutral, hard elements ('rock bottom truths')" with dialogical and heteroglot language that similarly reflects the social relations of the historical moment and the author's relation to that moment. In the novel,

heteroglossia becomes subject to an artistic reworking. The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch.

²³ See also Jameson's "Cognitive Mapping" for a discussion of this kind of mapping as it relates to the problem of representing social totality.

In one sense it seems possible, following Bakhtin, that history and fiction are in fact opposed forms of prose since history tends toward single-voiced statements of factual truth while the novel tends toward heteroglossic, the former being centripetal and the latter centrifugal in movement. Bradley's attempted banishment of jarring witnesses, for example, allies him with the kind of centripetal prose writing from which Bakhtin might wish to withhold the designation "novel":

If the novelist loses touch with this linguistic ground of prose style, if he is unable to attain the heights of a relativized, Galilean, linguistic consciousness, if he is deaf to organic double-voicedness and to the internal dialogization of living and evolving discourse, then he will never comprehend, or even realize, the actual possibilities and tasks of the novel as a genre. (327)

Historians and philosophers of history, of course, are not necessarily interested primarily in realizing these possibilities, but the problem posed does create a kind of generic conflict of interest for novels that attempt to represent history.²⁴ Nevertheless, Bakhtin maintains that "the

²⁴ One similar generic distinction Bakhtin makes clearly is that between the epic and the novel. Whereas the epic tends toward the centripetal and monoglot (doxic), the novel tends toward the centrifugal and heteroglot (heterodox). "For Bakhtin," writes David Carroll,

the epic is nationalistic, religious, hierarchical, and univocal; it is an "official literature," that of the ruling classes, a product of their institutions. The unity expressed in the epic . . . is a unity imposed on a people from the top down. (77)

See also Lukacs's view of the fall from epic presence and totality to the necessarily partial representations of the novel in *Theory of the Novel*. Robert Weimann discusses this generic distinction as well in relation to the problem of point of view (1984 234-66) and in relation to fictional representation and totality (1986).

idea of a singular language (a sacrosanct,²⁵ unconditional language) is foreign to prose": (324)

the art of prose is close to a conception of languages as historically concrete and living things. The prose art presumes a deliberate feeling for the historical and social concreteness of living discourse, as well as its relativity, a feeling for its participation in historical becoming and in social struggle; it deals with discourse that is still warm from that struggle and hostility, as yet unresolved and still fraught with hostile intentions and accents; prose art finds discourse in this state and subjects it to the dynamic unity of its own style. (331)

In the novel, for Bakhtin, no matter how unified the style, no matter how orthoglot, no matter how well the writer has managed to purge the jarring witnesses, traces of the heteroglot inevitably remain:

even when heteroglossia remains outside the novel, when the novelist comes forward with his own unitary and fully affirming language (without any distancing, refraction or qualifications) he knows that such language is not self-evident and is not in itself incontestable, that it is uttered in a heteroglot environment, that such a language must be championed, defended, purified, motivated. In a novel even such unitary and direct language is polemical and apologetic, that is, it interrelates dialogically with heteroglossia. (332)

In this sense, the jarring narratives always remain, if only as an absent presence to which the privileged point of view must somehow, however tacitly, respond. For Bakhtin, novelistic discourse is unique in that its orientation does bring it into relation with the larger world of discourse; it is "an orientation that is contested, contestable and

²⁵ Again, Bakhtin's allusion to the sacred here is not surprising if we recall Gallie's and Walsh's use of similar language in defense of an ideal of a single universal truth. Barthes similarly characterizes realist historiography as a form of "secularized reliquary" whose immense importance is evident in the fact that "the profanation of these relics is tantamount to the destruction of reality" (1970 155). Durkheim's discussion of the relationship between religion and the social totality has, of course, great relevance to this whole problem.

contesting--for this discourse cannot forget or ignore either by naiveté or by design, the heteroglossia that surrounds it." Thus even in what might be termed 'orthoglot' novels, heteroglossia nevertheless continues to determine "as a dialogizing background, the special resonance of novelistic discourse."

The novel, then, is an arena in which different, sometimes opposing, language groups assert their ideological identity and represent their particular point of view:

The speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue, and his words are always ideologemes. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for social significance.
(333)

This striving for social significance is another version of the struggle to impose the definition of reality that Bourdieu sees as a central aspect of social power relations. In that genre of striving known as the novel, the author, as ideologue, "must defend and try out his ideological positions," writes Bakhtin, "must become both a polemicist and an apologist" (333). Dialogue in the novel tends to underline this striving by pushing "to the limit the mutual nonunderstanding represented by people *who speak in different languages*" (356), language being defined here as "a concrete socio-linguistic belief system that defines a distinct identity for itself." In this, as in any contest, there are winners and losers, languages that dominate, that claim legitimate authority over others; some languages "fail to develop, some die off, but others blossom into authentic languages." It is "a process teeming with future and former languages, with prim but moribund aristocrat-languages, with parvenu-languages and with countless pretenders to the status of language" (357),

and there is, of course, an uneven social distribution of fluency and aphasia across this spectrum of discourse.

But these languages cannot speak for themselves in narrative, and Bakhtin acknowledges that they must finally depend to some extent upon the point of view of the author and upon the language privileged by the author: "The words of the author that represent and frame another's speech create a perspective for it; they separate light from shadow, create the situation and conditions necessary for it to sound" (358). Authorial language, then, provides the point of refraction for the structure of heteroglossia which constitutes the novel, and in this sense it is normative since the "image of a language may be structured only from the point of view of another language, which is taken as the norm" (359). Nevertheless, this norm cannot be taken as absolute. The contestation that is the condition of existence of these languages or ideologies, the striving for social significance, results in "the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms," for

there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are two sociolinguistic consciousnesses, two epochs, that . . . come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance. (360)²⁶

This collision or fight over the legitimate power to articulate the sense of reality need have no final outcome: Bakhtin's theory implies no teleology in that sense. It is, in fact, the dynamics of striving that is

²⁶ See also Volosinov's discussion of ideology and language in which he argues that the "sign becomes an arena of the class struggle" (23). As well, this striving, contestatory description recalls Lyotard's characterization of the field of discourse as essentially agonistic.

the point for Bakhtin, not the establishment of a new monoglot authority.

The novel tends to deny

the absolutism of a single and unitary language . . . refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world. It is a perception that has been made conscious of the vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages--all of which are equally capable of being "languages of truth," but, since such is the case, all of which are equally relative, reified and limited The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world. (366-7)

Bakhtin's relativism here seems close to Bourdieu's description of culture as arbitrary: neither should be taken in an absolute sense; rather both indicate that the relative range of available meanings or interpretations must always be related to specific socio-historical situations. That Bakhtin intends this decentering to be taken on a social level as well as a formal literary or intellectual level is clear. "A sealed off interest group, caste or class," he writes,

existing within an internally unitary or unchanging core of its own, cannot serve as socially productive soil for the development of the novel unless it becomes riddled with decay or shifted somehow from its state of internal balance and self-sufficiency. This is the case because a literary and language consciousness operating from the heights of its own uncontestedly authoritative unitary language fails to take into account the act of heteroglossia and multi-linguagedness . . . it is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture's awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naive absence of conflict. (368)

Once again the relation to Bourdieu is strong: heteroglot novelistic discourse emerges when through cross cultural contact or objective social crisis the doxic unity of culture is somehow loosened or decentered, and the possibility of orthodoxy and heterodoxy is arises. Without this, the "unitary, canonic language" or the "national myth bolstered by a yet-unshaken unity" is still too strong for heteroglossia to relativize and

decenter literary and language consciousness (370). This state of doxic innocence or harmony can be disrupted if the discourse of "heteroglossia that rages beyond the boundaries of such a sealed-off cultural universe" (368) begins to impinge upon the pre-conceptual (or obscurely conceived) space of doxa. Confirming in his own way Bourdieu's argument, Bakhtin writes that this passage from doxa, this ideological decentering occurs when a culture "becomes conscious of itself as only one among other cultures and languages" (370). The relativised sense of culture that results in this situation is fundamentally incompatible with the "absolute fusion of ideological meaning with language" that is the case in a state of doxa. Internal crisis and cross-cultural contact then, as in Bourdieu, open up the potential for transgressions of the doxic, monological unity of a culture. When a society or cultural system becomes aware of the "arbitrary" nature of its own discourse, its monological self-evidence (doxa) becomes insupportable. At this point an orthodox discourse may be instituted by the dominant groups in that society in an attempt to resist the heterodox forces that threaten to dissolve it.²⁷

One of the novel's primary concerns then, according to Bakhtin, is to explore the dynamics of "internally persuasive discourses." Everyday consciousness

enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development

²⁷ In his discussion of Bakhtin, Graham Pechey comments that "Any sociopolitical project of centralization or hegemony has always and everywhere to posit itself against the ubiquitously decentralizing (centrifugal) forces within ideology." Furthermore, "Parallel to this opposition . . . is another between whole national cultures which are 'self-sufficient' (in the sense of not knowing their otherness to others) and those which are no longer sealed-off and deaf to their polyglot ambience" (62-63).

is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. (346)

And this heteroglossic interaction, in all its varieties, is a central preoccupation of the novel. We have come, in a sense, to a reversal of the Aristotelian position from which we started, according to which unity was the characteristic of art that separated it from, even elevated it above, an episodic non-unifiable history. The novel appears now as an arena for the heterodox struggle of language groups, a site on which various ideologies are articulated from various points of view and contend for the power of orthodox internal persuasiveness, if for not the status of doxic or authoritative discourse.

What remains to be discussed is the specific nature of the orchestration of the heteroglossia in particular novels. In the name of what authority does the author exclude some voices (languages, witnesses) or relegate them to the chorus while giving solos to others. What is the basis of the legitimacy of such privileging of one voice, or a few voices, from the heteroglot field of historical discourse? How is aphasia socially distributed in the novel? In the following chapters I will explore the ways in which this struggle is articulated in various modern novels which deal with history.

Part II consists of an examination of three modern novels, Conrad's *Nostromo*, Ford's *Parade's End* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*. In particular, problems concerning the construction of a coherent narrative in each of the novels is explored, in relation to the function of historical and cultural point of view in this act of representation. While many interesting novels are relevant to such an inquiry, these three have been

chosen both for their similarities and their differences. Most obviously, they share a common language (in a non-Bakhtinian sense) and historical period. Further, all claim a certain stature in the modern (and modernist) canon. A final quality linking them, as I will argue, is an orthodoxy in Bourdieu's sense of the word. In each novel, on the other hand, the cultural difference in terms of which this orthodoxy can be understood presents a different aspect of the problem. In *Nostromo*, Conrad explores the problems of (post)colonial expansion, as a European-based community confronts a cultural 'other' on the terrain of the 'other'--South America. In Ford's *Parade's End* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, however, the 'other' is within: in the former, class, and to a lesser degree race and gender, are the loci for the orchestration of heteroglossia; in the latter, the problem of slavery and its legacy has created a unique heterodox situation combining a powerful sense of racial alterity with an internal and national struggle. The three novels have been chosen, then, both for what they share and for their representations of quite distinct historical situations

In Part III, two alternative approaches to historiographic narrative are considered. The penultimate chapter focuses on the way that members of a marginalized group, black American women, retell history, positioning themselves very differently in regard to orthodox historical discourse. Once again, many works might have been selected for discussion here, exemplifying the situation of marginalized groups in relation to dominant discourse. The fiction of Afro-American women has seemed most appropriate for a number of reasons. They have, as a group, been marginalized in a variety of ways: primarily on the basis of race and gender perhaps, but also, as a result of these, they have tended to become victims of socio-

economic class barriers as well. In spite of this, they have struggled against the aphasia that is a part of this condition and produced not only a remarkable body of fiction, but a body of fiction whose exploration of history is as extensive as it is intense.

And finally, Pynchon's *V.* provides the basis for a discussion of another response--postmodernist--to the problems of heterodoxy and point of view in historical narrative. As one of the American postmodernists *par excellence*, and as an author whose questioning of history and of historiography is profound, Pynchon's work investigates some of the philosophic as well as novelistic ramifications of postmodernism.

PART II

Nostromo and the "Torrent of Rubbish"

"Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing."

Joseph Conrad (1921 17)

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson remarks in passing that in *Nostromo* Conrad

makes it possible for the reader to overlook the identification of his positive figures among the locals--the so-called Blancos--with the aristocratic party, and that of the evil Monteros with the mestizos But *Nostromo* is not a political novel in the sense in which it would allow these two political ideals to fight it out on their own terms . . . rather, Conrad's own political attitudes are presupposed (270)

Conrad does make such a critical oversight possible. Indeed, he encourages critical attention to focus instead on the subjectivity of selected central figures and their complex networks of relationships--both interpersonal relationships and relationships to the overall movement of history. Nevertheless, I would like to dwell on this perhaps simpler political level. Jameson's meaning here is, in any case, puzzling. What can it mean in a novel to allow "political ideals to fight it out on their own terms" rather than in the author's or narrator's terms? How can political ideals be said to exist at all in a novel apart from the author, narrator

or characters who hold them? Are the political attitudes of some historically and culturally located people not always necessarily presupposed in fiction as in other forms of discourse?

Jameson's position here is reminiscent of Lukács' assertion concerning the historical novels of Scott that "Through the plot . . . a neutral ground is sought and found upon which the extreme, opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another" (1969 36). Critical commentary on *Nostromo* has frequently adopted a similar attitude, accepting rather than interrogating the novel's discursive neutrality. Irving Howe reads *Nostromo* as "a fictional study of imperialism" presenting "a coherent social world . . . in which all the relevant political tendencies are finely balanced" (1970 100-01). Avrom Fleishman writes that the novel "represents the history of society as a living organism," attempting to give an account of historical events "in their total unity, exhibiting an 'organic fullness'" (1967 161). More recently, but in a similar vein, Paul Armstrong argues that "Costaguana is an attempt to provide an anatomy of the being of society. It serves as a kind of ontological model that allows Conrad to test and explore the social implications of contingency" (1987 151).

Yet if Bakhtin's theory of the novel as an orchestration by an author of the social heteroglossia of his or her culture can be accepted, then *Nostromo* can be read as a confrontation of ideologies within a necessarily charged ideological field whether or not such a reading seems encouraged by the text. *Nostromo* does work the problem out in terms of Conrad's political attitudes, but if the novel is to be studied at all then we are unavoidably drawn into an engagement with Conrad's political attitudes as the narratorial "point of refraction" (Bakhtin) for the

social heteroglossia that constitutes the novel. The fact that it does not appear as a "neutral ground," a level discursive field, is not something to be overlooked but a condition of the narrative in need of discussion. Bakhtin's observation that plot itself is a manifestation of the working out of dialogism, the struggle of language groups to be heard,¹ is crucial here, suggesting that the specific inequalities built into the discursive playing field need to be examined more closely. That some critics have accepted Conrad's representation of society in *Nostromo* as total and coherent indicates more, perhaps, about their agreement with him than it does about the actual representation itself.

In *Nostromo*, history seems to begin with the introduction of modern capitalism into Costaguana. The opening paragraph presents an Edenic image of Sulaco as "an inviolable sanctuary . . . in the solemn hush of the deep Golfo Placido as if within an enormous semi-circular and unroofed temple" (17). This prelapsarian calm is a result of the lack of propitious winds to bring the sailing ships--and thus modern European commerce. While Conrad acknowledges that Sulaco has a long past, it does not enter into history proper until the advent of steamships capable of entering the harbor. The pre-Columbian history of Sulaco is not really dis-

¹ Concerning this aspect of Bakhtin's theory, Pechey writes :

Dialogism as the very principle of structuring, dissolving the unities of character and plot; dialogism as the action of the novel; plot as mere motivation or a dimension of monological paraphrase circumstantiating and dramatically resolving a 'great dialogue' of authorial and other voices which inwardly resists all resolution It is around this strong case for the novel in general that Bakhtin develops a wider case about cultural hegemony. (69)

cussed, and the time from the "Spanish rule" until the steam age is dismissed quickly since Sulaco "had never been commercially anything more important than a coasting port with a fairly large local trade in ox-hides and indigo." The fall into history begins with the arrival of commerce, of industrial capitalism, when the steamships of the O.S.N. arrive "to violate the sanctuary of peace" (21). The opening sentences of each of the first two chapters orient the reader specifically in terms of commerce: first, temporally, by defining history in terms of commerce, and second, spatially, by fixing on the "only sign of commercial activity within the harbor." If, as Collingwood argues, the representation of history is inevitably connected to present interest, here that is an interest in modern commerce and its social effects, and any other historical discourse pre-dating or extraneous to these interests is consigned to the margins of the narrative.

While there may appear to be a note of regret in Conrad's tone, a nostalgia for the peace and simplicity of the era before capitalism, it should be noted that the historical inevitability of this fall parallels the transcendent inevitability of the first Fall. In neither case does it make any sense to question seriously whether or not things could have been different, whether or not it should have happened the way it did. A further effect of this analogy is the relegation of pre-colonial cultures to a mythic or religious rather than historical past, a denial of the historical claims of those cultures to relevance and integrity.² And just as

² The point here is not to suggest that Conrad's novel should or could have represented a different history--from the point of view of the colonized people, for instance--but the extremely limited degree to which the existence of that dimension is acknowledged in the opening is notable. The establishment of the existence of that reality as a point of reference need not necessitate adopting it as a point of view. See Johannes Fabian for a full discussion of the implications of the denial of coeval status

there can be no rational thought of returning to a prelapsarian state, there can be no rational thought in Sulaco of opposing the hegemonic power of Western "material interests." While the legendary past--like the landscape--may have some exotic appeal or symbolic weight, Conrad, in opening both of the first two chapters uses European commerce as a means of orientation, as an apparent limit to what can "reasonably" be thought in historical terms. Native South American cultures thus occupy the position of the unnarrated, the heterodox historical presence whose omission from the representation may be seen as a kind of absent center.³

Captain Mitchell is the first important character we meet, and he, in fact, acts as a kind of guide to Sulaco both for visitors and for the reader. He also presents the first instance of the novel's ambivalence in its presentation of some of the main characters. Captain Mitchell also uses European commerce as the touchstone by which historical events may be evaluated, judging "as most unfavorable to the orderly working of his Company the frequent changes of government brought about by revolutions of the military type" (22). While he is portrayed satirically as a pompous, overblown character whose interpretation of events is open to question, on some details his opinion seems ratified as the novel progresses. Early on, in a blend of Captain Mitchell's account and third-person narrative,

and historicity (in a Western sense) to dominated cultures.

³ My use of the term "native" is, I realize, an awkward oversimplification, as is my use of the terms "Blanco" and "European". Jameson uses the term "mestizo", and others have used "Indian" to designate the historical 'other' that is presented in *Nostromo*. There are problems with all of these terms, but the differentiation referred to both in the novel and in this essay is, nevertheless, I hope, sufficiently clear.

the novel presents an example of the kind of revolutionary disruption that is bad for commerce. Mitchell characterizes the insurgents as "'the racially mob'" (23), and in the next paragraph the narrator speaks of having to leave "the town to the mercies of a revolutionary rabble,'" a "mob which . . . howled and foamed" outside the company's building. As he escapes, Captain Mitchell is wounded by a razor-blade fastened to a stick--a weapon, as he puts it, very much in favor with the "'worst kind of nigger out here'" (24). For the previous week, "'thieves and murderers from the whole province . . . had been flocking into Sulaco'" (24-25). Like vultures, "'They had scented the end.'"

Mitchell and Nostromo then return to check on "the Company's property. That and the property of the railway were preserved by the European residents . . . aided by the Italian and Basque workmen who rallied faithfully round their English chiefs" (25). While the mob is composed partly of natives, some can be relied on to behave well (in spite of being an "outcast lot of very mixed blood, mainly Negroes, everlastingly at feud with the other customers of low grog shops") because they have been so thoroughly intimidated by Nostromo: "There was not one of them that had not, at some time or other, looked with terror at Nostromo's revolver poked very close at his face" (25-26). In the end, due to the courage and coercive power of Nostromo and the apparent stupidity of the "rabble," little actual damage is done.

While the authority of Mitchell's epic account is ironically undermined⁴--by his pomposity for example and, as we find out later, by

⁴ It is epic in two Bakhtinian senses: first, in the sense of monological official discourse, a fundamentally doxic narrative demonstrating little or no awareness of the limits of its own thought; and second, as Bakhtin writes, "The world of the epic is the national heroic past: it is a world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national his-

his incomprehension of some important events--his testimony nevertheless stands, albeit partially under erasure. Nevertheless, if many of the details of Mitchell's historical narrative are shown to be questionable,⁵ what of the language in which he represents the rebels? His representation of the native rebels as a mob, the rabble, howling and foaming like animals or flocking and waiting like vultures dehumanizes them, and this reduction is further accentuated by pejorative references to race, resulting in a sense of genetic deficiency that denies rationality to them and precludes the necessity of any rational consideration of their claims to discursive or narrative authority. Mitchell's account may, in some senses, be shown to be suspect in juxtaposition to other accounts given in the novel, but the dichotomy he sets up between the 'good' faithful workers and the 'bad' rebellious "rabble" seems to go fundamentally unchallenged.

Nowhere in the novel are the natives given the opportunity--as the Blancos frequently are--to articulate a political position or to narrate a version of historical events. The very existence of their independent historical past has, in fact, been undermined, and their humanity metaphorically reduced to the level of bestiality. Denied a voice, such groups remain, in historian Eric Wolf's phrase, people without history.

tory, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests'" (13). The ironic countermovement is apparent in the lack of children in Gould's life.

⁵ Benita Parry observes that since many of the events are narrated by Mitchell, "the text is able openly to mock the idea of history as the linear record of prominent persons participating in or precipitating great and noteworthy public occurrences that coalesce to issue in the glorious climax of progress" (118).

As Michel de Certeau writes: "Historical discourse makes a *social identity* explicit, not so much in the way it is 'given' or held as stable, as in the ways it is *differentiated* from . . . another society" (45). The representation of native people in *Nostromo* constitutes such a negative pole by means of which the European elite--the Blancos--and their supporters may be differentiated and defined. In the juxtaposition of these two groups and the specific characterizations of each in the text, the struggle of two language groups to be heard takes place on a far from neutral ground. The uneven nature of the discursive field is established early on and continues throughout the novel.

Paul Armstrong finds reading *Nostromo* a disturbing experience. He doubts that

the novel's bewildering time-shifts and its baffling variety of perspectives reassure the reader of the certainty of his world. Rather than encouraging the reader's complacency, the novel's fragmented, multiple mode of narration would seem to impart to him in his very experience of the text a sense of the instability of all orderings and arrangements which the history of Sulaco dramatizes. (1986 68)

There is no doubt that the novel encourages a feeling of unease concerning the dominant power structure in Sulaco. The motives of all the Blancos and their supporters are subjected to a subtle and complex critique exposing a variety of overt and covert hypocrisies. Steve Ressler notes in this regard

the novel's many figures who give allegiance to something higher: Avellano's classical liberalism, Antonia's patriotism, Father Corbelán's religious politics, Viola's heroic republicanism, Emilia's faith in human values, Decoud's love for Antonia, Monygham's chivalrous loyalty to Mrs. Gould, Don Pepe's soldierly fidelity to Charles, Holroyd's purer form of Christianity. Even Mitchell . . . relates his efforts to progress. (48)

Gould himself sees the value of the mine, writes Ressler, "in the law, good faith, order, and security he is certain will result" (48).

Ressler's discussion of these characters is, significantly, entitled "Versions of Failure," and he shows how each fails in the end to measure up to the ideals he or she professes. Noting that "Almost every one of *Nostromo's* leading characters is identified by some deep-felt conviction," Armstrong proposes a similar list, then shows how the novel "alternates between endorsing and demystifying the ideologies it portrays" (1987 174-75).

While this analysis of the contradictions and shortcomings of the major characters and the complexity of the narrative representations of them is both useful and insightful, it overlooks one crucial exclusion: the denial of any depth or higher motive whatsoever to certain significant characters. The Monteros, for instance, who oppose the Blancos, are characterized as the antithesis of all idealism. If the idealism of the Blancos appears finally as hollowness, even this is on balance much more than can be said for the Monteros. Consequently, serious opposition to the established hegemonic power structure never for a moment becomes in any way thinkable in the narrative. A reader may sympathize at times, for instance, with Viola and his pride in his Garibaldian past, or Monygham and his torment, while remaining aware of the limitations that Conrad builds into these characters. Such sympathetic identification--however qualified--is never a possibility, however, with the Monteros (or their followers, such as Sotillo and Gamacho) who, as the representatives of native opposition to the hegemonic powers, exist beyond the horizon of what is thinkable. Were the Monteros merely other characters on the neutral ground of plot, it would have been possible for Conrad to

represent their position simply as another kind of political idealism or illusion, one whose shortcomings and hollowness he could have demonstrated in the same way that he undermines the idealism of the Blancos--showing that opposition, even revolutionary opposition, has no more real positive potential than any of the other ideals represented in the novel. Instead, the Monteros are presented as grotesque, bestial, semi-lunatics, a depiction that indicates, perhaps, a profound anxiety concerning the political possibilities that they represent.⁶

Armstrong argues that in *Nostromo* "Conrad employs a contradictory narrative strategy whereby he introduces a claim of authority only to call attention to its limits and cast doubts on its pretensions" (1987 163). For the most part, this is a valid reading, yet no matter how much the narrative authority of the Blancos is undermined or their motives put into question, there is no equivalent to the following representation of General Montero. Risen from the "rabble," subsequently to become leader of the opposing forces, his "claim of authority" is never introduced. There is no "contradictory narrative strategy" here, and it is in this com-

⁶ The possibility remains that the narrators are unreliable and that Conrad's attitude to the perspectives presented in the novel is ironic. Chinua Achebe's response to such an approach to *Heart of Darkness* seems relevant to *Nostromo* as well:

It might be contended, of course, that the attitude to the African . . . is not Conrad's but that of his fictional narrator, Marlowe, and that far from endorsing it Conrad might indeed be holding it up to irony and criticism But if Conrad's intention is to draw a *cordon sanitaire* between himself and . . . his narrator his care seems to me totally wasted because he neglects to hint however subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters. It would not have been beyond Conrad's power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary. (256)

parison that one aspect of the uneven nature of the discursive field may be clearly discerned:

In this gorgeous uniform, with his bull neck, his hooked nose flattened on the tip upon a blue-black, dyed moustache, he looked like a disguised and sinister vaquero [cowboy]. The drone of his voice had a strangely rasping, soulless ring.

During a formal dinner "he fixed a lurid, sleepy glance" on Sir John,⁷ commits a clear social and political gaffe in his toast, then sits down with "a half-surprised, half-bullying look." After dinner he appears equally alien and ludicrous, "his bald head covered now by a plumed cocked hat."

The white plume, the coppery tint of his broad face, the blue-black of the moustaches under the curved beak, the mass of gold on sleeves and breast, the high shining boots with enormous spurs, the working nostrils, the imbecile and domineering stare of the glorious victor of Rio Seco had in them something ominous and incredible; the exaggeration of a cruel caricature, the fatuity of solemn masquerading, the atrocious grotesqueness of some military idol of Aztec conception and European bedecking, awaiting the homage of worshippers. Don José approached diplomatically this weird and inscrutable portent, and Mrs. Gould turned her fascinated eyes away at last. (110-11)

Again, no matter how much we, as readers, may ultimately harbor reservations about Don Pepe or Emilia, our gaze is encouraged by the narrator to align itself with theirs in a shared distance from this bizarre figure whose very clothing refuses our interpretive codes. Armstrong notes the descriptions of Montero as well as Guzman Bento and Sotillo but sees them

⁷ The eyes function frequently as a window on the soul in *Nostromo*, distinguishing moral character as well as support for the Blanco regime. The government official with whom Gould deals has a "dark olive complexion and shifty eyes" (85), while Montero here moves from "a lurid, sleepy glance" to an "imbecile and domineering stare" (110-11). Don Pepe, on the other hand, has "a kindly twinkle of drollery in his deep-set eyes" (92), and Barrios has "a black silk patch over one eye. His other eye, small and deep-set, twinkled erratically in all directions, aimlessly affable" (141).

simply as portraits of tyrants who "seize and abuse power to compensate for wounds to their narcissism" (160). This analysis--which removes any political content from opposition to the Blancos, ascribing it instead to psychological deficiencies--does not take into account two related facts about the representational strategies of the novel: first, that these despicable narcissistic tyrants are all on one side of the struggle, are all against the Blancos; and, second, that no one opposed to the Blancos seems to be the beneficiary of a similar "contradictory narrative strategy" that would suggest a sympathetic human dimension as well.⁸ The reader may have serious misgivings concerning the Blancos, but the alternative is unthinkable, literally incomprehensible, and this is the kind of social "differentiation" de Certeau posits as a central function of historical discourse.

It would be short-sighted to deny either the acuteness or the subtlety of Conrad's critique of imperialism in *Nostromo* and elsewhere. Conrad undoubtedly succeeds in decentering the monological self-evidence (doxa) of imperialist culture through his critique of the Blancos. He casts doubt on the meaning of historical events and the motives that influenced them. Further, he calls into question the historiographical representations of those events through the many characters, such as Cap-

⁸ Ressler writes that "Because of cultural conditioning and insufficient modes of perception fashioned on assumptions of rationality, measure, and progress, the Westerners are unable to comprehend the alien and primitive forces of Costaguana." But there is more at stake than simple neutral incomprehension. Gould, for instance, realizes at times "that he, too, shares in the country's moral contagion" (50-51), an extremely negative characterization. Ressler is, perhaps, accurate enough in his assessment of the text, but he seems to accept uncritically this representation of the situation as an adequate one rather than questioning the very dubious ascription of "moral contagion" to this country and its people.

I tain Mitchell, Avellano, and Decoud who keep records or narrate historical events after the fact.⁹ Criticism of imperialism was not so widespread at the time, and Conrad's achievement is, perhaps, to move such a critical discourse onto the agenda, into the realm of the thinkable (orthodoxy). But he is clearly *not* concerned with pushing a step further into a vision of social heterodoxy that would give a voice to disruptive heteroglot elements. Those groups, notably the natives in *Nostromo*, remain essentially in a state of aphasia, permitted neither to narrate their own heterodox version of events nor to have those social positions represented--or even alluded to--with any seriousness by another narrator. If Conrad relentlessly exposes the illusions of the Blancos, nevertheless, as Jenkins observes, in *Nostromo*

All illusions are equal but some are more so, and just as the society of post-revolutionary Sulaco may be *in fact* better while, *theoretically*, no different from any other, so the same can be said of the beliefs and actions of the characters siding with the Blanco party. (158)

The natives are granted two basic modes of existence in *Nostromo*. First, they are represented as existing anonymously, timelessly, as picturesque scenery, elements of the exotic background setting of the novel. This is the vision that Emilia, for instance, conveys in the description of her first travels in the countryside (84-5), or in this passage, as they come eagerly seeking work in the silver mine:

Whole families had been moving from the first towards the spot in the Higuerota range, whence the rumour of work and safety had spread over the pastoral Campo Father first, in a pointed straw hat, then the mother with the bigger children, generally also a diminutive donkey, all under burdens, except the leader himself, or perhaps some brown girl, the pride of

⁹ See Edward Said's *Beginnings* for a discussion of these historiographic representations.

the family, stepping barefooted and straight as an arrow, with braids of raven hair, a thick haughty profile, and no load to carry but the small guitar of the country and a pair of soft leather sandals tied together on her back. (94)

Often in such situations, the picturesque sights are distanced through the use of a European observer who sees, as it were, with the reader and offers an interpretive stance. The interposition of the European mediates the strangeness by providing a 'familiar' frame for the exotic natives. In the description of Montero cited above, the appearance of this bizarre figure is mediated for the reader through the familiar gaze of Don José and Emilia. A similar mediation takes place here: "At the sight of such parties . . . travelers on horseback would remark to each other: 'More people going to the San Tomé mine. We shall see others tomorrow'" (94). In such cases there is no real penetration into the interior space of the natives, indeed little suggestion that such a space exists. The reader is allowed no direct access to the natives and their point of view--all representations of them emerge through the perspective of the Europeans.

The other mode of native existence has two aspects, both of which center on the perceived absurdity or irrationality of their lifestyles. Often, this too is presented through the eyes of Europeans in order to foreground the incomprehensibility of the people under scrutiny. Don Pepe is thought remarkable for his ability to remember the identity of so many of the miners; not only the men,

but he seemed able . . . to classify each woman, girl, or growing youth of his domain. It was only the young fry that puzzled him sometimes. He and the padre could be seen frequently . . . trying to sort them out, as it were, in low consulting tones. (95)

Their taxonomic difficulty is compounded by the appearance of the children, such as the

small, staid urchin met wandering, naked and grave, along the road with a cigar in his baby mouth, and perhaps his mother's rosary, purloined for purposes of ornamentation, hanging in a loop of beads low down on his rotund little stomach.

This sense of native absurdity has another, less benign aspect as well however, as evidenced in the description of the bestial and irrational Montero. He not only appears utterly differentiated from the 'civilized' Europeans, but because of the threat he poses to the political stability of the Blancos, his characterization also adds a powerful element of villainous irrationality to the (sometimes picturesque) absurdity of native existence.

The problem, then, is not that the European aristocrats and capitalists are presented as stable and good while the natives are presented as evil. Such a simple opposition entirely misses the complexity of Conrad's understanding of at least one half of the balance. Father Corbelán, for instance, may be "fanatical," but he is also fearless, honest and absolutely committed to his ideal. In the "wilds" the people he preached to are presented in rather more negative terms: "bloodthirsty savages, devoid of human compassion or worship of any kind." Because the natives are presented in this light, lacking 'human nature' as we understand it, a number of ironic juxtapositions appear. Father Corbelán himself is hardly a compassionate man, and, further, he believes "that the politicians of Sta Marta had harder hearts and more corrupt minds than the heathen" (168). But if there is a sense that the difference between the two cultural groups is being eroded, nevertheless, the "heathens" remain the negative pole on which such definitions are based. If the Blancos are presented as possessing a range of moral strengths and weaknesses, ideals and the betrayal of those ideals, the natives are granted no such depth or

complexity. That strategic historiographic denial constitutes the basis of their political and discursive marginalization.

There have been, of course, innumerable rebellions against imperialism throughout the history of South America. Such rebellions have been of many different kinds, having many different motivations, not all wholly admirable by any means. Yet in representing one such rebellion--the Monterist--Conrad is refracting the discourse of a socio-ideologically alien group and its struggle for legitimacy or authority. The situation is similar to that which Bradley confronts in dealing with the problem of evaluating jarring witnesses, and Conrad's response is similar: to the degree that their experience--not to mention their appearance--is foreign to us, their testimony can be refused. Since the native sense of reality on which such a point of view might be based is not acknowledged, their heterodox testimony is not allowed. One incident in Conrad's representation of the native rebellion may serve as a useful example. Late in the novel when the victory of the Monterists seems assured, Pedro Montero (brother of the leader) rides into Sulaco and makes a victory speech. The third-person narrator describes the entry of the rebels in terms that expand on, but do not in essence contradict, Mitchell's representation of them:

And first came straggling in through the land gate the armed mob of all colors, complexions, types, and states of raggedness, calling themselves the Sulaco National Guard Through the middle of the street streamed, like a torrent of rubbish, a mass of straw hats, ponchos, gun-barrels, with an enormous green and yellow flag flapping in their midst, in a cloud of dust, to the furious beating of drums. (318)

This heterogenous group straggles; they do not march or walk or stroll or move. There seems almost a kind of ludicrous impertinence in

their use of an official title: they may call themselves the National Guard, but the clear suggestion is that no right-thinking person would. They are a mob, not an army, and their lack of racial homogeneity seems to count against them as much as the poverty and hardship that results in their ragged clothes. The metaphor employed to describe them is "rubbish," garbage, and their humanity is further reduced through the metonymic figure that presents them as "a mass of hats, ponchos, gun barrels," not as people. Their over-sized flag flaps, rather than waves, as they straggle through the dust to the furious beating of drums, a cacophony that suggests insanity rather than victory.¹⁰ "Behind the rabble could be seen . . . the 'army' of Pedro Montero." The word "'army'" is contained within ironic quotation marks which mock the idea that this military force could possess any real legitimacy and which place into question the validity of the distinction between the rabble and the army.

To prepare the reader for Pedro's victory speech, Conrad provides some background information and a perspective on the man and his movement. In detailing the means by which Pedro Montero had gained his following, however, Conrad omits entirely the idea that oppressed people throughout history have periodically risen up against those in power in order to change the oppressive conditions of their existence.¹¹ His influence over the "rabble"

¹⁰ At times, even Europeans can be affected by this noise: "The barbarous and imposing noise of the big drum, that can madden a crowd, and that even Europeans cannot hear without a strange emotion" (115).

¹¹ As a Pole, Conrad was certainly aware of such political movements. The distinction seems to lie, perhaps, in the fact that since the natives are clearly an "inferior" group, the situation is simply not (in Bradley's terms) analogous.

can be ascribed only to a genius for treachery of so effective a kind that it must have appeared to those violent men but little removed from a state of utter savagery, as the perfection of sagacity and virtue. The popular lore of all nations testified that duplicity and cunning . . . were looked upon, even more than courage, as heroic virtues by primitive mankind. (319)

From perverse leadership to pathetic "rabble," the revolution is propelled, then, by a combination of racial, cultural and psychological shortcomings on the part of the revolutionaries rather than by any positive desire to redress the wrongs done to them or to alter the power structure that victimizes them. No political motive seems to influence them at all, living, as they appear to, below the horizon of political consciousness. The "ignorant and barbarous plainmen" follow Montero because they "are always ready to believe promises that flatter their secret hopes" (319-20), and Montero has been successful in thus manipulating them.¹² Conrad's ironic qualification ("We have changed since") does not, however, ameliorate the effect of the characterization: while noting a theoretical similarity between "us" and "them," it insists on a separate cultural time frame that denies "them" coeval (Fabian) status.

Pedro himself is "bald, with bunches of crisp hair above [his] ears, arguing the presence of some Negro blood" and is gifted, as members of 'lower races' apparently sometimes are, with "an ape-like faculty for imitating all the outward signs of refinement and distinction, and with a parrot-like talent for languages" (320). The benign, and, in the event,

¹² If the portrait of Montero anticipates to some degree the subsequent rise of fascist demagoguery in Europe, an important difference lies in the fact that European fascists supported racist and imperialist mythologies whereas the natives of South America were victims of them. European fascists sought to expand their power geographically, while the nationalist and populist movements such as the Monterists were attempting to wrest control of their own homes from the imperialists.

misguided, "munificence of a great European traveler" had provided him with some education after which, Pedrito,¹³ "incorrigibly lazy and slovenly, had drifted aimlessly . . . picking up an easy and disreputable living." Talent and education are obviously wasted on such a person, and so "His ability to read did nothing for him but fill his head with absurd visions. His actions were usually determined by motives so improbable in themselves as to escape the penetration of a rational person." Pedro thus stands in bold contrast to those Europeans whose complex motivations and rationalizations are penetrated so subtly in the novel. His mimicry of refinement, however, has been sufficient to delude those who did not know better into temporarily "credit[ing] him with the possession of sane views." This denial of rationality and sanity to Montero and his rebellion tends to ensure that any historical testimony he might present need not be seriously considered.

The depiction of Montero moves between terms of bestiality, insanity and racial inferiority. His insanity, combined with his ability to read, leads him to delusions of grandeur similar to those stereotypical ones of the madman who believes he is Napoleon. Montero, as a result of a misguided reading of French history, thinks he can model himself on the Duc de Morny. This obviously ludicrous aspiration--not a desire for social justice--"was one of the immediate causes of the Monterist revolution" (321), together with "the fundamental causes" that were "rooted in the political immaturity of the people, in the indolence of the upper classes

¹³ The narrator's use of the diminutive form "Pedrito" ("Little Pedro") itself has the effect of reducing whatever claim to authority he might have asserted. By contrast, the formal titles of the Blancos are frequently used (Don Carlos, Don Pepe), thus tacitly affirming the greater legitimacy of their social positions and aspirations.

and the mental darkness of the lower." Pedro's delusions of grandeur are not, however, without a practical side as well:

Now his brother was master of the country, whether as president, dictator, or even as Emperor--why not as an Emperor?--he meant to demand a share in every enterprise--in railways, in mines, in sugar estates, in cotton mills, in land companies, in each and every undertaking--as the price of his protection.

The stage has at last been set for Montero's victory speech. With a few theatrical gestures ("from the natural pleasure he had in dissembling" (322)), he climbs up a few steps to take his place, flanked by Gamacho (who "big and hot, wiping his hairy wet face, uncovered a set of yellow fangs in a grin of stupid hilarity") and Fuentes ("small and lean, looked on with compressed lips") and begins to speak: "He began it with the shouted word 'Citizens!'" But that is as far as we are allowed to follow. Conrad jams the speech, somewhat in the way that subversive radio stations are jammed by wary governments. The citizens are not interested anyway, we are told; they are instead, like children, interested only in the histrionics, "his tip-toeing, the arms flung above his head with the fists clenched, a hand laid flat upon the heart, the silver gleam of rolling eyes," and so on. Conrad is determined to distance the speech in every way possible, in the same way that he has made alien the man and his followers. The people, it seems, are not interested, so they do not hear it; and since Montero is clearly a jarring witness, the omniscient narrator chooses not to narrate it. Instead, in a sort of cinematic pan,¹⁴ the point of view retreats to a distance from which, apart from the shouts of the crowd, one can make out only

¹⁴ See Paul Coates's discussion of Conrad and the cinematic (89-92).

the mouth of the orator . . . opening and shutting, and detached phrases--'The happiness of the people', 'Sons of the country', 'The entire world, *el mundo entiero*'--reached even the packed steps of the cathedral with a feeble clear ring, thin as the buzzing of a mosquito. (323)

The aphasia of those excluded from power, "denied access to the instruments of the struggle for the definition of reality" (1977 170) is what is at stake here. Conrad enforces that aphasia first by making the character utterly alien, then by blocking Montero's ability to speak and be heard, metaphorically reducing it to the insignificant and meaningless "buzzing of a mosquito".¹⁵

It is one thing to suggest that for whatever reason, uprisings on the part of oppressed peoples are doomed to failure even if, initially, they succeed; it is quite another to vilify and ridicule those people to such an extent.¹⁶ The power of the rhetoric used to contain the speech of

¹⁵ Chinua Achebe, again commenting on a comparable situation of aphasia in *Heart of Darkness*, writes:

But perhaps the most significant difference is the one implied in the author's bestowal of human expression to the one [European] and the withholding of it from the other [African]. It is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the 'rudimentary souls' of Africa" (255).

¹⁶ The Monteros are last heard of in a disreputable condition befitting their overall role in the novel:

General Montero, in less than a month after proclaiming himself Emperor of Costaguana, was shot dead (during a solemn and public distribution of orders and crosses) by a young artillery officer, the brother of his then mistress.

Sexual scandal also surrounds "Pedrito the Guerillero," who has been "recognized . . . arrayed in purple slippers and a velvet smoking-cap with a gold tassel, keeping a disorderly house in one of the southern ports" (400). The use of explicitly sexual terms here to represent degradation recalls Bakhtin's analysis of images of the lower bodily stratum, or Mary Douglas's discussion in *Purity and Danger* of the transferral of images of pollution from the body politic to the physical or sexual body.

the anti-imperialist revolutionaries suggests, perhaps, a great fear. As Jenkins argues, in *Nostramo*, Conrad's

social position becomes a knife-edge balance between a desire to challenge the existing arrangements of the universe and a fear of summoning up some annihilating specter in the face of which the cruelty of the existing arrangements appears as nothing. (147)

The object of this fear is not so much successful revolution perhaps but anarchy, chaos, a carnivalesque overturning of authority, a possibility in comparison with which the ruling power structure begins to look more acceptable. It is as though in order to maintain his "knife-edge balance" Conrad must compensate for his critique of the European power structure in Sulaco with a far more extreme and total attack on the native alternatives to it.

One aspect of this balance might be suggested in the juxtaposition of two passages. The first occurs early in the novel, as Gould explains to his wife the socially beneficial effects of the mine:

What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope. (81)

By the end of the novel these ideals have not, of course, been realized, and Emilia's despair answers Charles's early idealism:

there was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea. She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. (427-28)

A wide range of the ideological spectrum is covered here: the mine as the ray of hope, the mine as darkest curse. But the political limits of this discourse can perhaps be noted both in the lack of political alternatives and in the narrow social spectrum represented. Those associated with the owners of the mine are given the most profound insights--indeed almost the only insights--into its potential for progress and for destruction. Those innumerable crushed lives--unless they are Blancos--remain no more than abstractions whose visions of the significance of the mine are never articulated, whose political hopes and social ideals find no expression.

The discourse of social critique, of liberation (that has often been a discourse of oppressed groups), is instead displaced onto the privileged groups in three ways. First, they are denied the right to voice it: for example, Pedro Montero's "victory" speech is blocked by the narrator and made incoherent. Second, with this native discourse jammed, the care for native well-being that naturally figures in such a discourse is then appropriated by the Blancos who seem to understand the condition of the miners and peasants better than they themselves do--a case in point here is Mrs. Gould who, on the dubious basis of having lived for a short time in southern Italy, is credited with an intimate knowledge of peasants and a profound concern for their well-being, and whose vision of the moral failure of the mine seems most profound. Thus, the self-representation of the lower strata is first blocked, and then overridden by the 'truer' representation articulated by the upper. The natives--whether Montero or the peasants--are seen through the eyes of the Blancos, never the reverse.¹⁷

¹⁷ See Edward Said's *Orientalism* for a discussion of the problem of colonial self-representation.

In a passage combining a moral and an aesthetic gaze, whose lyrical poignancy attests perhaps to Mrs. Gould's sincerity, Conrad writes:

Having acquired in southern Europe a knowledge of true peasantry, she was able to appreciate the great worth of the people. She saw the man under the silent, sad-eyed beast of burden. She saw them on the road carrying loads, lonely figures upon the plain, toiling under great straw hats, with their white clothing flapping about their limbs in the wind; she remembered the villages by some group of Indian women at the fountain impressed upon her memory, by the face of some young Indian girl with a melancholy and sensual profile, raising an earthenware vessel of cool water at the door of a dark hut with a wooden porch cumbered with great brown jars and a party of charcoal carriers, with each man's load resting above his head on the top of the low mud wall, slept stretched in a row within the strip of shade. (84-85)

Once again, a European acts as the readers's intermediary. Her credentials, however, based on a visit to her aunt, seem less than sufficient--not because the analogy between Italian peasant ("true peasantry") and South American native is untenable, but because her authority as spokesperson for native experience seems rather unfounded. To understand the sufferings of natives or miners, one would obviously do better to hear the testimonies of the natives or miners in question, rather than rely on that of the wife of the colonialist mine-owner. But the admission of this native perspective on historical events is not allowed in *Nostromo*.

The third step, completing this displacement of the discourse of social critique, is to ascribe the real suffering, the most essential ill-effects of imperialist capitalism, to the imperialists themselves who become hollow and enslaved, and who confront a meaningless world as a result of their relation to wealth and power. In the end, the Blancos appear as the real victims of imperialism: the Goulds, Decoud, and so on. Using Emilia once again as an example, the social tragedy that she articulates in the passage above moves from the fate of the innumerable crushed

lives to one particular crushed life--her own--in less abstract terms, echoing in a negative context the phrase her husband had uttered as the essence of hope:

she would never have him to herself. Never; not for one short hour altogether to herself in this old Spanish house that she loved so well! . . . A terrible success for the last of the Goulds. The last! She had hoped for a long, long time, that perhaps--But no! There were to be no more. An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal . . . all alone in the Treasure House of the World. The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words: 'Material interest.' (428)

While there is undoubtedly some heuristic value in representing the Goulds, for example, as the real victims, the real slaves, this symbolism obscures a great deal as well. It is not just a matter of an apolitical acceptance of the fact that all people-- imperialists and peasants alike-- are victims. This interpretation of Conrad's tragic, or perhaps nihilistic, vision of a universal "human condition" overlooks the fact that the representation Conrad constructs clearly does differentiate between the cultural communities, privileging the complex sufferings of one group and marginalizing that of the other. The transference that occurs here allows the Goulds to be represented metaphorically as the slaves, while the vast numbers of African slaves imported to mine the wealth of South America, and the millions of native people who were literally enslaved and worked to death are left without a legitimate com-

plaint, without even a voice with which to articulate a complaint.¹⁸

Instead, toward the end of the book, we find that discursive space rather ambiguously occupied by Nostromo who, since the events of the rebellion, has developed a radical social conscience. Ironically, the founding of the new regime owes a great deal to his heroic acts. His very name, Nostromo, is a nickname conferred on him by his European superiors, a name meaning not only boatswain (his previous occupation) but, more significantly, "our man." We see him in this capacity as he drives the "unruly brotherhood of all sorts of scum" to work, using "the butt of a heavy revolver " to solv[e] the problem of labour without fail." In this way he patrols the "slums" that resemble "cow-byres," or "dog-kennels," the "obscene lean-to sheds" where they sleep (89):

He called out men's names menacingly from the saddle But if perchance he had to dismount, then, after a while from the door of that hovel or of that *pulperia*, with a ferocious scuffle and stifled imprecations, a *cargador* would fly out head first and hands abroad, to sprawl under the forelegs of the silver-grey mare and the man, picking himself up, would walk away hastily from Nostromo's revolver, reeling a little along the street and snarling low curses. (89-90)

This approach to labor relations seems not to be questioned in the novel. "'The fellow is devoted to me, body and soul'" Captain Mitchell was given to affirm" (49). While this evaluation of their relationship can hardly be taken at face value, there is no doubt that Nostromo's impressive strengths are harnessed in the service of the "material interests." In this capacity he is "too scornful in his temper even to utter abuse, a

¹⁸ Ressler's response is not unusual. Of Emilia, for instance, he writes: "In the depth of her suffering and in her grasp of the darkest realities, Mrs. Gould endures the fullest burden of tragedy in the novel" (56). The suffering and grim realities faced by the native people seem to be wholly occluded from such a formulation, which focuses instead on the suffering of a person whose relative comfort stems from their oppression.

tireless taskmaster, and the more to be feared because of his aloofness" (26). Mitchell's complimentary reference to Nostromo's "force of character" conceals a somewhat less subtle kind of force.¹⁹

It is strange then to see Nostromo take up the cause of the poor, but even this dramatic conversion is contained within the circle of irony and orthodoxy. The change in his character initially appears as a kind of rebirth: he lies "as if dead" after his long swim, a vulture waiting, until he arises and says "'I am not dead yet'" (341-42). Essentially a public figure, "The necessity of living concealed" renders his existence meaningless since there is no one either to know or to care what might have happened to him. And it is at this moment of rebirth that he understands his friend Viola's vision of power relations: "Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general, kept the people in poverty and subjection; they kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service" (342). Just as Viola's insight is undermined by his own adulation of the Gould's and his scorn for the peasants, Nostromo's new political vision is similarly questionable.

Nostromo's social conscience seems to have its origin not in any real social concern but in a feeling of having been forgotten, betrayed by his superiors during the revolution. The courageous actions he had performed during that desperate affair in response to their urgent pleas had gone unnoticed, unappreciated, and it is the resulting personal resentment that fuels his alienation from his Blanco superiors more than any serious political ideal or social insight. Initially, in fact, Nostromo seems

¹⁹ See also a passage cited earlier, "There was not one of them that had not, at some time or other, looked with terror at Nostromo's revolver poked very close at his face" (25-26).

almost eager to return to his previous relation to Blanco power. Meeting Monygham soon after, he

was mollified by what seemed a sign of some faint interest in such things as had befallen him At that moment he felt communicative. He expected the continuance of that interest which, whether accepted or rejected, would have restored to him his personality--the only thing lost in the desperate affair. (357-58)

Monygham considers Nostromo's anger a kind of childishness, in accord with the narrator's earlier statement that he "was simple. He was as ready to become the prey of any belief, superstition, or desire as a child" (344). A "popular mind" such as Nostromo's, states the narrator, "is incapable of skepticism; and that incapacity delivers their helpless strength to the wiles of swindlers and to the pitiless enthusiasms of leaders inspired by visions of a high destiny" (346-47). Nostromo's new-found political awareness is thus undermined through its non-political basis in his helpless gullibility, childish resentment and naive pride. As with Montero, oppositional political opinion and action is thoroughly depoliticized through ascription to psychological imbalance.

Nostromo's political critique of the power structure is further compromised by its development in tandem with his decision to keep the treasure for himself rather than to return it to its owners. His social conscience appears compromised not only because he is becoming rich on the silver himself--silver which he has stolen, silver which as he knows is the source of much of the injustice he sees around him--but also by the fact that he seems in no hurry to use it to help the poor whose suffering he invokes more frequently the richer he grows. Jenkins asks:

what happens to this new-found consciousness and autonomy? It is true that Nostromo expresses it by supporting the new movement that asserts the independent interests of the workers as against those of the oligarchy. But Conrad nullifies the

validity of this autonomy by making it dependent on the stolen silver Nostromo passes from exploitation by the oligarchy to exploitation by the fetishized product of the oligarchy. (172)

Nostromo, toward the end of the novel, appears as yet another victim of the silver--like the Goulds, a slave to it. The wealthier he becomes, the more he seems a victim of slavery and tyranny: "And to become the slave of a treasure with full self-knowledge is an occurrence rare and mentally disturbing" (428). "And the feeling of fearful and ardent subjection, the feeling of his slavery . . . weighed heavily on the independent Captain Fidanza" (431). "He yearned to clasp, embrace, absorb, subjugate . . . this treasure, whose tyranny had weighed upon his mind, his actions, his very sleep" (433). His dream of a life for Giselle as splendid as that of Emilia (443) takes on a less than positive aspect in light of Emilia's despair. And his death is at least partly attributable to his possession of the stolen silver since this is behind his refusal to marry Giselle immediately. Any power Nostromo may have had as a spokesman for the poor is ultimately eroded in light of the many ways in which his political integrity is compromised.²⁰

The alternative discourse of liberation that might be thought to accompany the critique of imperialist capitalism is not just undermined, but everywhere discredited in *Nostromo*. In his portrait of the leader of

²⁰ There is a striking historical and literary irony in the fact that the edition I am using--Penguin--has on its cover a reproduction of a portrait of Zapata, the Mexican revolutionary peasant leader. The portrait is presumably meant to refer in some way to Nostromo, but Zapata, curiously, was leader of a revolution against everything that Nostromo and the Blancos stand for. Indeed, as a native leading a popular insurrection, Zapata seems closer to Montero than to Nostromo.

the new socialist organization in Sulaco, Conrad employs the rhetorical techniques that make a character appear alien that he used so successfully earlier in characterizing the Monteros. The leader is presented as "an indigent, sickly, somewhat hunchbacked" (432) man, "small, frail, blood-thirsty, the hater of capitalists, perched on a high stool" (459) near Nostromo's deathbed, "huddled up on the stool, shock-headed, wildly hairy, like a hunchbacked monkey" (460), intent on extracting money from Nostromo, a dying man. This is the last example in the novel of a character who might seem to be involved in a radical attempt to alter the power structure. His obsessive nature suggests a lack of any recognizably rational interior complexity or depth, and his appearance is at once monstrous and--like the natives--bestial. He doesn't sit, he perches and huddles. And to judge by his shock of unkempt hair and his resemblance to a monkey, one wonders if he too doesn't, perhaps, like the Monteros, have some "Negro blood."

Not only is oppositional discourse--native or European--thoroughly marginalized, at one point we are given a glimpse of a native who recognizes the benefits of the colonial system:

The grave alcalde [a civic official] himself, in a white waistcloth and a flowered chintz gown with sleeves, open wide upon his naked stout person with an effect of a gaudy bathing robe, stood by, wearing a rough beaver hat at the back of his head, and grasping a tall staff with a silver knob in his hand. (329)

The native is made to seem alien, a figure of ridicule, in much the same way that the Monteros were made to appear bizarre and grotesque. The reader's interpretive gaze is, once again, confounded by this figure, yet this absurd grave person is even proud of his ridiculous costume:

These insignia of his dignity had been conferred upon him by the Administration of the mine, the fountain of honor, of

prosperity, and peace which seemed with its treasures to pour down . . . the gifts of well-being, security, and justice upon the toilers.

These opinions are presented as those of the native (and of other natives as well), and the condescending irony of the passage allows the reader a superior vision, a knowledge that the mine is not so benign as these naive workers believe. Yet if a disbelieving irony distances the reader, there is nonetheless a degree of sympathy for the native, and for others who peaceably and uncomplainingly ally themselves with the mine. That sympathy is quite the opposite of the antipathy, revulsion, and scorn expressed toward those who, allied with the Monteros, oppose the established structure of "material interests." The narrator intercedes to speak even for the pro-Blanco natives, however, addressing the narrative audience over the heads, as it were, of the natives under discussion:²¹

In a very few years the sense of belonging to a powerful organization had been developed in these harassed, half-wild Indians. They were proud of, and attached to, the mine. It had secured their confidence and belief. They invested it with a protecting and invincible virtue as though it were a fetish made by their own hands, for they were ignorant, and in other respects did not differ appreciably from the rest of mankind which puts infinite trust in its own creations. It never entered the *alcalde's* head that the mine could fail in its protection and its force. (329)

The natives, however, are represented as different, beginning with the alien appearance that--as in the case of General Montero--distances by simultaneously attracting and repelling the European gaze through anarchic transgression of any recognizable dress codes. These "half-wild" creatures apparently need some institutional structure imposed from the out-

²¹ See Fabian, and Asad for discussions of the way anthropological or political discourse about native peoples rarely includes them as interlocuters.

side to tame them, and the mine providentially--for a while at least-- provides it. While the philosophic observation near the close of the passage appears to equate all humanity, at another level this transcendent universality is contradicted, and the suggestion subtly remains that on a pragmatic level some sections of humanity can provide order for those benighted sections who are constitutionally unable to do it for themselves. In the founding of a nation-state controlled by European and North American "material interests"--however compromised the ideals of those interests may finally be by wealth and power--there is at least a gesture toward the construction of a more stable social structure. "For the San Tomé mine," we are told, "was to become an institution, a rallying-point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live" (101).

While such endorsements of the mine cannot be taken without a large grain of salt, there is, as well, a kind of blaming of the victims for their difficulties. The greatest single threat to order and stability in this society seems to emerge from the natives who irrationally, greedily it seems, rise up periodically to destroy the fragile order that the mine might offer.²² Conrad does not dwell on the fact that before the European invasion the natives of South America had long-established, highly sophisticated civilizations which the Europeans systematically destroyed as part of a genocidal campaign--physical as well as cultural genocide--to

²² History repeats itself here in the early nationalist movement, later in the rise of Bento, and finally in the Monterist attempt to seize power. In each case, the anti-imperialist movement is denied political legitimacy, even rationality, appearing simply as (in Emilia's words) "a puerile and bloodthirsty game of murder and rapine played with terrible earnestness by depraved children" (53).

plunder natural resources such as silver. The blame for the political chaos is directed less toward the Blancos, however, than toward the greedy subrational natives--both the megalomaniacs who lead and the ignorant but docile ones who passively let themselves be led by these demagogues. *Nostromo*, while critical of the internal logic of imperialism and its ill-effects on the imperialists themselves, never moves beyond the orthodox common sense (*sensus communis*) position that can consider, if not finally wholly endorse, the benign effects of imperialism on the native people. As Terry Eagleton comments, "alien experience is allowed radically to question civilized structures which in turn gain fresh validation from the encounter" (31).²³

Eduardo Galeano points out that silver-mining in Latin America has rarely been benign either in intention or in effect: "The Indians of the Americas totalled no less than 70 million when the foreign conquerors appeared on the horizon; a century and a half later they had been reduced to 3.5 million." Natives sent into the silver mines "usually died within four years." One mine alone, Potosi's Cerro Rico "consumed eight million lives" in three centuries of operation. The natives, including women and children, were torn from their agricultural communities and driven to the Cerro. "Of every ten who went up into the freezing wilderness, seven never returned" (50-51). The anomaly of representing the San Tomé mine as

²³ While there are many passages that illustrate the negative effects of the mine on the owners and those associated with them, there is very little description of any suffering undergone by the native miners or their families. Kenneth Graham, citing descriptions of miners and their families seeking work and the "uncritical . . . description of the mine itself," argues that "the current in the book that would judge the mine adversely . . . is more than counterbalanced by the way it is also shown to teem with individual and collective vitality" (119).

a haven of justice and stability in the eyes of the natives (whether under Spanish or Anglo-American power), the suggestion that the natives themselves are most directly responsible for the political chaos because of their greed and immaturity, and the ascription of real suffering and real insight into that suffering to the Blancos rather than to the natives is almost grotesque in a way that Conrad's ironic representation of the situation cannot encompass.

Conrad does acknowledge some of this history briefly--not, of course, from the point of view of the natives, but through the thoughts of Mrs. Gould, who is generally seen to be more sensitive to suffering in any case:

Mrs. Gould knew the history of the San Tomé mine. Worked in the early days mostly by means of lashes on the backs of slaves, its yield had been paid for in its own weight of human bones. Whole tribes of Indians had perished in the exploitation; and then the mine was abandoned, since with this primitive method it had ceased to make a profitable return, no matter how many corpses were thrown into its maw. Then it became forgotten. (55)

But this era of atrocity is separated from the fictional present by a curious historical rupture. First abandoned, then forgotten, the mine is finally rediscovered in the modern period--not only rediscovered but morally reversed so that the Europeans (now English rather than Spanish) become the apparently blameless victims, and the nationalist governments are the aggressors. Following the War of Independence,

An English company obtained the right to work it, and found a vein so rich that neither the exactions of successive governments, nor the periodic raids of recruiting officers upon the population of paid miners they had created, could discourage their perseverance.

The historical (and rhetorical) division posited here represents the assumption of the changed face of imperialism. The era of exploitation by

the Spanish imperialists has long ago ended--even disappeared from memory perhaps, like the existence of the mine itself. Now, by contrast, the Anglo-American mine owners are represented as a progressive force in the land, victimized by unfair governments which do not, apparently, have a "right" to the mine. These governments then make life difficult for miners who by virtue of being paid rather than kept in slavery seem to have given their allegiance to the mining company.

This representation of the history of colonialist exploitation in Latin America is important to the legitimacy of the narrative coherence (tenuous though it sometimes is) of the Blancos. The San Tomé mine under the Goulds must be separated from the history of atrocity that is the Latin American colonialist legacy in order to assert even partially the legitimacy of the Blancos. The historical division that is suggested in this passage more or less corresponds to the coming of modern capitalism, which is seen to be completely separate from the earlier modes of production in that a concern with efficiency leads to a concern with the well-being of the miners. The reward for this humane approach in earlier decades unfortunately is that "the native miners," in an interesting twist on the outside agitator theory of popular resistance, who were "incited to revolt by the emissaries sent out from the capitol, had risen upon their English chiefs and murdered them to a man" (55). This is, of course, a prefiguring of the crisis that is unleashed on Gould and the Blancos, who apparently have given *relatively* good government to the natives, have won their trust and loyalty, yet are now faced with the irrational Monterist

insurrection.²⁴ No matter how much the legitimacy, authority and moral ground supporting the Blancos is eroded in the novel, never does their situation even begin to compare to the moral vacuum or actual evil ascribed to those who oppose them. Mark Conroy argues that the social dynamic represented in *Nostromo* is determined by its perspective: since "this is a European perspective . . . a kind of horizon obtrudes on the narrative, a state of affairs that cannot be seen beyond." Ultimately, "the text's turning away . . . from the next logical stage of political conflict" between Europeans and natives "is also a pointing toward, and what it points to is the horizon of the text, its perspectival limit" (137).

Nostromo operates on the generic border dividing the epic from the novel. It covers the ground traditionally reserved for the epic--the founding of a nation--but it does not respect one particular central characteristic of that genre: it is not univocal or doxic. Indeed, in Mitchell's account of events the story does take on an epic dimension, but the unity that should also be present is notably absent. Too many interpretations of events obtrude both in terms of what actually has happened

²⁴ Stephen K. Land asserts, without questioning the validity of the representation, that "The history of Costaguana is a succession of revolutions, oscillating between the rule of a partly-enlightened aristocracy and the tyranny of popular dictatorships" (111). This uncritical response, faithful enough to the world as Conrad describes it, may serve as an indication of how far from level is the discursive field constituted by the novel. In this formulation the aristocratic elite are at last partly enlightened, progressive, compared to the bestial dictatorial popular tyranny. The point here is not to suggest that the terms be reversed so that the natives are represented as the "good" in opposition to the imperialist "bad," but to specify the way that *Nostromo's* historiographic discourse is structured to legitimate some voices--such as the at least "partly enlightened aristocracy," and to exclude others.

and in terms of the motivations behind the actions. In this way, the epic dimension is parodied--and epic and parody are mutually exclusive genres. In the epic, attention is focused on the surface of events, not on the complex interiority of the agents; in *Nostromo* that subjectivity is constantly at issue to the extent that the epic or heroic dimensions of their actions are called into question.

Yet a trace of epic remains, nonetheless, in that the Republic is founded, the enemy (the Monteros) is represented as thoroughly villainous and is repulsed by courageous and intrepid--albeit occasionally confused--heroes. In this sense the centripetal movement of the epic is in evidence, but at the center there is no epic stability. At the center there is, instead, the instability of the characters and their narratives, and that instability is foregrounded by Conrad's demonstration of the difficulty of a closed, completed, true representation of the events. On the other hand, the centrifugal movement of the work is often overestimated. While there is finally no solid center, neither in the European characters whose motivations are always open to question nor in their interpretations of events which never reveal the 'whole story,' the reader is not permitted to move much beyond that center. The potentially centrifugal movement of heteroglossia is checked by Conrad in that the heterodox historical experience or point of view of the native characters remains beyond the bounds of the speakable or the thinkable.

The novel abounds in irony, as Conrad critiques the European characters and their ideals. But the centrifugal movement generated by that irony at no point impels the reader beyond the space of its object. The irony may call European imperialism into question, it may undermine it, it may be devastating in its critique, but that critique is in the end con-

I tained within its own discursive space.²⁵ The European imperialists are the subject of irony, and they are even to varying degrees conscious of it themselves. But the narrative does not then move the one decisive step further, which would open a discursive space outside, a space that might logically be occupied by an anti-imperialist discourse articulated by or on behalf of imperialism's victims, the natives. Even if that position were then to be subjected to the same sort of critique that Conrad employs to undermine the dominant discourses, it might at least be articulated rather than made to appear incomprehensible, beyond or beneath rationality. Instead, that critique is internalized within the circle bounded by European characters, and the natives are left without any rationale for their revolution other than apolitical ignorance and barbarity. As a result, they need not be taken seriously--except possibly as a military threat--and their claims for justice or an end to oppression can be largely dismissed. Once again, the point here is not to suggest that the populist or nationalist ideology that the novel portrays so negatively offers any final solution to the social dilemma represented in *Nostromo*, but to understand the uneven nature of the discursive field and

²⁵ This is analogous to the problem Malcolm Lowry located in *Heart of Darkness*. "Anyhow that story--great though it is--is at least half based on a complete miscomprehension." Critical of European imperialism, Conrad was nonetheless unable to look outside it to see what coherence or legitimacy another culture might have. "It is clear that Comrade Joseph did not allow himself to be corrupted by any savages though," writes Lowry ironically, "he stayed in Polish aloofness on board in company with some *a priori* ideas" (236). Conrad's (or Marlow's) determination to stay on board his ship here is analogous to the refusal in *Nostromo* to move beyond the confines of orthodoxy.

the ideological limits of this ultimately orthodox historical narrative.²⁶

This unevenness can be specified in the way that the text (along with many critics) insists on one very important--albeit perhaps negative--stability. While the main characters are shown to be complex and multi-layered both in themselves and in their intricate networks of relationships, the stability that remains arises from the lack of complexity or interiority of the native resistance, the "rabble." In relation to the Blancos, that asymmetrical representation is stable, and it is *not* fragmented or given any mode of narration whatsoever, much less a multiple one. In this sense, then, there is a limited certainty in the world of the text, and it does reinforce in this aspect the certainty of the world of the reader: the Europeans are people of complex interiority and subjectivity, as opposed to the natives whose absolute lack of interiority or subjectivity, whose unapproachable incomprehensibility, provides, by negation, a relatively stable center. As long as this opposition is maintained, the uncertainty likely to be engendered in the reader by Conrad's

²⁶ Benita Parry argues that a political reading of *Nostromo* must "confront the working out of discrepant discourses on the construction of historical meaning." She identifies three strands of discrepant discourse in the novel:

The teleological view of capitalism as the high point in human development and bourgeois democracy as its appointed end is negated by two mutually incompatible counter-arguments, the one belittling history as an arbitrary series of contingent occurrences producing nothing and going nowhere, the other reordering these same events as manifestations of processes initiated by human agency and developing in directions determined by permutations in the strength of competing class forces. (118)

Insightful as this reading is into the way the text articulates discursive tensions, Parry does not recognize that there is another level of discursive discrepancy in the text, the discrepancy between the representation of native discourse and that of the dominant group.

impressive control of modernist fictional technique is surely of a limited nature. It seems as though in *Nostromo*, the relatively familiar interiority and complexity of the characters of the dominant classes is in direct proportion to the denial of any similar familiarity, interiority or complexity in the dominated groups.

Through Conrad's critique of imperialism, the problem is moved into the realm of the thinkable out of the self-evident, into orthodoxy out of the doxic, into the novel out of the epic; but the critique is nonetheless contained. Being contained within the European circle it is contained within orthodoxy, that ultimately centripetal discursive space in which issues exist that allow the possibility of opposing views but without allowing them radically to undermine the legitimacy of the hegemonic discursive community. In what may on one level seem a contradictory effect, the very critique of the European Blanco community that the novel presents, in crediting only those people with sufficient complexity to provide the subject of a critique, enacts the exclusion of the heterodox or heteroglossic element that could erode the legitimacy of that group. This is accomplished through the imposition of aphasia onto the natives who, given possession of those same critical insights and that same interiority, granted equal status as dialogic interlocutors, might potentially be able to contest the legitimacy of their exclusion from possession of the three related things: the silver, complex subjectivity, and discursive authority. McClure argues that rather than recognizing the legitimacy of popular resistance, Conrad instead balances "profound criticisms of modern imperialism and vitriolic dismissal of popular movements." The second half of the formula, however, results in an interpretation of

the stubborn persistence of disorder as a sign that Latin Americans are inherently incapable of acting rationally. If

commentaries on *Nostromo* . . . have failed to question the validity of its portrait of nineteenth-century Latin America, it is perhaps because Europeans and North Americans have been conditioned to view Latin Americans in the same pessimistic and ultimately dismissive terms Thus even as *Nostromo* charges Western economic interests with the oppression and exploitation of Latin Americans, it presents an image of Latin America that has long been used to justify external domination and internal tyranny. (166-67)²⁷

The point here is not to suggest that Conrad himself was, or would have become, a supporter of American or European imperialist policy in Latin America, but rather that the attitude toward the natives articulated in *Nostromo* has much in common with that policy and contributes, at the very least by default, to its implementation.

The narratives constructed by the Europeans are all shown to be flawed in significant ways, but the natives are significantly denied the capacity to construct a coherent narrative at all; or, what amounts to almost the same thing, they are shown to be irrational and therefore not to be living in terms that a coherent narrative can comprehend. As jarring historical witnesses, their testimony may be disallowed and their actions judged to be narratively incoherent. Furthermore, whenever the discourse concerning the natives shifts its ground from the picturesque to the political, a subsequent transformation immediately occurs wherein political or social categories translate instead into problems of native psycho- or socio-pathology. If it is true to say that final narrative historical authority is not granted to the Sulaco Europeans, it is equally true that not a shred of authority--narrative or otherwise--is granted to

²⁷ Thus there is a sense of acceptance and inevitability--not to mention Mitchell's relief--attaching to the narrative and political closure imposed by the "international naval demonstration which put an end to the Costaguana-Sulaco war . . . [T]he United States cruiser, *Powhattan*, was the first to salute the Occidental flag" (400).

the natives. They are not even seen to act within a narrative continuum that would allow their actions to have rational causes. Their attempt to seize power is granted none of the rationality that is a prerequisite of narrative logic in history, none of the radical political analysis that has been a factor in many anti-imperialist movements in the third world. If epic unity--doxa--continues to elude the Blanco characters and their attempts to interpret history, not a trace of a coherent historical narrative can be constructed from any heterodox perspective represented in *Nostromo*. The natives do not, strictly-speaking, have any place in the category of history except as its other, that category of people without history (Wolf), without culture, whose defeat continues to be a constitutive factor in the relative stability of orthodox narrative history.

Parade's End: "Has the British This or That come to *This*!"

"I wanted the Novelist in fact to appear in his really proud position as historian of his own time." Ford Madox Ford (1933 180)

His own comments about the magnitude of his historiographical ambitions make it clear that in *Parade's End* Ford is attempting something close to a total history of an era. "The subject was the world," he writes, "as it culminated in war" (1933 195). Yet instead of carrying out his initial desire to write a comprehensive novel "in which all the characters should be great masses of people--or interests," Ford settled for the more feasible task of representing the "world seen through the eyes of a central observer" who "must be sufficient to carry the reader through his observations of the crumbling world." Gene M. Moore argues that the tetralogy constitutes a "comprehensive and broadly social attempt to restore a lost sense of continuity" (49), a comprehensiveness Ford presents through the "consciousness of 'the last English Tory'" as a means of representing "a vast social vision of historic continuity-in-change" (50). Many critics of the tetralogy acknowledge the "comprehensive" scope of Ford's project. Samuel Hynes describes it as "the history of his own time on an immense and public scale" (516). Joseph Firebaugh writes of his "comprehension of human life in all its tragicomedy" (32). Robert Green refers to the "comprehensive totalising realism" (144) of the work. George Core also remarks on the "comprehensiveness" (98) of the work, arguing that since Ford knew "that it was impossible to present a complete picture

of English life from 1908 to 1918," he instead "shows us the various spheres of action at random but representative moments" through characters who "are representative of every level of English society" (97).

If the frequently-used adjective "comprehensive" is appropriate to the novel, then it is worth considering the degree to which Ford's orchestration of the social voices of his time in *Parade's End* does in fact comprehend the heterogeneous social reality he is representing. If all narrative representations of history are to some degree partial--both in the sense of being incomplete and in the related sense of expressing (perhaps through that very incompleteness) a bias or partiality--if, as Mink argues, the idea of 'the whole story' is a narrative optical illusion in historiography, a conceptual impossibility, how does Ford's narrative text manage to maintain the illusion of comprehensiveness?

The suggestively quasi-allegorical nature of the work permits an interpretation that conflates to some degree the personal life and problems of Christopher Tietjens and the fate of Tory England or even, perhaps, the fate of England itself.¹ Thus, according to Green, Tietjens must appear

to be 'typical' or capable of universal application. The observer's troubles, Tietjens' disasters, had to be rendered as representative of the common fate of all the combatants

¹ See, especially, Firebaugh's insightful early (1952) reading in which he asserts that "*Parade's End* is an allegory of social decay" (23). Similarly Marlene Griffith who notes that "once we begin hunting for allegory we find ourselves amply rewarded" (141). Richard Cassell as well agrees that the tetralogy can "be easily read as allegory" (267).

. . . . Tietjens was, then, designed to carry the weight of what Ford saw as the general condition. (132).²

This identification of the 'comprehensive' consciousness of Tietjens with the social totality, with the "general condition," is further strengthened by Ford's impressionism, which foregrounds the complexity of subjective experience. Much of the real action is not directly narrated by a third person narrator, but is instead represented through the narration of past events by the characters--chiefly Tietjens--who (necessarily) interpret as they narrate their perspective on the events. Not actions themselves, but the reflections by Tietjens, Valentine and others on the actions and their possible meanings constitute the bulk of the novel. In this respect they are themselves like historians who interpret the meanings of, or identify patterns in, historical events.

Ford presents the subjective experience of Tietjens, with all his foibles and eccentricities, as a symbolically potent combination of the true subject of history and a kind of Arnoldian "best self" of the nation. As Moore puts it, he represents "what society ought to be, by embodying its most honored values" (52). Leer makes a similar point, arguing that "Tietjens is finally seen as a Fordian ideal grow[ing] to embody Ford's most complete affirmation" (105). A strong trace of Kant's "common sense" is present in this combination of social values and moral imperative. Furthermore, the remarkable omniscience that allows Tietjens to correct "from memory the errors in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*" (I 16)

² In his discussion of the historical novel in general, Avrom Fleishman, responding to Lukacs's concepts of representative and world-historical figures in such novels, argues that "the relation of the representative hero to the society of his time is . . . [one of] symbolic universality. The heroes of historical fiction represent . . . man in general, conceived as a historical being" (1971 11).

I acts as a proof both of his comprehensive mind and of his objectivity. As Paul Armstrong remarks, "If the *Encyclopaedia* is unreliable as an epistemological origin, Tietjens preserves the authority of 'Truth' through his own infallible memory" (1987 232). Consequently, Tietjens's subjective experience can be presented as a kind of gauge of the objective state of the nation, his ability to make narrative sense of the world around him measuring the ability of his class to maintain social order, and his point of view constituting the ideological center of the novel.

In his study of Conrad, Ford records his observation that "Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains" (194). As Armstrong argues, Ford's novels, especially *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End*, "dramatize the gap between confused, unreflective understanding and reflective interpretation that seeks to compose impressions into a clear, coherent narrative pattern" (1987 2). Coherent narration is constructed after the fact out of those impressions--or as Bradley writes, "rightly to observe is not to receive a series of chaotic impressions, but to grasp the course of events as a connected whole." The ability to connect these impressions into narrative form is not solely what is at stake, however. There is also, as Bradley and White agree, the further necessity of having that particular narrative account ratified, legitimated by the general population as well as by the the "weightiest interests." This process has an explicitly political side, as White remarks, in the struggle to make a convincing coherent narrative that will stick as the one in terms of which people will understand their own lives (167). Tietjens's narrative authority, a birthright of members of his class, is reinforced by his remarkable ("comprehensive") intelligence, and is ratified by all the sympathetic characters in the novel as well as by lower class characters,

whose acceptance--even adulation--of his authority is pointedly presented on several occasions.

Tietjens's perspective is, nonetheless, something of an anachronism. He is, essentially, a man whose value system belongs to an earlier century--the seventeenth or, at the latest, the eighteenth century--and whose ideals are located in a particular image of the rural social hierarchy of that time. Perhaps the passage most often cited in this regard is his meditation, while under fire in the trenches, on George Herbert's rural life at Bemerton. The extremity of the juxtaposition of these two moments is remarkable, the former as an image of modern reality and the latter not only as history but as the utopian moment from which much of the novel's social critique is directed.³ A less dramatic example may illustrate this critical strategy as well. Early in their acquaintance, Tietjens and Valentine are on a country path, a pleasantly bucolic setting, and he reflects on the situation:

'This', Tietjens thought, 'is England! A man and a maid walk through Kentish grass fields: the grass ripe for the scythe. The man honourable, clean, upright; the maid virtuous, clean, vigorous: he of good birth; she of birth quite as good Each come just from an admirably appointed establishment: a table surrounded by the best people: their promenade sanctioned, as it were, by the Church: two clergy; the State: two government officials; by mothers, friends, old maids.' (I 110)

³ The turn to the past for a social vision is a not uncommon strategy, one that can potentially be used to support any political position. Many early twentieth-century writers turned to these centuries--especially the early seventeenth century--for a myth of a preindustrial 'organic society' or a time previous to the modern 'dissociation of the sensibilities' as a fulcrum from which a critical perspective on modernity could be managed. For a discussion of this use of history--although of another period--see Christopher Hill on "The Norman Yoke." See also Raymond Williams' discussion of the uses of the past in "The Nostalgic Escalator."

While they both are undeniably "of good birth," the man's wife is having an affair and the maid is a suffragette engaged in civil disobedience. The good establishment is the home of the Duchemins: Reverend Duchemin, given to periodic fits of violence and sexual obscenity, and Mrs. Duchemin, a hypocritical social climber. The distance between the image and the reality is vast. Tietjens muses, "Walk, then, through the field, gallant youth and fair maid God's England' 'Land of Hope and Glory!'" (I 110-11).

By God, he said, "Church! State! Army! H.M. Ministry: H M. Opposition: H.M. City Man . . . All the governing class! All rotten! Then thank God for the upright young man and the virtuous maiden in the summer fields: he Tory of the Tories as he should be: she suffragette of the militants As she should be! In the early decades of the twentieth century, however else can a woman keep clean and wholesome! Ranting from platforms, splendid for the lungs (I 111)

The ironic gap between the ideal and the modern reality turns harsher, though, as he realizes that by enjoying this bucolic moment with Valentine he is compromising her reputation, perhaps causing her to be struck from the visiting lists of those "good" hypocritical establishments.

The political side of his peculiar brand of Toryism emerges from a conversation with her about women's right to vote. While he espouses no objection to civil disobedience and even destruction of property as a means, he finds the goals of the suffragettes "idiotic" (I 119). "What good did a vote ever do anyone?" he asks (I 120). Valentine cites the example of women seeking equal pay for equal work as a case in point, but he disagrees, arguing that if those women

backed by all the other ill-used, sweated women of the country, had threatened the Under-secretary, burned the pillar-boxes, and cut up all the golf greens round his country-house, they'd have had their wages raised to half a

crown next week. That's the only straight method. It's the feudal system at work." (I 121)

It is something of a reversal to support the feudal system on the basis of its offering better access to social justice for the lower classes. Nevertheless, it is a vision of a benign feudal system that Tietjens endorses: social positions well-defined and not yet mystified or reified by modern industrial and bureaucratic institutions, codes of behavior stable, everyone fulfilling the duties and enjoying the benefits of his or her acknowledged position. According to this vision, if the system does not at first function properly, there is recourse to direct action. In fact, it would not be difficult to adduce examples from British history in which such a confrontational strategy resulted in the harsh and violent repression of protest. Tietjens (as well as Ford) omits mention of the fact that while women or the lower classes may have recourse to direct action, the government has a virtual monopoly on the means of organized violence.

In one of the prefaces to the tetralogy, Ford claims that his attempt to represent history through "the eyes of an extinct frame of mind" (Hynes 524) is, however, a strategic one. "For by the time of my relative youth," he writes, "Toryism had gone beyond the region of any practicing political party. It had . . . expired." Moore argues that

Ford understood Tietjens' brand of bygone Toryism as having long ceased to play any effective role in politics Tietjens is an emotional Tory as well as a political Tory, and this choice of a doubly extinct perspective provided Ford with a means of viewing emotional situations in a relatively unemotional and objective manner, while Tietjens' status as a representative of an outmoded social class endows him with a similarly objective . . . overview of the struggles among various class interests. (52)

There is a strange movement in this argument whereby Tietjens's objectivity is established by his political bias, the centrality of his per-

spective is guaranteed by his obsolescence, and his relevance to the moment arises from his apparent anachronicity. Before this contradiction is explored further, however, it is important to understand the strategic use Ford makes of Tietjens in his critique of modernity.

Through the character of Tietjens, Ford is able to present a powerful indictment of the ruling classes of his time. This extinct Arnoldian "best self" not only analyses and criticizes the hypocrisies and incompetencies of those in power, but by his opinions and actions (which are almost invariably carefully thought out and above reproach) he alienates almost everyone around him. The novel is replete with examples of his moral and intellectual superiority, from his unwillingness to tamper with statistics to his concern with the reputations of others at the expense of his own. On the other hand, from this position the shortcomings of others are glaringly exposed: the outrageously self-centered maliciousness of Sylvia, the gullibility of General Campion who believes her lies, the incompetence of many in positions of bureaucratic and military power, the unprincipled rapaciousness of social climbers such as MacMaster and Edith Ethel. Tietjens's "public service" class--the class that, as we are told, rules the world (I 9)--has historically declined and no longer lives up to its responsibilities. "'All rotten,'" Tietjens exclaims (I 111).

Tietjens's personal power, emblematic of the power of his class, is the subject of the opening scenes of the tetralogy:

The two young men--they were of the English public-official class--sat in the perfectly appointed railway carriage. The leather straps . . . were of virgin newness; the mirrors beneath the new luggage racks immaculate as if they had reflected very little; the bulging upholstery in its luxuriant regulated curves was scarlet and yellow . . . the train ran as smoothly . . . as British gilt-edged securities. (I 9)

Tietjens and his friend MacMaster are powerful young men at home in this luxury--Tietjens born to it, his friend risen to it. "Their class administered the world," writes Ford. If the train had not run smoothly, indeed if any disruptions upset them, the story would not go unreported to the proper authorities--and the narratives of this class carry weight. These are, it might be said, examples of the weighty interests to whom Bradley alludes.

If they saw policemen misbehave, railway porters lack civility, an 'insufficiency of street lamps, defects in public services or in foreign countries, they saw to it, either with indignant Balliol voices or with letters to *The Times* asking . . . "Has the British This or That come to *this!*"

But the almost doxic sense of harmonious equilibrium based on the unquestioned hegemony of this class is soon shown to be, in reality, already a thing of the past. As Tietjens himself demonstrates, however, it is not the class system itself that is seen to be at fault, but the fact that the ruling class has not lived up to its responsibilities as governors. The rift between Tietjens and his wife Sylvia, indeed Tietjens's growing estrangement from most of his class, is symptomatic of a more general social breakdown characteristic of modernity. A further aspect of this breakdown is Tietjens's decreasing narrative power, a decrease affecting at once his ability to construct narrative, and the power of his narrative to compel assent.

Tietjens attempts to make narrative sense of his own personal history at several points during the novel. Given his symbolic role in this quasi-allegory, his success or failure bears directly on the political equilibrium of the social system. In fact, his increasing inability to narrate parallels a breakdown in the stability of the old social order, as

I the war forces Tietjens into a redefined relation with the "Other Ranks." In the opening pages he is able, in conversation with MacMaster, to colligate (Walsh) the events of his recent past into a significant narrative, but as the tetralogy progresses he has increasing difficulty in doing so. In the end he cannot do it, and, in fact, his consciousness at this point no longer represents the privileged focal point of the novel

At one point during the fighting, Levin brings Tietjens news from home, and the information creates in his mind the impression of "a singular mosaic of extraordinary, bright-coloured and melodramatic statements . . . without any sequence, and indeed without any apparent aim" (I 345). This is of course unacceptable to Tietjens, who determines to "go methodically into this!" Methodically into the history of his last day on earth" (I 349). At this point in *Parade's End*, Tietjens's total grasp on things for the first time seems to be seriously faltering. Accordingly, he decides that the optimal way to be methodical in this case is to make a full narrative account of his recent personal situation, detailing how his current difficulties came about. The great difficulty he begins to encounter in his attempts to plot the events, in making "a deliberate, consecutive recollection" (I 350), leads him to decide on a written narrative as the more stable form. His mind, however, is too excited and keeps suggesting different attitudes to events, different interpretive possibilities. "That opened up an immense perspective. Nevertheless, the contemplation of that immense perspective was not the way to set about a calm analysis."

This sublime sense of a bewildering plenitude of interpretive positions is unusual for Tietjens who is a precise man, a statistician. His attitude to narrative reflects this precision: "The facts of the story

must be stated before the moral. He said to himself that he must put, in exact language . . . the history of himself in relation to his wife 'Better put it into writing', he said" (I 351). Even this resort to the more stable written narrative form as a means of dealing with the past runs into serious obstacles: recollecting his farewell to Valentine, he knows that they agreed not to become sexually involved, but beyond that, events and interpretations become blurred:

I do not know how we agreed. We never finished a sentence. Yet it was a passionate scene. So I touched the brim of my cap and said: 'So long! . . . ' Or she . . . I don't remember. I remember the thoughts I thought and the thoughts I gave her credit for thinking. But perhaps she did not think them. There is no knowing. It is no good going into them. (I 352)

At this point the pressure of Tietjens's effort begins to tell, the emotional and intellectual strain of the attempt to impose a coherent, disciplined narrative order on events begins to take its toll: "'God, what a sweat I am in'" he exclaims.

The sweat, indeed, was pouring down his temples. He became instinct with a sort of passion to let his thoughts wander into epithets and go about where they would. But he stuck at it. He was determined to get it expressed.

When he does take up his story again, it is only to drift further into interpretive uncertainties. Within one page, these hesitations occur:

I took it to mean . . .
It might just as well mean . . .
She was of the opinion that it meant . . .
It was difficult to follow . . .
The interview ended rather untidily. (I 352)

Historiography often has to deal with rather untidy epistemological and interpretive conditions, but Tietjens's attempt to tidy it up here is doomed to failure. At this point he gives up in despair of ascertaining

the meaning, of finding a true and final narrative explanation. "What," he wonders in despair, "was at the bottom of all the madness and cruelty?" (I 353), No answer follows. Blocked by the sublime proliferation of interpretive possibilities, Tietjens turns inward instead and begins self-reflexively to wonder about the meaning of his impulse to narrate.

What in the world was he doing? Now? With all this introspection? Hang it all he was not justifying himself Why, if he, Christopher Tietjens of Groby, had the need to justify himself, what did it stand for to be Christopher Tietjens of Groby? That was the unthinkable thought. (I 354-55)

Literally unthinkable, perhaps, is this questioning his own subjectivity and (by extension) the subjectivity of the ruling class, traditionally the absolute subject of British history. At this point of personal and social crisis, however, the unthinkable begins to become thinkable, doxa turns toward orthodoxy, as Tietjens's previously total hold on the interpretation of events is eroded and his narration begins to turn in on itself.

The title "Tietjens of Groby" itself appeals to a specific narrative historical discourse, one overtly laden with ideological overtones: the genealogy of the Tietjens family, the eminence of its members, its wealth and prominence in British society for centuries, its massive capital⁴ It is Tietjens's inability to narrate coherently and his ultimate failure to re-cognize narratively the events and impressions that indicate the profound socio-historical change in progress. A "Tietjens of Groby" should simply be there--importantly, massively there (like Christopher's great physical bulk itself), beyond the need of justification. The ero-

⁴ I use the word here in all of Bourdieu's senses: capital being a form of symbolic power comprised of educational capital or cultural capital, for instance, as well as financial capital.

sion of identity and social role signalled in the collapse of his ability to impose a coherent interpretation on the past functions as a synecdoche for the collapse of Tory England that is so often invoked in the novel.

The idea that a social inferior such as Levin might claim a right to demand justification from Tietjens violates his sense of the proper order of society:

That would be absurd. The end of the earth! The absurd end of the earth Yet that insignificant ass Levin had that evening asserted the claim to go into his, Tietjens of Groby's, relations with his wife. That was an end of the earth as absurd! It was the unthinkable thing. (I 360)

The social division that separates ranks, compared in the following paragraph to the relationship between God and man,⁵ must be maintained, it seems, if the social world is to remain intact. But, in fact, "The world was foundering" (I 364). And the refrain that gives the title to this volume of the tetralogy is invoked here: "There will be no more parades," says Tietjens, no more of the public display of order and power manifested in the orderly movement of marching presided over by officers of one class

⁵ Also, a few pages later, Tietjens takes the analogy further, thinking

about the Almighty as on a colossal scale, a great English Landowner, benevolently awful, a colossal duke who never left his study and was thus invisible, but knowing all about the estate down to the last hind at the home farm and the last oak [Groby Great Tree?]: Christ an almost too benevolent Land Steward, son of the Owner, knowing all about the estate down to the last child at the porter's lodge, apt to be got round by the more detrimental tenants: the Third Person of the Trinity, the spirit of the estate, the Game, as it were, as distinct from the players of the Game: the atmosphere of the estate that of the interior of Winchester Cathedral just after a Handel anthem has been finished, a perpetual Sunday. (370-71)

demonstrating their authority over soldiers of another. "A landmark in history," he sadly reflects later (I 366).⁶

Eventually, as his marital situation worsens, Tietjens is faced with the previously unthinkable necessity of justifying himself to Levin--whom he perceives as a military, social and perhaps racial (Turkish-Armenian) inferior.⁷ Considering Tietjens's earlier agonized attempts at making narrative sense of his situation, Levin poses the demand in almost impossible terms: "You will kindly accept an order to relate exactly what happened," says Levin. Tietjens replies: "That is what is perfectly damnable" (I 465). He does, however, endeavor to tell the story, although to do so is to break the gentleman's code of discretion by which he lives and in terms of which he defines himself and his social superiority. Not only is the information he has to relate beyond the bounds of what a gentleman should speak of, but he must relate these private affairs to an inferior. All in all, for a gentleman of Tietjens's station, it is the unthinkable

An almost allegorical enactment of the world's foundering occurs later when, in *A Man Could Stand Up*, a shell explodes unexpectedly very close to Tietjens and his men. Ford's impressionist technique is well-

⁶ The parades referred to are military, the military parade appearing as a mass spectacle that both exemplifies and constitutes social solidarity, social unity, and the military power of the state. The repeated lament over the disappearance of such parades brings to mind another (though far less benign) man who attempted to forge a unified social sense of purpose by revivifying the ideology of (para)military parades in Britain a few years later: Oswald Mosely.

⁷ Levin's inferior military rank is only one strike against him. Even a military superior such as Lord Beichan garners Tietjens contempt--for reasons partly personal, partly ethnic. "Tietjens, his breath rushing through his nostrils, swore he would not go up the line at the bidding of a hog like Beichan, whose real name was Stavropolides, formerly Nathan" (I 377).

suited here to the representation of Tietjens's experience as he is tossed through the air.

It was being a dwarf at a conversation, a conflict--of mastodons. There was so much noise it seemed to grow dark. It was a mental darkness. You could not think. A Dark Age! The earth moved.

He was looking at Aranjuez from a considerable height The earth turned like a weary hippopotamus. It settled down slowly over the face of Lance-Corporal Duckett who lay on his side, and went on in a slow wave.

It was slow, slow, slow . . . like a slowed down movie. The earth maneuvered for an infinite time. He remained suspended in space. (II 140)

When he returns to earth, it is to be buried in mud above the waist, a situation that literally gives the physically-large Tietjens a new perspective, once again with more than a hint of social allegory implied: "A man stood over him. He appeared immensely tall because Tietjens' face was on a level with his belt. But he was a small Cockney Tommy really." He is then rescued by two of his inferiors, and subsequently himself helps pull a subaltern (a term which in this case simultaneously signifies military rank, social class, and racial origin--Levantine) to safety. In the light of such a literal and physical--not to mention allegorical--upheaval, social differentiations based on rank or race tend to appear somewhat arbitrary; juxtaposed with such an impersonal and indiscriminate violent force, many forms of social pretension and hierarchy are suddenly pared away.

Even the haughty Sylvia, so critical of Tietjens for lowering himself by taking 'common' soldiers seriously, reacts to the intensity of the barrage by losing momentarily her lofty sense of aristocratic distinction: as volume of the tumult increases,

She screamed blasphemies that she was hardly aware of knowing. She had to scream against the noise: she was no more responsible for the blasphemy than if she had lost her

identity under an anaesthetic. She had lost her identity
 . . . She was one of this crowd. (I 445)

As we see from a number of conversations involving long-time military men, earlier military campaigns had tended to reinforce traditional class divisions by reproducing, even exaggerating, those hierarchies in the military structure--and Tietjens's own nostalgic valorization of military parades emphasizes this same idea. Modern trench warfare techniques are so thoroughly dehumanizing, however, that all sense of class distinction, in this representation, is undermined.

One reason Tietjens is able to retain his identity as long as he does is that his sense of *noblesse oblige* separates him from the others: he is, for instance, receiving no pay for his military services. In the end, however, even this changes, and Tietjens of Groby not only becomes a wage-earner in the army but is actually reduced to dependence on his salary. Step by step, the distance between Tietjens and the 'Other Ranks' is eroded. For a while it seems as though all the hierarchies that have been set up throughout the novel--based on class, gender, race--may continue tumbling down once the war ends, and the leveling tendency that constitutes one aspect of life in the trenches may assert itself in civilian society afterward. This social transformation may be approached in diverse ways. Some commentators at the time argued hopefully that people would no longer be willing to accept the injustices of the traditional class system after the sacrifices of the war.⁸ When, however, Tietjens

⁸ Historian Brian Simon, for example, writes that a resolve was formed by many--less enamoured of England's rigid class system-- "that after the war things would be different, social evils and injustices abolished, and a brave new world emerge from the years of frustration, horror and mass slaughter" (345). A disillusioned R.H. Tawney wrote that "Reconstruction and a better world have been promised to the nation as a reward for the losses and tireless labours of the Great War" (32). Yet still,

thinks, "But today the world changed. Feudalism was finished; its last vestiges were gone" (II 171), he articulates a sense of regret. While the leveling tendency associated with modern trench warfare can be seen to have an egalitarian side, this same development in modern warfare can be read--as Tietjens does--as a synecdoche for the reification of modern bourgeois life. The other side of this egalitarian tendency constitutes an important theme of the tetralogy's exploration of modern society.

Due to the disappearance of the social harmony and the static, hierarchical equilibrium associated with the earlier 'organic' society, all motives appear rationalized into personal grasping for power. In feudal times, according to this schema, relationships of power were well enough defined that people could live happily in their stations. Were problems to arise, there existed straightforward face-to-face ways of dealing with them. In modern society, however, those boundaries lose definition and people (like MacMaster and Edith Ethel) feel encouraged by the system selfishly to get whatever they can for themselves. A kind of Darwinian struggle for supremacy results from this loss of the traditional social stasis, the biggest losers potentially being the lowest classes, traditionally in the 'care' of the aristocracy but now left on their own. The winners who emerge from this struggle are those whose insensitivity

There are classes that are ends and classes that are means--upon that grand original distinction the community is invited to defend, and to perpetuate the division of mankind into masters and servants. How delicate an insight into the relative value of human beings and of material riches! How generous a heritage into which to welcome the children of men who fell [in the war] in the illusion that in their humble way, they were servants of freedom. (51)

and rapaciousness allows them to overpower, in whatever opportunistic way necessary, anything or anyone that stands in their way. A moral code based on *noblesse oblige* simply does not work under such conditions, and Tietjens, with his highly developed sense of principled conduct, becomes, of course, a loser. As he loses the struggle for social power--too much of a gentleman even to struggle overtly--he loses as well his power to narrate, and his authoritative account and interpretation of events gradually dissolves.

Much of the thematic tension in the novel is a result of these two strands of interpretive possibility regarding modern history--the ultimately utopian democratization of modern society on one side, and the ultimately dystopian reification and rationalization of modern society on the other. If Tietjens most often represents the latter position, Valentine might be said to represent to some degree the former. Significantly, she shares with Tietjens the position of focalizer on Armistice Day. As *A Man Could Stand Up* opens, Valentine's thoughts and actions reveal a certain apprehension about the future but also a youthful hope:

She was not going to show respect for any Lady Anything ever again She was never going to show respect for anyone ever again. She had been through the mill: the whole world had been through the mill! No more respect! No more respect! Was that to be a lasting effect of the cataclysm that had involved the world? (II 10, 13)

Her reiteration of the phrase "No more respect" echoes, of course, Tietjens's even more frequent reiteration of "No more parades." While her morning begins with the duty of maintaining order in a group of six hundred young women--an ironic reference, perhaps, to the ever-present parallel idea of the male military parade--it ends with her rejection of any

such role in school discipline. Her refusal of this form of discipline is juxtaposed with Tietjens's lament for its passing. "It isn't what I want--to be a cross between a sergeant in the army and an upper housemaid" (44). But if she sees potential for positive social change in the unrest of the war's end, she also observes in the reaction of many the fear of another kind of social upheaval:

A quite definite fear. If, at this parting of the ways, at this crack across the table of History, the School--the World, the future mothers of Europe--got out of hand, would they ever come back? The Authorities--Authority all over the world--was afraid of that; more afraid of that than of any other thing. Wasn't it a possibility that there was to be no more Respect? None for constituted Authority and consecrated Experience? You had to keep them--the girls, the populace, everybody!--in hand now, for once you let go there was no knowing where They . . . mightn't carry You. (14-15)

Echoing Tietjens once again, she realizes that "All the unthinkable sorts of things" might happen, and "So it was indeed the World Turned Upside Down" (15). But while Tietjens is not so sanguine about the prospect of social change, for Valentine this historical change represents a potential release from intolerable social restrictions.⁹

These restrictions are, however, abandoned on Armistice Day in a Bakhtinian carnivalesque moment as Valentine joins in a celebration with Tietjens, his fellow-soldiers and the women who accompany them, a celebration that crosses class boundaries and even suggests a transgression of sexual taboos:

An officer, yelling like an enraged Redskin, dealt [Tietjens] an immense blow behind the shoulder-blades. He staggered, smiling, into the centre of the room. An officer gently pushed [Valentine] into the centre of the room. She was

⁹ For a reading of the novel which places the progressive attitudes of Valentine in a dialectical relation to those of the traditional Tietjens, see Marianne DeKoven.

against him. Khaki encircled them. They began to yell and to prance, joining hands. Others waved bottles and smashed underfoot the glasses. Gypsies break glasses at their weddings. The bed was against the wall . . . The whole world round them was yelling and prancing round. They were the centre of unending roaring circles. (II 176-77)

The references to "Gypsies" and "Redskins" refer to 'inferior' races in order to posit a transgression, a shift from the higher to the lower in a Bakhtinian sense.¹⁰ Because of the war, writes Ford elsewhere, "The sense of values has changed completely One has grown sentimental incredibly, coarse in a great measure, hungry, thirsty, loud voiced. The pleasures of the drawing room are unknown & not at all valued" (Longenbach 164). Indulging in unrestrained revelry with members of lower classes, celebrating in a manner not befitting the upper class, the suggestion of extramarital sexuality: this is the world upside down for Tietjens and Valentine, and it is precisely at this point that Tietjens loses his position as privileged narrator, as the central subject of the tetralogy and of history.

In the final volume Tietjens is literally an absent center. His position had been based on an acceptance of a certain set of social relations, and becomes untenable outside that set of relations. Of course this result has been developing throughout the tetralogy; the Armistice celebration is merely the dramatic culmination of a long process. Ann Snitow writes that at the outset, Tietjens's "blood and land and absolute rectitude all entitle him to look down on everybody he encounters. Indeed his snobbery about niggers, Jews, bounders, foreigners, other ranks, deca-

¹⁰ The concept is developed in Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*. Also see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White for an elaboration of this idea of transgression. Valentine's remark about the "World Turned Upside Down" is also relevant here of course.

dent gentlemen, aspiring Scots, and society beauties is his birth-right" (208). By the last volume, however, Tietjens's attitude seems rather altered. In terms of the novel itself, this process has taken only a few years: before the war Tietjens's upper class authority is more or less unassailable; at the war's end he is, in a sense, ruined. That Ford is in fact telescoping a much larger historical transition into a short period is clear from the allusions to Tietjens as fundamentally an eighteenth- or even seventeenth-century man. While Ford's teleological structure culminates in the social upheaval of the period during and after World War One, the historical decline of upper-class authority to which he alludes actually transpired over a much longer time.

The last volume of the tetralogy, *Last Post*, responds to questions concerning the post-war social power structure in a way that later satisfied neither Ford himself nor some subsequent readers and editors.¹¹ Rather than continuing the diachronic narration of the earlier volumes, Ford presents a synchronic picture, "a slice of one of Christopher's later days" (Hynes 527) as he calls it, although Tietjens is not in fact present through most of the volume. This cross-section of a day may lack the narrative tension provided by the earlier volumes, but it deserves attention nonetheless for its ambitious attempt to elaborate a model of post-war England. Had Ford not continued beyond the carnivalesque, almost apocalyptic, ending of the third volume, all the historical and social contradictions would have been left dissolved in the taxonomic chaos of

¹¹ Some editors have gone so far as to omit the volume, thus creating a trilogy. See Hynes (521-23) for a discussion of this editorial problem.

the Armistice celebration, a real but necessarily transitory moment of apparent abandonment of social division. History, however, does not stop there. If the final volume of the tetralogy is not wholly successful--neither aesthetically nor sociologically--the magnitude of the task attempted may perhaps mitigate to some extent the reader's sense of disappointment.

While narrative authority was focused largely on Tietjens in the earlier volumes--with some space given to Valentine as well--in the final volume narrative authority is fractured so that no single character or perspective dominates the narration. Nevertheless, it is not (as Valentine's thoughts or the carnivalesque celebration may have suggested) the end of all social order or the "World Turned Upside Down." Still, after the war a new--or at least a significantly altered--order seemed to be emerging from the ashes of the old, and it was of great importance to Ford to find what continuity he could in his narrative of socio-historical change. As James Longenbach writes, "Like many of the great modernist writers, Ford felt that the war had severed the modern world from its past" (150). In *Parade's End* this historical rupture is registered, for instance, in Tietjens's memory loss which "becomes a synecdoche for the historical memory loss which Ford felt the war had impressed upon the mind of Europe" (155). Yet the transition is not without some continuity.

The first perspective encountered in the final volume is that of the upper classes, the same perspective that was introduced as the point of reference at the beginning of the tetralogy as well. Just as that earlier appearance in the railway car emphasized the solidity of their power ("Their class administered the world"), the later situation draws attention to the waning of that power. Tietjens's dying elder brother Mark has

resolved to remain silent and immobile, apparently moribund like the social world he exemplifies. While Christopher is struggling to adapt to the new situation, Mark's immobility represents his refusal or inability to respond to the altered social world. He has abdicated his social authority, and although his thoughts and impressions continue, they are without effect on those around him due to his refusal of all communication. Having once dominated it, he is now no longer a part of the discursive community, the public sphere. Sylvia, another member of this class, similarly realizes that her way of life is almost played out and considers joining General Campion and going to India where, she feels, her style of aristocratic imperialism is still a viable possibility.

But if the representation of upper-class life is marked by historical discontinuity, at the other end of the social scale, the portrait of Gunning constitutes a form of exclusion by bestialization that insists on a strong sense of social distinction, a sense of hierarchy undiminished by the leveling experience of the trenches. Gunning is stupid and has "overlong, hairy arms" that contribute to his "gorilla-like" appearance (I 178-79). Cramp, the cabinet-maker, is described as "a remnant of the little dark persistent race that once had peopled Sussex" (I 205), and his voice is represented in the heteroglossia as a picturesque rural dialect: "'Ard! Thet cider was 'arder than a miser's 'art or 'n ole maid's tongue" (I 179). This bracketing off of the speech of the peasants through written dialect has a marginalizing effect, reinforcing the quaintness of what they say by the diction and accent they betray when they say it.

It seems, in a sense, as though Mark Tietjens's refusal of discourse opens the space for peasant speech, creating a sort of discursive vacuum

that must be filled. Gunning and Hogben¹² are drawn into that vacuum, and their conversation is, in fact, a parody of the discourse of administrative authority that Mark must once have dominated. In contrast to what we know about Mark's administrative acumen, however, the representation of their territorial dispute makes clear the stupidity that relieves us from having to take the peasants seriously. Furthermore, it makes a mockery of the very real disillusion felt by many of the lower classes and the political left at the inegalitarian social situation that persisted in Britain after the war: "The war," Gunning and Hogben (a gentlemen's bailiff and a tenant farmer respectively) agree, "ought to have given tenant-farmers the complete powers of local tyrants; it should have done the same for gentlemen's bailiffs" (I 210). The passage ends with a reference to a "sow grunt[ing] round Gunning's boots."

A broader awareness of the realities of power is briefly demonstrated in a comment that is not ascribed to any one person but seems to issue, as it were, from the general mind of the peasantry. In the midst of an adulatory discussion of what constitutes "the real Quality" in the upper classes, a peasant says that "The Quality ought to be told" (I 209) about what was going on at Tietjens's house. There are obstacles to this kind of cross-class communication, however:

But you do not speak to the Quality. Better if they do not notice you. You never know. They sticks together Queer things the gentry can do to you still if they notice you. It is all very well to say that this is a land fit for whatever the word is that stands for simple folk. They have

¹² Hogben's name is interesting both in its closeness to pigpen, and because hogs and pigs are mentioned so frequently in this short section. For a discussion of the social semiotics of the pig that explores the way pigs have come to represent all that which is socially base, see Stallybrass and White.

the police and the keepers in their hands and your cottages and livings. (I 209).

This almost furtive insight into the coercive side of hegemony--whether feudal or capitalist--points toward the possibility of a critical position taking into account the perspective of the lower classes, but it is never developed further and the peasants disappear soon after voicing it, leaving behind the trace of a break in the aphasia that glimmers for a moment then fades. And, in fact, there is something in the phrase "simple folk," as well as in much of the conversation and behavior of the peasants presented here, that suggests that these quaint "simple folks" are in need of a certain amount of benign hierarchic protection. Their ignorance of a word other than "simple folk" in dominant discourse that designates them as a class indicates their lack of taxonomic and discursive as well as social authority. Do they think of themselves as "simple?" Or is this the category bestowed on them by the gentry? In any case, this brief, but complex--anything but "simple"--moment indicates the breadth of the gulf that separates these language groups, demonstrating how far they are from any substantial dialogic engagement.

The contest, in the end, is represented as a hegemonic struggle between two groups--the old gentry on the one hand and the 'upwardly-mobile' *nouveau riche* on the other--whose relation to power and capital has undergone an alteration. The lower classes by and large remain dominated and respectful, for the most part without an independent voice.¹³ And when they do speak in this pastoral final volume, it is as

¹³ The confrontation between Gunning and Sylvia (II 303-08) is, obviously, anything but respectful. The reason for this is, however, that Sylvia has transgressed the accepted hierarchic code of behaviour and thereby forfeited her right to be treated as a lady of "Quality," not because Gunning presumes any democratic sense of equality.

country bumpkins, rustics generally as devoid of political awareness as of intelligence. The exclusion of the "Other Ranks" both from power and from any legitimate claim to a voice is registered in Armstrong's response to Ford's representative occlusion of a large proportion of the social spectrum. In retiring from the sphere of political power,

Mark has given up the struggle. But his proud silence asserts his ascendancy over the political arena he has disdainfully abandoned. With Mark's retirement, *Parade's End* rejects an institutional solution to the social ills of Britain. If the game defeats a player of Mark's stature, or at least forces him to withdraw, social reform on a grand scale does not seem possible. (258-59)

This reading may be justifiable within the text of the tetralogy, but it tacitly accepts the idea that only the rich and well-educated can be players in the game. It suggests that the reforms that were on the horizon at this time--an end to child labor, universal access to at least minimal education and health care, universal suffrage and so on--were either unimportant or actually marks of yet further decline from the lofty standards of old Tory England. In a sense, Ford's cross-sectional representation of social totality in *Last Post* makes this response possible by eliding the large (and in part well-organized and articulate) urban and industrial sections of the working classes and all those who spoke on their behalf.¹⁴

¹⁴ Even if the social changes that were introduced around this time are seen as essentially cosmetic, tactical alterations allowing the system itself to remain fundamentally intact, the wholesale exclusion of the participation of the "Other Ranks" in this representation of the political and cultural process is notable. His use of the rural peasantry only to represent those "Other Classes" is odd considering, for example, the rise of the Labour Party at that time.

The closeness to members of the "Other Classes" that Tietjens experiences in the trenches leads to the carnivalesque party on Armistice Day, but the longer-term results of this shoulder-rubbing across class lines should not be overestimated. The picture of life after the war shows Tietjens brought down a notch, but hardly hobnobbing with the peasants. Optimistic readings emphasizing the way a new and more egalitarian Tietjens grows in stature ignore to some degree the marked limitations which persist. Thus Armstrong argues that "Christopher learns that to be in society means to confront across one's horizons manifestations of otherness which defy total management" (237). Armstrong's acceptance of the implicit positing of a previous or even original state of "total management" is itself problematic. Furthermore, Tietjens's coping with those manifestations of otherness seem in the end to amount to having to work in partnership with Valentine (whom he loves, but who is a woman), having to deal with a Jew in the antique business, and indeed being forced to earn a living at all. Tietjens's fear about life after the war appears, in a sense, to be fulfilled: "what was he, Tietjens, going to do! Take orders! It was unthinkable" (II 70). In one of the final scenes in the tetralogy, Valentine seems, in fact, to be ordering him around.

Nevertheless, the change in Tietjens is not as complete as Green argues. "Although at the beginning of *Parade's End* Tietjens is so closely attached to the loyalties and customs of his own class, by the end of *A Man Could Stand Up* he has transcended them" (144). While he may, as Ford puts it, have "outgrown alike the mentality and traditions of his own family and his own race" (II 252), this still does not necessarily mean any more than that he has moved, and very painfully at that, from the upper classes to the ranks of the upper-middle classes--and taken the point of

view of the novel with him. The degree of Tietjens's actual social transcendence, a transcendence asserted in the text and generally accepted by critics, seems somewhat qualified by such observations as that "for a little, shivering artistic Jew" such as his new business partner, Tietjens "was quite capable of feeling a real fondness--as you might for an animal." In the end, this hardly seems the radical or existential shift it is sometimes made out to be. It is greatly overestimating this transformation to suggest, as Armstrong does, that Tietjens's change of employment from statistician to antique dealer represents evidence of real growth:

If statistics suggested to Tietjens hermeneutic certainty, timeless truth, and causal logic, then a different, nonreified cluster of implications is associated with his work in antiquities: the subjective divination of value, meaning unfolding in history, objects as the embodiment of human creation and social practice. Tietjens's abandonment of numbers for furniture represents an epistemological shift from the positivistic quest for fact to the hermeneutic explication of meaning and value. (243)

A less romanticized interpretation is that as an antique dealer, Tietjens is simply exchanging his cultural capital for money, both trading on his refined taste and literally selling off some of the heirlooms of his family and of other members of his class, who presumably are also not doing well in the modern world. By the end of the novel, Tietjens has lost the position of authority that traditionally had guaranteed automatically the legitimacy of his social position, and he is reduced to trading in the marketplace.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Bourdieu's *Distinction* for an examination of the exchange rates that obtain between different forms of symbolic capital.

A doxa, based on the limited and subjective experience of a few powerful people is seen to have shifted in the course of *Parade's End* into orthodoxy, the possibility that there may be other points of view demanding dialogic engagement. A disadvantage of this dialogic situation, Armstrong writes, is that "resentment and conflict become possible and even likely as soon as mutual understanding cannot be simply assumed" (248). But a mutual understanding that has been based on the world-view of the select group of the most powerful people in a society is surely mutual in only a very qualified sense. It is naive to suggest that when this hegemonic structure is modified there might be no rules left at all governing the institutions of social order and hierarchy. Armstrong continues: "Without a stable social hierarchy to establish structures of dominance and subordination, everyone is potentially equal" (249). This would lead to the conclusion that because Tietjens has at one point to take an order from a military inferior ("unthinkable"), there is no longer any appreciable difference between Tietjens, with his background of privilege and wealth and the colliers with whom he shares the trenches. It may at times seem that way to Tietjens who experiences it as a bewildering dissolution of the certainties of his social stature, but, on the other side, one may doubt whether the colliers or Cockneys, the "Other Ranks" and other races, felt themselves as privileged as the gentry on the basis of this social upheaval.

Similarly, because Tietjens's relationship to Valentine demonstrates an increased equality within a context defined by rigid gender roles, one ought not to use this as an indication of the end of the patriarchal social structures that guarantee the marked inequality of the sexes-- either potentially or in practice. Like the fleeting insight articulated

by the anonymous peasant into the coercive apparatus of state power, the feminist critique that appears from time to time in the novel constitutes another oppositional strategy that, although powerful, remains fundamentally underdeveloped. Nevertheless, more than any other element in the tetralogy perhaps, this position--and some of the women who represent it--does hold out some tentative hope. Perhaps the single most significant socio-historical change represented in the tetralogy is the alteration in the authority of women. Not only is Valentine accorded the authority to narrate, but so is Marie-Leonie. But while suffragettes are beginning to cause trouble in masculine strongholds such as the golf course, the rise of feminism is not finally addressed as a major issue. Sylvia, at one point during the war, reflects:

These horrors, these infinities of pain, this atrocious condition of the world, had been brought about in order that men should indulge themselves in orgies of promiscuity That in the end was at the bottom of male honour, of male virtue, observance of treaties, upholding of the flag An immense warlock's carnival of appetites, lusts, ebrieties These men talked of these things that occupied them there with the lust of men telling dirty stories in smoking rooms. (I 444)

Despite some rhetorical power here, Sylvia is not presented as--in Bradley's terms--a reliable witness.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the mere fact of presenting feminist perspectives in three very different women--Gertie, Valentine and Sylvia--and a strong independent presence in Marie-Leonie, suggests the potential for a critical position that is not fully realized in the tetralogy. Had Ford developed it more fully, there might have been

¹⁶ Ford's more sympathetic portrait of Valentine notwithstanding, he was highly critical of the anti-war stand he attributes to her and to Sylvia--a position he saw, according to Leer, as "childish and dishonest" (109).

a position solid enough to augment or even take the place of Tietjens's earlier critique from the point of view of the obsolete Tory, a position whose critical relevance seems diminished toward the conclusion of the novel. And this loss of critical ground that is not reclaimed may, to some degree, account for the inferiority some critics have observed in this final volume.

The feminist and peasant insights remain undeveloped, perhaps, because the novel's 'comprehensive' history is inextricably tied to Tietjens's 'comprehensive' consciousness, a consciousness that is not finally so all-embracing after all. Tietjens is a victim not only of historical change, but also of the limitations of his own ideology. It is because of this that Ford's choice of extinct Toryism as his critical vantage point on modern history leaves him ultimately with no focused position from which either to sustain a social critique or to suggest an alternative to a historical direction with which he was clearly not pleased. Ford establishes Tietjens's authority firmly in the opening pages, then undermines it gradually through the rest of the novel. The omniscience that allows him to correct "from memory the errors in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (I 10) ultimately deserts him, leaving him in fact dependent on the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as a source of information. His financial position deteriorates, his view of gender hierarchy alters through his relationship with Valentine, and even the parades, whose passing he laments, are finally (at least implicitly) recognized as belonging to the world of General Campion and a moribund imperialism. Ford thus represents the transition to twentieth-century modernity as a contradictory combination of social decline mingled with a slight and very tentative sense of hope and openness manifested in the characterizations of Marie-Leonie and

Valentine, who (like Gunning and Hogben) come to occupy some of the critical space left vacant in the significant absence of their respective spouses, Mark and Christopher.

There is a strong sense of social equilibrium in the opening of the novel. While troubles are beginning to loom on the horizon, Ford uses Edwardian society, at least superficially, almost as an Eden whose fall is imminent. The causes of that fall Ford locates within the irresponsible behavior of the dominant class itself. Indeed, the dissolution of "Tory England" that was occurring at the time of the war seems, in this representation of the history, to be entirely unconnected to any social or historical forces from below such as working class unrest or colonial resistance within the empire. The immense social transformation that Ford represents through Tietjens and his circle of acquaintances does not seem to have any relevance at all to the lower classes. While there does seem to be some temporary shift in the status quo in the trenches, it is due to the fact that Tietjens is being brought down, not because the lower classes are rising any higher. Tietjens's social Others seem to present a stable and stationary background against which his downward social mobility is traced.

The descriptions of the other ranks and other races that Tietjens deals with often condescend to them, present them as lower in nature, a strategy whereby such classes of people are denied a full voice as historical subjects, as historical agents, or as historical narrators. Ford's containment of social heterodoxy even extends so far as to have oppositional positions presented (and thus, in a sense, diffused) by members of Tietjens's circle. Valentine, for instance, somewhat in the man-

ner of *Nostromo's* Emilia Gould becomes a voice for the dispossessed early in the novel, at one point even indicating an admiration for Rosa Luxemburg (I 125). Another source of such ideals is introduced toward the end--Mark Jr. even flirts with the "Marxian communism" fashionable, Ford ironically points out, "in his set at Cambridge" (II 217). Radical political voices, then, are located within the elite group of the upper-class, not beyond, and those positions are not presented with a great deal of seriousness. Both Valentine and Mark Jr. are young and well-intentioned, but their radicalism seems merely a stage they will ultimately grow out of. Indeed, there is not much evidence in the final volume of the radicalism Valentine espoused in the first.¹⁷

The problem is not so much that this is unrealistic--some young men and women in England coming from the ranks of the most powerful and privileged have adopted radical social positions, and in a comprehensive novel about the historical transformation of the nation, it is arguably important to represent them. On the other hand, there is something very limited about restricting the representation of the oppositional point of view to these young and privileged people; it is a rather significant omission to leave out all the working-class agitation that led to many of the reforms and social change that the novel is attempting to represent. In pointing to the omission of these voices from Ford's orchestration of social heteroglossia, I do not mean to suggest that the tetralogy is

¹⁷ Or, for that matter, of the radicalism that occasionally is expressed by Tietjens, such as his opinion that there should be a minimum wage "of four hundred a year and every beastly manufacturer who wanted to pay less [should] be hung. That it appeared was the High Toryism of Tietjens as it was the extreme radicalism of the extreme Left of the Left" (I 84).

uncritical in its presentation of the class system. In fact, it is highly critical of that system, but in locating its critical perspective in the mind of Tietjens, who supports pre-capitalist feudal values, Ford in a single move opens up a space for a radical social critique and closes off and contains that space by locating it in an anachronistic and historically dubious sense of benign but absolute social distinction. The critique that seemed initially to offer a radical perspective in the end resolves into an orthodox position. At the same time, any demand to take seriously the more relevant or influential critical positions of his time is pre-empted by Tietjens's 'more radical than the radicals' posture.¹⁸

Because of Ford's reluctance to grant any independent narrative authority to the Other Ranks--whether by the significant inclusion of a spokesperson for that perspective in his representation, or more simply by alluding to its historical existence--the set of historical possibilities that opens through his analysis of the increasingly democratic or egalitarian nature of modern society remains curtailed. While we are shown the implosion and collapse of the ideology supporting the old ruling class at a number of points, this social movement does not seem to be supported by the dominated classes themselves. The workers and tradesmen with whom Tietjens interacts, as well as the soldiers in his command, are all full of respect and admiration for him. When Tietjens knows more about the cabman's horse than the cabman himself and is then admired for it by the appreciative worker (I 17), or when, a few pages later, he jumps on the train under the admiring gaze of the good-natured stationmaster

¹⁸ See, for instance, his discussion (cited above) with Valentine in which he argues--albeit with a degree of irony perhaps--the futility of granting women the right to vote (120-21).

(28), these examples are meant to demonstrate both the degree to which Tietjens is worthy of the authority that is naturally, it seems, conferred on him, and the harmonious social atmosphere that results from all the members of society contenting themselves with their 'proper' stations.

While it is not historically untrue to say that there were men like Tietjens who were respected and obeyed unquestioningly by their social inferiors, neither is it the 'whole story.' The hegemony exercised by the gentry and aristocracy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was, of course, neither as natural nor as spontaneous as Ford's initial use of Tietjens as a normative figure would seem to indicate. Nor was it as harmonious as this representation might suggest. It was, to use Gramsci's definition of hegemony, a combination of consent and coercion; and while it might, in retrospect, be attractive to lessen the coercive element and preserve a nostalgic image of harmonious consent, this remains a very partial representation.¹⁹ Yet at the outset of *Parade's End* the original authority of the dominant class, exemplified in Tietjens (and, as we learn, his brother Mark), is represented as natural, self-evident, apparently well-deserved, and beyond challenge.

In spite of the informing vision of seventeenth-century feudal life-style and social structure, in spite of the attempt to retreat to a pastoral life in the final volume, it is impossible finally to escape the set of historical possibilities that results from the increasing reifica-

¹⁹ In response to Matthew Arnold's similar sentimental invocation in *Culture and Anarchy* of a golden age of the enlightened aristocracy, Henry Sidgwick astutely replied: "Our historical reminiscences seemed to indicate that [their] passion for making reason and the will of God prevail . . . was of a very limited description; hardly, indeed, perceptible to the scrutiny of the impartial historian" (216-17).

tion, rationalization and bureaucratization of modern bourgeois life, its crass commercialization and commodification of spheres of life that once were sources of real value. But since Tietjens is the center of the novel, since it is Tietjens and those he represents who are seen as the victims of history, the effects--positive or negative--of the transition to modern capitalism on the rest of the population are left more or less unexamined. And Tietjens himself is at least partially left in retreat from modern life, attempting to escape to a pastoral idyll--an anachronism that Ford exposes by having modern life relentlessly intrude on the rural retreat, but one to which he proposes no real alternative. Ford locates his utopian impulse in nostalgia for a historical past that arguably never existed (the happy feudal system, organic society, stable hierarchy), and which is certainly unattainable in the twentieth century.

In spite of Ford's disclaimer, some versions of Tory England with all its snobberies and privileges still existed as an ideology in Ford's time, indeed still persist today, even if in modified forms. Tietjens, as a symbol of a social class or a social ideology, is neither extinct nor irrelevant, nor is he in a position to offer an objective overview.²⁰ To accept the portrait of Tietjens as a Kantian historical "consciousness in general" (Walsh), to lament his passage from the (hegemonic) center of British life, entails at least the tacit acceptance of the social aphasia that long made this narrative position possible. The historical and

²⁰ There are of course many kinds of Tory, and it would be a mistake to confuse Tietjens's social vision with a contemporary Tory position such as Thatcherism. In 1924, in fact, while maintaining his stance as a traditional Tory, Ford distanced himself from the Conservative Party because he felt that it represented "nothing that was conservative except the so-called conservative banking interests" (Leer 113).

1 social changes brought about by the "objective social crisis" (Bourdieu) associated with the war have clearly altered some boundaries of social discourse, but orthodox limits remain firmly in place.

Absalom, Absalom!: The "Nigger in the Woodpile"

In an interview, Faulkner once asserted that "In the South . . . there is still a common acceptance of the world, a common view of life, a common morality" (1968 72).¹ The meaning of the word "common", as Faulkner uses it here, is surely a restricted one, the *sensus communis* referred to having certain limits--tacit or otherwise. Around the middle of *Absalom, Absalom!* when the scene first shifts to Harvard, Quentin's identity as a Southerner places him in the position of respondent to questions about the South. "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all" (143). These are large questions to be sure. Who can legitimately claim the authority to speak for the South, to answer these questions on behalf of the community? Who, in fact, has the authority to define what constitutes membership in this community? In an attempt to address these questions historically, the several narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* (Rosa, Mr. Compson, Shreve, and most importantly Quentin himself) construct various representations of the historical essence of the South. This aspect

¹ In a similar spirit, as Richard Gray observes (165), in *Intruder in the Dust* Faulkner has Gavin Stevens declare: "We are defending . . . our homogeneity . . . only from homogeneity comes anything of a people or for a people of durable and lasting value" (154). See also T. S. Eliot's well-known comments in *After Strange Gods* (noted by Richard Poirier in this context) on the South as a positive example of community. He suggested in 1934 that tradition and community were still possible in the South because there was less "difference of language or race" (16).

of the novel has been noted by many critics, and Michael Millgate's response is not atypical:

As a young, intelligent Southerner, eldest son of his family and . . . about to leave the homeland for the foreign environment of New England and Harvard, Quentin seems an appropriate repository for a story which they both dimly recognize as embodying some quintessential and symbolic relationship to the whole Southern experience. (48)

Millgate goes on to suggest that the Sutpen story is "an exceptionally rapid and concentrated version of the history of virtually all Southern families" (50). As is the case with *Nostromo*, and *Parade's End*, there are many such statements in the literature on *Absalom, Absalom!* which suggest the comprehensive social scope of the novel. Melvin Backman, for example, argues that *Absalom, Absalom!* constitutes a "search for the truth about a whole society" (59). More recently Peter Brooks makes a similar point: we have, he writes, "at least the postulation of a story that may equal history itself" (251).

The answers offered in the novel to the questions posed by Southern historical experience, however, are necessarily constrained by the problem of point of view and its attendant restrictions, restrictions that are at once epistemological and cultural. Since no single point of view is fully privileged in the novel, it is important to examine the question of the range of attribution of historiographic authority.

Who speaks for the South, for Southern history? The question of voice is central to *Absalom, Absalom!*, and that centrality is underscored both by its presentation throughout the novel as the medium of narration, and by the initial description of the evocative power of Rosa's voice. Her narrative voice is repeatedly described in the first two pages:

talking in that grim haggard amazed voice Her voice would not cease the voice not ceasing as if it were the voice which he haunted. (5-6)

An effect of this voice's narration is to create in the listener's (Quentin's or the reader's) mind images corresponding to the images of the narrative, images having a compelling reality of their own. "until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound and the long-dead object of her . . . frustration would appear . . . out of the biding and dreamy and victorious dust" (5). In Faulkner's description of the effect of Rosa's monologue on Quentin's imagination, there is a sense that her narration virtually makes the historical reality come into existence, confers reality on the events that she describes:

Then in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table . . . creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*. (6)

There is a double sense of creation in this passage: if Sutpen's creation of Sutpen's Hundred has something of the *ex nihilo* about it, so does Rosa's recreation in Quentin's mind of that historical event. In any case, the historical past depends for its continued existence and transmission on the power of narration and in *Absalom, Absalom!* that power is considerable.

Rosa has, of course, spent years writing a version of the history of the old South in poetry, attempting to preserve an obsolete image of a previous social structure. It is her desire that Quentin do something similar: "maybe some day you will remember this and write about it . . . and submit it to the magazines" (7). Whether or not the story gets written (of course it does, in a sense--by Faulkner if not by Quentin) it is

clear that history is seen as a legacy that must be passed on. This epic telling of the story of the South is history in the grand style--describing the founding of a society and its ultimate destruction all under the watchful eye of God ("and know at last why God let us lose the war" (8); later Rosa asks rhetorically, "'Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?'" (16)), complex genealogies, battles, larger than life characters--conveying a whole world-view which is in the process of crumbling with that generation.

Almost by definition, the epic does not reflect too deeply on its own narrative stability. Yet from the outset the narrative stability of epic history in *Absalom, Absalom!* is undermined, relativized, through the use of multiple narrators some of whom reflect on the tenuous nature of their grasp of the material they are narrating. In fact, the narrative situates itself initially by reference to the gap that exists between the narrator (Rosa) and the listener (Quentin), or alternatively in the gap between two Quentins, a gap which reiterates the former but remains nonetheless ultimately insupportable in epic historical discourse. As he listens to Rosa, there seem to be

two separate Quentins now--the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and people with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts . . . and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was--the two separate Quentins now talking to one another. (6)

This kind of split would be unthinkable within a unified epic consciousness. Nonetheless Rosa's position may be seen as a kind of doxa--the position of epic *par excellence*. The gap that separates Quentin from Rosa (or from the Rosa in himself) is the gap that signals a generic division of epic and modern novel, and further, the shift from doxa to orthodoxy.

Not only are several voices subsequently permitted to narrate, thus complicating the narrative in a definitely non-epic manner, but the complex historical interrelations of these voices are acknowledged. Observing that Quentin sounds like his (Quentin's) father, Shreve reflects, in quasi-historiographical terms, on just how interconnected people (and their narratives) are:

Yes. Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm . . . Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us. (215)

The orchestration of heteroglossia suggested here and previously ranges from Rosa to Quentin, alternatively including Shreve, Mr. Compson and even Sutpen himself--a wide narratorial range. Yet the "umbilical water-cord," while permitting a significant degree of imaginative identification, has distinct limits. *Absalom, Absalom!*, by admitting a range of voices into its discursive arena, clearly foregrounds a kind of novelistic heteroglossia; but at the same time, by its significant limitation on which voices are allowed to speak, it resists some of the fuller implications of a social heteroglossia that would allow the dialogic participation of voices outside the *sensus communis* of the community Faulkner invokes in the opening quotation.

When Shreve, for instance, interrupts Quentin to take up the narration himself, saying "Let me play a while now" (230), the historiographic

jouissance this suggests is, nevertheless, inevitably tightly constrained by the ideological limits of the players. As narrators, they are as unable to project a black person as a full historical character as their narrated characters are unable to recognize one. The kind of sympathetic imaginative projection that they can sustain is powerful, but ultimately limited in scope: "So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas Eve: four of them and then just two--Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry" (275). Complete identification with these characters is available, but none whatsoever seems possible with the blacks. They remain thoroughly beyond the limits of the orthodox historical imagination in this case. No black people are admitted into the web of interrelations that constitutes this pool of understanding. Significantly, no umbilical cord joins marginalized black characters to this network, a network that may not legislate a final version of historical truth since none seems finally possible, but which certainly does legislate whose voices will be heard in the discussion, who may narrate, who may articulate a historical vision. The limits of this "umbilical cord" of communal vision ultimately define in *Absalom, Absalom!* the limits of an orthodox historical discourse.²

It is an orthodoxy that has Quentin and Shreve, "the two of them back to back as though at the last ditch, saying No to Quentin's Mississippi shade [Sutpen] . . . who dead remained not only indifferent but

² This is not to say that Faulkner's fictional representations of blacks remain static throughout his novels. But while he abandons the rather simple black stereotypes employed in an early work such as *Sartoris*, nevertheless his representations of the racial "other" rarely significantly challenge southern orthodoxy.

impervious to [logic and morality], somehow a thousand times more potent and alive" (231). This magnetic pole that Sutpen constitutes remains the center, the centripetal organizational point, around which Quentin and Shreve's discourse is situated no less than is Rosa's. Their "last ditch" attempt to say No presents the apparently non-transcendable horizon of their discourse, a horizon that guarantees its orthodoxy and that finally ensures their inability to admit any "other" voices. While *Absalom, Absalom!* may be said to trace a trajectory from an epic monologic discourse to a strained novelistic orthodoxy, neither of these genres seems to allow space for an articulation of a black historical subjectivity. Nevertheless, the absent narrations by and about black characters have a sort of virtual existence behind the text as it were, constituting the non-narrated or non-narratable that is the condition of every narration. It is conceivable, perhaps, that such an exclusion might constitute an ironic authorial comment on the cultural and historiographical exclusion of that group; but while *Absalom, Absalom!* is more than the sum of its narrators, there is no substantial indication that the novel ought to be read in such a way.³ One obvious way in which such an ironic position

³ Indeed, a reading of Faulkner's letters, essays and speeches does not encourage such a position. His many public statements on the matter maintain an orthodox position. In an address given at the University of Virginia, for instance, he suggests that "Perhaps the Negro is not yet capable of more than second class citizenship. His tragedy may be that so far he is competent for equality only in the ratio of his white blood." Faulkner accepts that this need not always be the case, however. If "the Negro" is to be made "capable of . . . the responsibilities of equality," then

we, the white man, must take him in hand and teach him that responsibility Let us teach him that, in order to be free and equal, he must first be worthy of it He must learn to cease forever more thinking like a Negro and acting like a Negro. This will not be easy for him. (1965 155-57)

Whether through genetics or re-education, only through renouncing

might be asserted would be the insertion into the narrative of a character, perhaps a black character, who presents at least the elements of the historical narrative that the novel occludes. Even a character who does not present such historical evidence would be sufficient if s/he were clearly endowed with the potential to do so. In any case, as Achebe points out with regard to Conrad (cited above), had he wanted to draw a *cordon sanitaire* around the text, Faulkner is certainly a skillful enough novelist to do so.

The various images of blacks in *Absalom, Absalom!* do not, however, contribute to the creation such a heterodox representation of historical reality. The first image presented by Rosa's haunted voice is that of a "man-horse-demon"--Sutpen--imposed on a peaceful scene "with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men" (6). The representation of historical reality that is however powerfully or convincingly evoked is a specific one and the reference to the bestiality of the "wild niggers" is unsettling. There are a number of objectionable aspects to Rosa's racist simile of course, but the particular aspect most relevant here is the consequent denial of the power of speech to these "wild niggers." Beasts cannot speak, write or represent themselves through language--a condition not entirely dissimilar to that of blacks in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

The first incidence of actual black speech occurs early in Rosa's narration. The man in question, an anonymous slave whose face is described as "the wild Negro's perfectly inscrutable one with the teeth

negritude and becoming to some degree white can blacks, according to Faulkner, overcome this marginality .

glinting a little" (19), speaks first to a team of horses, suggesting a shared bestiality that is confirmed in the description of that speech: "something without words, not needing words probably, in that tongue in which they [slaves] slept in the mud of that swamp and brought here out of whatever dark swamp he [Sutpen] had found them in" (20).⁴ This characterization suggests a being wholly other, alien, incomprehensible, foul and once again bestial. When, a few lines later, someone, presumably white, attempts to prevent him from beating the horses, he speaks. But his words themselves contain a total abdication of dialogic speech, a removal of the speaker from the arena wherein speech has authority: "Marster say, I do. You tell Marster." The black slave has the authority only to do as he is told and to direct any queries to the master. His speech act constitutes solely the acceptance of his inadequacy, for whatever reasons, as a participant in discourse. It is a refusal of speech in any dialogic sense, and quite remarkable in juxtaposition with Rosa's strong articulation of her position.

Rosa's distrust of the alien language spoken by the "wild Negroes" is later demystified to some degree. The tongue they brought from the mud and swamp turns out to be less foul and mysterious than Rosa and the townspeople assumed: "The Negroes could speak no English yet . . . and doubtless there were more . . . who did not know that the language in

⁴ Africa is later characterized as "the dark inscrutable continent from which the black blood, the black bones and flesh and thinking and remembering" originate (206). In the attribution of inscrutability both to the continent and to the people, similar to the sense of moral contagion ascribed both to the continent and the population of South America in *Nostromo*, there appears to be little self-conscious sense that the inscrutability may have more to do with the inability or unwillingness of Faulkner's community to comprehend the dynamics of cultural difference, than with an inherent, almost ontological, darkness or obscurity.

which they and Sutpen communicated was a sort of French and not some dark and fatal tongue of their own" (29-30). Their use of (Caribbean) French seems to elevate them in the opinion of the third-person narrator in a way that the use of a "dark and fatal tongue of their own"--which can only mean an African language--would not. This is a sort of backhanded compliment, taking away as much as it gives. Much later, however, the problem of language seems to remain unresolved as Quentin narrates the story of the escape of the architect:

maybe . . . the niggers saw him go and didn't think it needed mentioning; that being wild men they probably didn't know what Sutpen himself was up to So I reckon the niggers never did know what the architect was there for, supposed to do or had done or could do or was. (180)

The ignorance imputed to the slaves--this time by Quentin--implies not only a kind of zero degree of culture, but also, considering their role in building the house, a remarkable lack of ability to observe what was going on around them. Furthermore, this passage seems to lose sight of the fact that the slaves do not speak a "dark and fatal tongue of their own" but French, the language of the architect. Even a difference of dialect would not account for such a total language failure. One need not postulate lengthy or intimate conversations between them in order to suggest that in such a situation the "wild niggers" would know what was going on rather more than they are given credit for. Such an ascription of utter ignorance is consonant with the implication elsewhere that the slaves occupy a position in the hierarchy that leaves them rivaling animals in terms of relative level of civilization.

When the narrator explains why Sutpen had been naked and covered in mud while working to build his house (30), he goes some way to humanizing the man: he was naked in order to save his one set of decent clothes. By

omission, however, it seems that no similar explanation of the blacks' nakedness is deemed necessary. The presumption seems to be that for Sutpen this state is unusual and needs to be explained if Sutpen is to be accepted as sharing in our common human nature, but that such a state of mud-covered nakedness is natural to the slaves and need not be explained. The dynamic enacted here recurs in the novel: Sutpen is seen to descend to the base level of the "wild Negroes," and subsequently it is shown that there is more to him than that. The "wild niggers" themselves, however, are not given similar complexity, never similarly demystified, never accepted as possessors of a common human nature, within the circle of a *sensus communis*. They continue to present the stable position of low and inscrutable (incomprehensible) against which all other positions are defined by successive negation. The slaves remain almost sub-human, beneath the acceptable level at which speech is recognized as a legitimate part of social heteroglossia.

The exclusion of the slaves from the position of narrators, or even interlocutors, of history coincides significantly with their exclusion as narrative agents. Sutpen's accomplishment is described here first by a third-person narrator, then by Mr. Compson: "inside of two years he [Sutpen] had dragged house and gardens out of virgin swamp, and plowed and planted his land with seed cotton" (33). Sutpen had "conceived that house and built it in a strange place and with little else than his bare hands" (42). And twenty slaves, one might add. While black labor is not sufficiently accorded its place in the building of the plantation, Sutpen's success is such that, as Mr. Compson puts it, "There were some among his fellow citizens who believed even yet that there was a nigger in the wood-

pile somewhere" (59).⁵ There is, in fact, "a nigger in the woodpile" of this narrative construction of Southern history and it is the denial or concealment of any significant black historical experience or legitimate power of historiographical narration.⁶

Once again, Bakhtin's comment that plot is the backdrop for the struggle of language groups to be heard seems relevant here. Such an omission, writes James Snead in his discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!*, "becomes not merely the vagary of the individual consciousness, or the bad luck of the social outcast, but rather a mechanism of all narrative, one not immune from being abused as social censorship." Since "Plot formation touches questions of history and time as well as meaning," such an omission ultimately constitutes "a refusal or inability to recognize others" which "hides under the normal requirement for plot to withhold what does not belong" (125-26). It seems that any amount of speculation on and nar-

⁵ "A nigger in the woodpile. Originally a way of accounting for the disappearance of fuel; it now denotes something deceitful or underhanded; a concealed troublemaker or suspicious character." (*Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* 784).

⁶ In a discussion of "what America has done for them", Faulkner, in a speech given to the Southern Historical Society in 1955, characterized Afro-American history in these terms:

the people who only three hundred years ago were eating rotten elephant and hippo meat in African rain-forests, who lived beside one of the biggest bodies of inland water on earth and never thought of a sail, who yearly had to move by whole villages and tribes from famine and pestilence and human enemies without once thinking of a wheel . . . in only three hundred years in America produced Ralph Bunch and George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington.

Beyond the slight to African cultural history, it is perhaps worth noting as well Faulkner's choice of black heroes. No radicals here: all espoused a conciliatory position that offered little challenge to white hegemony. See Taylor's discussion of the complexities and contradictions in the positions Faulkner advocated.

ration of the events, relationships, possible motives of white past is of interest; at the same time, all discussion of black experience is omitted. An obvious conclusion to be drawn is that, as Bradley suggests, blacks are not thought to have an interiority in any degree comparable to whites. Or perhaps if they do have an interiority it is assumed to be so alien as to be incomprehensible ("inscrutable") to whites--a possibility that returns us to Bakhtin's concept of the mutual non-understanding of alien language groups (356).⁷

Considering the remarkable degree of individuation of whites--as characters and as narrators--the blacks seem inevitably to remain types, generic. They are referred to as "one of the Negresses" (58), "the wild niggers" (48), "the octoroon," and typically remain anonymous. A couple of related incidents concerning the anonymous "Negresses" and the "wild niggers" are of interest in this connection. After the fall of the South, says Mr. Compson, the Coldfields lose everything:

Even the two Negresses were gone now--whom he had freed as soon as he had come into possession of them (through a debt, by the way, not purchase), writing out their papers of freedom which they could not read and putting them on a weekly wage which he held back in full against the discharge of their current market value--and in return for which they had been among the first Jefferson Negroes to desert and follow the Yankee troops. (69)

⁷ Rosa, for instance, says that Clytie

was so foreign to me and to all that I was that we might have been not only of different races (which we were), not only of different sexes (which we were not), but of different species, speaking no language which the other understood (126).

While Rosa can in no sense be taken as a spokesperson for Faulkner, the cultural abyss she articulates here and elsewhere in the novel is never really challenged.

Furthermore,

all of Sutpen's Negroes had deserted also to follow the Yankee troops away as though his presence alone compelled that house to accept and retain human life in this house an incontrovertible affirmation for emptiness, desertion; an insurmountable resistance to occupancy save when sanctioned and protected by the ruthless and the strong. (70)

There is a sense in the first passage that the "Negresses" should have been more grateful for this opportunity to buy their freedom. And there is the further suggestion that they were somewhat ungrateful to "desert" after such generous treatment, although what possible meaning the word "desert" can have in such a context is difficult to ascertain.⁸

Sutpen's "wild Negroes" have similarly "deserted," and the reason seems located in the absence of the magnetic personality and will of Sutpen, their "ruthless and strong" protector. Almost in spite of themselves they are seen to be rejected by the very house, as though they somehow wished primarily to remain there in the condition of slavery, and were then simply swept away on the next wave that passed--coincidentally the Yankees. No conscious thought or action is, in either passage, attributed to these people; no sense of struggle or desire for personal or political freedom is imputed. Faulkner's exploration of the past through the complex subjectivity both of its actors and its narrators is absent in his representation of black characters. There is no developed sense of a human subject possessing complex interiority and capable of sustaining a narrative point of view as there is for whites.

⁸ For a representation from a different point of view of a slave working off the purchase price, see Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Also, see Eugene Genovese's analysis of southern slave-owner paternalism, in particular the genuine shock experienced by many on being "deserted" by slaves they had thought loyal. (97-112)

Bradley's legal model regulating who may reliably act as a historical witness, who therefore may be counted as an equal member of the human community, comes to mind when the younger Bon is taken to court after a brawl which he had apparently started for no obvious reason:

he made no denial, saying nothing, refusing to speak at all, sitting here in court sullen, pale and silent: so that at this point all truth, evidence vanished into a moiling clump of Negro backs and heads and black arms and hands There had been no cause, no reason for it; none to ever know exactly what happened. (166-67).

Bon's actions seem incomprehensible, their rationale lost in an aporia existing on the boundary between black and white communities, in the inability of the white *sensus communis* to comprehend a range of experience outside its own bounds, and because no (white) narrator seems able to imagine what goes on in the narrative gaps in his (Bon's) life: "none ever to know what incredible tale lay behind that year's absence" (169). But the "tale" does seem potentially both narratable and credible, except for the fact that the "none" clearly means no one white, and therefore no one with the legitimate authority to narrate.

When Bon's son returns from his 'non-narratable' absence with a wife, the woman is characterized in terms of another absence: an absence of humanity.⁹ He returns "with a coal black and ape-like woman and an authentic wedding license" (169), the implication being that there might be some doubt about the legality of a man marrying what is clearly depicted as a lower species. She "existed in that aghast and automaton-

⁹ The specific narrator who characterizes her in these terms is Mr. Compson, but there is no sense elsewhere that this characterization is meant to be contested. In fact, some of the pejorative terms are repeated later in the conversation between Quentin and Shreve, once again without apparent qualification.

like state" in which she had arrived, possibly incapable of narrating ("did not, possibly could not, recount") the story of their union and journey ("how he had found her, dragged her out of whatever two-dimensional backwater . . . her mentality had been capable of coercing food and shelter from"). It is a mentality that renders her unable to retain the name of her town or village, leaves her unable even to sign the wedding register with an "X" so that someone has to guide "her very hand doubtless while she made the laborious cross", consigns her to such an intellectual abyss that when she married him she apparently knew neither his name nor whether he was black. Nevertheless, he returns, flaunting "the ape-like body of his charcoal companion" (her mind is significantly absent from this formulation), "an authentic wife resembling something in a zoo" and "kenneled her," "the black gargoyle," in a ruined cabin nearby (170-73). Returning to his wife after visiting Judith, Bon is described as "treading the thorny and flint-paved path toward the Gethsemane which he had decreed and created for himself, where he had crucified himself and come down from his cross for a moment and now returned to it" (172).

Since his skin is very light in color, Bon's choice of a dark woman signals, apparently, a decision to degrade himself, the relative tone of the skin acting as one indicator in *Absalom, Absalom!* of the relative level of civilization. Richard Poirier comments:

Though he could pass for a white man, he marries a woman who is an extremely dark Negress, and insists on being recognized as a Negro himself. Considering the social consequences, this is really a conscious form of self-degradation Valery Bon can define [him]self only horribly. In Sutpen's world, all Valery Bon can do is to assert negatively his potential dignity as a man. (30).

Negro equals degradation, extremely dark negress equals horrible degradation. Poirier's response indicates the way in which the text neither

transcends its own orthodox horizon nor encourages readers to challenge its racial taxonomy. While it might be maintained that Faulkner's characterization of this woman, his denial of humanity as well as voice to her, constitutes an ironic comment on the position of oppressed black women in his community, there seems to be no 'objective' or external point of reference from which such a position could be supported. The narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* see this woman as a sub-human creature, if Faulkner does not, or if he does not intend the reader to, this attitude is nowhere made clear. When, during Shreve's narration, Quentin repeatedly protests that he has been told too much, that he has heard too much, it should be noted that the "ape-woman" has never spoken, and that until he hears her he has not perhaps heard enough. This typifies, in a sense, what Bourdieu calls "the 'aphasia' of those who are denied access to the instruments of the struggle for the definition of reality" (170).

Another black woman, Clytie, is described in terms that similarly emphasize her alterity: while looking at Jim Bond, Quentin fails at first to notice the "little dried-up woman not much bigger than a monkey and who might have been any age up to ten thousand years . . . her bare coffee-colored feet wrapped around the chair rung like monkeys do [speaking] in a voice almost like a white woman" (176-77). The sense of difference attaching to this monkey-like woman suggests the problematic nature of the discursive situation. Furthermore, the idea of timelessness which comes up here and elsewhere in relation to Clytie seems to partake of the image of racial and cultural prehistoricity (or ahistoricity) that anthropologist Johannes Fabian discusses as a common means of denying coeval status and discursive authority to marginalized people. When Rosa confronts Clytie at the stairs, similar terms are used: "the face . . .

antedating time and house and doom and all . . . the face without sex or age . . . the same sphinx which she had been borne with . . . and which she still wears now at seventy-four, looking at me with no change . . . [staring with] a brooding awareness and acceptance of the inexplicable unseen, inherited from an older and a purer race than mine" (112-13). Whether stressing timelessness or bestiality, the end result in either case is to remove the subject from the profoundly historical existence that is the common experience of the white characters in the novel. Timelessness is the condition, passive endurance the character.¹⁰

In a novel in which narratives of genealogy have such definitive importance, Jim Bond himself seems to live outside any narrative framework whatsoever. Had he been asked

if he was Charles Bon's son he not only would not have known either, he wouldn't have cared: and if you had told him he was, it would have touched and vanished from what you (not he) would have had to call his mind long before it could have set up any reaction at all, either of pride or pleasure, anger or grief (177).

He seems to exist in a situation of semi-namedness, between the genealogical certainty of the white Sutpens and the genealogical obscurity and anonymity of the black slaves. Not only is his identity a mystery to him, but Quentin does not at first know his name. When Quentin and Rosa confront Clytie at the end, Jim Bond appears, "his arms dangling, no surprise, no nothing in the saddle-colored and slack-mouthed idiot face" (304). His idiocy is all the more pointed due to the tension of the scene

¹⁰ Another anthropologist, James Clifford, writes that while it is difficult to "escape the reductionist use of dichotomies and essences, [one] can at least struggle self-consciously to avoid portraying abstract ahistorical 'others'. It is more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another, as well as of the relationships of knowledge and power that connect them." (23)

and Quentin's ironic observation that he (Bond) represents "The scion, the heir, the apparent (though not obvious)" to the house of Sutpen (304). His lack of positive identity is clear when ROSA shouts, "You, nigger!" What's your name?" Bond's response, "Calls me Jim Bond," is similar to the earlier black speech strategy, in that there is the same aphasic deflection of assertive statement through passive reflection of the statements of others. Even in his name, there is a slippage from Bon to Bond--a slippage that can be read as a descent from good to bondage but signals as well the loss of essential genealogical continuity. As Philip Weinstein notes, Jim Bond "may have a putative soul, but Faulkner has not created it for him, and so we do not imaginatively credit it" (184).

While Sutpen does not, as has been suggested, come from a neutral or positive background concerning racial difference, his first real confrontation with blacks comes in Virginia, and the prevailing attitude among the poor whites is an interesting one.¹² Those blacks, such as the

¹¹ Coincidentally, another Faulknerian idiot, Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, in a sense Bond's white double, is granted both a voice and a soul, as well as an urgent if not coherent narrative competence. Jim Bond, though, a true child of his mother, the "ape-woman," is not

¹² Irving Howe argues that "the pioneer innocence of young Sutpen is defined as a freedom from . . . racial feeling" (117). Davis agrees, arguing that Sutpen's real failure is the betrayal of the original innocence and egalitarianism of his origins.

What Sutpen violates in accepting the principles of the "monkey nigger" and Tidewater Virginia is precisely a personal code of honor and moral behavior derived from the social and ethical order of his own mountain society. Albeit more primitive, the mountain society has values that are more in keeping with the purer dictates of the human heart to which Faulkner frequently refers" (185).

Still, this idea that Sutpen disturbed a pre-existent cultural purity or unity of some kind, an Edenic American moment of origin, seems dubious--not just as a matter of historical accuracy, but also as a reading of the novel--when it is recalled that these mountain people had a strangely familiar attitude toward the problem of racial difference "the only

"broadcloth monkey" (187), who were at the top of the slave hierarchy were the focus of resentment among lower class whites but the sense remained that they were not the root cause.

You knew that you could hit them . . . and they would not hit back or even resist. But you did not want to, because they (the niggers) were not it, not what you wanted to hit; that you knew when you hit them you would just be hitting a child's toy balloon with a face painted on it, a face slick and smooth and distended. (189)

The problem is posed here not in terms of the morality of beating blacks, but in terms of whether or not it would be any use. In the description that follows of the beating of one slave the point is brought home. The black victim as usual remains anonymous (190).¹³ The beating itself, as Quentin describes Sutpen's image of it, is a scene of horror common in the South for many years:

the torch-disturbed darkness among trees, the fierce hysterical faces of the white men, the balloon face of the nigger. Maybe the nigger's hands would be tied or held but that was all right because they were not the hands with which the balloon face would struggle and writhe for freedom, not the balloon face: it was just poised among them, levitative and slick with paper-thin distension. Then someone would strike the balloon one single desperate and despairing blow and then . . . fleeing, running, with all about them, overtaking them and passing and going on and then returning to overwhelm them again, the roaring waves of mellow laughter meaningless and terrifying and loud (190-91).

The suggestion that there may be a real person inhabiting the balloon face, of course, is here; but the effect of the perspective asserted is to

colored people were Indians and you only looked down at them over your rifle sights" (181).

¹³When Sutpen, as a boy, asks "which one of Pettibone's niggers", his father replies that he doesn't know. "He must have meant the question the same way the father meant the answer . . . no actual nigger, living creature, living flesh to feel pain and writhe and cry out."

elicit understanding, if not sympathy, for the "desperate and despairing" whites whose powerlessness has driven them to this barbaric act. While it is undeniably important to understand their point of view, once again the black perspective is almost wholly occluded. Furthermore, the "one single desperate and despairing blow" which is struck gives little indication of the extent of the violence that was routinely carried out against blacks for many years.

White resentment arises from the fact that Sutpen and his class must, he feels, appear

as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them, who would in turn spawn with brutish and vicious prolixity, populate, double treble and compound, fill space and earth with a race whose future would be a succession of cut-down and patched and made-over garments bought on exorbitant credit because they were white people, from stores where niggers were given the garments free, with for sole heritage that expression on a balloon face bursting with laughter. (193)

Sutpen is made aware of his condition and inspired to change his life by the denial of speech inflicted on him by a black doorman. Knocking on the door of a mansion owned by a wealthy white planter, he is turned away, his speech is refused as illegitimate: "the nigger told him, even before he had had time to say what he came for, never to come to the front door again but to go around to the back." At this moment Sutpen is bested in a speech situation by a "monkey nigger" (191), a "broadcloth monkey" (187). Such an unthinkable occurrence, a breach of the *sensus communis*, acts as the objective social crisis that sparks Sutpen's remarkable career. While others might have reacted violently, Sutpen himself decides not to exact revenge on the "broadcloth monkey" or on any of the "monkey niggers"--but his reasoning has nothing to do with any imputation of common humanity. Black faces remain "balloon-faces." Instead he realizes, quite pragmat-

cally, that in this situation beating or even shooting them would not solve anything, that the only solution is to raise himself to the level to the slave-owner. And it is precisely through violence committed against blacks--initially in Haiti--that he succeeds in his goals.

Faulkner articulates the tensions that might lead a person to embrace this sort of brutality very effectively, providing insight into a difficult situation. But considering who is on the losing end of the exchange, considering the history of torture, lynching and rape of blacks that continued long after the Civil War--indeed well into this century and during the time Faulkner was writing--that balloon face silently cries out for a voice with which to narrate the centuries of white brutality.¹⁴ Faulkner notes in passing, as it were, that this man remains anonymous, remains silent, but neither provides the discursive space for him to speak nor suggests that such provision ought to be made.¹⁵ Among the multiple perspectives on history that the novel articulates, there is no point of view in *Absalom, Absalom!* for the balloon face, no narrative framework for the "ape-woman". Howe writes that

¹⁴ Phyllis R. Klotman cites a figure of approximately 4,000 lynchings of blacks between 1882-1937. No figures are available for rape and assault or other forms of violence inflicted by whites on blacks. See also Trudier Harris's discussion of this horrific subject.

¹⁵ Sutpen is no stranger to interracial tension, having quelled a slave rebellion at a sugar plantation in Haiti, an island with a "rank sweet rich smell as if the hatred and the implacability, the thousand secret dark years which had created the hatred and implacability, had intensified the smell of the sugar", an island whose "soil [was] manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation" (204-06). Once again the racial discord is registered but remains an abstraction in the absence of any black narrative perspective. For another fictional perspective on the historical role of sugar in the problems of the third world, see Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, discussed in the next chapter.

Though he has given us a wider range and taken a deeper sounding of Negro character than any other American writer, Faulkner has not yet presented in his novels an articulate Negro who speaks for his people. No one has the right to demand that he do so, but it is a legitimate problem in literary criticism to ask why he has not . . . Faulkner's honesty, his continuous moral growth, but above all, the inner logic of his own work--all these would seem to require that he confront the kind of Negro who is in serious, if covert, rebellion against the structure of the South (1962 131-32)

Although Howe seems here to overlook the entire tradition of Afro-American literature in his claim for Faulkner's preeminence, the point is nevertheless well-taken.¹⁶

In a novel so concerned with hierarchy, it is significant that while whites are capable of both high and low behavior, blacks are confined to the sphere of the low. They can be contacted physically only through sexual possession of the black woman by the white man, or in physical combat from which the white man--in this case Sutpen--whether through superior physical strength or superior will, always emerges victorious. Thus while a range of behavior is open to whites, blacks are only capable of being physically dominated. This image is related to Faulkner's attribution of the virtue of endurance to blacks, the one virtue they are seen regularly

¹⁶ Howe's own comments, in a sense, reflect the kind of aphasia to which he refers. One can, obviously, find better insight into "Negro character" in the works of any number of black writers. While lacking Faulkner's novelistic complexity, such writers as far back as Harriet Wilson (*Our Nig*, 1852) or Frances Harper (*Iola Leroy*, 1892) demonstrate more awareness of black experience and character. Howe's remark is all the more surprising coming as it does in the revised edition (1962) of the book, long after the publication of works by Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Ann Petry, Richard Wright and numerous others. It is interesting to note that in the 1975 edition, Howe altered the phrase "any other American" to read "most other American." Howe's claim is not, however, unusual. In a recent essay, Noel Polk asks: "doesn't [Faulkner's] concern with the problem of Negro humanity express itself more eloquently and more profoundly . . . than in any other book by any other author, written any where, at any time, ever?" (146).

to possess. The condition of being dominated--beaten, raped, often with legal sanction¹⁷--is one that leads to endurance for reasons of survival. Endurance is not a racial characteristic. In spite of the obviously oppressive social conditions endured by blacks, when Faulkner wants a character to represent sublime suffering he does not choose a black character. In fact, Shreve at one point posits a separate category for the black equivalents of white (human) feelings: "Clytie looked at you and you saw it was not rage but terror, and not nigger terror because it was not about herself" (289). Instead he chooses someone high, someone white, to exemplify this grand emotion such as the architect who

flung the hand up in a gesture that Grandfather said you simply could not describe, that seemed to gather all misfortune and defeat that the human race ever suffered into a little pinch in his fingers like dust and fling it backward over his head. (212)

The low is a condition that any group can be in, white or black. Sutpen, for instance, begins there. But it seems the unique power of whites to have the ability to move out of that condition, to be "riven forever free from brutehood" (215), whereas blacks seem fated to remain in a condition of close to brutehood, unable to rise not only as a result of the particular historical set of power relations that enslaves and brutalizes them, but also as a result of some timeless absence in their make-up

¹⁷ The feelings of those two "wild nigger" females that Sutpen brings from Haiti--and all the women they synecdochically represent--are never articulated. Their presence, their historical witness in *Absalom, Absalom!* is a mute one. In terms of plot, they are necessary for breeding so that Clytie's presence can be accounted for, but they never speak, they remain anonymous. They are represented, but they never represent.

that has substituted endurance for ability.¹⁸ It would be unfair to ascribe to Faulkner responsibility for any one of the representations of blacks in the novel, or the opinions about blacks that he puts in the mouths of his characters. However the spectrum of such representations and opinions is, finally, a narrow one--broader certainly than the stereotypes provided by the racist elements of his community, but orthodox enough to leave him within the bounds of its *sensus communis*. In response to an appeal for donations to the N.A.A.C.P., Faulkner refused, because the organisation seemed to him to be promoting too radical a position, promoting

actions which will do your people harm, by building up to a situation where the white people who hate and grieve over the injustice which your people have to suffer, will be forced to choose either for or against their own people, and they too, the ones which your people consider the best among my people, will have to choose the side of the rest of the white people
(1977 444)

The possibility that a sense of justice, even among the "best" of the white community, could override the *sensus communis* is not considered here--white people will stick together no matter what. In the final analysis, a heterodox alliance outside the bounds of the white community is

¹⁸ By the 1950s, Faulkner accepted, at least in principle, the idea that blacks can rise up from their low condition. But overlooking the long struggles of the black intelligentsia and community leaders, he saw it as a southern white man's burden. "So we alone" he argued, speaking of the southern white community, "can teach the Negro the responsibility of personal morality and rectitude--either by taking him into our white schools, or giving him white teachers in his own schools until we have taught the teachers of his own race to teach and train him in these hard and unpleasant habits" (1965 157-58).

not thinkable, no matter how imperfect the orthodox position may be.¹⁹

The denial of historical legitimacy and historiographic authority to black characters does not imply a necessary granting of such authority and legitimacy to the white characters. *Absalom, Absalom!* undeniably complicates and qualifies white narrative authority. Lukács writes that "The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality" (1971 56). With its temporal complexity, *Absalom, Absalom!*'s account of the Sutpen story seems to have aspects of both epic and novel. Rosa imparts the epic

¹⁹ Faulkner's sense of community is made clear in a conciliatory letter to W.C. Neill, who had publicly taken issue with Faulkner's moderate position on segregation in the school system: "I doubt if we can afford to waste even on Congress, let alone on one another, that wit which we will sorely need when again, for the second time in a hundred years, we Southerners will have destroyed our native land just because of niggers" (1965 391). The phrasing is striking not solely because of the final pejorative term, but even more so perhaps because the terms "we Southerners" and the possessive "our native land" clearly do not include blacks. Elsewhere, in an interview conducted apparently while Faulkner was under the influence of alcohol and the strain of the threat of federal government intervention in the civil rights crisis, he put the matter more strongly. "If I have to choose between the United States government and Mississippi, then I'll choose Mississippi But if it came to fighting I'd fight for Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out into the street and shooting Negroes" (1968 260-61). While the degree to which Faulkner may be held responsible for a statement that he subsequently clearly regretted making is debatable--at another time he said that given such a situation he would be forced to leave the south--the depth of his commitment to an orthodox *sensus communis* is not. For a different assessment, see Louis Daniel Brodsky's discussion in "Faulkner and the Racial Crisis, 1956," (791-807). Brodsky's defense of Faulkner's position does not, in my view, investigate the general framework of the problem.

quality to her narration insofar as it is the epic of the founding of a nation and its subsequent destruction. Her references to God's will and to destiny are resonant with the grand style of the epic. But the whole subsequent movement of the narration, its multiple and unreliable narrators, fundamentally subvert Rosa's attempt to reach epic stature in her telling of the fall of the old South. The historiographical abyss faced by Quentin in his representation of the past is an index of his distance from the epic certainty of Rosa. In Rosa's epic treatment of the past, totality still appears graspable, and meaning, if tragic, is relatively unproblematic.

For Quentin however the situation is much less straightforward. Quentin, with the aid of Shreve McCannon, narrates related events, yet Rosa's totality and certainty are no longer available to him as a historical subject. The end of epic history appears at the moment in Quentin's narration of the last days of the civil war when Bon accepts that there is nothing left of the old South, "Not God; evidently we have done without Him for four years, only He just didn't think to notify us" (288). The shadow of that earlier epic vision though, as Lukács suggests, still haunts his telling. Quentin seems poised between Yoknapatawpha and Harvard, between Rosa and Shreve, and must define himself in relation to both. The position seems untenable for him, and he thus occupies that position of homelessness that Lukács characterizes as the essence of the novel (1971 41). In a statement suggesting their distance from the epic model, his father says that the earlier generation was made up of people in some respects like them, but

victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic and the figures therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but dis-

tinct, uncomplex who had the gift of loving once or dying once instead of being diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb from a grab bag and assembled (73).

With this new complexity comes the sense that events seem to occur at times according to

sheer chance, just a little more of the illogical machinations of a fatality which had chosen that family in preference to any other in the county or in the land exactly as a small boy chooses one ant-hill to pour boiling water into in preference to any other, not even himself knowing why. (84)

Bakhtin writes that the epic past is "walled off by an unapproachable boundary from the continuing and unfinished present" (30). In the case of *Absalom, Absalom!*, that boundary appears to coincide with the end of the Civil War, and the consequent destruction of the certainties on which the social fabric of the old South had been based. Nevertheless the attempt to make sense of events and people in history must be made, even though the coherence of the narrative colligation of those events may owe as much to the imagination of the narrator as to the sequence of events themselves. The epic certainty of the narrative and the epic stature of the characters appears to be eroded, as the historical sublime threatens to overwhelm coherence. As Mr. Compson, situated generationally between Rosa and Quentin, recognizes, an abyss separates the historiographical 'whole story' from the sublime sum of its parts:

you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (83)²⁰

²⁰ This vision of history looks back to the historical sublime of Schiller and Burke, and forward to White (discussed further in Chapter 6).

The narrative confusion in *Absalom, Absalom!* regarding what actually happens and when even extends to its author--Faulkner's appended chronology (presumably designed to clarify the novel) does not in fact tally with the narrative itself, but presents yet another contradictory layer of historiographical confusion.²¹ Snead writes:

The confusion over dates and even the jumbled sequences of each narrative suggest that *Absalom, Absalom!* is not primarily about particular historical events, but about how actual historical events are transformed, often retroactively, into deceptive fictive, mythic, and ideological constructs. (104)²²

In this novel, "murmurous with ventriloquial voices," it is, argues Warwick Wadlington, "reductive to regard this lack of fixity as merely an issue of decidable or undecidable epistemological authority" (213). In fact, the undeniably polyphonic narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* does have quite decidable limits, does not slide from a decentering of authority to a totally relativized rejection of certainty or dispersal of point of view. There is an important margin that must be taken into account. Even at its most thoroughly dialogic, the novel maintains a strict control on which voices are permitted to narrate. As both Bourdieu and Bakhtin observe, the epistemological limits of heterodoxy or heteroglossia are

²¹ While Cleanth Brooks dismisses the discrepancies as errors on the part of either the author or his characters (424-26), Robert Dale Parker argues that they are a deliberate part of Faulkner's strategy for "refus[ing] authority and suspend[ing] his readers in fictionality" (196).

²² Barbara Foley writes that *Absalom, Absalom!* "is perhaps the prototypical modernist historical novel," representing as it does a "historical process" that "transcends comprehension or purposive agency. The historical record is revealed to be discrepant and confusing" (199). Faced with 'discrepant narrations,' she concludes, Quentin's "criterion for validity in historical reconstruction is, finally, internal or imaginative coherence rather than external correspondence; he makes no claim that the patterns he uncovers inhere within the object of his inquiry" (200).

determined by the objective realities of the social crisis at the historical moment--in this case a doubled moment of crisis including elements both of the moment of writing and the period in which the novel is set. Rosa is reported as saying that "the stable world we had been taught to know dissolved in fire and smoke", but some world, however unstable by comparison with the pre-war society, persists.

Absalom, Absalom' is concerned with the waning of the authority and legitimacy of a social group whose point of view on history is becoming, if not invalid, then at least no longer absolutely privileged. Its claim to author-ity, to legitimacy, is displaced to the power of its rhetoric to move, to cast a spell, to summon up the traces of an otherwise lost doxic past. This compulsive obsessional telling of the past, dwelling on the details, interpreting and reinterpreting, keeps the past from dissolving altogether like the pre-Civil war authority that once legitimized their version of it. And the intensification of that compulsion seems at times to increase in inverse relation to the availability of historical data. Like the lost sense of meaning and totality that Lukács invokes, the shadow of lost authority looms over *Absalom, Absalom!*--whether the authority of Sutpen or the certainty of Rosa, highlighting by contrast the instability of Quentin's position as historical narrator and historical agent.

Quentin and Shreve resort increasingly to fabricating the past they narrate, "the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere" (250). They imagine a Bon who, like themselves as historians, was

almost touching the answer, aware of the jigsaw puzzle picture integers of it waiting, almost lurking, just beyond his reach,

inextricable, jumbled, and unrecognizable yet on the point of falling into the pattern which would reveal to him at once, like a flash of light, the meaning of his whole past life. (258)

In response to passages such as this, Peter Brooks argues that "there seems to be no clear authority, not even a provisional sort, for the telling of the story, and as a result no suggestion of how to achieve mastery of its interpretation" (251). Further, it "shows us how narration can become fully dialogic, centreless, a transaction across what may be a referential void Narrative plots may be no more--but of course no less--than a variety of syntax which allows the verbal game--the dialogue, really--to go on" (261-62). Yet even jumbles can have a certain logic, and games are often controlled by limiting who may play. Brooks's analysis oversimplifies the situation in one crucial aspect--it loses sight of certain specific conditions of the narration. A center can be recognized--not a doxic, absolute center, not an epic center, but nevertheless a center which seems to regulate, for instance, who is to enter into the dialogue.

It is, writes Wadlington, "in the context of this immense busy traffic of accommodating yet dangerous voices and listening that the attempt to establish a freestanding monological House has its significance and tragic magnitude" (213). The House of Sutpen constitutes a lost doxic center of the narrative, acts as such for

the narrators who help to furnish their own existence from the legendary House and to regulate what it has already furnished them The tragic edifice is their communal project The novel's overall rhetoric, as variously performed and scripted . . . manages the novel's multiplicity of personal voices and so serves the traditional function of the hero: to demonstrate the adequacy of the culture's . . . empowerment and thus persuade the audience to adopt it. (213-14).

But the exclusion of black voices offering a perspective on the "tragic magnitude" of the House of Sutpen is a major gap in the novel if it is to be conceived as a broad cultural discourse in this way, a gap that necessitates an interrogation of the notion of community implied by this allusion to a communal project. It is a *sensus communis* that still, even as it disintegrates, even as it becomes neither freestanding nor monological, continues to provide an orthodox center. As a point of cultural orientation, the House of Sutpen refuses equal entrance to blacks and allows little black input on the definition of the communal project.²³

While the struggle for the possession of legitimate authority produces no clear winners, there are clear losers who never even get a hearing. The point of view of the younger Charles Bon, for instance, is out of bounds, as is that of his wife, the "ape-woman," who seems to exist beneath the horizon of language, well beyond the reach of Faulkner's dialogic community. The final loser, perhaps, is Jim Bond who, in a novel presenting the complex relations of voices in social discourse, can only articulate howls. Blacks do not have a story to be narrated in *Absalom, Absalom!*; they are the marginal objects, not the subjects or authors of historical narrative. While it is true that the distinction of providing the legitimate narrative account, the authority to author, is becoming shaky, this system of exclusions remains intact. Although there are many

²³ Alice Walker asserts that

Faulkner was not prepared to struggle to change the structure of the society he was born in. One might concede that in his fiction he did seek to examine the reasons for its decay, but [o]ne reads Faulkner knowing that his "colored" people had to come through "Mr. William's" back door, and one feels uneasy, and finally enraged that Faulkner did not burn the whole house down. (19-20)

complexly interwoven narrative voices--whether directly narrated, indirectly presented, or purely ventriloquized--the narrative remains solidly in the hands of white narrators: Quentin and his father, Rosa Coldfield, Shreve McCannon.²⁴

The voice that continues to reverberate unintelligibly beyond the end of the novel is that of Jim Bond. Peter Brooks writes that

The one left is, of course, Jim Bond, the idiot, the leftover who can be heard howling at night. The tale he would tell would be full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. He stands as a parodic version of Barthes's contention that the classical narrative offers at its end the implication of a residue of unexhausted meaning, a "pensivity" that remains to work in the reader . . . the *envoi* to the reader--the residual meaning embodied in Jim Bond--seems the very principle of non-significance. (265)²⁵

Such a formulation does not sufficiently recognize the specific location of this remainder--race--which is a problem of doxa and ideology, not a purely formal narratological problem. If, however, we see this as a social as well as a narrative "residue," the incomprehensibility of Bond or the "ape-wife" can then be read as an ideological limit of Faulkner's imagination that inevitably coincides with the limit of his narrative colligation. The absence of signification, the inability to signify, then

²⁴ Quentin's ultimate suicide (in *The Sound and the Fury*) undermines still further the ability of this dominant group to continue imposing its definition of the situation; nevertheless the possibility that another group might be able to share power and authority does not exist within the horizon of the novel.

²⁵ Confronting a similar problem in the philosophy of history, Paul Ricoeur asserts that no matter what historiographical methodology is adopted "the event is restored at the end of each attempted explanation as a remainder left by each such attempt . . . as a dissonance between explanatory structures, and finally, as the life and death of the structures themselves" (I 224).

becomes a function of the inability of the white narrators to read the discourse of the other.

Bakhtin writes that "the novel must represent all the social and ideological voices of its era, that is, all the era's languages that have any claim to be significant; the novel must be a microcosm of heteroglossia" (411). Bond howls instead of speaking. It seems that in this case, black voices simply do not have any claim to be significant, can claim neither authority nor legitimacy. But rather than recognizing this as the orthodox limit of the narrative imagination, the limit of what is narratively thinkable, the text displaces this lack of coherence onto the black characters themselves. Whereas the narrative of white Southern history in *Absalom, Absalom!* gradually grows beyond the grasp of the narrators, blacks are made to seem beyond (or perhaps beneath) the comprehension of narrative from the outset.

Craig Werner notes that Faulkner's important observation--an observation in tune with much twentieth-century theory of history--that the "'past isn't dead, it isn't even past,'" articulates the simple, but all too often ignored, knowledge that the excavation of history is an absolute necessity if we are to make any sense of the present" (1986 37).²⁶ He then notes the high "cost of excluding 'others'--either racial or sexual--from active participation in the dialog necessary to the excavation of history." Faulkner certainly recognizes the importance of the dialogic process in coming to terms with the past, but, continues Werner, "the silences, the gaps in Quentin's excavation--and I suspect in this he

²⁶ See also Werner's "Tell Old Pharoah: The Afro-American Response to Faulkner."

shares much with his creator--reflect an unwillingness or inability to apply the implications of . . . his own process and admit the other into active dialog" (47).²⁷ While Faulkner is aware that the excavation "requires a collective process, a dialog incorporating numerous perspectives and sensibilities . . . the actual presence of the 'other' is extremely limited. Quentin, Mr. Compson, Shreve--the primary voices are those of white males" (48). While Rosa's voice is clearly heard, it is the ghostly voice of the epic past, not a challenge to that doxa. The narrative may have its moment of origin with Sutpen's refusal to accept being silenced by a "broadcloth monkey," it may subsequently record the rise and fall of Sutpen's authority, but it does not finally transcend its own parallel silencing of black voices.

A number of white voices are heard, and constitute the narrative center of the novel. As Weinstein points out with reference to Derrida, "the center does not merely 'permit' the margin to exist at its side: rather it is constituted by the very notion of marginality" (170). Weinstein then examines the marginal position of blacks in *Absalom, Absalom!* through the characters of Bon, his mother Eulalia and Clytie. "Largely deprived by the narrative of voice, of point of view, of their own past and future . . . blacks as represented by Faulkner are truncated figures. These lives may well take on incandescent symbolic importance for the anguished whites viewing them [characters and readers]," but they

²⁷ On the question of the connection between Faulkner and Quentin, Poirier writes that in *Absalom, Absalom!* "one is almost obliged to associate the problems of the author with the problems of Quentin Compson" (25).

"have no access to their own incandescence; their importance is for others alone" (171).²⁸

Furthermore, in placing these characters at the margin, Faulkner has created a kind of 'mulatto' buffer zone between white narrators and black experience. Charles Bon is so 'white'--in education, upbringing and pigmentation--that he has no trouble 'passing.' His father is white and his mother has some small fraction of 'negro blood' but certainly passed as white until Sutpen was told that she was invisibly tainted. Bon occupies the position of a white aristocrat through most of the novel, he even becomes an officer in the Confederate army. How then can he be thought representative in any way of black experience in the South, of the realities of that marginal existence? If the missing narratives of Eulalia, Bon, and especially Clytie define the margin, where are we to locate the absent narratives of the "ape woman" or her son? As Walter Taylor has argued, Faulkner's interest in the idea of 'mixed race' far outweighs his exploration of "the meaning of growing up black in a white-dominated society" (116).

Many nineteenth century mulattos, no doubt, identified themselves with white fathers; but Faulkner's mulattos did that with such consistency, and with such disregard for their black ancestors, that the pathos of their tragedies was ignored Faulkner's figures were in no way representative of the majority of slaves. Field hands forced to fight each other like animals, women forced to breed like mares . . . but Faulkner's preoccupation with Bon, Clytie, and Valery obscured the problems of their fellow blacks more than it explained them. (116-17)

²⁸ As James Baldwin observes, "Faulkner could see Negroes only as they related to him, not as they related to each other" (472-474). See also "Faulkner and Desegregation" in the same collection (147-52)).

The odd possibility that there may be no essential difference between black and white, that mere superficial differences obscure the harmonious co-existence of separate but parallel lives, is asserted in one passage that equates black slave and privileged white university student:

the six or seven of them [students], of an age and background, only in the surface matter of food and clothing and daily occupation any different from the Negro slaves who supported them--the same sweat, the only difference being that on the one hand it went for labor in fields where on the other it went on . . . the hard violent hunting and riding; the same pleasures: the one, gambling for worn knives and brass jewelry and twists of tobacco and buttons and garments . . . the other for the money and horses, the guns and watches . . . the same parties: the identical music from identical instruments, crude fiddles and guitars, now in the big house with candles and silk dresses and champagne, now in dirt-floored cabins with smoking pine knots and calico and water sweetened with molasses. (80-81)

An enormous cultural division based on power is elided in this passage. While there may be a point to such a comparison of the youth of two different cultures, surely more is concealed than is revealed in such a comparison--not just the liability to violent torture and rape against which the slaves had neither defense nor recourse, but the thousand more subtle minor daily practices of humiliation and forced submission that result from such a state of enslavement. Instead, the situation evokes a sense of the "human condition" or "family of man" that occludes the real inequalities based on the unequal distribution of power structuring that society.²⁹ The possibility that Faulkner's meaning at this point is

²⁹ See Roland Barthes's discussion of "The Great Family of Man," a well-known photographic exhibit showing "the universality of human actions in the daily life of all countries of the world."

Everything here, the content and appeal of the pictures, the discourse which justifies them, aims to suppress the determining weight of History; we are held back at the surface of an identity, prevented . . . from penetrating into this ulterior zone of human behavior where historical alienation introduces some "differences" which we shall here quite simply call

ironic is not really supported. The inclusion of a voice capable of articulating the point of view of the slaves, a witness for whom the difference would have been obvious, could have created such an ironic juxtaposition--but this is not the case. That this point of view existed historically is attested to by the existence of many black writers and orators whose works went generally unrecognized by the white community of the period--indeed, when their work was, at times, recognized, the penalty some paid was high.

While the center in *Absalom, Absalom!* clearly does not hold, none of the narrators articulates a corresponding movement outward from the centripetal narrative tendency to a recognition of a heterodox experience. Subsequent narrators may radically undermine the doxic unity of Rosa's vision but they neither enlarge its cultural perspective in any fundamental sense, nor do they challenge it with an alternative. The terms Quentin uses to retell the story of Sutpen's pursuit of the architect betray a lack of insight into black humanity that shows no development of vision in the two generations since Rosa. The "wild niggers" still populate the narrative, and their narrative position remains close to that of the dogs with whom they compete as trackers. While there is, in Quentin's discourse, a degree of ironic self-consciousness and uncertainty, an exploration of historiographic aporias and complexities that is not to be found in Rosa's, nevertheless the pejorative representation of blacks is

not countered. Nor is the absence of any representation of Southern history from a black perspective problematized.

By the end, the anonymous "ape-wife" and her son, the idiot, constitute the defining pole of the black community in the novel. However strained the white *sensus communis* may be, however unprepared it may be for the task of redefining its legitimacy after emancipation, a sense of equality--not to mention community--with blacks is not thinkable.

Thadious Davis writes that

Slavery, the tragic flaw in the old design, complicates notions of a heroic, chivalric moral code and tarnishes edenic pictures of its glory. As a result, the sensitive, aware artist, like Faulkner, occupies an uncomfortable space between the drive toward reality and the attraction to the myth. Because of the uncertainties resulting from conflicting artistic appeals, legends, tall tales, and myths cannot so easily be isolated from 'reality.' The threads of southern existence derive from both myths and fabrications and from kernels of fact and truth. All of these have become intertwined and inseparable in the present. (225)

It seems, however, rather an understatement to claim that the edenic image of the chivalrous old South is merely "complicated" by racism. A number of "threads" and "kernels" are conspicuously absent from the novel, and it is in this elision of the reality of the black characters that any trace of "edenic" chivalry can still be thought to adhere to the image of this brutal racist system. There is another aspect of historical reality here that can easily be separated from myths and legends of the old South, but it is necessary to look outside the centripetal orthodox historical discourse of *Absalom, Absalom!* to find it.

There is some historiographical irony in a small detail easily overlooked early in the first chapter. In the act that in a sense sets the whole narrative structure in motion, Quentin is summoned to listen to Rosa's history by means of a "note which he had received by the hand of a

small Negro boy" (7). The anonymity of the messenger, his diminutive stature, his youth--the racist idiom by which "boy" signifies all black males also comes to mind at this point--his subordinate position as messenger rather than interlocutor, all these factors add to the (in)significance of his position in this major American work of imaginative history. He carries a message between whites, announcing that the time has come to discuss history, to narrate the past; that it is time for the torch of historical tradition to be passed--in however a complex and incomplete way--from one generation of white Southerner to another. In this almost ritual act of communication and community, he himself remains voiceless, anonymous, a servant of white historiography and historically, a servant.

In her essay, "The Black Writer and the Southern Experience," Alice Walker makes a statement remarkably similar to Faulkner's description of the homogeneity of the Southern community (see above, p. 146): "What the black Southern writer inherits as a natural right is a sense of *community*" (17). Walker's stipulation of "black," however, underscores the fact that Faulkner's "community" is defined by race as well, but as a member of the dominant community which (as dominant communities often do) sees itself as universal, normative, he seems to feel himself under no obligation to specify the exclusionary social taxonomy on which his *sensus communis* depends. Who speaks for the South? "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all" (143). One pragmatic answer to the question is that William Faulkner has been considered a spokesperson for the South. In *Absalom, Absalom'*, his narrative construction foregrounds the inevitable inadequacy of attempts to answer these questions in historical terms, but not in the

sense of questioning certain dominant definitions concerning who might legitimately respond. In spite of the threat of narrative disintegration, *Absalom, Absalom!* does not move beyond its orthodox boundaries. Instead it lodges itself at the moment of the "last ditch" attempt to say no to Sutpen (231) and all he stands for, neither constructing nor suggesting any representation of what might be involved if that refusal were to be taken as a starting point.

PART III

Bearing Witness: Black American Women's Fiction

"The American museum of unnatural history It is assumed that all non-Anglo-Saxons are uncomplicated stereotypes. Everybody knows all about them. They are lay figures mounted in the museum where all may take them in at a glance. They are made of bent wires without insides at all. So how could anybody write a book about the non-existent?"

Zora Neale Hurston (170).

In this chapter I would like to examine the strategies by which a group that has been marginalized in the orthodox discourse of narrative fiction and history is able to articulate its own perspective, to assert its own discursive space. A number of marginalized groups could be focused on in this respect. Categories of class, race, religion, gender, and nationality, for example, have been used to deny the discursive legitimacy of certain sectors of society. To the degree that their narratives have not coincided with those of the dominant groups they have been rendered what Bradley called "jarring witnesses" whose discrepant narratives need not be accepted, indeed sometimes cannot be accepted without disruption to the authority of the dominant group. This chapter will explore the representation of history in the novels of a number of black American women--a group doubly marginalized, in terms both of race and gender. Zora Neale Hurston's image of the figure without insides echoes almost directly Bradley's assertion that savages are unable to take in

simple impressions because they have no corresponding internal world. It has been the task of many black American women writers such as Hurston to correct that image, to assert the authority and legitimacy of the perspective of black women in a society whose dominant discourses have traditionally denied it.

In the introduction to a recent collection of essays titled *The State of Afro-American History*, Thomas C. Holt analyses "the biases that left slaves, as people, out of the history of slavery" (7). In an argument that recalls many of the issues raised in the earlier discussion of historiography, Holt suggests that the reasons for this omission concerned "what could be considered legitimate and illegitimate sources. This in turn had to do with how knowledge, or fact itself, was defined." The situation of black history has much in common, he observes, with that of women's history, working-class history, or the history of oral cultures that have left no written record to be analysed. Nevertheless,

The reason Afro-Americans were so long excluded is not because they had no history, an impossibility where life and experience exist; nor that that history was unimportant, a notion easily contradicted by reference to almost any political and economic development, nor that there were no sources from which to write that history--clearly there were and are Rather, it was that these sources remained unseen. What we see is a function of where we stand. And where we stand is a function of our political and social relations (7)¹

In the same collection, Nathan A. Huggins argues that it is "perverse" (7) to think of American history without Afro-American history and women's history. "A white American and a male history ought to be, common

¹ See also Collingwood's comments on the constitution of evidence (cited above).

sense tells us, unthinkable." Without theorizing the contribution that common sense (*sensus communis*) itself has made to this exclusion from the thinkable, Huggins nevertheless asserts that "we have read a lot--indeed, been brought up on--a lot of perverse history." It is not sufficient, however, simply to add Afro-American history to the discourse as it stands. What is necessary, he argues, and what has in fact already begun to take place, is an alteration of the character of the discourse of American history "as historical problems have been freshly conceptualized, as the context has been enriched by a more heterogeneous history" (158). As a result of the emphasis on more heterogeneous "social" histories, "American history is not what it once was That story, that continuum, that wholeness, that narrative is no longer available to us."

The story of America I was told as a boy began with our pilgrim fathers and ended with my school day's present There has been a fragmenting and a faceting of the history so that the wholeness of the narrative no longer can contain all we now know to have been real, important, essential. (159-60).

American history, in general, is based, Huggins points out, on a historical rupture, a break in the line of tradition that leads to an originary European past. He notes that the dominant communities in America reacted to this rupture by attaching themselves to a myth of descent from a classical past. On the other hand, "Africans who were brought to America suffered a similar rupture from their immediate and natural tradition. They, too, were to become a new people, but it would not be easy to find a satisfactory linkage with any past known to them" (162). The myth of America animating many historiographical approaches to the American experience--"the dominant Bancroftian myth of providential destiny of America, the American people and nation that onward, upward vision" (163)--has not rested comfortably with the realities faced

by black Americans. This disjunction has led, on the part of the dominant community, to "the tendency to deal with such groups as anomalous or egregious" (163). In other words, such groups appear as jarring witnesses whose historical testimony has consequently been marginalized. Huggins concludes that

It may be that the Afro-American story remains too discordant with progressive assumptions to be comfortably incorporated into the American story The Afro-American story has more been told in terms of failed hopes, frustrated and ambiguous victories, dreams deferred. (167)

The exclusion of this perspective from the dominant national narrative has important ramifications. The legitimacy of social groups depends to some extent on the ability of those groups to articulate a perspective, depends, writes Bourdieu, "on the work of representation . . . that they perform in order to impose their view of the world or the view of their own position in the world--their social identity" (1985 201). Like Mink, whose understanding of the contingency of all narrative representations of history did nothing to negate his sense of its necessity, Huggins calls for new narratives, and a reorganization of narrative perspective. Since the narratives that a nation chooses to live by "are selected from a matrix of historical experience," it is essential, he argues, "that we recognize that in an important way the story is what history is about. We all need to be calling for a new narrative, a new synthesis taking into account the new history" (160).

One response to this call for a new historical narrative can be located in the many new fictional narratives being produced by black American women. As Barbara Christian writes in her influential study of black women's literature,

it is important to define for ourselves the concepts of history and of literature with which we are concerned. Most people are taught to think of history as that which happened in the past. Some of us . . . know that it is one way of organizing human knowledge, the past being raw material. But for those of us who were not in control of our past or our history and are not now in control of our present, we are clear about the fact that history is a selection of significant events, a means of constructing a coherent pattern out of the past. We know that often what is selected as significant is integrally connected to the point of view, values, and intentions of the historian as he or she exists in time. (1985 166)

Frequently, the histories that they relate seek to locate an Archimedean leverage point from which the social world can be moved by redefining the categories and contesting the legitimacy of the principles of division of the social and historical field. The dominant *sensus communis* structuring the organization of society, if not transformed, can at least be thrown into relief through juxtaposition with another, parallel or alternative, perspective. To this end Imamu Baraka (Leroi Jones), in "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature,'" has called on the black artist to "provide his version of America from that no-man's-land outside that mainstream" (114). Although the sexist language underlines, of course, one particular set of principles of social classification, yet nevertheless the call for another "version of America" remains exemplary.

It is the definition of a community of sense--as well as a sense of community--that is at stake in these novels, and that work of definition is often carried out in historical terms. Jane Campbell notes that in recent years, "Afro-American historians and artists have launched a full-fledged exploration--and celebration--of the past" (xv). As Susan Willis points out, "If there is one thing that predominates in contemporary writing by black American women, it is the journey (both real and figural)

back to the historical source of the black American community" (57).² In a similar vein, Marjorie Pryse has observed that "black women novelists challenge the authenticity and accuracy of an American history that failed to record their voices and a literary history--written by black men as well as white--that has compounded the error of that neglect" (4). That journey of discovery backward in time is part of the more general project of black women's writing since the nineteenth century that Hazel V. Carby has characterized, in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, as "The attempt to establish an independent and public narrative voice," a project entailing "the necessity for black women, as writers, to develop their own discourse of black womanhood" (38-9). This discursive independence is needed if black women are to counter the reductive and not infrequently offensive images of them long produced and reproduced by the dominant discourse.³

In order to claim legitimacy for their collective historical experience, to establish the authority of their historical narratives, marginalized groups such as black women have first to overcome the accumulated

² This sentiment is not, of course, common only to black women. Ralph Ellison, for instance, has written: "I have to affirm my forefathers and I must affirm my parents or be reduced in my own mind to a white man's inadequate conception of human complexity." James Baldwin, more succinctly, states: "I mean to use the past to create the present." (Bruck and Karrer 289)

³ In the introduction to one of the formative collections of essays in the field of black women's studies, *All the Blacks . . .*, Gloria Hull and Barbara Smith cite Faulkner's incidental characterization of a black nursemaid, in *Light in August*, in terms of the "vacuous idiocy of her idle and illiterate kind" (53). They argue that Faulkner's "assessment of Black female intellect and character, stated as a mere aside, has fundamental and painful implications" (xviii). The fact that the works in which such oppressive images as the vacuous idiot (and the ape-woman) "appear are nonetheless considered 'masterpieces' indicates the cultural-political value system in which Afro-American women have been forced to operate."

weight of the orthodoxy that has enforced their marginality. Not surprisingly then, a recurring set of concerns in these novels is the distance separating the marginal from the dominant groups and the social and epistemological dislocation necessary (objective social--or personal--crisis) in order for the experience of the marginal group to become available and comprehensible outside the confines of that group. Further, given an extreme enough degree of marginality and alienation, this experience must be legitimated even for members of the marginalized group itself whose interpretive categories may be overwhelmed by the *sensus communis* of the dominant social and interpretive community. In the face of a hegemonic power contradicting them, these witnesses need, at times, to be reminded of the legitimacy of their own testimony.

In a sense, the work that fiction is being asked to do is that of *defamiliarization*, but in an explicitly political manner not theorized in any detail in the Russian Formalist definition.⁴ It is a defamiliarization that would make newly visible and comprehensible the past sufferings and injustices borne by marginal groups, and legitimize their aspirations for the future. This politicized defamiliarization acts to counter the naturalization imposed by ideology on a situation that is in essence historical. "If one is not to be misled by the . . . *naturalization*, which every group tends to produce in order to legitimate itself, to justify its own existence," writes Bourdieu, one "has to reconstruct in each case the *historical labour* of which the [social] divisions and the social visions

⁴ Bakhtin/Medvedev criticize the formalists for their apolitical use of the term: "Shklovskii therefore radically distorts the meaning of the device, interpreting it as an abstraction from semantic ideological significance. But, in fact, the whole meaning of the device is in the latter" (61).

of these divisions are the product" (1985 214). To this end the process of defamiliarization that is attempted works through an explicit historicization--the creation of a historical (albeit fictional) narrative to colligate the available historical evidence and testimony into a significant narrative (Walsh). To accomplish this defamiliarization, a representation of the crossing or transgression of entrenched social boundaries serves the function of breaking down the monological self-evidence of the discourse of the dominant group in order that the historical experience of the dominated group can attain discursive legitimacy and narrative coherence.

The rewriting of history from the point of view of the historically dominated is an important aspect in the symbolic struggle to produce legitimate representations not only of history but also of all the objects of the social world whose meanings depend to some degree on the historical discourse in which they occur. In its own way, not just the definition of the past, but also of the present and the future are the stakes of this struggle for legitimacy in historical representation. And in order to change the social structures that permit (or enforce) domination, that struggle must contest not only specific dominant historical representations, but also the general view of the social and historical world that produces those representations. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues that for black women writers, "The account of origins remains, at least in part, a map of 'where I'm bound.' The account of the black women's self cannot be divorced from the history of that self or the history of the people among whom it took shape" (176-77). The novels by black American women that I will be discussing do both of these things--they narrate a version of history 'from below' which the dominant, 'orthodox' historical discourse has

not included, and they engage in various ways problems of world view and representation that necessarily underlie any specific elaboration of historical narrative. Such novels are a part of the more general struggle in which, as Bourdieu writes,

the past--with retrospective reconstruction of a past tailored to the needs of the present--and especially the future, with creative forecasting, are endlessly invoked, to determine, delimit and define the always open meaning of the present.
(1985 201)

Although this chapter is primarily concerned with more contemporary fiction, essentially the same dynamic can be traced back much further. As Robert Stepto comments, "The strident, moral voice of the former slave recounting, exposing, appealing, apostrophizing, and above all remembering . . . is the single most impressive feature of a slave narrative" (3). Another interesting case in point is the use of a violent juxtaposition or transgression of dominant and marginal social categories in some of the earliest novels by black American women. *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* was published in 1892 by Francis Harper, a prominent activist in feminist and anti-racist issues. A first novel, written when Harper was sixty-seven, the book is both sentimental and didactic. Arguing for women's rights, temperance, and justice for blacks in a deeply racist and sexist America, *Iola Leroy* is interesting both as a work of fiction and as a work of social advocacy.⁵

⁵ Only recently has an earlier novel by a black American woman been rediscovered. *Our Nig* by Harriet Wilson (1859), a quasi-autobiographical work, narrates the physical and emotional sufferings of a young black girl in the north at the hands of the family who keeps her in servitude. While exhibiting many similarities to the novels I discuss, it does not have an explicitly historiographical dimension.

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The novel is set largely in the south, opening in the years preceding the Civil War and continuing into the period of the reconstruction. Spanning two such different eras, it represents two very different ideological positions as well. Iola Leroy, the eponymous main character, is the daughter of a wealthy southern plantation owner and his wife, the latter a former slave whose fraction of 'negro blood' has never been revealed to the children. Well-educated, genteel, protected from any knowledge of the harsher realities of slavery, she develops into a supporter of that system, an apologist for what she considers a benignly paternalistic social arrangement. As she argues with abolitionist schoolmates early in the novel, she occupies the 'common sense' white southern position of her time. With the sudden death of her father, however, her world is overturned. Due to her fraction of 'negro blood'--until now unknown to her--she is herself remanded into slavery and experiences from the inside the brutality of that system. She falls completely outside her former *sensus communis* in two related ways: she is suddenly and, as it seems, arbitrarily excluded from membership in that community, and she realizes the degree to which the social representations of that community in fact misrepresent, even misrecognize, the reality of slavery as it is experienced by the slaves.

The transition she is forced to make from one reality, as it were, to another is violent and abrupt. From being a sheltered upper-class young woman, she is thrust into the position of being the property of anyone who purchases her--from autonomous subject to dependent object. Remaining within the conventions of the sentimental novel, Iola's sexual violation at the hands of brutal masters is alluded to in order to make clear the profound gulf that separates the social groups. The treatment

she receives at this point would have been unthinkable earlier, a juxtaposition that draws attention to the relativity of what is thinkable from different points of view. Since she has become an object, Iola's experience of reality simply does not count. Having previously established a sympathetic identification with the reader, her experience on both sides of the ideological fence makes her a character who can presumably lead the reader to a clearer understanding of the reality faced by slaves.

When Dr. Gresham, a white doctor and abolitionist, proposes to Iola, she has the opportunity to resume her comfortable life in the north 'passing' as a white. She declines this offer, preferring instead to dedicate herself to re-uniting her dispersed family. This decision has two implications. As Carby points out in her introduction to the novel, this fictional situation is a standard "metaphor for the African diaspora an established Afro-American literary convention" (xviii). But it should also be noted that the family connection she seeks to maintain is that of her black ex-slave mother rather than that of her wealthy white father, and that the first result of this decision is her refusal of marriage to a white man. This rejection of Dr. Gresham's proposal thus signals a rejection of white male patriarchy--even in its most benign form. The struggle to which Iola dedicates herself concerns both race and gender, insisting on her autonomy as a woman as well as on the legitimacy of black aspirations. The marriage that she does enter into at the end of the novel is a marriage of equals, with both partners working to fulfill the "grand and noble purposes [that] were lighting up their lives, and they deemed it a blessed privilege to . . . labor for those who had passed from the old oligarchy of slavery into the new commonwealth of freedom" (211).

Thus the versions of historical experience that are given expression in the novel are sorted through in order that yet another reality might be created in the future: "From threads of fact and fiction," she writes in a concluding note, "I have woven a story whose mission will not be in vain if it awaken in the hearts of our countrymen a stronger sense of justice and a more Christlike humanity" (282). History, then, is appropriated in the interest of changing history.

Another novel written not long after *Iola Leroy* employs a similar historical situation. In her preface to *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1899), Pauline Hopkins articulates the problem of representation in a way that brings to mind more contemporary discussions of the subject:

Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs--religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation. *No one will do this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history, and, as yet, unrecognized by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race.* (13-14; Hopkins's italics)

Hopkins's novel is, of course, an attempt to do just that. Like *Iola Leroy*, it begins with a plantation-owning family whose racial purity is less than secure but whose members never suspect the fate awaiting them. Upon the circulation of a rumor that displeases certain opportunistic white supremacist groups in the area, the father is murdered and his wife and children destined for slavery. While the wife escapes her fate through suicide, the children, who, like *Iola Leroy*, might have become slaveowners, themselves become slaves. The novel thus is able to explore the historical reality of slavery from both sides: "I have presented both

sides of the dark picture truthfully and without vituperation" (13). While Hopkins's claim that she has "tried to tell an impartial story, leaving it to the reader to draw conclusions" may be seen as problematic, there is no doubting the sincerity of her statement of fictional purpose, a purpose that combines, like Harper's, the desire to record the history of a marginalized group with a desire to alter that group's future through legitimizing its historical experience. As Hopkins was writing, violence against blacks was reaching unprecedented levels, one result of white determination that even after emancipation blacks would not be allowed a political voice, and she sees her novel as a way of addressing this situation: "In these days of mob violence, when lynch-law is raising its head like a venomous monster," she writes, "the retrospective mind will dwell upon the history of the past, seeking there a solution of these monstrous outbreaks (14).

Hopkins aims her work both at blacks who would find their experience reflected there and at whites who had much to learn about this marginalized group. The faith and optimism suggested in her claim that her novel is a form of "pleading for that justice of heart and mind for my people which the Anglo-Saxon in America never withholds from suffering humanity" (15) is more than slightly undermined in the novel itself with its verifiable accounts of racist torture, rape and murder.⁶ While her hope for social justice in 1899 may have been unfounded, her attempt to find justice through a depiction of the historical sufferings and aspirations of the black population is only one of many based on the perhaps naive con-

⁶Hopkins directs readers who doubt the veracity or realism of her narrative to the "archives of the courthouse at Newberne, N C., and at the national seat of government, Washington, D C." (14).

fiction that if only people in power knew what was really happening, they would put a stop to the injustice. What was needed, then, was a portrait of those oppressed people that could penetrate the ideological barriers of the dominant *sensus communis*. Like Frances Harper, Hopkins found that the most effective way to overcome those barriers was to have fictional characters who could speak for the dominant group forced across those barriers. Witnesses whose reliability has already been established--at least in part through their membership in the white community--now speak from the position of the dominated group, have themselves become, in fact, members of that group. The result is that the transgression of the boundary between the two groups exposes the artificiality and brutalizing effects of the boundary itself.⁷ What had appeared natural--the segregation and stratification of the races--is thus shown to be a social and historical creation, subject to historical alteration.

Many novels by black women feature characters whose acceptance of the self-evidence of the status quo is demolished and replaced by an inside knowledge of the heterodox reality of the other--alterity defined here in terms both of race and gender. To accomplish this, a wrenching of the normally experienced reality of social relations must be enacted in order to defamiliarize the sense that these social patterns are somehow

⁷ The conventions of the sentimental novel, and the extremity of the social positions to be narrated contribute to the use of quite melodramatic representations of the conflict. In *Contending Forces*, for example, after her noble husband is murdered by 'white trash,' the beautiful and cultured Grace Montfort is tied to a post and whipped, and the "rough hand of Hank Davis . . . tear[s] her garments from her shrinking shoulders" (68). The whipping is recounted quite sensationally, and even accompanied by a full-page frontispiece illustration of the scene, accentuating the outrage the reader may feel in the knowledge that the law is on the side of the villains.

natural rather than historical and contingent upon relations of power and dominance. The importance of historiography is clear in this context; it constitutes one of the privileged narratives that can be invoked to legitimate or de-legitimate the systems of classification that structure social life, to articulate and lend credibility to the realities of people who had remained in a state of aphasia. Bourdieu argues that

The capacity to make entities exist in the explicit state, to publish, to make public (i.e. render objectified, visible, and even official) that which had not previously attained objective and collective existence . . . --people's malaise, anxiety, disquiet, expectations--represents a formidable social power, the power to make groups by making the *common sense*, the explicit consensus, of the whole group. (1985: 202)

It has been the burden of much black women's writing to begin to exercise this kind of discursive power, to overcome this form of aphasia by articulating an alternative narrative point of view on historical reality, and through this representation to legitimize and valorize the experience of a previously marginalized and oppressed social group.

For reasons of space, a number of novels that might usefully be discussed here have, with regret, been omitted. The most significant single omission is, perhaps, the work of Alice Walker, all of whose novels have an explicit historical dimension. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* presents one of the most powerful recent explorations of black American history. Other novelists working in this area include Toni Cade Bambara (*The Salt Eaters*), Margaret Walker (*Jubilee*) and Alice Childress (*A Short Walk*). To deal with all of this material would, however, require another thesis.

Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969)

declares its historical concerns in its opening epigraph, a saying from the Tiv, a west African people whose descendants are perhaps among the population of the Caribbean island that the novel depicts.

Once a great wrong has been done, it never dies. People speak the words of peace, but their hearts do not forgive. Generations perform ceremonies of reconciliation but there is no end.

The great wrong that provides a framework for Marshall's novel has its historical beginning in the forced migration and enslavement of millions of Africans, and the consequences of that great wrong ramify in complex ways through the lives and relationships of all the novel's characters

Saul Amron, his wife Harriet and assistant Allen Fuso arrive in Bourne Island to carry out anthropological research on this underdeveloped community as the preliminary phase of a development project sponsored by a 'philanthropic' foundation (CASR). Funding for the "Center" is provided by several large corporations, but mainly by "Unicor", a company which also controls the sugar-based economy of the island, and a company with which Harriet Amron is connected. Harriet's family wealth originated with an ancestor who had traded in rum and slaves, a family business that has changed with the times yet has maintained economic control over some of the descendants of those slaves through both the sugar industry (production) and through the saltfish that provides the basis of the islanders' diet (consumption).

Marshall's bitter sense of historical irony is thus evident as she

discusses the motivation behind such a foundation. The Center⁸

with its emphasis on uplifting the impoverished of the world, served as a fitting public expression of their quiet humanitarianism and concern, and as a means, although this was seldom mentioned, of saving substantially on government taxes by being intimately connected with a nonprofit, tax-exempt foundation. (36)

The connection is indeed intimate, as Harriet is married to the chief academic researcher, and it is in a sense her money that underwrites the whole project--and thus her approval or disapproval that is necessary to its continuance. As Merle (who acts as a spokesperson for many islanders) realizes, the power structure has, in some significant ways, not really altered. In the midst of a highly emotional outburst she exclaims that things have not changed since the English

were around here selling us for thirty pounds sterling. Not really. Not when you look deep. Consider. The Kingsley's still hold the purse strings and are allowed to do as they damn please And the Little Fella is still bleeding his life out in a cane field Things are no different. The chains are still on. (210)

Then, directing her appeal to a representative of the island's postcolonial black elite, she concludes by asking: "'Haven't you . . . learned anything from all that's gone on in this island over the past four hundred years? Read your history, man!'"

The residents of impoverished Bournehills are, for the most part, victims of history. The Atlantic ocean, separating them from their ancestral home, crashes in on their island

with a sound like that of the combined voices of the drowned raised in a loud unceasing lament--all those, the nine million and more it is said, who in their enforced exile, their

⁸ Frequently referred to as "the Center," it suggests as well the hegemonic center that it represents, and the relation of margin to center that it ultimately enforces.

Diaspora, had gone down between this point and the homeland lying out of sight to the east. This sea mourned them. Aggrieved, outraged, unappeased, it hurled itself upon each of the reefs in turn and then upon the shingle beach, sending up the spume in an angry froth which the wind took and drove in like smoke over the land. Great boulders that had roared down . . . centuries ago stood scattered in the surf; these, sculpted into fantastical shapes by the wind and water, might have been gravestones placed there to commemorate those millions of the drowned. (106).

The sense here that history is inscribed even on the face of nature suggests the way that Marshall portrays it as a force determining the very categories of perception available to the natives. History, in this novel, is not a separate discourse, however privileged, but the basis on which a culture develops its sense of itself and its relation to the rest of the human community. It is the framework in terms of which all present discourse must be interpreted. The historical sense of victimization impinges on all the categories through which the impoverished islanders view the world. As Spillers observes,

the scene against which [the island] enacts and reenacts its history has been decided by origins that must be appeased, at least recognized and named out loud. The transatlantic slave trade, the historic provenance of Bournehills, is thoroughly mediated through a number of peak points. But the trade and its human and social currencies become the basic archetypal and memorial symbol-pattern that asserts itself in the cultural and daily activities of the community. (158)

"Perception of the social world," as Bourdieu has argued, "is structured because the schemes of perception and appreciation available for use at the moment in question, especially those that are deposited in language, are the product of previous symbolic struggles and express the state of the symbolic power relations" (1985 200-01). In Bournehills, those previous struggles (symbolic and otherwise) have left people impoverished and defeated, caught in a web of victimization that is reproduced not simply in their own attitudes, but also in their continued victimization

by more or less the same forces that enslaved them hundreds of years before. The genealogy Marshall provides, connecting Harriet to the original slave-traders indicates the continuity of this pattern--her non-profit philanthropic foundation notwithstanding.

The colonial legacy is present as well in the placenames that identify the island--not only Westminster, but outside town as well: Aquin-court, Buckingham, Sussex, Lords, Drake (101). A dispossessed people whose dispossession is registered, for instance, in the fact that they do not name their own land.⁹ The great exception in this (synchronic) pattern of naming the island is the great exception historically (diachronically) as well: Pyre Hill. This name registers the island's one great historic moment of resistance, an event (says Merle) that took place back "'in the days when the English were around here selling us for thirty pounds sterling.'"

'[O]ne of the biggest estate houses on the island used to be right on top of that hill. People say it stood like a castle there. It belonged to Percy Bryam, the man who owned all of Bournehills and everyone in it in the beginning. People used to have to get down on their knees when he passed'. (101)

Cuffee Ned, leader of a slave rebellion, killed Bryam and burned his estate to the ground, an event whose success is unparalleled in the island's history. Its value to the islander's sense of the past and of their community is expressed by Merle: "'There was never anything like it

⁹ The power to bestow a name, whether on a place or a person (oneself or one's children) is a frequent motif in many of these novels. Slaves were given names by their owners and made to live in places whose names were foreign to them--symbolizing their enforced lack of control over their own lives, their bodies and their world. Bourdieu writes of the power inherent in the ability to bestow a name, a power all the more vital "in crisis situations, when the meaning of the world slips away" (203).

before or since. It's the only bit of history we have worth mentioning'"(102). And indeed, this moment of insurrection stands in bold relief against the unbroken history of oppression that structures local attitudes to authority and to a future whose bleak prospects are relieved only by the millenarian hope that Cuffee Ned--or some avatar--will return to liberate them once again.¹⁰

This *sensus communis* seems registered in their very convention of greeting one other: "they would slowly raise their right arm like someone about to give evidence in court, the elbows at a sharp ninety-degree angle, the hand held stiff, the fingers straight. It was a strange, solemn greeting encompassing both hail and farewell, time past and present" (103). The legal simile recalls, once again, the vision of jarring witnesses, which they indubitably are in the eyes of the dominant community.¹¹ Their evidence is abundantly clear to them, however, and constitutes one of the most fundamental truths that sustains them and orders their perception of their place in the structure of power. The greeting is furthermore a kind of ritual of recognition whereby members of a closed community recognize and tacitly affirm each other, and at the same time form a tacit barrier excluding those who do not share in this sense of community.

¹⁰ This millenarian hope is expressed explicitly by the sugar cane workers, as well as implicitly in Leesy's redemptive care for the memory of her ancestors and in the hope that her family will be reunited someday on her little plot of land. The theme of family reunification once again expresses a larger communal aspiration. (28, 34)

¹¹ This image is developed further in the anecdote of the servant charged with the theft of a piece of his employer's property. The servant's (jarring) version of events is not accepted by the court and the employer's complaint is upheld (76).

The gap that distances them from other communities is evident:

"those people are another breed altogether," one of the island's elite women warns Harriet. "You can't figure them out. They're like they're bewitched or something. To tell the truth, I don't even like to think the place exists" (70). The incomprehension--the mutual incomprehension of alien language groups that Bakhtin observes--is frequently registered, in the "veiled eyes" (154), or in the distance that separates them from the community of power. When the island's elite meet for drinks at a local bar,

Unnoticed in the distance beyond the tree stood a small crowd of local people--young people for the most. They were watching from behind the tall split-bamboo fence which secured the hotel from its surroundings . . . standing there invisible, their black faces part of the greater blackness of the night. (75)

Even more dramatically, this gap is illustrated by Marshall's description of Saul's attempt to communicate the real meaning of his development project to the population of the island who have gathered to hear him. The elite members of the society "filled the shabby drawing room," while the rest remain outside. In between, "the long veranda stood empty . . . like some no man's land no one dared cross" (132) in spite of the fact that those on the outside have been urged to come in. But instead of doing so, they

sat on the precipitous steps leading down . . . to the beach and spilled over onto the beach itself, where they stood in great faceless numbers under the far-reaching shadow of the veranda, while behind them, down the stretch of shingle, the breakers pounded and clawed at the land. The torn spume, soaring up into the darkness each time a wave struck, was a brief, brilliant pyrotechnic display in the light from the house.

The play of light and shadow between the house (containing the elite) and the beach (whose surf recalls the millions of dispossessed) conveys much,

almost allegorically, about why the gap remains though there is apparently no one to enforce it. Even Merle cannot convince them to bridge it.

Merle kept urging those outside, especially the ones on the darkened beach below, to come up. Periodically, she would lean over the railing and plead with them to come upstairs. But to no avail. Each time she called down they would look off, making it appear that she was speaking to someone other than they, gently ignoring her. (132)

Saul decides to go to them, since they will not come to him. Moving down to the beach, his sense of difference, of distance, in relation to these people becomes even clearer, but it also begins to seem, "measureable."

He tries, with little success, to make contact by looking into their eyes,

deep-set eyes which seemed to be regarding him from the other end of a long dimly lit corridor, whose distance was measurable both in space and time, and down which he was certain he would have to travel if he were ever to know them or they to know him. Moreover, as he . . . leaned in close to repeat his name over the loud crash of a wave, he had the odd feeling that the youngest among them, including even the babies asleep on their mother's breasts, were in some way unimaginably old. (137)

The basis of the sense of distance, of age, is suggested in the crash of the wave, whose memorial to the nameless dead obscures Saul's attempt to identify (name) himself. Saul is, however, committed to the attempt to cross that cultural barrier, a crossing that requires, as he realizes, not only an understanding of the other but also a redefinition of the self.

Harriet is not so ambitious, and her meeting with them is less of a challenge. Her smile is simply a function of her "unruffled surface," and the "masked smiles they gave her in return held a profound recognition" (137). This recognition is a tacit acknowledgement of a whole cultural configuration, a world-view providing well-defined roles for the Harriets of the world and for its dispossessed. And once again they "extended their hands in the same slow eloquent manner . . . which seemed to make of

them witnesses after some fact," a fact that remains unspoken but whose sublime power sounds loudly in the waves crashing in on the scene.

The eloquence of the salutation is, perhaps, the only eloquence they demonstrate beyond the limits of their own community. The distance that separates them from the community of power expresses itself as well in their lack of the power of speech. Voluble with their peers, their ability to articulate is lost in the presence of others. The most powerful example of this aphasia, though by no means the only example, occurs when Ferguson, a mill worker, resolves to speak to the owner, Sir John Stokes, about the bad condition of the equipment.

"Yes, I'm going to speak to the big man himself," he said, sobering, "even if I got to have a few grogs to do it. I'm going to step right up . . . I'm not going to bite my tongue. You think I'm making any rasshole sport. I'm going to tell him straight, just the way I'm telling you. Mark my words." (156)

When that momentous occasion finally arises, he seems ready:

more than ever resolved to speak to Sir John . . . He had taken a few drinks to give him heart, and as he stood waiting in all his lean tensile grace and authority on the platform above the two noisy wheels, his breath, his whole person, gave off the faint redolence of rum. (219)

The opportunity is everything he could have hoped for. Sir John comes to look at the equipment, positioning himself close to Ferguson and the rollers in question. Ferguson stands, "waiting to speak to him." Although "He had drawn himself up to his full tremulous height, and with his shoulders thrown back and his eyes fixed ahead, he looked like a soldier awaiting inspection" (221), Sir John remains unaware of him for some time. He is alerted eventually by the quality of tension emanating from Ferguson, and he looks up.

Their eyes met and for a moment they quietly regarded each other down the length of the railing, Sir John vaguely

puzzled, questioning, the little commanding lift to his head challenging Ferguson to speak, and Ferguson straining to do so, the veins and tendons that strung together his limbs standing out in a tangle beneath his skin in the effort. But no sound came. He stood silent. Behind his glasses his eyes were eloquent with the speech he was to have given, that he had rehearsed so often for Saul's benefit, but his lips were as if sewn together. His long pliant body that moved with such passion when he declaimed upon Cuffee Ned in the rumshop at night seemed a thing of stone, a dumb effigy of himself. (221-22)

When Sir John finally takes the initiative and asks Ferguson how he is, the moment is broken.

Ferguson, sounding unlike himself, answered, the words issuing in a rapid breathless burst from his constricted throat, "Fine sir, thank you sir." His eyes . . . had fled Sir John's by now and were fixed on the murky gloom above his head. (222)

The encounter is completed by Sir John's admission that although Ferguson is "'one of the oldest hands in the place,'" he is never able to remember the man's name.

Although within their own community they are vocal and articulate, the blockage of speech, the aphasia that occurs when they confront those in power, is emblematic of the general discursive situation of the Bournehills community. The great exception is, of course, Merle, who speaks endlessly. She acts frequently as a spokesperson for those less articulate than herself, and her logorrhea contrasts sharply with the general aphasia of the oppressed people.¹² Her speech is, however, not really heard, makes little or no impression on those in positions of power. She articulates, in her own way, the history that is the legacy of the islanders, and her suffering ("wide enough to include an entire history" (68)) is acknowledged by all. Yet she is not really heard. Lyle

¹² Peter Nazareth writes that "Merle, indeed, is the voice of a voiceless people" (120).

Hutson, one of the local elite, attempts to pass off her diatribe good-humoredly as the "customary tongue-lashing" (66). But as the "flow of words continued unchecked, the voice rushing pell-mell down the precipitous slope toward its own destruction" (66), one gets a sense of the seriousness of her speech

At one climactic moment when the mill is closed, threatening to destroy what little economic independence the people have, her language reaches its highest pitch as she tries to confront the mill boss. He does not respond, does not even come to the door to acknowledge her presence, so that

in the face of the unassailable silence of the house, the abuse she heaped on him sounded hollow, ineffectual, even pathetic. As quickly as the curses rose they fell. Those outside could almost see them falling like downed birds through the air. She, too, must have finally realized the futility of her harangue because her voice suddenly ceased. And as quickly the off-season silence returned. She might not have spoken. (387)

In a variation on the aphasia suffered by Ferguson, Merle speaks but her voice is not heard.

Her problem is that she has allowed herself to remain open to the horror of history, continues to think about it, to feel it, and to speak of it. As Saul realizes,

it didn't appear that she could help herself. She might have been condemned to tell the tale--and something in her eyes, a doomed, obsessed glint, did put him in mind of the old mariner in the poem he had read as a boy. She, too, might have been witness to, victim of, some unspeakably inhuman act and been condemned to wander the world telling every stranger she met about it. (89)

The demand that is in her speech is a demand that her listeners break through the deafness that prevents them from responding equally to the horror of history that animates her.

Saul, the anthropologist, is an obvious target. By profession he is expected to be capable of the kind of cross-cultural understanding necessary to such empathy.¹³ And as a post-Holocaust Jew, he shares with her a sense of the horror of history. Initially he resists opening himself to such an understanding, not disputing the horror but sensing the futility of dwelling on it:

He would have liked . . . to spare her the pain of saying all this, for he could see how that pain and outrage had laid waste to her face. He would have advised her, if he thought for a minute she would listen, that it was sometimes necessary to seal up the heart as he had done and live as best one could in the midst of it all. (88)

Unlike all the others who have preceded him, representing various developmental agencies, Saul is gradually drawn in to the universe of Bournehills, begins to understand how they see the world, their sense of history and their sense of possibility. When Ferguson is unable to speak to Sir John, Saul no longer sees the situation from the insulated position of those in power, but from the position of the powerless, the colonized.

Saul saw those sealed lips and stricken eyes--and had to look away quickly. He felt the unspoken words choking Ferguson choking him. He felt the other's anguish and helplessness as intimately as if they were his own. (222)

Saul's relationship with Harriet begins to break down as he grows closer to Merle and begins to bridge that socio-historical gap. Following the carnival, an event that momentarily inverts the social world, shedding

¹³ The irony here is that anthropology has not frequently enough, perhaps, entered into a real dialogue with the cultures under study, but acted instead as part of the western knowledge industry that has too often been party to the oppression of those cultures. See Fabian, Asad, or Clifford.

much new light on the power relations that obtain on the island, "Saul finds himself with Merle, drawn further into the world of Bournemouths, while Harriet, frightened by the power unleashed in the carnival pageantry, seeks refuge in the home of Lyle Hutson, exemplar of the postcolonial bourgeoisie. This realignment, a general shifting of loyalties and allegiances, suggests the widening gap dividing Saul from the center of power--CASR, and all it stands for. As Spillers has argued, in this novel, "The individual agent, concentered in the 'circle of history,' is obligated to rediscover his or her own particular relationship to historical content, and rename, metaphorically speaking, herself or himself in the light of the discovery" (160). The starting point of each is clearly determined so that "The clash of cultures and histories renders a specific text, captured in the varying sentimental education of the major characters" (160).

No simple resolution or synthesis is, however, obvious-- neither in the world of Marshall's novel nor in the political reality it represents. And indeed she makes no real effort to impose an imaginary solution onto this very real dilemma. Reflecting on the writing of this novel a few years later, she comments that

After struggling for some time, I was finally able in my most recent novel to bring together what I consider to be the two themes most central to my work: the importance of truly con-

¹⁴ Although there is not space here for extended discussion, the representation of carnival in this novel fits very well into the Bakhtinian analysis of the social meaning of such events. With its ritual re-enactment of the slave uprising of Cuffee Ned--complete with the dramatized murder of the imperialists--this carnivalesque moment acts for Saul as a catalyst for the defamiliarization of socio-historical reality of the islanders. It is the moment of his 'conversion.' For Harriet, it is perceived simply as a gross threat, producing not re-orientation but grave disorientation.

fronting the past, both in personal and historical terms, and the necessity of reversing the present order. (1973 110-11)

While the former themes are amply and complexly dramatized in the novel, the imperative reversal remains unrealized in the novel, and indeed unrealizable except as social praxis. While the urgency of the imperative is not in doubt in the novel, no means of realizing it is concretely articulated. Merle's decision to go to Africa seems only a very preliminary step toward defining a new cultural identity from which such social change might then be conceived.¹⁵ "I am not really talking so much about an actual return, although it is couched in those terms," Marshall has commented,

I don't know if that is really possible, or even necessary. The physical return . . . is a metaphor for the psychological and spiritual return back over history, which I am convinced Black people in this part of the world must undertake if we are to have a sense of our total experience and to mold for ourselves a more truthful identity. Moreover, I believe this exploration of the past is vital in the work of constructing our future [A]n oppressed people cannot overcome their oppressors and take control of their lives until they have a clear and truthful picture of all that has gone before, until they begin to use their history creatively. This knowledge of one's culture, one's history, serves as an ideological underpinning for the political, social and economic battles they must wage. It is the base upon which they must build. (1973 107)

The demand for a "clear and truthful picture" of history resides uneasily, perhaps, with the injunction to use history creatively. Yet this is of course the tension inherent in all narrative accounts of history. Marshall's solution brings out the tragedy of black history at the expense of whites (with the exception of Saul, whose Jewish heritage

¹⁵ Marshall at one time conceived this novel as part of a loose "trilogy describing, in reverse, the slave trade's triangular route back to the motherland, the source" (1973 107).

exempts him), who are portrayed in a pointedly unsympathetic manner--who become, in fact, from this point of view, the jarring witnesses of black history and are dealt with in a similarly peremptory fashion. Harriet's suicide seems almost a fitting end for her, a complementary fate to that of her first husband, a scientist whose hand she always imagines on the button that will bring about the nuclear holocaust that completes the blind destructive white quest for power. Allen Fuso is likeable enough, perhaps, but he is represented as lacking character and sexual identity as a result of his racial and cultural background.¹⁶ Merle's lesbian ex-lover in England seems almost pathologically perverse, Sir John and his minions on the island are thoroughly reprehensible, and so on.

There is, however, a difference between Marshall's reduction of the complex humanity of her white characters and the similar (but contrary) reduction by white writers of black characters, and that difference has to do with history and power. Marshall attributes her original understanding of narrative to hearing her mother and her friends, maids and cleaners for wealthy New Yorkers, telling stories of their experiences in the fine houses of the rich during the Depression. Those conversations, she writes, "were highly functional, therapeutic . . . it was their way to exorcise the day's humiliations and restore them to themselves."

The people they worked for were usually the first thing to come under the whiplash of their tongues. For hours at a stretch they would subject their employers to an acute and

¹⁶ The suggestions of homophobia in the novel appear, perhaps, as signs of Marshall's own untranscended orthodox cultural frame. Both in the lesbian relationship from Merle's past and the scene with the boy dancer in Sugar's bar, homosexuality is used as a metaphor for cultural decadence. See also Spillers's discussion of this aspect of the novel (172-74 n.6), or Missy Dehn Kubitschek's "Paule Marshall's Women on Quest."

merciless analysis But this has long been a standard phenomenon in Black-white relations in America. The oppressed has to know the enemy--his survival depends on it. While the oppressor, to defend against his guilt, usually chooses not to know us I never saw any of these women they spoke of--and had no wish to; it was bad enough that I was forced to wear their children's cast off clothes . . . yet my mother and her friends made them visible to me with their deft and often devastating descriptions. (1973 98)

The caricatures that the black women created of the whites, they created as a means of self-defense, a way of working through their oppression, a survival strategy. The white caricature of the blacks that arose out of a similar situation appears as a reduction of black humanity as a way of avoiding guilt over their role in oppressing the blacks. Thus the privileging of one point of view over another can mean different things at different times, depending on the particular set of social relations involved--a fact which formalist analysis of narrative might overlook.

"As I see it," writes Marshall, "the person we are talking about, the Negro woman, has been until recent times almost non-existent in the prose literature of the country" (1974 33). After citing examples from Stein and Faulkner to demonstrate her point that "she [the black woman] is denied the complexities, the contradictions, the ambiguities that make for a truly rich and credible character in fiction," Marshall asserts that

The purpose, the intent, was to deny the Negro woman her humanity. For if she was less than human all sorts of crimes could be committed against her and go unpunished. She could be exploited in the fields and kitchens, her body freely used, her children taken from her, her men castrated before her eyes, and yet in the mind of white America this abuse, this outrage, was somehow not serious, was in fact, justified. (34-35)

The assertion and affirmation of shared humanity is one task of black women writers, attainable through the development and articulation of a complex point of view that could no longer be ignored by "the mind of

white America." In *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, historical victimization appears as a crime, exploitation appears as a historical fact and not as the result of natural causes. The sense of abuse and outrage that Merle cannot contain--that demands response--constitutes Marshall's attempt to impress these facts and this point of view in an undeniable way on the mind of America.

In Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills* (1985), Willa Prescott Nedeed has been displaced from her comfortable middle-class black lifestyle and locked, along with her child, in a dungeon-like cellar. This has been done to her by her husband, who unjustly suspects her of bearing another man's child and thereby disrupting his sense of genealogical continuity and (literal) legitimacy. Her escape from this imprisonment, a rising up (or uprising) which occurs as the culmination of her search for an independent identity, can take place only after she puts into question a social role as bourgeois wife and mother which she had once accepted as natural. This questioning, an act of historical research as well as political critique, sheds light on the way in which black women have been doubly oppressed: by the politics of race which has oppressed all blacks, and by the politics of gender which has placed many women in a relationship of dependency on males. Legitimation and authority, then, appear doubly inaccessible to her. The result of this defamiliarization, this newfound sense of her own historical continuity, is the symbolic death of her previous identity, followed by her actual death.

While a sense of historical community might be located more commonly in the legacy passed from mother to daughter, here that legacy is dis-

placed so that the true understanding of her literal and symbolic imprisonment in her role as Mrs. Nedeed (as even her husband refers to her) comes from the Mrs. Nedeeds who came before. In this form of patriarchal relations, as Naylor represents it, identity is passed not from mother to daughter, but from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. Legitimacy is seen then as something possessed by males, something that a woman can attain only through a relationship with a man who possesses it. Legitimacy is not something that women can possess independently of men, either individually or as a group.

During the initial period of her imprisonment in the basement, her sense of powerlessness as a victim seems overwhelming. Furthermore, her suffering as a black woman--even as a relatively wealthy one--seems not to leave a mark on history. Her sense of the injustice of the crime being perpetrated against her is gradually compounded by her sense that an equally great injustice is being committed in that her testimony--and that of her predecessors--is given no credence, has in fact no hearers. As her sense of imminent death gathers, she reflects that there will be no witness to narrate her story, none to articulate the shared history of oppression that she has discovered:

She would leave it all very soon, but there should be somebody to pity this. And there would be no one. Their bodies would be carried away, dumped somewhere, and left unmourned because no one would know. But didn't she know? (91)

The sense of aphasia suggested in this passage, the sense that the history of black women has been unrecorded, their sufferings unmourned, is pervasive in the literature they have produced. In Lyotard's use of the phrase, this denial to the victim of the means to testify constitutes a wrong:

This is what a wrong [tort] would be: a damage [dommage] accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage. This is the case if the victim is deprived of life, or of all his or her liberties, or of the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply of the right to testify to the damage, or even more simply if the testifying phrase is itself deprived of authority In all of these cases, to the privation constituted by the damage there is added the impossibility of bringing it to the knowledge of others, and in particular to the knowledge of a tribunal. (1988 5)

Naylor's almost-Benjaminian sense of the historiographical vulnerability of the dead¹⁷ leads finally, as the last line of the quotation suggests, to the first trace of Willa's creation of a new identity, to a willingness to impose her presence on the historical record. Before that can be accomplished however she must confront the legacy of her dead predecessors, women for whom there has been no one to pity--until she is forced to.

Like many basements and attics, hers contains the old family heirlooms and keepsakes, objects bearing in them the records of family history. When Willa learns to see them as *evidence*, however, a remarkable history begins to unfold. While looking for some material in which to wrap the body of her son, she finds yards of lace--ironically, an antique bridal veil worn by the first Mrs. Nedeed--wound around an old bible, dated 1837 and inscribed with the name Luwana Packerville. The termination of Willa's forward genealogical trajectory, constituted by her imprisonment and the death of her young son, thus coincides with her discovery of another linkage, one that links her instead to the family past. A sense

¹⁷ Benjamin writes that "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious" (255).

of historical continuity begins to develop as she covers the boy's body with the old lace.

Yes, you looked like your grandmother. And the mother before that. And the mother before that. Oh, my baby, what have I done to you? With horror she saw the answers forming through image after image strung out by white hot links webbing themselves among the crevices in her brain. Her hand clawed around the Bible and she buried her head deeper into the lace-covered body, but it was too late to block them out. (93-94)

The presence of the antique lace and the old family bible--a traditional repository of the chronicle of family histories--signals that the answer to this apparently personal question will only be found in historical enlightenment. The first Mrs. Nedeed, Willa learns, was removed from a condition of literal slavery in order to become the wife of Luther Nedeed, who had bought her from her master. The documents that Willa reads permit her to reconstruct the woman's gradual realization that she has really exchanged one form of slavery for another, that her non-person status as a slave is, to some degree, left unaltered in her transformation to Mrs. Nedeed. Willa finds traces of her own experience in the diary entries written in Luwana Packerville's bible and in the records left by subsequent Mrs. Nedeeds: in the desperate story that is revealed in the recipes left by Evelyn Creton, and in the photograph album left by Priscilla McGuire. The story of each of the former Mrs. Nedeeds is the story of an erosion of personal identity. The loss of name (identity) that is sometimes an aspect of marriage, for instance, figures in the novel as an element in the dissolution of the subjectivity of the women as they are reduced to a series of 'Mrs. Nedeeds' and driven mad.¹⁸

¹⁸ Margaret Homans writes that in *Linden Hills*, "slavery multiplies the condition of the wife: the novel suggests that what whites do to blacks, (some) black men have done to black women" (378). Furthermore, "most of the documents Willa discovers in the basement are a record simply of effacement and suffering" (379).

As Priscilla McGuire gradually loses her identity and integrity as a woman and becomes instead a function of her husband's (and son's) identity, her face begins to disappear from the photographs. At first it seems more and more that she is photographed in the shadows, but finally her face appears utterly without features, "a beige blur between the shadows cast by the two grown men [husband and son] on each side of her. The entire face, the size of a large thumbprint, had been removed. This had been done on purpose." Then, "Over and over, page after page, the smeared hole gaped out into the dim light She came to the last photograph. And scrawled across the empty hole in lilac-colored ink was the word *me*" (249).

Like Willa's reaction to the traces of the earlier Mrs. Neededs, Luwana and Evelyn, her first reaction to this progressive self-effacement is horror. But this horror is transformed into the elements of a sense of historical community, the recognition of a shared pattern of (forced) self-annihilation crossing over several generations of married life. "*I knew you would come*," the missing face seems to say to her, "*and I'm so pleased*" (249). While the ultimate fate of the other Mrs. Nedeeds is unclear, Willa is able, in a sense, finally to reassert her own identity as a result of her comprehension of the systematic oppression of her predecessors. Her response to the missing face of the photograph is to try to locate her own face, first by touching it, then by seeking her reflection in a pot of water. "No doubt remained--she was there" (268). This understanding, reached through a historical confrontation as well as a personal objective crisis leads her to a new perspective on her life,

and a new basis for action. "Now that she had actually seen and accepted reality For whatever it was worth, she could rebuild" (268).

An interesting juxtaposition exists in the main plot of the novel, as Willie and Lester, two young men who have just witnessed a woman's suicide, encounter Dr. Braithwaite, a renowned history professor whose speciality is black American history. While Willa's understanding of history leads her to "rebuild," Braithwaite's leads to a social and political paralysis. In a restatement of the loss of identity to which Willa has been subjected, Braithwaite responds to the suicide by saying "'the authorities are going to have to locate her husband. This will be a crushing blow for Howard I would hate to be in his shoes when he finds out. Of all people, for it to be his wife His wife'" (252). To this elision of the wife's identity, Willie replies "'Her name was Laurel '" The historiographic implications in this brief interchange are amplified in the rest of the scene. Braithwaite, a world authority in his field, considered for the Nobel Prize, appropriates history rather differently than does Willa. From his position of academic distance and social privilege, he feels removed from any personal historical responsibility as a historical agent. Just as Willa begins to understand her identity and realize her position and responsibilities in history, Braithwaite refuses his:

'I'm talking about not being able to stop the course of human history, a collective history or an individual one. You can delay the inevitable, set up roadblocks and detours if you will, but that personal tragedy today was just a minute part of a greater tragedy that has afflicted this community for decades.' (257)

His passive acceptance of history as destiny is complicated by his attitude toward historiography, a position that seems to combine a pseudo-

objective stance expressed in a reference to photographic realism, and a fairly shallow sort of relativism:

'Was slavery wrong? It would depend on who you were talking to and when There are no absolute truths, and the best historians know that. You strive to capture a moment of time, and if your work is done properly, history becomes a written photograph. Put your subject too much in the shade, too much in the light, dare to have even a fingernail touch the lens or any evidence of your personal presence, and you've invalidated it. (261)

Braithwaite's blind spot becomes evident in his occlusion of the victim from the suicide, in his obvious and inevitable intrusion into his historiographical narratives, and most of all perhaps in his references to photographs--the medium through which Willa is meanwhile confronting history in the person of Priscilla McGuire whose photographic (non)image presents an implicit critique of Braithwaite's pseudo-objectivity.¹⁹ The history confronted both by Willa and by Willie is profoundly affected by the occlusion of black women not only by white society but also by black men such as Braithwaite (who is benignly patriarchal) and her husband, Luther Nedeed (who is not so benign).

As the similarity in their names suggests²⁰, there is an affinity between Willa and Willie, one based on the assumption of historical responsibility through the exercise of the will. At the moment that Will-

¹⁹ Catherine C. Ward contrasts Willa and Braithwaite as historians, finding the latter "irresponsible." Willa's historical quest, however, "implies that the history of women is not found in books and official archives but . . . in the mundane records of women's daily lives" (17-18)

²⁰ In many ways, Willie and Willa move in parallel directions, both learning to assert their will as a result of their experiences in the novel. While Willie's exploration has been into the geographical (synchronic) Linden Hills, Willa's has been into the historical (diachronic) dimension of it. Although Willa dies, Willie lives on having learned something of the lesson she exemplifies.

he is falling to sleep with the opening lines of a poem in his mind, ("There is a man in a house at the bottom of the hill. And his wife has no name" (277)), that woman is trying to reconstruct her identity. Willa's inarticulately lamenting voice has been heard but not recognized in the neighborhood for days at this point. "The cry," writes Ward, "is the lamentation of generations of women whose existence has been denied" (79). It constitutes a kind of inarticulate testimony (like that, perhaps, of Jim Bond), a "plea for lost time" (60).

At the moment of re-establishing her identity, naming herself anew, she is able to transform her testimony from a cry of lamentation into articulate speech and thought and rational (within its context) action. "Her name was Willa Prescott Nedeed. After thinking about it for hours, she knew she was safe starting from there" (277). At this moment, she claims an identity. Furthermore, as her name suggests, unlike Braithwaite, she realizes the importance of personal will in history, and the necessity of realizing and asserting her individuality as a woman. She also begins to understand the degree to which she has acceded to her elision from the narrative, and the consequent need for her to will a change if she is to rise up, to escape from her imprisonment.

Upstairs, she had left an identity that was rightfully hers, that she had worked hard to achieve. Many women wouldn't have chosen it, but she did She was sitting there now, filthy, cold, and hungry, because she, Willa Prescott Nedeed, had walked down twelve concrete steps. And since that was the truth--the pure, irreducible truth--whenever she was good and ready, she could walk back up. (280)

The new sense of purpose that she has developed, however, is not connected to a rejection of her role as a housewife, but to a rejection of any identity that is unthinkingly accepted. Her emergence from the basement at Christmas, filthy and emaciated, bearing the body of her son, cul-

minates in the destruction by fire of the house and its inhabitants, suggesting the destruction of the bourgeois patriarchal structure that had imprisoned her. Even with the partial entry of blacks into hegemonic power, *Linden Hills* suggests that this structure continues frequently to exclude women, to erode the traditional sources of strength in black culture, and to dehumanize all who accept its values.

Only through the horror of her imprisonment and the death of her son is she brought to the point where she can conceive of a legitimate historical narrative built from her perspective as a black woman, a narrative whose urgency and validity eclipses the pseudo-objectivity of Braithwaite. And only once she has constructed a coherent narrative from this point of view can she establish a clear understanding of what she must do in the present. Being beyond the limits of what is reasonable according to the prevailing *sensus communis*, the ex-centric coherence she discovers appears inevitably as madness, one of the standard categories by which jarring witness have been disqualified.

In Gayle Jones' *Corregidora* (1975), one character tells how his father, a blacksmith, had put every cent he could save into the purchase of a small plot of land "'so the generations after him would always have land to live on'" (78). When, after his death, his widow attempts to claim the land at the courthouse the deed is missing, a historical document torn from the book. The son has no choice but to accept this legal disinheritance since "'they ain't nothing you can do when they tear the pages out of the book and they ain't no record of it. They probably burned the pages'" (78). By this account, blacks, as a group, are allowed

no legitimate claim to ownership that cannot be rescinded at the whim of the whites in power.²¹ The women whose history forms the central narrative of *Corregidora* are obsessed with the historiographic implications of the ability of those in power retroactively and selectively to edit the historical record.

Unlike *Linden Hills* which establishes a historical line of descent from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law, *Corregidora* traces a line of matriarchal descent over four generations of women. The bond that joins these women is forged in response to historical and historiographic injustices typified by the means used by white authorities to the seize land belonging to blacks: "'My grandmama,'" says Ursa, "'said when they did away with slavery down there they burned all the slavery papers so it would be like they never had it'" (9). In order to keep this historical record alive,

'My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn't live through and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through and we were suppose to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget. Even though they'd burned everything to play like it didn't never happen.

This is their collective strategy to avoid the Lyotardian predicament described in *Linden Hills* whereby there is no one to remember what happened, no one to pity the victims. In fact their main purpose in life seems to be to preserve this memory-- even the bearing of children is justified with reference to passing the memory through generations. Having been beaten by her husband, Ursa becomes sterile, unable to continue bearing the generations that can preserve the memories of historical

²¹ A similar event is depicted in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, when Jake is murdered by powerful whites for land that is legally his.

brutality. But the story of Ursa's brutalization is interwoven with the historical accounts of the brutalization of her predecessors, by working through this collective memory, and her relation to it as a woman who cannot bear children, Ursa comes to terms with her present situation, much as Naylor's Willa had to work through the accumulated past of her predecessors in order to come to terms with her s

The great-grandmother, with the five-year-old Ursa in her lap, "told the same story over and over." She tells of her life as a slave to Corregidora, a

Portuguese seaman turned plantation owner [who] took her out of the field when she was still a child and put her to work in his whorehouse while she was a child 'He would take me hisself first and said he was breaking me in. Then he started bringing other men and they would give me money and I had to give it over to him' (10-11)²²

If these women do not preserve this history, certainly no one else will. And while Ursa is unsure how to respond to it, she is in no doubt of the intensity of the sense of duty bequeathed to her by preceding generations. When, at five, she questions the truth of the story, she is slapped in order to put such doubts to rest and told that her mission in life is to remember:

'Because they didn't want to leave no evidence of what they done--so it couldn't be held against them. And I'm leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up the evidence, we got to have evidence to hold up. That's why

²² Eugene Genovese mentions Portuguese slaveowners in Brazil as an extreme example of the sexual exploitation that was common to slavery (423-25).

they burned all the papers, so there wouldn't be no evidence to hold up against them.' (14) ²³

The implied teleology here suggests an end point at which all the rights and wrongs of history will be reckoned, a point analogous to the millenarian moment of post-diaspora reunification alluded to in Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, the moment implicit in Walsh and explicit in Benjamin at which the past becomes "citable in all its instances." The role inherited by Ursa is that of continuing the generations until this apocalyptic moment of judgment and final justice, since, as her grandmother tells her, "*They can burn papers but they can't burn conscious, Ursa. And that's what makes the evidence. And that's what makes the verdict*" (22). If it comes, it will be a verdict that will rectify all the "Days that were pages of hysteria." In fact, "Their survival depended on suppressed hysteria" (59) as Corregidora incestuously fathers children in subsequent generations even while living off the prostitution he forces them into.

The most graphic incident narrated concerns a couple on an adjacent coffee plantation, and suggests the destructive effect of slavery on sexual relationships between blacks, as black women--married or not--were expected to be sexually available to any white man. The sexual violence

²³ Regarding the status of evidence concerning the murder of a black woman, treatment which registers the social position of black women, one character says:

'she wasn't nothing but a nigger woman to the police. You know they ain't gon take they time to find out nothing about a nigger woman . . . as soon as you leave, they say, "Here put it in the nigger file." That mean they get to it if they can. And most times they can't. Naw, they don't say put it in the nigger file, they say put it in the *nigger woman* file, which means they ain't gon never get to it.' (134)

contained in this brief episode becomes an integral part of the novel's thematic structure.

'The master shipped her husband out of bed and got in the bed with her and just as soon as he was getting ready to go in her she cut off his thing with a razor she had hid under the pillow and he bled to death, and then the next day they came and got her and her husband. They cut off her husband's penis and stuffed it in her mouth, and then they hanged her. They let him bleed to death. They made her watch and then they hanged her.' (67)

The crushing of black resistance in this narrative suggests the power and ruthlessness of the dominant white group who imposed and enforced slavery, sexual and otherwise. In fact, blacks were not often in a position to resist this brutal dehumanization actively, and as Jones shows, the disjunction between what they felt and how they could act ultimately and inevitably affects their relationships, with ramifications reaching down to the present. The sense of possession moves back through history in her mother's story *"about the Portuguese who fingered your genitals His pussy. 'The Portuguese who bought slaves paid attention only to the genitals.' Slapped you across the cunt till it was bluer than black. Concubine daughter"* (54). And again in the warning Corregidora delivers, *"I don't want nothin black fucking with my pussy"* (127).

This is the history that is passed down in Ursa's family, from mother to daughter, from grand- and great-grandmother to daughter. And there is a related injunction passed down. Not only must historical events be remembered, but even more difficult perhaps, the ideological after-effects of that history must be faced and dealt with. Ursa's mother tells her:

'They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they didn't burn what they put in their minds. We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to

bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood.'
(72)

What has been put in their minds is the memory of the violence committed against them as blacks, as women. It carries over as a residue from the slave era when male-female relationships and family relationships were subject to the disruptions brought on by the slaveowners who asserted a right to sexual possession of black women (or sale of their husbands and children).²⁴ These patterns have been put into their minds and continue to operate even in the absence of the white owner who instigated the destructive behavior. As Ursa tells Mutt, "*Didn't I tell you you taught me what Corregidora taught Great Gram. He taught her to use the kind of words she did,*" words like "*'You fucking me, bastard'*" (76). The sense of degradation belied by these words exemplifies the legacy of gender relations inherited by Ursa's generation. It is this self-destructive attitude internalized from the centuries of slavery that structures Ursa's relationships with men, and, of course, lies behind the brutality of black men to women in this novel. The disruption of normal sexual relationships enforced by the slaveowner tends to lend a violent urgency to black male possessiveness even generations after. This legacy, as Jones represents it, leaves the men prone to sexual violence and the women unable to reconcile hate and desire, prone to an inability to respond sexually. The history of slavery is thus inscribed in their present behavior. Since the

²⁴ The other main form of disruption of the family and social fabric was the result of the practice of selling black children at an early age without regard for family relationships. This practice, one aspect of the diaspora, is described over and over in these novels. In *Corregidora*, when Ursa questions the all-female make-up of her family over four generations, her mother replies: "*'I think there was some boys. I think they told me there was some boys, but Corregidora sold the boys off'*" (61).

violent sexual possession is repeated to some degree in the relations obtaining between black men and women of Ursa's generation, that suppressed hysteria is repeated as well. Reflecting back on her relationship with Mutt, and its violent end, she remembers him

Talking about his pussy. Asking me to let him see his pussy
Let me feel my pussy. The center of a woman's being. Is it?
. . . . Is that the way you treat someone you love? Even my
clenched fists couldn't stop the fall. That old man
[Corregidora] still howls inside me. (48)

And she bears a literal scar where her husband's violence has led to a hysterectomy. This is added to the list of historical injustices awaiting the time when testimony can be given, when the voices of black women can be heard.

For Ursa, the bearing of children that has been an integral part of the preparation for bearing witness becomes an impossibility. Her position is thus greatly complicated by her inability to bear children, an inability that alters her place in the family's collective sense of the necessity of making generations who will continue to preserve the past until it can be heard as testimony. It is this rupture in the generational passage of the legacy that forces Ursa to reconsider her own personal position. Deprived even of the legitimacy that inheres in the preservation of the memory of slavery, she must rethink her relation to that memory.

In an interview, Jones stated that in writing *Corregidora*

I was particularly concerned with getting across a sense of an intimate history, particularly a personal history, and to contrast it with the broad, impersonal telling of the *Corregidora* story. Thus, one reason for Ursa's telling her story and her mother's story is to contrast them with the 'epic,' almost impersonal history of *Corregidora*. (Tate 92)

The epic story that the older women tell carries a great moral weight in the novel, but the weight of the past is a double-edged sword. While it

is possible to locate a discourse of liberation in it, the obsessive attachment to the past nevertheless leads to the inability of the characters to rise above it in the present.²⁵ Forced by her physical crisis to redefine her place in the generational responsibility of succession, she realizes that not only her great-grandmother and grandmother--slaves to Corregidora--have histories. In order to understand the recent past that has been overwhelmed by the distant "epic" slave past, she decides to visit her mother, a woman who was not possessed by Corregidora, but whose life has been lived in his shadow. For this reason the mother is acutely aware of the necessity to understand what it has done to their minds and to burn it out while not losing sight of the history that produced them. She understands this, but does not have enough distance on the legacy of the past to overcome its destructive effects.

Her mother is not at all free of the epic past that has obsessed the Corregidora women. Although Ursa specifically asks to hear her mother's personal memories, the mother slips back periodically into the further past:

²⁵Richard Barksdale writes that

The historical roots of sexual conflict are clearly delineated. The novel asserts that the black woman's sexual slavery began with slavery--a time when the system granted every master and every white male overseer the unchallenged right to use and abuse every female slave on the plantation according to his fancy. (404)

"So, over the years," he concludes, "there occurred a mirror-imaging exchange of power, and in his sexual relations with his women the black man replaced his former master" (407). Genovese points out that these "incidents of force or seduction under implicit threat of force must have taken a fearful toll. These women paid a high price . . . for it was they who suffered the violence and the attendant degradation of being held responsible for their own victimization" (428).

It was as if she had more than learned it off by heart, though. It was as if their memory, the memory of all the Corrigedora women, was her memory too, as strong with her as her own private memory, or almost as strong. (129)

This possession by the past affects her ability to respond in the present, to see her own life as having historical significance, prevents her from thinking about her own life in ways not provided for in the Corrigedora epic narrative. Because she cannot free herself from the obsession with the tale of (white) male brutality, she experiences difficulty in responding to the (black) man who does, for a while at least, offer her love. This is the lesson Ursa begins to absorb as her mind goes from real or imagined encounters with her ex-husband Mutt, to recitations of the epic, to recalling the story of her mother's failed attempt to reach beyond the limits of that epic past to embrace a contingent present.

Ursa finally realizes, as Keith Byermann writes, that "Keeping alive the story of Corrigedora and blaming Mutt for her troubles reveal more than a desire for justice; they also reveal evasion of one's own responsibility" (178). Leaving her mother, Ursa wonders if "now that Mama had gotten it all out, her own memory--at least to me anyway--maybe she and *some man* . . . But then, I was thinking, what had I done about my *own* life?" (132). The point here is not to deny the past, but to find a balance that can integrate that past with the present, to realize the way that the hangover from the past reaches into the present to poison it as well. Mutt, at one point, insists on a separation from the past: "Whichever way you look at it, we ain't them'" (151). The simplicity of this separation is lost on Ursa, however, who thinks that "the way I'd been brought up, it was almost as if I was." She then steps back from Mutt and thereby from the present--a physical and emotional distance aris-

ing from their different perspectives (151). And in fact, Mutt's violence toward her suggests that such a simple separation does not adequately represent their dilemma.

The rethinking of history--both personal and family--that takes place after her physical injury,²⁶ and after her visit to her mother, leads her to try to come to terms with the degree to which she has passively allowed an epic history to control her present reactions. Like her mother, Ursa has been unable to respond in the present, and the story of her relationship with Mutt and its failure becomes the subject of her memories in the final section of the novel. When she realizes this, she begins to re-interpret the meaning of the breakdown in her relationship in the light of her personal as well as her family or cultural history. This allows her to conceive of her relationship with Mutt in more complex terms than those bequeathed to her by the Corregidora story by integrating the insights derived from that story into the sense of interpersonal responsibility she has learned from her mother's narrative.

The penultimate section of the novel begins with a declaration of a new historical and personal perspective. "It was June 1969. I was forty-seven" (168).²⁷ When Mutt returns, she resumes her relationship with him in a confrontation combining all the elements of love and hate, fear and

²⁶ Byermann notes that just as the historical record can be altered, Mutt proves that bearing children as a form of bearing witness can be prevented as well, "destroy[ing] the truth itself by effacing the future" (178).

²⁷ This echoes Willa Nedeed's similar pronouncement. Such declarations often occur in these novels and constitute assertions of identity and historical agency on the part of these women that attempt to counter the marginality that has been their condition.

desire, past and present that have marked sexual relationships in the novel.

It was like I didn't know how much was me and Mutt and how much was Great Gram and Corregidora--like Mama when she had started talking like Great Gram. But was what Corregidora had done to *her*, to *them*, any worse than what Mutt had done to me, than what we had done to each other, than what Mama had done to Daddy, or what he had done to her in return? (184)

The result of this conflation is that she realizes in this moment of mutual vulnerability, first, that she too has power: "'I could kill you," she realizes in what might otherwise be a moment of sexual submission during fellatio. If the incident recounted earlier when the dead man's severed penis was put into his widow's mouth records a moment of degradation imposed by the dominance and brutality of a slave owner, it is up to Ursa and Mutt to throw off the degradation, to make their act of sexual communion into an act of mutual tenderness rather than to repeat it as an act of violence signifying a dominance/submission relationship. Corregidora is long dead; and their sexual relationship must escape from the brutal definitions he had imposed upon it, must somehow recuperate a sense of love and equality. Gradually the implications of this mutual vulnerability become clear to both of them. "'I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you,'" Mutt says in response to the violence of her statement. "He shook me till I fell against him crying. 'I don't want a kind of man that'll hurt me neither,' I said. He held me tight" (185).

In the end she is able, very tentatively, to balance the history that has had such a deleterious effect on them both--he violent and jealous, she unresponsive and withdrawn--with a sense of personal responsibility that accepts the situation and seeks whatever tenderness can be found. This resolution, partial though it is, emerges in Cor-

regidora only with the new understanding of black history, history not as it is conceived by the dominant white community but also not as the epic of black suffering whose unalterable shadow looms over every present act. Finally, the history of slavery appears as a powerful narrative that must be assimilated before it is possible to go on in the present, to understand its effects on present attitudes and how the more destructive effects might be tempered. The problem with the epic past of the *Corregidora* women is not that it is untrue, inaccurate, or need not be preserved, but that by itself it does not provide the categories by which its racist and sexist brutality can be overcome, thus making life livable in the present. It only provides a witness, a narrative description. Until the millenarian verdict is pronounced, the testimony must be preserved, but in order to live in the present, the racist and sexist images that are its legacy must be confronted and overcome. As Ursa's mother realizes, "We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound" (72).

Melvin Dixon writes that the word '*Corregidora*,' comes from a Portuguese term meaning 'a former judicial magistrate.' If the slaveowner *Corregidora* once passed judgement on these women and sentenced them, then Ursa *Corregidora*, who still bears the name and lives out the legacy of the sentence, herself becomes a female judge who is

charged by the women in her family to 'correct' the historical invisibility they have suffered, 'to give evidence' of their abuse, and 'to make generations' as a defense against their further displacement and annihilation Ursa must bring justice to bear upon [*Corregidora's*] past exploitation of blacks as slaves and women as whores and upon his haunting contamination of her present life. (110)

The rupture that occurs in Ursa's life enables her finally to use her historical legacy as a tool with which to rethink the present on other terms

than those contained in the story of the past she inherits. But first the rupture must take place that enables her to possess the past rather than being possessed by it. By itself, history is not enough to sustain, not even the vital history from the margins that the Corregidora women keep alive. Because they seem to live only for that witness, they ultimately remain captive to it--indeed their continued enslavement is registered in the fact that they keep the name of the slaveowner for generations. It is Ursa's task to accept the contingent present, to live in the absence of faith in a final tribunal yet to maintain her jarring testimony and use the past to develop a narrative sufficient to sustain her in the present--as an individual, and as a member of a specific historical community.

Octavia Butler is known primarily as a writer of science fiction. Her novel *Kindred* (1979), while not belonging to that genre, does display one element often associated with it--time travel. Dana, the main character, inexplicably finds herself thrust one hundred and fifty years into the past, and into antebellum Maryland from her native California. As a modern black woman suddenly transposed into a slave culture, she is forced to confront a historical reality quite remote from anything she has experienced before. The temporal rupture not only distances her from her present (1976) reality, but has the effect of defamiliarizing both the past, whose history she had thought she knew something about, and the present, which now comes to seem less 'natural' and more the result of social and historical processes. Butler herself has referred to the novel as "a grim fantasy" (xii) rather than as science fiction, perhaps because it discourages questions concerning the mechanics of the temporal and geographi-

cal shifts and concentrates instead on the emotional and intellectual processes of Dana--and to a lesser degree, her white husband Kevin--as they come to terms with the cultural disorientation of the situation.²⁸

In an interesting variation on the narrative device employed much earlier by Harper and Hopkins, a free woman with whom the reader can, presumably, identify, is suddenly remanded into slavery so that the condition of slavery--as well as history itself--is defamiliarized and made more immediate. The literal impingement of the past upon her present forces onto Dana a new sense of the reality of historical events. After her first brief sojourn into the past, she is shocked and frightened but soon begins to lose the immediacy of the experience. "'I don't have a name for the thing that happened to me, but I don't feel safe any more,'" she says, adding, "'As real as the whole episode was . . . it's beginning to recede from me . . . like something I saw on television or read about--like something I got second hand'" (17). She does not at first understand what has happened, that she has been in the historical past. But before the novel is through, the reality of that past comes to rival the present in its immediacy. And as she gradually realizes, the historical past was as real as the present--which is also historical, though perhaps less transparently so. While this observation may seem self-evident, the contingent nature of all reality that is usually taken for granted as 'normal' is one of the themes of this novel.

²⁸ Sandra Govan notes the historical accuracy of the novel: "Without turning to an actual slave narrative, there is probably no more vivid depiction of life on an Eastern Shore plantation than that found in *Kindred*. The composite rendering is as exact as detailed research could make it" (94).

Dana is transported into the past at moments of danger to Rufus, the white son of the plantation owner, whose life she saves each time. In their first conversation, Rufus refers to her casually as a "nigger" (24), a word that begins to make clear a non-synchronicity that is not just historical, but ideological as well. When Rufus mentions, without betraying a sense that the reality he refers to is in any way cruel or unusual, the whip that his father uses on "niggers and horses" (26), she begins to understand. As well, the shock that Rufus and his parents experience at Dana's way of dressing ("wearing pants like a man" (22)) registers the mutual incomprehension of these social groups. Countering this sense of alienation is a concurrent feeling of mutual attraction, of sameness that Dana cannot account for until she begins to understand, through recollections of genealogies absorbed as a child, that Rufus is her own ancestor. The complexity of their relationship stems from the fact that no matter how despicable he may sometimes seem, Dana knows that he must be helped to live at least long enough to father the child that will become her forbear. The mother of that child, Alice, is a slave whose life is ruined by Rufus: his violence, jealousy and lust destroy any possibility for happiness, love, or sense of black community she attempts to establish. Some kind of acceptance of this brutality must be reached, however, if Dana is to fulfill her historical role, enabling the present to come into being.

It is indeed a role, in two senses. Her role as a historical agent enabling her own genealogy, if unconventional, is clear enough. Her role as an agent in a wider historical as well as personal sense is more ambiguous however. Her initial incomprehension resolves into a bewildered acceptance of her peculiar circumstances, and a probing into the possibilities for concrete action, both on her own part and on the part of

other slaves for whom resistance of any kind is both a necessity and a near impossibility. "'I hate to think of you playing the part of a slave at all,'" (79) says Kevin. By the end, the problem of the degree to which she is playing a part separate from her 'real' 1976 identity--a role in a theatrical sense--and the degree to which she is identical to her historical role--in the sense of historical agency--is problematic. The conflation of these two positions begins early, as she realizes that purely out of self-interest, concern for self-preservation, she must begin an ideological campaign to change Rufus, "'to keep him from growing up into a red-haired version of his father'" (81). At this point she is attempting to intervene in history more than simply to ensure its seamless production of her present.

A dialectical relation operates between, on the one hand, her ability to play the role convincingly for others, and on the other, a more essential identification with that role which threatens to overwhelm her present life. Very early in the novel this dialectical interplay of immediacy and distance is brought home as Dana witnesses a not-uncommon scene. A black man, visiting his wife without white authorization, is caught by white patrollers who break into their cabin, pull them naked from their bed, and tie the man to a tree, insulting the woman while preparing to whip the man. As the whipping proceeds, the man's initial stoicism gives way to screams of pain. "I could literally smell his sweat," Dana says,

hear every ragged breath, every cry, every cut of the whip. I could see his body jerking, convulsing, straining against the rope as his screaming went on and on. My stomach heaved, and I had to force myself to stay where I was and keep quiet I shut my eyes and tensed my muscles against an urge to vomit. (36)

Dana's response to this brutality is, of course, a sense of shock that is registered viscerally as well as emotionally and intellectually. Her initial reference point, a modern reified one, is overcome by the immediacy of this scene:

I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard the well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. I was probably less prepared for the reality than the child crying not far from me. (36)

Because the violence is not within the realm of what is normal for her, the scene is more difficult to cope with for Dana than it is for the child whose parents are being brutalized. If the banality of the television images is rejected, she does connect the scene to her present in two ways. First she realizes the identity of the group perpetrating these acts, "breaking in doors and beating and otherwise torturing black people" (37). These were members of the infamous 'patrols': "Groups of young whites who ostensibly maintained order among the slaves. Patrols. Fore-runners of the Ku Klux Klan." The second connection she makes across history is even more significant, as she realizes from the names she hears that these brutalized slaves "were my relatives, my ancestors" (37). The sense of relation here acts not only as a plot device but also as a metaphor in the sense alluded to earlier--the dispersal and recovery of the family suggesting the black diaspora and the hope of reunification. And Dana's sense of spectatorship, still more or less unproblematic at this point, begins to assume the shape of a problem. If she becomes unable to maintain her spectatorial distance as she has done here, now then is she to intervene in the historical past once the common sense of the situation in the antebellum south takes on the appearance of normality?

When one of the patrollers returns, Dana's spectatorial distance is completely collapsed and her sense of relation confirmed as she is mistaken for the wife of the beaten man, then made a victim of an attempted rape.²⁹ The scene anticipates the final confrontation between Dana and Rufus, but while the coercion here is overt and physically violent, later it will be slightly more subtle. Initially surprised at her ability to take punishment as she is beaten, when the moment comes in which she could fight back, she cannot:

He had leaned down close to me, pinning me flat on my back. I raised my hands to his face, my fingers partly covering his eyes. In that instant, I knew I could stop him, cripple him, in this primitive age destroy him . . . I had only to move my fingers a little and jab them into the soft tissues, gouge away his sight and give him more agony than he was giving me. (42)

But she cannot act: "The thought sickened me, froze my hands where they were. I had to do it! But I couldn't . . . My squeamishness belonged in another age, but I'd brought it along with me."

Later in the novel, however, after witnessing and suffering much brutality, her ability to respond alters. This relation of immediacy and distance, past and present, is mediated by the necessity of action, a necessity that connects, finally, both sides of the dialectic. "I began to realize," she says,

why Kevin and I had fitted so easily into this time. We weren't really in. We were observers watching a show. We were watching history happen around us. And we were actors . . . we humored the people around us by pretending to be like them. But we were poor actors . . . We never forgot that we were acting. (98)

²⁹ While Dana clearly understands it as a rape attempt, the legal or epistemological ramifications that Butler explores here become more complex. The white patroller would not perhaps see it as rape since a black woman possessed no human rights.

This sense of separation diminishes first in her unsuccessful attempt to intervene in Rufus's ideological education, but even more so in her decision to teach Nigel, a slave to read and write. The beating she receives when the owner discovers her teaching makes it impossible to maintain the initial safe distance on the situation that guaranteed her orientation. "In a place like this," she wonders, "how could a woman be sure of anything. And then there was history" (40).

The defamiliarization that takes place alters not only her view of this historical past. She begins to make other connections as well with her own century--the racism of Nazi Germany, or that of contemporary South Africa. The imperative for some sort of engagement in present political/historical realities results from the historical encounter. If what seems normal or taken for granted in the past to its inhabitants seems contingent and brutal to a visitor from the present, presumably that same present could seem equally brutal and contingent, equally historical and ideological rather than natural or normal, to a visitor from the outside. And that is, of course, what Dana and Kevin become by the end of their series of disorienting experiences in the antebellum south. Returning disoriented to their present, fully at home in neither historical period, their experiences in the past inform their reactions to the present but their commitment begins to be more to the past because of the greater periods of time spent there. "You might be able to go through this whole experience as an observer," she tells Kevin,

I can understand that because most of the time, I'm still an observer. It's protection. It's nineteen seventy-six shielding and cushioning eighteen nineteen for me. But now and then . . . I can't maintain the distance. I'm drawn all the way into eighteen nineteen, and I don't know what to do. I ought to be doing something though. I know that. (101)

Before too long, Kevin becomes active in the anti-slavery movement and in helping slaves to escape to the north.

After witnessing children of the slaves enacting the rituals of the slave auction as a game, Dana is struck by the way that such a brutal reality is integrated into everyday life. Reflecting on her own sense of detachment or that of Kevin, and further, the children's acceptance of the slave market and their incorporation of it into their games, Dana comments, "The ease seemed so frightening . . . I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery" (101). It is much easier to accept it than to act against it for two reasons, both of which are dramatized in the novel. The first is the severity of the punishment of those who break the rules. In the absence of human rights, such punishment could be brutal, even fatal. Second, and more subtly, it is simply much easier just to go along with the system. As a favored slave on the plantation, this temptation becomes crucial for Dana. But at what point does the reality she endures--or witnesses--become so unacceptable that suicide or murder, previously unthinkable in themselves, become thinkable options? She comes close on a number of occasions, but the novel's encounters across history come to a close when Rufus attempts to rape her. Yet even then Dana's temptation to passivity is strong:

I realized how easy it would be for me to continue to be still and forgive him even this. So easy, in spite of all my talk. But it would be so hard to raise the knife, drive it into the flesh . . . So hard to kill. (259-60)

At this point she realizes the slave mentality that is behind those thoughts and rejects it. "A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her" (260). She then chooses what seems to her the harder course of action--murder. Yet the difficulty of resisting the temptation to accede

to the prevailing *sensus communis*--antagonistic to her though it is--is immense. Given the legal force that the slave system exercised to demolish all trace of resistance, the level of resistance managed, on a covert day-to-day basis, as well as on the more spectacular level of escape, by the slaves who do not have Dana's historical perspective on the situation is impressive to her.³⁰

Dana's position balances uneasily between three versions of reality: her own 'normal' present, the reality of the slave community she is forced to join, and the reality of the slaveowners with whom she is forced to associate. Through the juxtaposition of these three versions of reality, the contingency of any particular *sensus communis* is foregrounded along with the violence that underlies the successful imposition of the point of view of one particular social group at the expense of another. The normal reality of her present includes more subtle or distanced oppression: the negative reactions of relatives on both sides when she and her white partner marry, and her dependence on "the slave market" (52) of temporary labor agencies,³¹ as well as larger political realities such as the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. The normal reality of oppression experienced by the slaves has as a fundamental condition of possibility the difficulty of imagining another set of political relations. While the condition of slavery, as Butler represents it, seems at times unlivable, the possibility of escape is quite negligible, and political

³⁰ Butler once succinctly remarked in an interview: "I began writing about power because I had so little" (Govan 96).

³¹ In his introduction to the novel, Robert Crossley observes that in certain respects, Dana's modern working life "operates as a benign ghostly version of institution slavery's auction block" (x1).

agitation leading to reform is simply suicidal. Thus the horizon of possibility for the slaves is narrowly circumscribed, and the *sensus communis* within which they live is tenuously balanced between a frustrated but irrepressible desire for freedom and, as the children's game illustrates, an inevitable assumption of the role of slave. The recognition by Dana of the normal reality of slaveowners is perhaps most shocking for her. It is a realization that Weylin, Rufus's slave-owner father, is not even a particularly evil man, but is merely an ordinary man who lives, as most people do, within the orthodox bounds of the common sense reality of his time and place.

Butler demonstrates that it is difficult for anyone to get outside those bounds. The difficulty of transcending one's own ideological position is surmounted in Dana's case through the narrative sleight of hand that periodically dislocates her--ideologically as well as geographically and temporally. This problem of orthodoxy is faced more directly, however, as she attempts--unsuccessfully--to show Rufus another legitimate viewpoint on reality. Where Merle succeeds in guiding Saul over this line in Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, Dana is forced to admit defeat. When affirmed by the prevailing *sensus communis*, it is not impossible, she realizes, to turn some people into slaves, and it is very easy for others to become slaveowners. It is very difficult, however, to convince people to make an ideological break with the common sense reality that provides them with the definitions of themselves as individuals and as a community, definitions that locate them--for better or for worse--in the social world.

In the "Author's Note" which introduces *Dessa Rose* (1986), Sherley Anne Williams relates her novel first to two separate historical incidents, then to a more general reflection on power and historical discourse. In the first incident,

A pregnant black woman helped to lead an uprising on a coffle (a group of slaves chained together and herded, usually to market) in 1829 in Kentucky. Caught and convicted, she was sentenced to death; her hanging, however, was delayed until after the birth of her baby. (ix)

The delay, presumably, was due to the prospective market value of the baby. In the second, historically unrelated, incident, "a white woman living on an isolated farm" in North Carolina in 1830 "was reported to have given sanctuary to runaway slaves" (ix). Williams's sense of regret "that these two women never met" is registered in her imaginative re-writing of these incidents so that they do meet.

Her more general deliberation on the writing of history begins with her admission of "being outraged by a certain, critically acclaimed novel . . . that travestied the as-told-to memoir of slave revolt leader Nat Turner" (ix). The novel she alludes to here, by William Styron, was found offensive by a number of black writers--an example of the fact that even on those occasions when black history has found its way into mainstream literary discourse, sufficient attention is not always paid to the perspective of that community.³² "Afro-Americans," she writes,

³² Styron's novel resulted in the publication of a collection of critical essays dealing with this problem: *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond* (ed. John Henrik Clarke. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968). See Fleishman's discussion of this debate in *The English Historical Novel* (ix-xii). Williams's Nathan seems to be a reference to Nat Turner, and a number of other intertextual references can be located in this novel as well. A story is told about a slave named Thomas who betrayed a black conspiracy to the plantation owners, and whose nickname, "Uncle Tom" has become anathema to the black community (20-21). Also, there is some correspondence, coincidental or otherwise, between Bertie Sutton (Rufel's husband) and Thomas Sutpen of *Absalom, Absalom!* and their

having survived by word of mouth--and made of that process a high art--remain at the mercy of literature and writing; often, these have betrayed us. I loved history as a child, until some clear-eyed young Negro pointed out, quite rightly, that there was no place in the American past I could go and be free. I now know that slavery eliminated neither heroism nor love; it provided occasions for their expressions. (ix-x)

The sense of alienation from both historical legitimacy and historical discourse, then, is countered in this act of imaginatively apprehending that history through a narration that tests and transgresses the limits of the *sensus communis* both of slave and of slaveowner. "Maybe it is only a metaphor, but I now own a summer in the 19th century" (x), writes Williams; but taking possession of that historical ground is not a simple process in *Dessa Rose*. The novel is in three main sections, and the different narrative point of view employed in each presents a different angle on Dessa Rose, a pregnant slave captured following an uprising, and on the possibilities for communication and understanding across the racial boundaries that seemed almost absolute at that time.

The first section, "The Darky," recounts the efforts of a white writer, Adam Nehemiah, to understand the actions of Dessa so that he can include her in his book on slave revolts, a book that he hopes will find a wide audience among slaveowners who fear the outbreak of such actions on their own plantations. In the course of his conversations with her, she narrates in fragments the story of the events leading up to the violence that led to her imprisonment. In this section the gap separating black

respective plantations--Sutton's Glen and Sutpen's Hundred. The book's many references to the attempt to go west in search of freedom begs comparison with *Huckleberry Finn*. That they have such difficulty doing so, because of the racist climate of opinion that extends far beyond the slave states, seems a bitterly ironic comment on that particular manifestation of the "American Dream."

and white senses of reality is uncrossable, and the narrative foregrounds this mutual non-comprehension of alien language groups by shifting the focalization from one to the other.³³ Toward the beginning of the chapter Nehemiah tries to deal with his difficulty in making sense of her story by listing the certain facts that he can put together. But whenever he moves beyond the narrow confines of those facts to fill in the background or interpret their context he is betrayed by his presuppositions about "darkies" to such an extent that he is unable to use the facts which this jarring witness does provide. Her tale of captivity and desire for freedom, of the cruelty of treating husbands, wives, and children as saleable property without respect for their familial links, falls on deaf ears since he does not think of slaves in these human terms.

By the end of the chapter, Williams has created the effect of two separate but parallel universes of experience. The two interpretive communities--one white and powerful, one black and subjected to that power--concur on individual facts, such as that Dessa took part in the violence that resulted in a number of deaths, but beyond this the narratives diverge according to the *sensus communis* of each. Since he does not regard her as fully human, Nehemiah resorts to supernatural, or non-human categories in order to explain her actions. Dessa's murder of whites, for instance, is a simple fact to her, the inevitable outcome of com-

³³ Bakhtin's phrase is particularly appropriate here, as the disjunction between Dessa and Nehemiah is registered in their language as well as in many other ways. "He hadn't caught every word; often he had to puzzle overlong at some unfamiliar idiom or phrase, now and then losing the tale in the welter of names the darky called" (10). For Dessa the separation and constraint is simultaneously physical and linguistic: "She clutched the bars of the window and peered at him through them. She had not understood the half of what he had said, catching only the meaning of 'camp' and 'runaway'" (64).

prehensible, even obvious, social pressures. From his perspective, however, such an explanation is not thinkable:

He had understood then something of what the slave dealer, Wilson, might have meant when he talked of the darky's "devil eyes" her "devil's stare".

"I kill white mens," her voice overrode mine, as though she had not heard me speak. "I kill white mens cause . . . I can. (13)

Her "bald statement . . . seemed to echo in the silence. This was the 'fiend', the 'devil woman' who had attacked white men and roused other niggers to rebellion" (13). While violence against blacks appears in the white discourse as a normal and acceptable, if sometimes regrettable, fact in the disciplining of an inferior species, Dessa's violence against whites is inexplicable to Nehemiah who has to resort to the non-rational in order to account for it. Dessa's escape from literal imprisonment at the end of the chapter registers as well Nehemiah's inability to confine her within the interpretive categories available to him.

The second section, "The Wench," begins to bridge that gap as Dessa joins a group of escaped slaves living on land belonging to Rufel, a white woman. A good deal of tension, sexual jealousy, and resentment, as well as racial misunderstanding continues through this section as the point of view now shifts between Dessa and Rufel. When Dessa regains consciousness in an unfamiliar "whitewashed" (82) room and finds a strange white woman leaning over her, her automatic response articulates a serious cultural division: "she fought to untangle her arms and legs from covers. The white woman would kill her kill her and . . . the baby. Baby. Her ba-- She freed an arm and smashed it into the white woman's face" (83). When she next awakens, she is somewhat more cautious; through half-closed eyes she guardedly surveys the strange room to get her bearings:

Dessa watched the white woman . . . watching the white woman through half-closed lids. The white woman stood at the door . . . A white woman moving very quietly around her bed . . . a white woman white stared at her . . . The white woman moved. Her heart thudded in her chest. The white woman passed beyond her line of vision. (83)

In all her experience, nothing good can be expected from being under the watchful eye of a white person, and her tension and suspicion is obvious. Until the past sequence of events begins to come back to her, she assumes from the strangeness of it all that she must be dreaming. Seeing her new baby in the arms of the white woman just increases her sense of bewilderment and estrangement, as she can only conclude that her baby has fallen into the hands of the whites--a fate worse, perhaps, than death.³⁴ The situation that obtains at this plantation, however, is unlike any that Dessa has ever encountered.

The dissolution of the hegemonic white *sensus communis* here is revealed as the narrative focus shifts to Rufel's point of view. The absence of her husband--a white male authority figure--from the plantation indicates the loss of the power center, a vacuum in the patriarchal hierarchy that results in a more egalitarian social organization. Rufel's harboring of runaway slaves, far from being based on any consciously ethical position, occurs originally as a sort of path of least resistance. The slaves have more or less gradually taken over in the absence of the master, and they tolerate the mistress in the same way that she tolerates

³⁴ Because of the future apparently in store for her child, Dessa regrets her pregnancy during her imprisonment and at one point considers killing the child when it is born. A similar desperation frames events in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, as a mother kills her daughter when it appears they will be sent back into slavery, and David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* provides a dramatic enactment on the part of a group of escaped slaves of the song "Before I'll be a slave/ I'll be buried in my grave."

them--out of necessity. They keep the plantation running for her, she provides a legitimate setting for them. And all sides seem to feel it is best not too delve to deeply into the transgression of social order that is going on. On the surface Rufel is still in charge and the slaves are still below her; she clings to the remnants of that belief and they do not upset it too much for fear of upsetting the uneasy balance that has been established. "They couldn't start using the Glen like a regular hideaway, she would think fearfully, and push the speculation aside" (99). Such speculation about the definition of her position comes closer to the surface in encounters such as her run-in with Annabelle, who is supposed to be her maid:

Once, Rufel had stood posing in front of the mirror, lifting her hair from her neck, tugging at the waist and bodice of her dress . . . and she prattled to the girl, as she used to do with Mammy, about fashions and hair styles. (102)

As Rufel talks, assuming the role of Southern belle for which she was raised, Annabelle quietly walks out of the room. Such a flagrant and insubordinate breach of roles upsets Rufel, and she tries to summon up the authority that she has lost as well as the racial categories that substantiated it. "'Nigger . . . you come back here' . . . [Rufel] retreated a step before the other's silence . . . 'You know you don't just walk away from a white person without a by-your-leave.'" Annabelle's subsequent mocking response upsets whatever shreds of authority Rufel might have left, reducing the Mistress to the level of spoiled child.

Hands on hips, Annabelle leaned toward Rufel, grinning in her face . . . A thousand imps seemed to dance in her eyes as she said on a rising note of incredulity, "Mistress 'Fel? Miz Rufel?" (103)

This use of a pet-name given by a slave to a child "put Rufel almost on the same level as herself," writes Williams, alluding indirectly to the

social analogy equating slaves and children. "Shaking, Rufel screamed, 'My name is "Mistress" to you!' and fled before the silent laughter in the girl's eyes" (103).

Although the socially-defined roles frequently continue to guide appearances through this chapter, it is clear that the objective crisis arising from Rufel's literal estrangement from her community is eroding her *sensus communis*. In fact, her sense of who constitutes her community is gradually changing, edging toward an acceptance of the fact that her community is now, in reality, a predominantly black community--not only in terms of population, but, more importantly, in terms of leadership. Her gradual absorption into this alien community leads to the inversion of a number of stereotypes. Rufel, a nursing mother herself, at one point breastfeeds Dessa's baby, taking

the baby to her bosom almost without thought, to quiet his wailing More of that craziness, she knew; but then it had seemed to her as natural as tuneless crooning or baby talk And only when his cries were stilled and she looked down upon the sleek black head, the nut-brown face flattened against the pearly paleness of her breast, had she become conscious of what she was doing. A wave of embarrassment had swept over her and she had looked guiltily around the parlor No one would ever know, she had assured herself. (105)

She continues dozing and feeding the baby, until she is awakened by the entry of Ada and Harker, two of the blacks who share her farm.

Their consternation had been almost comic. Ada had stuttered and Harker had gaped. In the pause Rufel had recovered her own composure, feeling somehow vindicated in her actions by their very confusion. She had confounded them--rendered Ada speechless. Still, she had felt some mortification at becoming wet nurse for a dinky. (105-06)

The role reversal depicted here, a white woman precariously close to becoming "Mammy" to a black child, is as unthinkable for the black adults who come upon her as it would be for a 'normal' white woman.

But Rufel is not normal, her normal world is disintegrating and the social taxonomies that once guided her are disintegrating with it. In one sense she is "crazy," as she notes--at least in terms of the norms of rationality understood by her husband, her family, the society that produced her. Having moved beyond the common sense behavior expected of her by both the black and the white community, she is not the only one to question her sanity. After realizing that Rufel is not trying to harm her or her baby, Dessa wonders "Was the white woman crazy? Maybe she was crazy, Dessa thought, but not a killer but touched, maybe; strange in the head" (120-21). As the nickname the blacks have evolved for her ("Miz Ruint" (120)) indicates, her position in her own community is ruined.

Bourdieu argues that in any discourse, "socially known and recognized differences," such as (in this case) hierarchical racial taxonomies

only exist for a subject capable not only of perceiving differences but of recognizing them as significant, interesting, i.e. only for a subject endowed with the capacity and inclination to make the distinctions that are regarded as significant in the social universe in question. (1985 203)

As the traces of Rufel's community become fewer and fewer, the systems of difference on which that community based its sense of itself come to exert less and less of a claim on her perception of the social world. The constellations of significance that had previously ordered her social universe become fainter, less distinct. As a member of the white aristocracy, she is ruined; but to the degree that another perspective on the social world fills the vacuum left in the disintegration of her sense of herself as a member of Charleston high society, she is not ruined. Instead she has reconstituted her community, and consequently re-defined her *sensus communis*. While her ability to distinguish the skin color of

the people among whom she lives is obviously unimpaired, the significance for her of such a system of classifications based on race, and her interest in maintaining such a system of differences, gradually evaporates.

The disjunction separating Dessa and Rufel--who as mothers and lovers become doubles to some extent--is, perhaps, clearest when they conflict over the identity of "Mammy," one of the central figures in the social universe of the old south. Rufel's thoughts turn back nostalgically to the days before her marriage and isolation at Sutton's Glen, to a time when the hierarchies of her earlier world remained firm. Her beauty, her social status, her "mammy," who evidently loved and cared for her--all the luxuries of the southern aristocracy guaranteed her happiness and privilege. For Dessa though, the word "mammy" brings to mind her own mother, and in terms of that painful memory, Rufel's nostalgic reverie begins to seem offensive. For Rufel, "mammy" conjures up

'the pretty clothes She used to dress me up so pretty. Even the Reynolds girls--and their daddy owned the bank; everyone said they wore drawers made out of French silk. They used to admire my clothes [they'd] pretend their clothes came from a fashionable *modiste*, but I always said "Oh, this is a little something Mammy ran up for me." So when I walked into the great hall at Winston, I had on a dress that Mammy made and it was Mammy's--' (124).

Dessa is more volatile than Annabelle, who had simply walked away, and she attacks this construction of "mammy" on two levels.³⁵ First she rejects

³⁵ This illustrates the point Lyotard makes:

The universalization of narrative instances cannot be done without conflict. Traditions are mutually opaque. Contact between two communities is immediately a conflict, since the names and narratives of one community are exclusive of the names and narratives of the other It is thus a litigation over the names of times, places, and persons, over the senses and referents attached to those names. (1988 157)

Or again, Bourdieu points out, the power to bestow identity through naming becomes especially crucial "in crisis situations, when the meaning of the

the idea the Rufel had a black mammy at all--mammy means mother, and of the two only she, Dessa, had a literal black mammy. As well, she assaults Rufel's nostalgic image of "mammy" by showing that Rufel had never really known the person that she called by that name.

'You ain't got no "mammy,"' she snapped "Mammy" ain't nobody name, not they real one You don't even not know "mammy's" name. Mammy have a name, have children Child don't even know its own mammy's name. What was mammy's name?' (125)

The authority of Rufel's response ('Mammy . . . That was her name') is severely undercut by Dessa's angry assertion--"'Her name was Rose'" (125). Dessa is propelled by this encounter to a series of memories of her own about her mammy, whose name was Rose, and who had many children--some of whom died, some of whom became slaves like her, and were taken and sold away. "Remembering the names now the way mammy used to tell them, lest they forget, she would say; lest her poor lost children die to living memory as they had in her world" (126). While no millenarian sense of ultimate reunification fuels this ritual of pronouncing the names of the lost as it did in Marshall's *The Chosen Place*, once again, the need to preserve such an otherwise irretrievable past haunts these black women characters.

Dessa's response has the effect of defamiliarizing Rufel's comforting idea of "mammy," forces her to rethink the identity of the woman whose memory seems so important to her but whose real name, "Dorcas," seems so unfamiliar.

world slips away" (1985 203). This is precisely the situation--objective crisis--that obtains at Sutton's Glen, as the previously recognized limits and definitions of the social world are slipping away.

Dorcas. She mouthed the name, seeing "Mammy's" face now, but finding no comfort in the familiar image. It was as if the wench had taken her beloved Mammy and put a stranger in her place. Had Mammy had children, Rufel wondered . . . and how had Mammy borne it when they were taken away--That's if she had any Mammy might have had children and it bothered Rufel that she did not know. (136)

Rufel's questioning of the identity of the person known to her as "Mammy" leads her to find out some information about the woman ("maybe she had a couple of kids. But they was sold away or maybe she just lost touch with them early on it's doubtful Dorcas even know her own children, if she had any" (146)). More importantly, however, her rethinking signals a new and generalized awareness of the human reality that underlies such stereotypical masks as "Mammy."³⁶

And the section concludes with the dropping of another racial boundary--Rufel's realization of the equal humanity of blacks, and her sense of community with them, moves a step further as she and Nathan become lovers. Yet the consciousness of how her own community would necessarily judge her cannot be avoided. This form of miscegenation (white woman/black man) was considered particularly scandalous, constituting a breach of one of the most fundamental tenets of the white southern aristocratic orthodoxy of the time. Hearing once again the nickname "Miz Ruint," she begins to understand its meaning: "Ruined, that was what the wench had said. Ruined. That was what she meant" (172).

³⁶"Mammy" has been, of course, a common character in much southern fiction. Another perspective on that institution is provided in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Historian Leslie H. Owens argues that "references by southern leaders . . . to their motherly mummies should be treated as more than simple affection for a tragic figure" (33). Owens also notes that when southern congressmen in the 1920s attempted unsuccessfully to have a federal statue erected to the black mammy in the District of Columbia, their "efforts met with considerable resistance within the black community" (32).

In the final section, "The Negress," the narrative perspective shifts to the first person as Dessa Rose completes the story with a final rapprochement between white woman and black woman before they go their separate ways. The titles of each chapter indicate the discursive frames within which Dessa is represented, the first two ("The Darky," "The Wench") suggesting pejorative images of race and gender, and the last ("The Negress") reversing, to some degree--within the vocabulary of the time--those negative connotations.

Rufel joins with a group of the runaway slaves in order to perpetrate a fraud on the white slave-buying public. She accompanies them to various towns, posing as their owner and "selling" them. They then escape immediately, meet at a pre-arranged location and continue on to the next town considerably richer. Rufel's actions here constitute a further development of her alienation from her community. Whereas previously her transgressions of what should be her common sense might loosely be characterized as passive, since her involvement with Nathan that is no longer the case. She now takes an active role in working with the blacks in order to subvert the authority of the dominant social order. Ironically, the charade they act out as they travel requires that Rufel become the proper Southern aristocrat and Dessa become the mammy looking after the white woman's daughter. Initially, these roles cause some friction between them as pretense and reality are easily confused, but in the end the relationship is strengthened not only through Dessa's gradual acceptance of Rufel's redefinition of her sense of community, but also through their realization that as women they share a commonality that can transcend racial division: when Dessa helps Rufel fend off a would-be rapist, for example, she realizes that in some ways their positions are similar.

"The white woman was subject to the same ravishment as me; this was the thought that kept me awake. I hadn't knowed white mens could use a white woman like that, just take her by force same as they could with us" (220).

When, at the end of the novel, Dessa is recognized on the street of a small southern town by Nehemiah and he attempts to force her back into slavery, her fate rests on Rufel's commitment to saving her--even though doing so means considerable danger for her as well, if they are caught. Their friendship, difficult though it is, proves strong enough to transcend the racial division that structures their society, and Rufel betrays her own (white) community in order to protect Dessa. Thus *Dessa Rose* projects a past in which those racist divisions could be overcome even at the moment of their greatest influence. In this novel Williams creates historical figures who with some difficulty not only defamiliarize their own *sensus communis*, but seem finally to rid themselves of the inclination to make the distinctions on which the racist system depends, thus articulating a hope that the narrowly divisive sense of community that victimizes those it excludes may be overcome.

Toni Morrison has expressed her commitment to the novel a number of times. She argues, in fact, that "narrative remains the best way to learn anything, whether history or theology, so I continue with the narrative form" (1981 27). Her concern with narration and history as a means of recognizing and articulating the perspective of her marginalized community is evident in such works as *Sula* and *Beloved*, but her exploration of the problem is, perhaps, most direct in *Song of Solomon*. This novel narrates the coming of age of a young black man, Milkman Dead, whose path to

maturity leads him through a personal and social crisis to a confrontation with his historical background and a renewed understanding of community.

While there are not many white characters in the novel, the disjunctive presence of the white community as a disruptive external force in the life of the black community is nevertheless important, presenting an objective limit around which the black community must work in order to sustain its *sensus communis*. The question of the relative discursive authority of divergent language groups is raised almost immediately in the novel, and the specific issue in terms of which the difference is posited relates the divergence to the historical basis of community identity. According to the official town maps, there exists a street by the name of "Mains Avenue, but the only colored doctor in the city had lived and died on that street, and when he moved there in 1896 his patients took to calling the street . . . Doctor Street" (3-4). This unofficial nomination never reaches official status, however, never achieves legitimacy. When city legislators, in an effort to suppress this unofficial nomination, post notices advising the black population that the street is not Doctor Street, they obligingly and ironically defer to authority, renaming it Not Doctor Street (4).

Through this minor anecdote Morrison suggests a great deal about the relative discursive power of the two communities, and the consequent power to bestow legitimate identity or orientation. On the same page, Morrison alludes to white authority in mentioning the fact that on Not Doctor Street there is a hospital (Mercy Hospital) which has never, until the day on which the novel opens, admitted a black patient and thus has come to be known as No Mercy Hospital. The connection established between authority, historical experience and names (signifiers of identity) is worked out in

some complexity throughout the novel. The same set of discursive power relations operates, for example, in the (mis)naming of Macon Dead, Milkman's father. One aspect of Milkman's quest, then, is to recover his family's true name, and thereby their identity.³⁷

The enactment in dialogue of the authority of one community over another is further registered when, during an emergency, a white nurse approaches a black woman and her children and demands, "'Are these your children?'".

The stout woman turned her head slowly, her eyebrows lifted at the carelessness of the address. Then, seeing where the voice came from, she lowered her brows and veiled her eyes.

'Ma'am?' (6)

When the nurse peremptorily issues an order to one of the children, the woman tries to tell the nurse the boy's name, but the strangeness of the name to the nurse's ears renders her unable to register it.

'Guitar, ma'am.'

'What?'

'Guitar.'

The nurse gazed at the stout woman as though she had spoken Welsh. (7)

In issuing her order to him, the nurse speak very slowly, as one would to someone not likely to understand. She tells him to go to Admissions, spelling it out for him incorrectly: "'You left out a s, ma'am,' the boy said. The north was new to him and he had just begun to learn he could speak up to white people. But she'd already gone" (7).

³⁷ The recurrence of discussions of the problematic nature of names in all these novels is notable. An awareness of the relations of power that are present in the according of a name perhaps is more immediate in a community whose power to bestow names--even on themselves--could not always be taken for granted.

The implications are manifold. The white woman has the authority to control the dialogue in some ways, at least to the degree that she has the privilege of initiating it, of enforcing her authority through it, of organizing the action or results that come from it, of terminating it at will and without warning, excuse, or apology. She can command respect, comprehension, and response without displaying these qualities in return. While she is free to disregard any claim to authority they might make based on their own cultural competence, they are not at all in a similar position in regard to her authority since it is legitimized in ways theirs cannot be. Her discursive authority is not a function of linguistic competence (as the exchange with the boy indicates) but stems from a social taxonomy that has arranged the ground on which the communities meet, a taxonomy whose categorical imperative necessitates the recognition by blacks of the definitions of reality imposed by whites, but imposes no such reciprocal demand on whites.

In the background of the discursive violence enacted on the black community, never too far from the surface, there lies the spectre of physical violence as a method of coercive suppression when more subtle methods fail to maintain order. While Milkman is too self-centred to take much interest, the men at the barbershop listen intently to the radio reports concerning

A young Negro boy [who] had been found stomped to death in Sunflower County, Mississippi. There were no questions about who stomped him--his murderers had boasted freely--and there were no questions about the motive. The boy had whistled at some white women, refused to deny he had slept with others, and was a Northerner visiting the South. His name was Till.
(80)

The reference is to the murder of Emmett Till, a well-known historical incident.³⁸ The response of the men in the barbershop focuses first on whether or not the incident will be reported in the newspaper, a suggestion of the process of selection that creates news--and by analogy, history. Their subsequent discussion of right and wrong in the case underlines the variety of positions held by members of the black community in response to such a brutal attack. One feels that Till should have known better, implying in a sense that he was at fault; another fiercely resents such a suggestion as an acceptance of the restriction of the humanity and liberty of blacks.

The final disagreement focuses on the subject of the dispensation of justice to the murderers. When one suggests that the murderers will be caught, another replies, "'Catch'em? Catch'em? You out of your fuckin mind? They'll catch'em, all right, and give'em a big party and a medal.'" "'Yeah. The whole town planning a parade.'" (82) Some easing of the tension gradually occurs through a series of historical reminiscences, as they recall racist incidents in the past, including an attack on black veterans in 1918. Historical narratives, then, assume a therapeutic value for this oppressed community (as Paule Marshall

³⁸ According to Aldon D. Morris, "By 1955 the South had become an extremely dangerous place for blacks. In 1955 a number of hideous murders took place. One was the killing and removal of the testicles of a fourteen-year-old black boy named Emmett Till, who was visiting Mississippi from the North. Till was killed for allegedly whistling at a white woman" (29-30). The characters's (well-founded) suspicion of a lack of witness to the crime is, in this case, erroneous. Nevertheless, in spite of worldwide publicity and international protest, in spite of the fact that the identity of the killers was not in serious dispute, no one was ever punished for the crime. In Lyotard's phrase, this constitutes a wrong not in that the victims were denied the means to make their opinions public, but in that their testimony was deprived of authority.

observed) as the

men began to trade tales of [racist] atrocities, first stories they had heard, then those they'd witnessed, and finally the things that had happened to themselves. A litany of personal humiliation, outrage, and anger turned sicklelike back to themselves as humor. They laughed then, uproariously, about the speed with which they had run, the pose they had assumed, the ruse they had invented to escape or decrease some threat to their manliness, their humanness. (83)

In this way a sense of history, both personal and public, infuses the novel with the suggestion that the two are not, perhaps, so separate.

While few white characters are introduced in the novel, none of them major, the presence of the white community is strongly registered as an objective force with which the black community must deal in working out its own *sensus communis*.³⁹ The almost incomprehensible violence of whites is difficult for them to account for in any rational way. No common sense explanation seems adequate to

what they believed was white madness--crimes planned and executed in a truly lunatic manner against total strangers They firmly believed that members of their own race killed one another for good reasons: violation of another's turf . . . refusal to observe the laws of hospitality . . . or verbal insults impugning their virility, honesty, humanity, and mental health. More important, they believed the crimes they committed were legitimate because they were committed in the heat of passion: anger, jealousy, loss of face, and so on. (100)

Two very different responses to this situation are represented in the positions taken by the two friends Guitar and Milkman. Guitar, who has listened to the conversation about Emmett Till with a certain visible

³⁹ Cynthia A. Davis comments: "Morrison's almost total exclusion of white characters . . . allows her to treat white culture as 'necessity' without either mythicizing specific acts of oppression or positing present necessity as eternal White brutality and insensitivity are part of the environment the black characters must struggle with, but they are most often conditions, institutionalized and often anonymous" (334-35).

intensity, tells Milkman that he is no longer able simply to express pity for the black victims of white pathological violence; the time has come, he believes, for a stronger move. The irrational violence of whites eventually provokes an equal and opposite response and Guitar becomes involved with a group called the Seven Days, a group whose rationale reflects the problem of being in the position of jarring witness in the eyes of the nations "weighty interests."

'There is a society. It's made up of a few men who are willing to take some risks. They don't initiate anything; they don't even choose. They are as indifferent as rain. But when a Negro child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by *their* law and *their* courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner if they can. If the Negro was hanged, they hang; if the Negro was burnt, they burn; raped and murdered, they rape and murder.' (155)

This response is understandable, perhaps, in a land where, as Guitar puts it, "The earth is soggy with black people's blood. And before us Indian blood" (159). The group has originated, apparently, in response to incidents of racial violence: "when that private from Georgia was killed after his balls were cut off and after that veteran was blinded when he came home from France in World War I" (156). And Guitar himself remembers seeing "that picture of those white mothers holding up their babies so they could get a good look at some black men burning on a tree" (157).

At issue is not only a sense of revenge, but of justice, of historical witness taken seriously, of jarring witnesses seeking a way to have an effect without the backing of weighty interests.

'Where's the money, the state, the country to finance our justice? Do we have a court? Is there one courthouse in one city in the country where a jury would convict them? There are places right now where a Negro still can't testify against a white man. Where the judge, the jury, the court, are legally bound to ignore anything a Negro has to say. What

that means is that a black man is a victim of a crime only when a white man says he is. (160-61)

While his representation of the situation--consonant, once again, with Lyotard's definition of a wrong--is accurate enough, nevertheless the limitations of a response such as Guitar's are apparent. Not only is no solution to this historical problem brought any closer but, as Milkman realizes, the random nature of the retaliation replicates that of the original white irrationality.

The major historical focus of the novel is not Guitar however, but Milkman, a young man in some ways like Quentin Compson in that he has been chosen as the proper vessel for the transmission of the historical heritage of his community. Milkman, early in the novel, shows little sign of interest in these issues. His sense of himself is that of an individual, and a successful one who, like his father, need not bother with his community or its history. He is dismissive of the Emmett Till incident ('Yeah, well, fuck Till. I'm the one in trouble.' (88)), choosing to focus instead on his own problems with his family, with money and women. A series of personal crises compel him to rethink this position, however, and he finds himself on a journey south in search of gold. Though he does not know it at this point, Milkman's quest is twofold: he must come to understand the relation of his community to the white community, and he must come to understand his own community and his position in it on its own terms. Both of these ends are reached by means of a journey that constitutes a long symbolic excursion into the history that has shaped Milkman's present.

One of the first stories he hears as the narrative of his family history begins to take shape concerns the murder of his grandfather.

Milkman has heard some of the details before, but not enough to put together (colligate) a whole story. He had been murdered by wealthy white landowners who wanted his land, and the story that Milkman hears about the murder echoes the discussion of the death of Emmett Till in such a way as to problematize Milkman's prior separation of personal (private or family) and public affairs.⁴⁰ When Milkman asks if his grandfather's murderers were ever caught, Rev. Cooper's answer echoes elements of the barbershop conversation for Milkman--who wasn't listening the first time.

'Catch?' he asked, his face full of wonder
 'Didn't have to catch 'em. They never went nowhere.
 'I mean did they have a trial; were they arrested?'
 'Arrested for what? Killing a nigger? Where did you say you was from?'
 'You mean nobody did anything? Didn't even try to find out who did it?'
 'Everybody knew who did it Wasn't nothing to do. White folks didn't care; colored folks didn't dare Besides, the people what did it owned half the county." (234)

Those people were the Butlers. Milkman gradually pieces together the narrative as a detective might, finding that the woman who took his father and aunt in when their father was murdered worked for the same Butlers. He finds her still in the Butler house, and in an almost-Faulknerian

⁴⁰ Echoes of the reference in the earlier conversation to the violence against blacks that took place after the war are heard as well, as Rev. Cooper shows Milkman a lump on the side of his head:

Some of us went to Philly to try and march in an Armistice Day parade We were invited and had a permit, but the people, the white people, didn't like us being there. They started a fracas. You know, throwing rocks and calling us names. They didn't care nothing 'bout the uniform. Anyway, some police on horseback came--to quiet them down, we thought. They ran us down. Right under their horses. This here's what a hoof can do. Ain't that something?" (235).

The bitter irony is that such events could occur immediately after a war which should have unified the population. Once again, public history is made personal by such testimony.

scene, Morrison does one thing that Faulkner could not--she articulates the point of view of this old woman, Circe, a character reminiscent of Clytie in *Absalom, Absalom!* She has remained in the house long after the deaths of the Butlers, the last of whom had died in poverty. Milkman suspects that she has done this out of a misguided sense of loyalty, but the truth of the matter lies elsewhere, closer to Alice Walker's wish (see above) that Faulkner had burned the house down:

'They loved this place. Loved it. Brought pink veined marble from across the sea for it and hired men in Italy to do the chandelier that I had to climb a ladder and clean with white muslin once every two months. They loved it. Stole for it, lied for it, killed for it. But I'm the one left. Me and the dogs. And I will never clean it again. Never. Nothing. Not a speck of dust, not a grain of dirt, will I move. Everything in this world they lived for will crumble and rot. The chandelier already fell down and smashed itself to pieces. It's down there in the ballroom now. All in pieces. Something gnawed through the cords. Ha! And I want to see it all go, make sure it does go, and that nobody fixes it up. I brought the dogs in to make sure You ought to see what they did to her bedroom. Her walls didn't have wallpaper. No. Silk brocade that took some Belgian women six years to make. She loved it--oh, how much she loved it. Took thirty Weimarans one day to rip it off the walls. If I thought the stink wouldn't strangle you, I'd show it to you.' (249-50)

This is, of course, a version of history from below, a servant or slave's eye-view of the accumulation of wealth and material success that confirms Benjamin's well-known statement that every document of culture is also a document of barbarism. The means to wealth--the desire for which at this point is still Milkman's primary motivation--are suggested in the Butlers's murder of Milkman's grandfather and theft of his land. In Circe's monologue there lies the desire for revenge or vindication that is the dream of many servants and slaves, and, in a limited sense, a historical teleology is implied here according to which the victim is, at least partly, avenged.

Earlier, during his conversation with Rev. Cooper, Milkman begins to understand one of the novel's important lessons about family and community: until then "he hadn't known what it meant: links" (231). As he leaves Circe, those links are becoming much clearer, and they lead him back (and south) even further. It is while he stays in the small black town of Shalimar that those links are fully revealed, and Milkman understands his place in a community that has, in the course of the novel, been articulated both synchronically (his geographical journey allows him to recognize differences between his own northern urban situation and that of the traditional rural south) and diachronically (his family genealogy is traced back to a slave origin, and by implication, to the African destination that Solomon flew back to).

As Milkman tries to think it through, to colligate it, his questions seem to multiply until finally the pieces fit together enough for him to construct his personal (family) narrative to a point of historical origin. He is then able to understand the relation of history to identity--particularly in the way that history's traces are everywhere left in the names that represent things, places and people. With this realization--almost a revelation for Milkman--a whole new dimension of experience is made available.⁴¹ Travelling by bus back to the north in autumn, he passes states whose history had previously meant nothing to him.

⁴¹ As Susan Willis comments, "For Morrison, everything is historical. Even objects are embedded in history and are the bearers of the past" (Gates 268).

If Milkman's present is a meaningless void of bourgeois alienation, the possibility of a past opens out to him like a great adventure Milkman comes to realize that only by knowing the past can he hope to have a future. (270)

He read the roadsigns with interest now, wondering what lay beneath the names. The Algonquins had named the territory he lived in Great Water, *michi gami*. How many dead lives and fading memories were buried in and beneath the names of the places in this country. Under the recorded names were the other names, just as 'Macon Dead,' recorded for all time in some dusty file, hid from view the real names of people, places, and things. Names that had meaning . . . Names that bore witness. (333)

Names, in *Song of Solomon*, bear a jarring witness to the historical existence of communities whose history had not been otherwise recorded, testify to a buried history shaped by oppression and exploitation from without and community solidarity from within. The possibility of the imminent dissolution of that community is very real in the novel, and the novel makes its archeological research into the names of the generations in order to maintain a sense of historical continuity, even into the future.

The final moment of the novel shows a kind of uneasy unification of the oppositions the novel has posited. Milkman and Pilate--one male, one female; one young, one old; one representing modern bourgeois individualism, the other a powerful representative of historical continuity--are brought together to bury the remains of an ancestor. As she dies in his arms from a sudden gunshot, he sings for her a song she had taught him containing the names of the dead, finally bearing witness to the generations of struggle. Milkman then launches himself from atop a hill into the arms of her murderer, Guitar, whose desire for violent revenge against whites has gone out of control and obliterated the sense of love for his people that first inspired the violence. On one hand, these two opposed positions may destroy each other; on the other hand, a synthesis of the two--Guitar's anger and determination and Milkman's newfound insights into history and community--suggest the possibility of a positive redefinition of the black community.

1 Morrison once described her project as a writer in terms not so far removed from those of Bradley himself: "My work bears witness and suggests who the outlaws were, who survived under what circumstances and why, what was legal in the community and what was legal outside it" (1981 26). Her novels constitute an eloquent response to the situation she had encountered in her reading of literature: "There were no books about me," she stated in an interview, "I didn't exist in all the literature I had read . . . this person, this female, this black" (McKay 45).

V.: IN THE RATHOUSE OF HISTORY WITH THOMAS PYNCHON.

"One would have to exorcise the city, the island . . . The continents, the world. Or the western part," as an afterthought. "We are western men." (V. 451)

Hayden White's argument "that the conviction that one can make sense of history stands on the same level of epistemic plausibility as the conviction that it makes no sense whatsoever" (73) seems to echo a recurring concern in Thomas Pynchon's works. Stencil in *V.*, Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* all seek to discern some order or pattern in the world and its history. An inevitable problem then arises to haunt them throughout the novels--is this pattern, order, meaning (if located) a property of the world and of history, or is it a projection of the ordering perception of the one who is searching for meaning? If the order or meaning perceived is primarily a property of the interpreter's perception, how then is that sublime object of interpretation--historical reality--to be approached? And what are the political implications of this problem?

A number of critics have discussed the epistemological problems presented in Pynchon's work, but surprisingly little attention has been paid to the precise setting or context in which Pynchon locates those problems. Yet these are essential components of the work. *V.* explores the aporias of epistemology at a series of specific and critical junctures

I in modern western history, documenting the breakdown of white imperialist hegemony. His concern with science and various abstract bodies of thought is certainly important, but Pynchon's radical questioning of power, politics and historical events (as well as philosophy of history) ought to be taken seriously. There is an almost Pynchonesque irony in the way many critics have maintained a blind spot in their readings of Pynchon's texts, a blind spot that occludes the explicitly social and political dimensions of the work. William Plater, for instance, dismisses the overt political history in Pynchon quite lightly in favor of a more abstract grounding of the work: "colonialism", he writes "is only one of Pynchon's several metaphors for the uncertainty relations of reality and illusion. Others work equally well" (112). John Stark, perhaps, is most adamant: "Occasionally he does discuss moral or social issues, but he usually subordinates them to other issues As a general rule, however, he focuses on literary, epistemological, and metaphysical problems" (23-4). "Pynchon does not often refer to social and political history" (105). Elsewhere he speaks of "the relatively minor importance of politics" in *V.* (169). In general, however, even those critics who, like Thomas Schaub, do acknowledge the social and historical dimension of Pynchon's work devote most of their commentary to his various abstract philosophical and scientific concerns. In the following chapter I attempt instead to present Pynchon as a profoundly political and historical novelist whose conception of the political and historical field has much in common with contemporary historiographical theory.

According to Hayden White, prior to the formation of the discipline of history in the nineteenth century, the subject was considered a

branch of the more general field of rhetoric, "the source and repository of tradition, moral exemplars, and admonitory lessons" (1987 64). White writes that

as long as history was subordinated to rhetoric, the historical field itself (that is, the past or the historical process) had to be viewed as a chaos that made no sense at all or one that could be made to bear as many senses as wit and rhetorical talent could impose on it. (65)

As history came to constitute a distinct discipline, rules of evidence and a more rigorous sense of factuality came into play, regulating not only the kinds of narratives a historian could produce but also altering the underlying conception of the nature of the historical field itself: "For this tradition, whatever 'confusion' is displayed by the historical record is only a surface phenomenon." (71) subject to correction by subsequent historians.

White goes on to relate these dichotomous conceptions of history to the concurrent debate on the nature of the sublime and the beautiful. The irreducible confusion and the ultimately unrepresentable nature of the total historical field is associated with the idea of the sublime while the conception of history as possessing order, logic, or sense falls into the aesthetic category of the beautiful. As aesthetics superseded rhetoric and the beautiful gradually displaced the sublime as a category of judgement, the narratives both of history and of fiction were expected to display a more thorough sense of coherence, to make sense in a more complete and sustained way. Any single historical narrative should ideally exhibit both an internal coherence and a fidelity to "the facts" such that it could be seen as one chapter of a narrative that, if extended long enough, could theoretically recount and account for all of history. This view of history is supportable only by the exclusion of the his-

torical sublime: history as an awesome, perhaps incomprehensible, terrifying, multifarious, unrepresentable spectacle.

The attempt to represent history in a narrative form, then, gives rise to some difficulties--the problem is not that history cannot be interpreted as much as the fact that it can be, endlessly it seems, and in contradictory ways. As Paul Ricoeur argues in *Time and Narrative*, no matter which historiographical methodology is applied

the event is restored at the end of each attempted explanation as a remainder left by each such attempt . . . as a dissonance between explanatory structures, and finally, as the life and death of the structures themselves. (v.1 224)

Similarly, Jean-Francois Lyotard argues in "The Sublime and the Avant Garde" that the sublimity of the pure event subverts any attempt at final or full representation. The sublimity of the event is thus precisely what must be repressed in order for representation to occur. The exhaustive narrative is by definition impossible, and any history is necessarily a selective one. Selection of the events deemed worthy of narration, selection of narrative point of view and selection of the narrative techniques employed thus fall partly under the compulsion of the need for narrative coherence, a compulsion that prompts White to ask: "what kind of notion of reality authorizes construction of a narrative account of reality in which continuity rather than discontinuity governs the articulation of the discourse" (10). With a few exceptions, notably in modern literature,

narrative strains for the effect of having filled in all the gaps, of having put an image of continuity, coherency, and meaning in place of the fantasies of emptiness, need, and frustrated desire that inhabit our nightmares about the destructive power of time. (11)

The continuity of the narrative realist form of historical discourse, its tendency to totalization, has another aspect, one that White

describes with reference to Hegel: an "intimate relationship" seems to exist, he writes, "between law, historicity, and narrativity" and, he observes,

this raises the suspicion that narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals to the fully realized "history", has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority. (13)

It may not be stretching the point too much to infer that problems of narrative continuity have to do with problems of authority in a more general sense as well. History is generally, as the saying goes, written from the vantage point of the victors; to this may be added Franz Fanon's observation that objectivity has always been on the side of the colonizer (61).

In a similar vein, White argues that

For subordinated, emergent, or resisting social groups . . . opposition can be carried forward only on the basis of a conception of the historical record as being not a window through which the past "as it really was" can be apprehended but rather a wall that must be broken through if the "terror of history" is to be directly confronted. (82)¹

A number of historians, including White, have called attention to Chateaubriand's heroic conception of the vocation of the historian:

In the silence of abjection, when the only sounds to be heard are the chains of the slave and the voice of the informer; when everything trembles before the tyrant and it is as dangerous to incur his favor as to deserve his disfavor, this is when the historian appears, charged with avenging the people. (79)

White does not however advocate a more rigorous "scientific" approach to the writing of history, nor a return to the Covering Law Model. A breakdown in the idea of objective narrative realism and the recovery of the historical sublime may, he argues, be a "necessary precondition for the

¹ Numerous examples of this might be found in the writings of black American women discussed in the previous chapter.

production of a historiography of the sort that Chateaubriand conceived to be desirable in times of 'abjection'".

This postmodern version of the historical sublime differs, however, from its predecessors. Fredric Jameson remarks that the sublime

is no longer subjective in the older sense that a personality is standing in front of the Alps and knowing the limits of the individual subject and the human ego. On the contrary, it is a kind of non-humanist experience of limits beyond which you get dissolved. (1987 30-1)

This sense of dissolution that marks the sublime can be taken to refer as well to the dissolution of the continuity and coherence of narrative and its claim to represent reality realistically. If narrative coherence is threatened, White's remarks on the relation of narrativity and legality would seem to imply, then the cohesion of the social system producing them is also being threatened. Along with the weakening of the authority of the narratives through which society understands and authorizes itself comes a concomitant crisis in that society. It is surely no coincidence that much postmodern fiction was produced in a period of social upheaval, a period during which many of the basic beliefs of European and North American society were subjected to radical critique. The potential dissolution of individual subjectivity resulting from the sublime corresponds on the social plane (in terms of White's historical sublime) with a dissolution of certain kinds of social and narrative authority. "With the sublime," writes Lyotard, "we go a long way into heterogeneity" (1987 175). In this sense, postmodern historical relativism can be seen as the dissolution or delegitimization of any one cultural group's claim to sole authority in the construction of historical narrative, an authority that is ultimately political in nature.

This crisis in narrative authority has ranged from a questioning of the various aspects of the art of narration to a wholesale scepticism toward the possibility of narrative representation. Edward Said writes that for some contemporaries

narrative, which poses an enabling *arché* and a vindicating *telos*, is no longer an adequate figure for plotting the human trajectory in society. There is nothing to look forward to: we are stuck within our circle. (1986 50)

Yet it is a central function of artists and intellectuals to try to think a way out of this situation, to work through to the other side of the crisis of narrative in the western world. To some degree, the way through seems to lie in a recognition and an acceptance of a more heterogenous narrative discourse of history and fiction--a heterogeneity that is rendered impossible by the dominance of monolithic 'objectivity' and 'realism' in historical and fictional narrative. This heterogenous discourse would by definition include the alterity which has been repressed by an imperialist culture and its totalizing narratives.

The problem of separate, perhaps incommensurable, worlds of experience and a concurrent separation in the representation of that experience, has long been a central one for Pynchon and he has often been quite specific about the social and political implications. As a student in the late fifties influenced by the beat movement he began "to get a sense of that other world humming along out there" (1985 xvi-xvii) beyond the privileged world of Cornell. His own early short fiction often turns on themes of class or racial separation, anticipating the social turbulence of the sixties. About that era, Pynchon writes that

The success of the "new left" . . . [was] limited by the failure of college kids and blue collar workers to get together

politically. One reason was the presence of real, invisible class force fields in the way of communication between the two groups. (xv-xvi)

As its title suggests, one of Pynchon's few published essays, "A Journey Into The Mind of Watts", is an attempt to map one such force field and to articulate the subjective experience of the residents of Watts as the possibility of riot simmered, once again, at the brink of boiling. At "the heart of L.A.'s racial sickness is the coexistence of two very different cultures: one white and one black." These two cultures, each with its own internal logic and historical trajectory, often confront each other over the barrel of a police revolver:

your life trembling in the crook of a cop's finger because it is dark, and Watts, and the history of this place and these times makes it impossible for the cop to come on any different, or for you to hate him any less. (35)

The eastern boundary of Watts, he writes, looks "like the edge of the world" (80). The idea of mental geography and frontiers continues in another image of the ghetto as a "country which lies, psychologically, uncounted miles further than most whites seem at present willing to travel" (78), a country whose customs, dress codes, hairdos and history simply do not mesh with the hegemonic white culture.

While insisting on the existence of an invisible force field of race and class separating the inhabitants of Watts from the dominant white culture, Pynchon nevertheless attempts to bridge that gap, to interpret and represent the experience of the 'other' with empathy, intelligence and decency. In a very similar vein, Said, in his essay on postcolonial intellectuals, writes:

I think we should begin by accepting the notion that although there is an irreducible subjective core to human experience, this experience is also historical and secular, it is accessible to certain kinds of analysis, and . . . it is not

exhausted by totalizing theories marked and limited by doctrinal lines or by analytic constructs . . . That is we must be able to think through and interpret together discrepant experiences, each with its particular agendas and pace of development, its own formations, its internal coherence and its system of external relationships. (1986 55-56)

Images such as "the edge of the world" and "invisible force fields" posit a universe made up of "non-synchronous" (to use Ernst Bloch's term) systems of "discrepant experiences", and Pynchon's frequent invocation of this difference, whatever its epistemological consequences, is firmly based in social and historical observation. It is by means of this grounding in concrete social experience that he avoids the trivialization that is sometimes a consequence of moral or cultural relativism. For example, early in V. he states the problem in miniature. Profane is riding the subway, "yo-yoing" back and forth from one end of the line to the other for hours; during the course of the day he sees the atmosphere change radically:

The shuttle after morning rush hour is near empty, like a littered beach after tourists have all gone home. In the hours between nine and noon the permanent residents come creeping back up their strand, shy and tentative. Since sunup all manner of affluent have filled the limits of that world with a sense of summer and life; now sleeping bums and old ladies on relief, who have been there all along unnoticed, re-establish a kind of property right, and the coming on of a falling season. (37-8)

Although the beach image suggests that the bums and old ladies have actually gone somewhere, Pynchon assures us that they have not. Instead, their power to impose the definition of what Sidney Stencil would call "The Situation" has been eclipsed: the affluent have "filled the limits of that world", that is, defined it according to their own limited experience, then moved on without having been touched or affected in any way, without even having recognized the existence of an alterity whose defini-

tion of "The Situation" it has occluded. This little epistemological parable describes an important and frequently overlooked aspect of power relations between the relatively rich and the relatively poor.

This kind of reference to the limits of a particular world recurs in the novel. Early on, Rachel Owlglass, an upper-middle class young woman who feels constrained by the limits of her world, laments that "Daughters are constrained to pace demure and dark-eyed like so many Rapunzels within the magic frontiers" (25). Since she realizes that she may not be able to escape, she asks Profane to tell her about the world outside: "How the road is. Your boy's road that I'll never see . . . What it's like west of Ithaca and south of Princeton. Places I won't know" (27). Ithaca and Princeton function here as ideological boundaries as much as geographical locations and the epistemological limits arise here through gender as well as class.² Those "magic frontiers" recall "the limits of the world" mentioned above and look forward to yet another similar instance: Esther meets a college boy who leads a conventional middle-class life but is attracted to the bohemian life-styles of a group known as The Whole Sick Crew:

He will straddle the line, aware up to the point of knowing he is getting the worst of both worlds, but never stopping to wonder why there should ever have been a line, or even if there is a line at all. He will learn how to be a twinned man and will go on at the game, straddling until he splits up the crotch and in half from the prolonged tension, and then he will be destroyed. (58)

² The image is evidently an important one for Pynchon: his second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, employs the same image of a woman trapped in a socio-epistemological tower, and documents her attempts to escape. See Catherine Stimpson's discussion of women in Pynchon's work. See also Paul Coates, "Unfinished Business: Thomas Pynchon and the Quest for Revolution."

This time the split between worlds separates what might be termed a counter-culture from the mainstream.

The "invisible force fields" separating cultural groups find metaphorical expression in *V.* as well in the profusion of siege imagery--the siege of Malta and Foppl's siege party are the most detailed, but there are many other passing references. The military siege with its focus on a wall separating opposing groups finds its epistemological correlative in the idea of fundamentally irreconcilable discrepant experience, or perhaps in White's epistemological "walls that must be broken through". The most extensive exploration of this problem in *V.*, however, revolves around certain aspects of racial difference, examining a series of critical moments in the history of European imperialism when the west quite deliberately and strategically denied the validity and the reality of non-synchronous third world experience as part of a brutal enforcement of its own priorities. Not only has imperialist western culture not often cared to "think through and interpret . . . discrepant experiences" together with other cultural groups, it has in fact attempted to eradicate some of those cultures entirely. Pynchon writes of the "racist, sexist, and protofascist" spirit of the time preceding the publication of the novel in 1963, a time when "John Kennedy's role model James Bond was about to make his name by kicking third-world people around, another extension of the boy's adventure tales a lot of us grew up reading" (1985 xxi). *V.* is, in a sense, a parody of those books--by Kipling, Buchan, Haggard et al.--that contributed to the construction of the "Manichean" racial difference that Abdul JanMohamed locates at the very heart of that colonialist literary genre. Clear though Pynchon's political position seems here, perhaps the most critically neglected aspect of *V.* is his political use of

1 epistemological and historiographical problems as a means to break down the wall of objective realism to which White alludes, a wall that has served to protect the hegemonic culture of Western society from an awareness of its own historical relativity.

The general epistemological dilemma in V. is given one central formulation by British agent Sidney Stencil, who

remembered times when whole embassiesful of personel had run amok and gibbering in the streets when confronted with a Situation which refused to make sense no matter who looked at it, or from what angle. (189)

As a result he problematizes the very existence of an objective reality. "He had decided long ago that no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment" (189). In order to minimize confusion--a costly danger in the espionage business (which is not merely an epistemological metaphor but also, and perhaps more importantly, a straightforwardly political one)--Stencil Sr. has developed an alternative to objective appraisal: a form of epistemological teamwork. But this approach too is not without difficulties:

Since these several minds tended to form a sum total or complex more mongrel than homogenous, The Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three. Hence the success or failure of any diplomatic issue must vary directly with the degree of rapport achieved by the team confronting it. (189)

"The sublime" writes Lyotard in a similar vein, "bears witness to the incommensurability between thought and the real world" (1985 7). If, as Lyotard argues, the terror and the sublimity of the event lies in part in its unrepresentability, then for Stencil there is at least safety in

numbers. Truth, or knowledge, thus ultimately becomes a problem not of verification (or at least not of verification alone) but of consensus, privileging the homogenous and orthodox over the heterogenous. In fact, one of the lessons of V. concerns the final impossibility of representing the world coherently and fully from any single perspective, an unrepresentability that brings us back as well to White's historical sublime. Stencil Jr.'s quest for V. demonstrates both the futility of the attempt and the inevitable distortions that must result from such an obsessive and totalizing vision. In developing his consensus approach to reality and *The Situation*, Stencil Sr. stresses the need for a "degree of rapport"--a shared *sensus communis*--among those attempting to form the composite picture of it, suggesting that otherwise they would "form a sum total or complex more mongrel than homogenous" (189).

The word "mongrel" carries here, as usual, a pejorative sense and in V., with its acute awareness of race and colonialism, it carries a less abstract meaning as well--a racial mixture. Stencil's insistence on a "degree of rapport" suggests an ethnocentrism which serves to protect his version of *The Situation* from epistemological and political dissolution and guarantees the exclusion of the kind of discrepant or non-synchronous experience that Said and Bloch speak of. Like many of his generation, Stencil Sr. acknowledges with regret the passing of an imperialist era which protected the homogeneity of representation and power. As an anti-colonialist movement gathers momentum in Malta, with its "motley of races" (310), he reflects with resignation that

There were no more princes. Henceforth politics would become progressively more democratized, more thrown into the hands of amateurs. The disease would progress. Stencil was nearly past caring. (489)

In the world of Stencil Jr. however, that difference--while still central--is far less divisive. Racial purity, a fetishized ideal in the historical sections of *V.*, is at times almost parodied. The members of the Whole Sick Crew, and their associates, are by and large, as Rachel puts it, "Deracinated" (382) in both senses of the word: rootless and without sharp racial distinctions in the manner of Stencil Sr.'s generation: Profane is Jewish-Irish, Rachel is Jewish, Sphere is black, Fergus Mixolidian is an Irish Armenian Jew, Profane spends part of the novel living and working with a Puerto Rican family. Esther does get a nose job, turning her "Jew nose" into an Irish *retroussé*, but she is criticized for it both by her friends and even by the doctor who performs the operation (103). Most important of all, perhaps, is the identity of Paola Maijstral, who is Maltese. Malta is in the middle of the Mediterranean, literally the middle of the middle of the world, a point where imperialist Europe and colonized Africa intersect. It is referred to as "a cradle of life" (382) and echoing Stencil Sr.'s strictures against a "mongrel" reality, the people of Malta are characterized as a "motley of races" (310). Furthermore, her last name, Maijstral, suggests the wind, and in *V.* the wind is associated with the dispossessed on a number of occasions. Malta is the site of a number of key episodes in the novel, and in one of the most powerful scenes the children of this "motley of races", among the ruins of European WWII bombing, disassemble *V.*, who has come to be identified with a particularly evil form of reified racist colonialism.

Ironically, when Stencil Jr. tries to represent The Situation of 1898, his narrators constitute precisely the sort of "mongrel" assortment his father would have rejected: P. Aleui, Arab café waiter; Yusef, another Arab, a kitchen worker; Maxwell Rowley-Bugge, a disgraced expatriate

English pedophile; Waldetar, a Portugese Jew working on the railroads in Egypt; Gebrail, an Arab taxi driver; Girgis, an Egyptian acrobat and burglar working with a team of Syrians; and Hanne, barmaid in a German-style beerhall in Egypt. All of these characters try to interpret the behavior of the same group of diplomat-spies, attempt to construct a version of The Situation. Thus Stencil Jr. attempts to come to terms to some degree with the idea of a non-homogenous interpretation of reality.

Nevertheless, Stencil Jr. is finally something like White's traditional historian attempting to find both meaning and narrative coherence in history. His facts of course are incomplete, so in an effort to represent certain historical moments of importance to his overall narrative he must go beyond hard facts, blurring further the line separating fiction and history. History according to Herbert Stencil, as his name might suggest, is made to fit a pattern; or as Eigenvalue puts it, it has been "Stencilized" so that places and characters whose names begin with the letter "v" become prominent. Yet within the novel it is largely through Stencil's narratives that we have access to history:

Around each seed of a dossier, therefore, had developed a nacreous mass of inference, poetic license, forcible dislocation of personality into a past he didn't remember and had no right in save the right of imaginative anxiety or historical care, which is recognized by no one. (62)

The first historical dossier that Pynchon, via Stencil, presents concerns the Fashoda episode, a critical moment in European imperialism. In any narrative, focalization or point of view determines a great deal; Chapter Three presents a series of fictional events related to the historical crisis, each from a different point of view but always with the guiding vision of Stencil's combination of "imaginative anxiety or historical care" in the background. The eight separate focalizers in the

chapter offer very different perspectives on the events they observe. In more conventional narratives, writes Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, the "norms" of the text "in accordance with which the events and characters" are evaluated "are presented through a single dominant perspective, that of the narrator-focalizer" (81). Pynchon's use of multiple focalizers undermines any single sense of norms as interpretive guides. In this kind of situation, Rimmon-Kenan observes,

the single authoritative external focalizer gives way to a plurality of ideological positions Some of these positions may concur in part or in whole, others may be mutually opposed, the interplay among them provoking a non-unitary, 'polyphonic' reading of the text. (81)

This "non-unitary, 'polyphonic'" reading may presumably be extended to encompass a reading of history itself, a reading that could allow space for non-synchronous and disparate experience.

In the other "Stencilized" chapters as well this technique is employed. Whether it is a shifting focalizer (ch.7), Stencil's adaptation of someone else's story (ch.9), or the rendering of someone else's diary (ch.11), "the single authoritative external focalizer" is always undermined. Pynchon's use of this technique allows him to present a glimpse of the world from various perspectives, an imaginative attempt to cross those "magic frontiers" that separate different universes of discourse. We are reminded however of the difficulty of doing so, of escaping from our towers, by the fact that both the focalizers who provide a centre of consciousness and to some degree the events related have been "Stencilized". Yet balancing this narrative instability is the historical detail: the Mahdi, the Fashoda episode, the siege of Malta. These are matters of historical fact and Pynchon does not seem concerned with challenging that status. According to the history books, the Herero uprising

of 1904 *did* occur and was suppressed by von Trotha in the manner Pynchon relates, and in 1922 the Bondels, led by Abraham Morris *did* unsuccessfully rise against the white South African government.³

It is worth pointing out that whatever the epistemological traps that lie tangled within Stencil's obsession with V., the subtext of every historical narrative he produces has to do with imperialist conquest or violence, with a steady current of racism. Even in the chapter "V. in love," the least overtly political of the historical chapters, there occurs a profusion of references to race and imperialism probing the "erotic and aesthetic fascination with 'the Orient'" that Andreas Huyssen similarly characterizes as a "deeply problematic" element of European modernism (51). It is in these themes of race and colonial history that the continuity of V. lies and it is a continuity that remains undisturbed by the epistemological aporias presented by the novel. However much the possibility of final knowledge is undermined and narrative shown to be unstable, Pynchon seems at times to address the reader directly and without a trace of epistemological distress:

[Hanging] had been a popular form of killing during the Great Rebellion of 1904-07, when the Hereros and Hottentots, who usually fought one another, staged a simultaneous but uncoordinated rising against an incompetent German administration. General Lothar von Trotha, having demonstrated to Berlin during his Chinese and East African campaigns a certain expertise at suppressing pigmented populations, was brought in to deal with the Hereros. In August 1904, von Trotha issued his "Vernichtungs Befehl," whereby the German forces were ordered to exterminate systematically every Herero man, woman and child they could find. He was about 80 percent successful. Out

³ While some critics have questioned the veracity of Pynchon's historical detail in the light of the evident fertility of his imagination, Arnold Cassola argues that "Pynchon has taken the trouble to investigate everything to the last detail. His 'historical' narrative is based on documentary evidence" (311).

of the estimated 80,000 Hereros living in the territory in 1904, an official German census taken seven years later set the Herero population at only 15,130, this being a decrease of 64,870. Similarly the Hottentots were reduced in the same period by about 10,000, the Berg-Damaras by 17,000. Allowing for natural causes during those unnatural years, von Trotha, who stayed for only one of them, is reckoned to have done away with about 60,000 people. This is only 1 per cent of six million, but still pretty good. (244-45)

All this information is a matter of verifiable historical "fact". The only trace of irony in this section occurs in the last sentence, and it does nothing to undermine the certainty of the account--instead it adds power to it.

While Pynchon may sometimes seem to accept a relativist position, he has not rejected the possibility of moral judgement--difficult, relative and tentative though it may be. Mondaugen, at one point during the seige party, sets off in search of the power generator so that he can tap some of the electricity for his experiments. The generator he actually finds is of a more symbolic nature than he had intended however:

Foppl's own planetarium, a circular room with a great wooden sun, overlaid with gold leaf, burning cold in the very center and round it the nine planets and their moons, suspended from tracks in the ceiling, actuated by a coarse cobweb of chains, pulleys, belts, racks, pinions and worms, all receiving their prime impulse from a treadmill in the corner, usually operated for the amusement of the guests by a Bondelschwartz [slave], now unoccupied. (239)

Ignoring the reference to slavery, one might argue that the epistemological metaphor here concerns the way we construct our reality, our universe, and suggests that our constructions are, like Stencil's, rather clumsy at times. Mondaugen has, odd though it may seem, danced into the room with a young woman whose declared "purpose on earth is to tantalize and send raving the race of men" (239). The rhythm of the music they had been dancing to is transformed into a kind of cosmic rhythm as

I
 Mondaugen released her, skipped to the treadmill and began a jog-trot that set the solar system in motion, creaking and whining in a way that raised a prickling in the teeth. Rattling, shuddering, the wooden planets began to rotate and spin. Saturn's rings to whirl, moons their precessions, our own Earth its nutational wobble, all picking up speed; as the girl continued to dance, having chosen Venus for her partner; as Mondaugen dashed along his own geodesic, following in the footsteps of a generation of slaves. (239)

Again, it is possible to read this as a demonstration that love (or at least desire) makes the world go round. And Pynchon with his fine sense of cliché perhaps intends this. But the final allusion once again is to slavery, oppression. Without knowing it, Mondaugen has found the generator, although not the one he was looking for. So "breathing heavily," he "staggered off the treadmill to carry on his descent and search for the generator" (240). For the reader at least there should be less ambiguity surrounding the power *generator* and the *generation* of slaves as Mondaugen reaches bottom in his descent and finds, perhaps, the very slave whose place as generator on the planetary treadmill had been unoccupied.

As if the entire day had come into being only to prepare him for this, he discovered a Bondel male, face down and naked, the back and buttocks showing scar tissue from old sjambokings as well as more recent wounds, laid open across the flesh like so many toothless smiles Mondaugen approached the man and stooped to listen for breathing or a heartbeat, trying not to see the white vertebra that winked at him from one long opening. (240)

The seemingly incongruous images that accompany this scene, of smiles and a wink, underscore with a grim irony the power of metaphorical representation.⁴ The wounds that Mondaugen represents as smiles and winks can

⁴ As well, the idea that wounds and mouths have a certain similarity is not original to Pynchon: "Mouths are often likened to wounds in Shakespeare. The image may derive from their appearance, and from the idea that they could speak as witnesses to what caused them" (Abrams 515 n.9). Pynchon's use of one wound as an eye and another as a mouth thus combines, perhaps, both witnessing and testifying possibilities.

be read as the literal inscription of the desire and power of the oppressor on the body of the slave--from the point of view of the torturer, a point of view that Mondaugen has passively accepted. Eventually, however, he decides to leave the white enclave: "Mondaugen this time withdrew, preferring at last neither to watch nor to listen" (278).

His dramatic crossing of the ravine separating the seige party from the rest of the world is highly symbolic--the seige is, in V., political and epistemological as well as military. He drops a plank across a narrow part of the abyss and works "his way gingerly across, trying not to look down at the tiny stream two hundred feet below" (278-79). The ravine represents a significant epistemological gap with overt moral consequences, and Mondaugen is crossing one of the "magical frontiers", going beyond "the limits" of that particular world. He makes his way through the scrubland until he meets

a Bondel riding on a donkey. The Bondel had lost his right arm. "All over", he said. "Many Bondels dead, baases dead, van Wijk dead. My woman, youngers dead." He let Mondaugen ride behind him. At that point Mondaugen didn't know where they were going. As the sun climbed he dozed on and off, his cheek against the Bondel's scarred back . . . Soon as they trotted along the Bondel began to sing . . . The song was in Hottentot dialect, and Mondaugen couldn't understand it. (279)

Disoriented and in many ways uncomprehending after the literal bridging of a sublime abyss, a "magic frontier", an "invisible forcefield", he has arrived at the conditions of possibility of another state of mind, beyond the seige mentality. His non-comprehension of the Bondel language does not constitute a threat. The scarred back of the Bondel can be considered a kind of text that can be read in different ways in different cultural and historical situations (even as "smiles" and "winks"), but the existence of the scars themselves is not in doubt. Although "history is not a

text" writes Jameson, "it is inaccessible to us except in textual form" (1981 35). Here the text of history is inscribed in the scars on the backs of i's victims. Writing of another colonized group--Latin American Indians--Michel de Certeau asserts that in the body language of scars

the Indians preserve a painful recognition of four and a half centuries of colonization. Dominated but not vanquished, they keep alive the memory of what the Europeans have "forgotten"--a continuous series of uprisings and awakenings which have left hardly a trace in the occupiers' historiographical literature. This history of resistance marked by cruel repression is *marked on the Indian's body* as much as it is recorded in transmitted accounts--or more so.

For them, these "scars on the body proper--or the fallen 'heroes' or 'martyrs' who correspond to them in narrative" constitute as well "the index of a history yet to be made" (227).

There is a clear moral and historical imperative governing Pynchon's representation of "real" historical events and their apparently repetitive pattern. It can be detected, for example, in the way the Bondel's postrevolutionary song (a failed revolution) echoes in V. through decades and across cultures: in Porcepic's appropriation of African polyrhythms for white European modernist music (402), and in Sphere's black American jazz with its "rising rhythms of African nationalism" (60). While a number of patterns do repeat in the historical and the contemporary chapters, it is an overstatement to claim as Molly Hite does that reality in V. is somehow "static . . . which suggests that past and present exist simultaneously or even that they are reversible . . . in V. past and present reflect each other in receding vistas" (51). There can be no question, for example, of reversing the genocidal atrocities carried out against the Hereros, and to suggest an equivalence to "Mafia Winsome's intellectual racism" (Winsome is an Ayn Rand-type of character) is clearly

as disproportionate as is her equivalence of Foppl's seige party (with its racist torture, murder, rape and depravity) and the relatively mild bohemianism of the Whole Sick Crew (64-65). This response to the novel is quite common however and results from approaching it as an formalist epistemological puzzle (albeit a puzzle that may not allow the possibility of a solution), or an abstract philosophical statement, to the exclusion of the overt social and historical detail.

Most critics would no doubt agree with Richard Patteson that for Stencil, "V. is in a sense a vast hall of mirrors in which . . . an indefinite number of variations" may be discovered, "but no way out of his dilemma" (25). The recurrence of mirror imagery in discussions of V. is symptomatic of a prevalent problem in postmodernism: the possibility that an acceptance of relativity entails a trivializing of interpretation--even a kind of solipsism. Bloch argues that in some versions of historical relativism

The very process of history is broken up historical relativism is here turned into something static; it is being caught in cultural monads, that is, culture souls without windows, with no links among each other, yet full of mirrors facing inside. (Fabian 44-45)

A dangerous tendency of cultural relativism, Fabian adds, is the fact "that such mirrors, if placed at propitious angles, also have the miraculous power to make real objects disappear" (45). Bloch and Fabian undoubtedly have an important point: certainly there are aspects of postmodernism and cultural relativism that effectively de-realize history--it has been argued that some of White's work lends itself to this possibility for example. Yet this need not be the case. There is a corollary to this mirror imagery: if placed at certain other propitious angles, mirrors have an equally miraculous power to present objects and perspectives previously

unavailable to perception. Pynchon's postmodern mirrors may indeed conceal many things and present many illusions and deceptions, but they also re-present historical situations and events that had hitherto remained obscured from sight. By means of a postmodern historical relativism, rather than making events disappear, he is making present what seems to be a remarkable history of western racism, from the atrocities of colonialism to the somewhat more covert racism of America at the time of writing.

It is also not entirely accurate to claim, as Hite does, that "in *V.* . . . nobody seems to learn anything." Sphere, Rachel, Maizstral all seem to progress in their understanding of the world. And while it is true that "Benny Profane's last words in the book are 'Offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddam thing'" (51), Profane is not set up as an ideal or universal specimen. Nor is Stencil, whose policy toward knowledge is either obsessive or "Approach and avoid" (55), to be considered a universal epistemological model:

it hadn't really ever stopped being the same simple-minded, literal pursuit, *V.* ambiguously a beast of venery, chased like the hart, hind or hare And clownish Stencil capering along behind her, bells ajangle, waving a wooden, toy oxgoad. For no one's amusement but his own. (61-62)

Surely there is a middle ground between Profane (who claims to understand nothing; to learn nothing) and his opposite, Stencil (who seeks to comprehend the totality of experience). Much of the book is written in a slapstick tone which encourages at best a limited identification with the characters. As readers we need not choose only between the two: instead, it ought to be possible to learn something ourselves. However subjective our interpretation of Pynchon's interpretation of history might be, there are, in the end, facts that are presented in *V.* as history, and these facts are often related to themes of political oppression.

The point here is neither to hypostatize facts nor to relativize them out of existence. As Said contends, "Facts do not speak for themselves but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them" (1984 14). And, he continues, in a tone almost reminiscent of Chateaubriand,

where are the facts if not embedded in history, and then reconstituted and recovered by human agents stirred by some perceived or desired or hoped-for historical narrative whose aim is to restore justice to the dispossessed. (16)

Pynchon's history is an attempt to remind us about certain aspects of our heritage that we might prefer to overlook as we select the materials from which to construct our narrative of the past. And no matter how much it is argued that the past is our own creation, we create it out of a limited supply of building materials:

People read what news they wanted to and each accordingly built his own rathouse of history's rags and straws. In the city of New York alone there were at a rough estimate five million different rathouses . . . Doubtless their private versions of history showed up in action. (225)

Doubtless everyone's version of history does show up in action, which is why it is so important to examine the construction of history in order to come to an understanding of the complex relationship between ideology and praxis. In theory there may be an infinite number of designs for the rathouse, but in practice there is a finite (and remarkably consistent) number of headlines to build with, and many rathouses display a certain similarity. The building of a historical rathouse is not simply a matter of *jouissance*, of the free play of the imagination: such a "Postmodern Style of History" would, as Hal Foster fears, "signal the disintegration of style and the collapse of history" (73).

In Pynchon's work, however, history is in no danger of collapsing. The Herero-Bondel episode in *V.* is not at all an isolated one. The Mahdi,

alluded to in Chapter Three, was a nationalist, millenarian movement which had attempted to repel the colonizing British. Historical accounts of the Battle of Omdurman (1898), yet another of V.'s sieges, are chilling. Against a large army of Sudanese, most of whom fought with spears, the British forces used heavy artillery with the result that on the battlefield, more than 10,000 Sudanese died immediately and uncounted more men, women, and children died of wounds or in the shelling of the city. As a fitting conclusion to this military and epistemological destruction, after the fighting was over, the tomb of the Mahdi, the only building of size in the city and "an object of veneration . . . the focal point of the religious and political life of the capital was destroyed" (Daly 4-5). Thus the decimation of the population was accompanied by the destruction of the symbolic center or orientation point of their *sensus communis*.

Elsewhere, one of Stencil's impersonations considers the strange history of Egypt's Lake Mareotis:

Beneath the lake were 150 villages, submerged by a man-made Flood in 1801, when the English cut through an isthmus of desert during the siege of Alexandria, to let the Mediterranean in. Waldetar liked to think that the waterfowl soaring thick in the air were ghosts of fellahin. What submarine wonders at the floor of Mareotis' lost country: houses, hovels, farms, water wheels, all intact

Did the narwhal pull their plows? Devilfish drive their water wheels? (79)

Here again we are given historical fact without epistemological complication but accompanied by a quiet but powerful, even lyrical, sense of historical pathos. The incident is a kind of historical curiosity as well, since it occurred as part of the British campaign against the French led by Napoleon, and neither nationality remained in Egypt long after the battle. It was, in a sense, a precursor to the Fashoda crisis which also pitted the British against the French, but without the overt colonialist

motive for the British. E.M. Forster discusses the incident in his book on the city of Alexandria and, as an example of historical relativism and the de-realization of history, it is worth juxtaposing his account with the account Pynchon gives to Waldemar. What is now "Lake Mariout [sic] was almost dry," Forster writes. "It contained a little fresh water, but most of its enormous bed was under cultivation." In a strategic move to isolate the French troops in Alexandria the British opened a channel. "The salt water rushed in, to the delight of the British soldiers, and in a month thousands of acres had been drowned." The move was a military success. The French surrendered and both imperialist armies retired: "we had accomplished our aim, and had no reason to remain in the country any longer; we left it to our allies the Turks." Forster's elision of the inhabitants from this narrative is made all the more strange by use of the metaphor "drowned" to describe the acres instead of the people whose fate does not, in this account, merit notice. Indeed, Forster suggests, they should be grateful for receiving the attention of Europeans; brief though it was, it rescued the area from a kind of native stupor:

But the sleep of so many centuries had been broken. The eyes of Europe were again directed to the deserted shore. Though Napoleon had failed and the British had retired, a new age had begun for Alexandria. Life flowed back into her, just as the waters, when Hutchinson cut the dyke, flowed back into Lake Mariout. (93)

The problem of point of view in history is central here. Deserted by whom? The imperialist forces who returned immediately to Europe? The inhabitants whose lives were submerged beneath the salt water? White argues that although we claim "to rank events in terms of their world-historical significance . . . that significance is less world historical than simply Western European," representing "a perspective that is

culture-specific, not universal at all" (9-10). Forster reiterates the kind of culture-specific historical narrative that White criticizes and Pynchon is self-consciously undermining. As one of V.'s characters points out,

We can always so easily give the wrong reasons . . . can say the Chinese campaigns, they were for the Queen, and India for some gorgeous notion of Empire. I know. I have said these things to my men, the public, to myself. There are Englishmen dying in South Africa today and about to die tomorrow who believe these words as--I dare say you believe in God. (169)

It is at a point such as this that his technical manipulation of narrative together with his overt subject matter combine to subvert the standard historical accounts. This reference to South Africa is as timely today as it was in 1963 when it was written, or perhaps more so, as mainstream political and historical opinion on South Africa seems gradually to be undergoing an alteration--yet another illustration of historical or historiographical relativity. White, whose linkage of narrative and authority was quoted earlier, writes that

The more historically self-conscious the writer of any form of historiography, the more the question of the social system and the law which sustains it, the authority of this law and its justification, and threats to this law occupy his attention (13)

Pynchon's self-consciousness as a historian and otherwise have often been observed, but the problem of social or political authority has not generally been considered central to V. Yet the novel is replete with examples of this kind of reference to authority both in the events of history and in the narrative representations of those events. Whether the examples are drawn from Egyptian, Sudanese, Namibian or Maltese history, the rooms in Pynchon's rathouse exhibit a consistently radical rereading of European imperialism.

Yet Pynchon is no dogmatist: any final interpretation--of history or of his story--remains thwarted. As Schaub argues, "he is adamantly opposed . . . to the creation of any stable, fixed "history" (110). Pynchon's project is not primarily a reconstruction of history from the point of view of its victims, although elements of this are present in the novel. Instead he works to decenter the established authoritative objective western account of historical events. Mink argues that

The cognitive function of narrative form, then, is not just to relate a succession of events but to body forth an ensemble of interrelationships of many different kinds as a single whole. In fictional narrative the coherence of such complex forms affords aesthetic or emotional satisfaction: in historical narrative it additionally claims truth. But this is where the problem arises. (144-45)

Pynchon, of course, is well aware of the problem and at the possible expense of "aesthetic or emotional satisfaction" has sacrificed, to some degree, the totality implied in the idea of "single whole" story. Instead he is faithful to the fact that, as Mink (cited above) observes, one event may be appear in different stories, told by different narrative communities and its significance may vary enormously with its place in these different narratives. (144-45)

Pynchon might even agree with Jameson that postmodernism's resort to the sublime and to relativity need not necessarily remain an end in itself; the point is rather "To undo postmodernism homeopathically by the methods of postmodernism . . . to reconquer some genuine historical sense by using the instruments of what I have called substitutes for history" (1987 42). In any case, Pynchon's historiographical practice in *V.* amounts to the implosion of the culture-specific historical narrative that White has outlined. As Stencil Sr. observes, *The Situation* is an n-dimensional mish-mash (460) and Pynchon demonstrates this technically by

undermining to such a degree the stable representation of historical fact, stuffing the novel full of references to every theory of history imaginable, and yet continuing to render historical facts. Despite Stencil's impersonations, *V.* does not, by itself, articulate the discourse of the Other to any great extent. But by fragmenting the monolithic western narrative of objective historical realism it works toward opening the heterodox discursive space in which that narrative of alterity, of non-synchronous and discrepant experience may be articulated and, possibly, even understood. "There's no organized effort about it," explains the narrator of *V.* in relation to the inhabitants of exotic lands, "but there remains a grand joke on all visitors to Baedeker's world: the permanent residents are actually humans in disguise" (78). Pynchon's fiction constitutes an attempt to reveal the human behind the disguise, to create the conditions of possibility under which jarring historical witnesses might testify.

In his retrospective introduction to *Slow Learner*, published twenty years after *V.*, Pynchon writes that

It may yet turn out that racial differences are not as basic as questions of money and power, but have served a useful purpose . . . in keeping us divided and so relatively poor and powerless. (xxi)

Yet in *V.*, written while the American civil rights movement gathered momentum, it is racial difference that is explored most fully. Early in the novel, Paola teaches her friends a song that she had learned from a French paratrooper on "leave from the fighting in Algeria"--Algeria, being perhaps the most well-publicized anti-colonial war immediately prior to the U.S. involvement in Viet Nam, was no doubt in the news while *V.* was being written:

Demain le noir matin
 Je fermerai la porte
 Au nez des années mortes;
 J'irai par les chemins.
 Je mendierai ma vie
 Sur la terre et sur l'onde,
 Du vieux au nouveau monde. (18-19)

Closing the door on the dead years, for this soldier, can only mean closing the door on the historical era of colonialism. Yet most of the many military characters in *V.* live below the horizon of historical consciousness, participating in it without much awareness of the political and historical pressures behind military action. When the Suez crisis occurs, the sailors in *V.* talk of many things, but not of the historical or political background. The lack of awareness on the part of the characters in *V.* has been commented on by a number of critics as has the novel's lack of tangible hope. But there may be, as *V.*'s Eigenvalue says, folds and crests in the fabric of history

such that if we are situated . . . at the bottom of a fold, it's impossible to determine warp, woof or pattern anywhere else . . . [and] it is assumed there are others, compartmented off into sinuous cycles each of which come to assume greater importance than the weave itself and destroy any continuity. Thus it is that we are charmed by the funny-looking automobiles of the '30's, the curious fashions of the '20's, the peculiar moral habits of our grandparents. We produce and attend musical comedies about them and are conned into a false memory, a phony nostalgia about what they were. We are accordingly lost to any sense of a continuous tradition. Perhaps if we lived on a crest, things would be different. We could at least see. (156)

V. may then be read as an attempt to foster, if not clear vision, then at least the necessary conditions in which clearer vision might be possible. The vision that *V.* seems to explore is, as well, one that is able to focus on the lives of the dispossessed and the victims, in relation to the discourses of power that oppress them. To this end, Pynchon examines some of the implications of cultural and historical relativism

and of the sublime,' the latter is present in both aspects discussed by Lyotard. The first--the ultimately unrepresentable nature of the event and the plurality of historical interpretation--has been discussed earlier. "The art object," writes Lyotard, "no longer bends itself to models [of the beautiful] but tries to present the fact that there is an unrepresentable" (1985 12). The other aspect of the sublime is perhaps more peculiarly contemporary: "the sublime," he writes, "is kindled by the threat of nothing further happening What is terrifying is that the *It happens that does not happen, that it stops happening*" (10). Lyotard's idea of nothing further happening entails the end of the narrative, and the end of the social possibility of creating narrative can only coincide with the destruction of that society--as the plight of the Namibian Hereros in 1904 demonstrates,⁵ or as Said has argued in reference to the Palestinian question (1984).

The end of the unfolding narratives of history on a global scale is apocalypse, the sublime spectacle of unrepresentable terror. "The sublime has not lost its link to terror," writes Huyssen. "For what could be more sublime and unrepresentable than the nuclear holocaust, the bomb being the signifier of an ultimate sublime" (46). As long as events continue to unfold, however, it is possible to represent them in one way or another as *something happening*, continuing the narrative as it were. But the possibility echoes throughout V. that the end of the story, the end of history, may be imminent, as "the balloon" appears set to "go up" on a number

⁵ The difficulties of the Hereros, of course, continue--until recently as longstanding victims of an illegal South African occupation. See Karla Poewe study *The Namibian Herero: A History of Their Psychosocial Disintegration of Survival*.

of occasions and western society seems about to tear itself apart in war yet again. The novel ends as the troops prepare for another neo-colonial showdown--Suez. "The Middle East," says Stencil Jr., "cradle of civilization, may yet be its grave" (387). This ending signals an attempt to connect the historical record and the novel itself to present conditions in the world, to historicize contemporary politics in a radical context. Pynchon is contributing another dimension to the design of the historical rathouse that is to be built out of the headlines about the Suez crisis.

Writing of the story that became chapter three of *V.*, Pynchon observes that although World War I takes on the power of an "apocalyptic showdown,"

Our common nightmare The Bomb is in there too. It was bad enough in '59 and is much worse now, as the level of danger has continued to grow Except for that succession of the criminally insane who have enjoyed power since 1945, including the power to do something about it, most of the rest of us poor sheep have always been stuck with simple, standard fear. I think we have all tried to deal with this slow escalation of our helplessness and terror in the few ways open to us, from not thinking about it to going crazy about it. Somewhere on this spectrum of impotence is writing fiction about it. (1985 xxix)

Pynchon's appropriation of epistemological relativism and the historical sublime constitutes in many ways an early example of the move toward racial integration and non-coercive understanding that was to become a central tenet of radical politics in the 1960s. In a study of the liberational possibilities of cultural relativity, Dirlik writes:

Hegemony requires a center, not only in space but also in time. The decentering of the hegemonic group, be it class or nation, deprives history of a center and the hegemonic group of its claims upon history. Culturalism that achieves this end points to a liberating possibility, if only as a possibility (27).

Yet the fragility of this sense of possibility must be noted.

Indeed, as Dirlik (and many others) points out, some kinds of postmodern

thought have the effect of de-realizing concrete historical experience quite thoroughly, compounding rather than helping to ease the post-colonial situation. What is needed,

it needs to be stressed, is not an epistemology the goal of which is to discover abstract truths, but an epistemology with an intention, one that seeks to overcome the alienation that is implicit in the notion of truth conceived abstractly (45).

There is no reason to assume that postmodernism, as an "ism", can provide the appropriate concrete historical, philosophical or political framework. If it can, writes Huyssen, it "will have to be a postmodernism of resistance, including resistance to that easy postmodernism of the 'anything goes' variety" (52). As a postmodern historiographical novel--a novel about historical representation as well as about historical events--Pynchon's *V.* does point in that direction.

CONCLUSION.

In *The Historical Novel*, one of the first modern studies of the genre, historian Herbert Butterfield suggests that

Whatever connection the historical novel may have with the history men write and build up out of their conscious studies, or with History, the past as it really happened, the thing that is the object of study and research, it certainly has something to do with . . . that mental picture which each of us makes of the past; it helps our imagination to build up its idea of the past. (2)

Since it concerns our ideas, history--fictional or not--is a story that concerns the present, even the future, as well as the past. The present situation exerts, in various ways, a determining influence on the way the past is perceived and on the way it can be represented; the future, as a projected continuation or culmination of the past and present, draws both to it in ways that alter their shape. Moreover, history is a story that is not solely concerned with time and events. In its representation of those times and events, it functions as a form of self-representation and self-definition for the social groups in question. The social identity of the narrative community is constituted both positively (by inclusion) and negatively (through exclusion--whether by being represented as alien, 'other,' or simply through the absence of representation).

The novels discussed in this thesis concern themselves explicitly with history in both senses of the term--events in the past and the narrative record of those events. What the novels articulate is the struggle among social groups over the power and authority to narrate, and the

struggle for possession of the power to impose the legitimate categories in terms of which the narration is to be articulated. It is, in a sense, a struggle over point of view, over the power to select from among the jarring witnesses the accounts that may be accepted as legitimate testimony. Von Ranke's great insight that the writing of history is, finally, impossible without the selection of a point of view is borne out here--his other great insight concerning history as the more or less transparent account of "what actually happened" notwithstanding. Yet the difficulty of arbitrating between the groups of jarring witnesses, of taking a position with respect to the selection of, and versions of, events to be privileged in narrative is a longstanding problem to which philosophers of history have often returned. In some ways the distance between F.H. Bradley and Hayden White is, however, less than one might expect: both emphasize the importance of the social forces that are inevitably influential in the narration of the past; both understand clearly that the "weightiest interests are at stake" (Bradley) in the representations of the past that are produced; and both explore the determining role of tacit presuppositions on the construction of historical knowledge.

The novels discussed in Part II are certainly secure in their canonical status, and justifiably so. In discussing the limits of the historiographic perspective in these novels, my intention is not to attack the novels but to understand the limits that inevitably bound them. Conrad, Ford and Faulkner were men of their time and of their communities; their novels articulate the tensions present at that time within those social groups. Indeed, it would be strange if the ideological structures,

tensions, and boundaries of their social worlds were not present in their works. Insightful as they are, some of their perceptions of the social world are not wholly adequate to the more heterodox reality of the present. This has been a busy century, and we are separated from them by much history. Their value to us exists not in accepting their social visions whole, but in understanding the ideological structures that enabled those specific orchestrations of heteroglossia, identifying what will no longer suffice (to borrow Wallace Stevens's phrase), and attempting to work out new approaches.

Edward Said has recently argued that "the fundamental historical problem of modernism" is that the dominant Western social groups "were being asked to take the Other seriously The subaltern and the constitutively different suddenly achieved disruptive articulation exactly where in European culture silence and compliance could previously be depended on to quiet them down." As a result of this social crisis, this cross-cultural contact, the doxic unity of culture, the sense of a single sacrosanct language (Bakhtin) can be seen to be breaking down; in response to the conflicting narratives of many different cultural groups, the great metanarratives of European culture gradually lose their legitimizing power.¹ To this (multi)cultural challenge, writes Said,

modernism responded with the formal irony of a culture unable to say yes, we should give up control, or no, we shall hold on regardless: a self-conscious contemplative passivity forms itself, as Georg Lukacs noted perspicaciously, into paralysed gestures of aestheticized powerlessness. (1989 222-23)

¹ Said cites Lyotard here, but criticizes the lack of historical and political context in *The Postmodern Condition*.

Modernism consequently "foundered on or was frozen in contemplative irony." This summary description, while reductive, does point toward a significant pattern in the three novels discussed in Part II. In all three cases, the certainty of the epic monological position is shown to be irrevocably undermined, yet the language groups constituting the "other" of those dominant groups are not granted real power of speech. A sense of impasse thus results. In *Nostromo*, the trace of epic unity is at once displayed and discredited; yet Conrad does not then reach beyond the orthodox limits of his own culture in search of supplemental or alternative definitions of the historical or cultural situation. Instead the novel remains within the ironic bounds of a conservative nihilism that offers a critique but no challenge to the existing power structure. Taking Tietjens initially as a representative figure for the best of British upper class tradition, Ford records the demise of the authority and centrality of that class. Yet since it is made in the name of the specific, if increasingly obsolete, class interests, and since no other groups are given serious consideration, the critique mounted against modernity suffers a consequent loss of critical focus in the final volume of *Parade's End*. Faulkner's inability to move beyond an essentially negative position--expressed, for example, as the struggle to say no to the legacy of Sutpen or Quentin's final repeated "I don't hate it"--leaves him straining against the narrative limits of his *sensus communis*, but rarely penetrating them.²

² Kenneth Burke notes that the question of stable authority is a recurrent one. At "different periods in history, there have been quarrels as to the precise vessel of authority that is to be considered 'representative' of the society as a whole." This sense of a stable, generally accepted point of view--a problematic concept in much historiographical theory--is predicated, at least in part, on the existence of a stable social organization. In the absence of that social stability,

The place of ironic consciousness in modern narrative that Said notes is, according to Hayden White, an important factor in historiographic narrative as well. White has observed, for example, the relationship between the rise of irony and "an atmosphere of social breakdown or cultural demise" (1973 232). Echoing Bakhtin's similar model of the passage from epic to novel, White notes that "Irony represents the passage of the age of heroes and of the capacity to believe in heroes."

Irony thus represents a stage of consciousness in which the problematical nature of language itself has become recognized In Irony, figurative language folds back upon itself and brings its own potentialities for distorting perception under question. (37)

Unlike the epic, "The modern novel is born in the consciousness of its narrative perspective," writes Robert Weimann, and one is tempted to add that in the twentieth century that consciousness becomes more precisely a narrative self-consciousness (256). In response to this situation, he argues, "the reader's most basic task in reading a novel is to resolve the irony in the meaning of perspective and to recover that element of whole-

the stability of narrative point of view is also thrown into question "Periods of social crisis," writes Burke, in a formulation that seems close to Bourdieu,

occur when an authoritative class, whose purpose and ideals had been generally considered as *representative* of the total society's purposes and ideals, becomes considered as *antagonistic*. Their class character, once felt to be the *culminating* part of the whole, is now felt to be a *divisive* part of the whole. (23)

In the novels discussed here, the dominant group in question is not considered divisive perhaps, but they are seen to have slipped from their position of representative centrality.

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ness to which point of view is the counterpart" (266). The final chapter
examine two alternative approaches which attempt to provide access, at least
to a wholeness, at least to a perspectival plenitude that the earlier
representations of the earlier novels do not allow. First, the attention
retrieval of suppressed black historical experience, and second, the adoption
of a more thoroughly ironic postmodern mode of history capable of
relativizing the claims of specific hegemonic cultural group and locating
historical knowledge accordingly.

If the novels of Part II internalize ~~the~~ self-consciousness,
the novels discussed in Part III, since they stand in a very different
relation to the dominant discourses, respond very differently. The
repeated problems that these texts encounter are posed by the difficulty,
for marginalized groups, of recovering suppressed history, of keeping it
alive, of legitimizing that testimony and those witnesses, and of living
in the present and constituting a future with the legacy of that past.
The narrative self-consciousness of these novels by black women, in which
is expressed not so much through formal self-reflexivity or irony regard-
ing point of view or focalization, instead, it is expressed as the self-
consciousness of the witness who knows that she is perceived as a partial
witness yet whose testimony *must* be rendered. The self-consciousness is
related then not toward the formal possibility of narrative authority *per se*,
not toward the ironic critique of historiographic truth, but toward
the difficulty of overcoming the aphasia imposed by a powerful and alien
dominant language group. The burden in these novels then is to move
beyond irony to a position recognizing the experience of those whose dis-
course has never been heard in the dominant institutions and is therefore

not in any need of ironic demystification. On the other hand, Pynchon's *V.* takes that modern narrative self-consciousness to an extreme through the formal self-reflexivity of both narrator and characters, through parody directed at the great metanarratives, and through an exploration of the ethnocentricity that is evident in both the events of colonial history and in the historiographic accounts of those events. *V.* embraces the irony more fully and in doing so points out the less-than-dialogic basis of the communication that has been carried on in this century between different language groups.

It is increasingly difficult to imagine, with E.M. Forster, "the English novelists . . . seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room--all writing their novels simultaneously" (17). While Forster himself confronts certain aspects of the problem of cultural pluralism in *A Passage to India*, and while he makes it clear that he is using the term "English" here to refer to the language and not to the nation, it is doubtful whether he could have foreseen just how many diverse social groups, each with its own perspectives, would have to be represented at that circular table before the century was out. The relative tranquility of the room--that had for so long depended upon the tacit ascendancy of a particular set of perspectives or presuppositions--might be endangered by the heterogeneous discourses of so many jarring witnesses. But the ensuing creative dialogue concerning the significance of the past and the diverse narratives of temporality and social identity emerging more and more from such a dialogue constitute one important mode of working through the long objective social crisis that this century has experienced. We are, indeed, fortunate as readers to have access to such a

variety of narratives and historical perspectives. And that plenitude of historiographic testimony is, perhaps, the closest we can ever approach to grasping 'the whole story' of the past

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