IMAGINED SPACES: INSTANCES OF SIMULTANEOUS SUBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIVITY IN AMERICAN FICTION

by

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(Under the Direction of Hubert McAlexander)

ABSTRACT

This study begins with the premise that fictional texts are imagined worlds, worlds with which we can interact as participants, investing emotionally and psychologically in characters and events, but worlds that we ultimately recognize as distinct from our own and regard from some critical distance. While scholars who have examined this subjective/ objective duality have focused on its effect on the reader, I examine how *writers* address these competing stresses, arguing that navigating between the two is, if anything, a more urgent problem for the writer than for the reader. Using these basic assumptions as a starting point, I explore specific textual instances where writers encode the tension between these two poles into their work. In an effort to isolate such moments, I limit my study to a very specific time and place in literary history: late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. American writers during this roughly fifty year period were influenced by a number of dramatic social and political changes – Westward expansion, the publication of Darwin and Freud, and the introduction of new artistic media among them -- which together fostered an atmosphere in which artists were virtually forced to confront this duality. I deal primarily with four writers of the period -- Henry James, Stephen Crane, Upton Sinclair, and Willa Cather -- each of whom seems to respond to this duality from his or her own unique perspective. I begin with Henry James, whose narrative voice

in *Portrait of a Lady* enacts the struggle the artist faces, between providing a realistic representation of life and the necessity of using the artificial elements of technique to create this representation. In the next chapter I look primarily at Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, and the ways in which he uses movement as a means of providing both a subjective experience of events and a complete picture of the battlefield. Next I turn to *The Jungle*, in which Upton Sinclair uses the immigrant character Jurgis Rudkus to offer an outsider's perspective on the social, economic, and political structure of Chicago. Finally, I conclude with a study of Willa Cather, whose work employs multiple levels of storytelling as a means of distancing her audience from the text itself.

INDEX WORDS: American literature; American fiction; Henry James; Willa Cather; Stephen Crane; Upton Sinclair; Subjectivity in Literature; Objectivity in Literature

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DEDICATION

To my parents, who taught me to love learning,

to Katie, who encourages me to explore,

and to Samantha, whose curiosity never ceases to awe and inspire me.

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My dissertation argues that there are two ways in which an imaginative writer sees his text. He views that text subjectively, becoming an active participant in the world he creates. He must also experience that same text objectively; he must be able to regard that imagined world from a distance, as a whole and complete universe.

In the pages that follow, I focus on "fictional" texts, but in fact all writing requires this dual perspective. All writers must constantly shift back and forth between *writing*, which involves a high level of investment in internal ideas and the speech patterns used to convey those ideas, and *editing*, which requires that we look at the work as a whole, that we notice places where we've overused the phrase "on the other hand," and can tell whether or not our conclusions actually connect to our beginnings. At least for myself, I find that the latter process, editing, is more difficult. I have no trouble seeing my students' work with objectivity, nor am I troubled by texts, both literary and critical, that I encounter in my research. My own words on the page, however, often remain a mystery to me, a whole lot of trees that I can rarely if ever see as a forest.

Thus I am eternally grateful to a number of people who helped me as I worked through this project, for providing me with that most important component – objectivity. First, this project could not have been accomplished without the constant feedback on my ideas provided by my mentor and major professor, Dr. Hubert McAlexander. He was always ready to read through drafts and comment on issues of both content and mechanics. More importantly, though, he has served as a model to me of what a teacher and scholar should be.

In addition, I owe a debt of great thanks to my dissertation completion group. Carmen Skaggs, Jennifer Eimers, and Anita DeRouen have shared their own dissertation traumas as we all muddled through this difficult process of writing and revising, constantly reminding me that I was not alone. They were always willing to look at drafts or comment on new ideas. They were also, and perhaps more significantly, always willing to listen to tales of midnight madness and offer words of encouragement during existential crises.

Anita DeRouen, in fact, has been my sometime officemate, teaching colleague, and dear friend from the time we both entered the graduate program at UGA, and I know for a certainty that I could never have made it through the past six years without her constant comradeship and encouragement.

Finally, my fiancé Katie Horton has been there all along to insist I maintain a very different kind of objectivity. As anyone who has gone through this process knows, you can easily lose yourself in the work of this or that chapter and forget that, in the end, even the most brilliant academic discourse is only one small part of a much richer life. I was lucky, in that she never allowed me to live too deeply in my own work, gently insisting that every now and then I return to “reality” and, if nothing else, walk the dogs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:
SUBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIVITY IN THE LITERARY TEXT

North and south, as far as his eye could see, it was unbroken white, save for a dark hair-line that curved and twisted from around the spruce-covered island to the south, and that curved and twisted away into the north, where it disappeared behind another spruce-covered island. This dark hair-line was the trail--the main trail--that led south five hundred miles to the Chilcoot Pass, Dyea, and salt water; and that led north seventy miles to Dawson, and still on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato, and finally to St. Michael on Bering Sea, a thousand miles and half a thousand more.

But all this--the mysterious, far-reaching hairline trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all--made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a new-comer in the land, a chechaquo, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination.

--From “To Build a Fire,” Jack London

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> 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 beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*.
>
> From *Absalom, Absalom!*, William Faulkner

> She drove into San Narciso on a Sunday, in a rented Impala. Nothing was happening. She looked down a slope, needing to squint in the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding.
>
> --From *The Crying of Lot 49*, Thomas Pynchon

As writers, Jack London, William Faulkner, and Thomas Pynchon would appear to have little in common. They are all three American, all male, but are in most other respects quite

different from one another. Yet, the above passages are remarkably similar in at least one regard. In all three, the reader is put in the position of looking down on a scene from some height and watching as events unfold below. London's narrator looks down on the icy Yukon from a mountain peak; Faulkner has Quentin see events as though they are cards on a table; Pynchon's Oedipa first looks down on the city from atop a hillside and then additionally compares this view to looking down into the interior of a radio. The basic commonality in how they describe these scenes, though, is merely the manifestation of a deeper, more fundamental impulse on the part of all three writers. While the three larger works from which these passages are taken present an essentially subjective viewpoint, one through which we are encouraged to see events as though we were a participant in them, this subjectivity is balanced at these key moments by a wider, more objective view of the same scene. All three passages, then, demonstrate the competing demands for subjectivity and objectivity in a work of fiction, and they all aim, though of course in very different ways, to accommodate both points of view.

For the most part, London's short story, "To Build a Fire," is designed to elicit a subjective response in the reader. In part, this is achieved through vivid descriptions of the extreme environment in which the protagonist finds himself. The "crackle" of his spittle in the air, before it falls to earth, and the precise language detailing the dog's condition -- "The frozen moisture of its breathing had settled on its fur in a fine powder of frost, and especially were its jowls, muzzle, and eyelashes whitened by its crystalled breath" (1302) --, help to draw us in, so that we too feel the bitter cold. Likewise, the building desperation of the situation, the movement of the plot, from the man's unfortunate step into the frozen creek, to the extinguishing of his fire by the falling snow from the tree branch, to his pathetic attempts to light a match, able to hold them only with the heels of his hands, is designed to generate an almost physical

response from us. And London further develops our emotional reactions to the story by telling us frankly that the man will die – when the snow extinguishes his fire, "It was as though he had just heard his own sentence of death" (1304). The result of this knowledge is a kind of dramatic irony in which we struggle with the knowledge that this man is already doomed – we, in many ways become him, hoping for what we recognize as impossible and clinging to some fantasy that the situation may turn out differently.

London also places us, on many occasions, inside the protagonist's mind, making this protagonist's thoughts our own. So, for instance, he writes, "That man from Sulphur Creek had spoken the truth when telling how cold it sometimes got in the country. And he had laughed at him at the time!" (1303). The emotion indicated by the exclamation point here argues that these are not the thoughts of a neutral narrator, but rather the direct transcription of what the character himself thinks. We are not only along for the trip with this character; we are inside his mind with him, feeling his doubts and his rising panic.

London's efforts to include us in this experience make it especially surprising that he begins as he does, with a distanced, bird's-eye-view of the landscape. Certainly he offers this viewpoint through subtle means, ultimately ascribing it to the protagonist, who pauses at the top of a "steep bank" to look back on where he has been. Yet London shows us more than this character could possibly see; he tells us that the line of the path extends "south five hundred miles" and over two thousand miles to the north. Even more important is his choice of metaphor for this line of trail, the "dark hair-line," for it makes the landscape not merely a distant view, but an object so far removed from the omniscient narrator that it becomes in size little more than a man's head. This distanced objectivity serves as a way for London to assert his own control over the text, his own power as creator. He highlights this control by referencing the character's more

limited perspective: “All this […] made no impression on the man.” London manages, in other words, to include two very different -- and in many ways contradictory -- viewpoints, allowing us at one and the same time this man’s individual perspective and a larger, more informed view of what is unfolding.

In Faulkner’s *Absalom Absalom!*, the competing pulls of these two perspectives are still present, though in a slightly different guise. Here it is Quentin Compson who must deal with them rather than the author. Quentin is so divided between the two, in fact, that at one point he describes himself as two separate individuals. On the one hand he is “The Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times” (5). It is this Quentin who remains objective, who sits passively listening to Miss Coldfield tell her tale, an observer who can note to himself that her “getting to it […] was taking a long time” (14). But he is also “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” (5), a participant in these events no less than are Colonel Sutpen or Clytie or any other figure in the story, drawn into it both by the fact of being born in the South and by the fact that he himself must become the storyteller before the novel’s end, must take into himself the people and events of the town.

To be sure, there are obvious differences to be found between London’s purpose and Faulkner’s. London’s passage shows a desire on the part of the author to incorporate the two competing vantage points: it is the narrator of “To Build a Fire” who shifts the point of view. But it is Quentin who does the shifting in *Absalom*. The struggle between objectivity and

subjectivity remains associated with the act of writing. It is worth noting that Quentin operates as a stand-in of sorts for Faulkner himself, a creator figure who struggles to piece together events as he is told them, to unify them into a coherent whole. Quentin remarks early in the novel that Miss Coldfield must have involved him in her story because "*she wants it told*"(7). Still, the fact that Faulkner foists the dilemma onto a character, this young man, is significant. By making the struggle between the two ways of seeing the story Quentin's rather than his own, Faulkner turns that struggle into the very subject of the novel. Such a move perhaps argues for Faulkner's greater self-awareness of the artist's dilemma. While London's work represents competing impulses on the part of the writer, Faulkner's offers a commentary on those impulses. Specifically, his work argues for the indissoluble connection between the two. Quentin, as the tabletop passage demonstrates, begins from an objective standpoint. He is the creator looking down on his creation. As the novel progresses, however, Faulkner makes it all too clear that the act of bringing this world into existence involves submitting oneself to it. Ultimately, Quentin cannot escape becoming himself a participant in what he has wrought.

Pynchon offers yet another distinct approach to this objective/ subjective duality in fiction. Like Faulkner in *Absalom*, Pynchon's use of a perspective from above the events, as Oedipa looks down on the city of San Narciso, not only represents an attempt to gain some objective ground, but is also tied to the central theme of his novel. For Oeidpa seeks to understand the world laid out below her, to attain some degree of objectivity, and yet Pynchon makes it clear that such objectivity is impossible in the world she inhabits. She tries to make sense of what she sees, comparing it to something she has seen before and trying to draw parallels so that she will be able to understand. In the end, however, the analogy she creates is no more accessible to her than the image as she initially finds it. To put this situation in more

post-modern terms, the referent of her sign turns out to be nothing more than another sign with no referent of its own. She can find a means of connecting the view below her to something from her own past, to give the present view a context, but ultimately this context is merely a "hieroglyphic" itself, with its own concealed meanings. Such is the nature of the novel's larger theme: Oedipa's quest to solve the mystery of the phantom postal service ultimately uncovers a great many signs but no final solution. Again we see an evolution of the objective/ subjective duality from that found in Faulkner. Like Quentin, Oedipa struggles to find a means of rationalizing the scene before her, of uniting the subjective and objective. The difficulty in her attempt lies in the fact that experience for Pynchon and other post-modern writers is simultaneously more subjective and more objective than it was for the Moderns. Oedipa has a deeply personal response to the scene beneath her, and yet she must come to terms with the fact that her deepest subjective experiences and emotions remain at a distance from her.

One important fact to be gathered from these three passages is that this objective/ subjective duality can be discovered in works from a broad range of literary periods, styles and approaches. Indeed, similar instances can be found scattered throughout the literary cannon. "The Mousetrap" from *Hamlet* allows the play's principle characters to view the king's death from an outsider's perspective, even while they are living subjectively through the actual events. Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, by alternating between chapters on the Joads as a specific family and chapters full of broader, more general observations on the state of life in the Dust Bowl era, alternates between subjective and objective views of the same event.

Surprisingly, such moments have not been studied in any direct way by critics or scholars, at least insofar as they are exemplary of a general phenomenon. In part this may be because they are the result of so simple a principle that they have simply been overlooked. After

all, the integration of subjectivity and objectivity is basically the outgrowth of a very fundamental element of all fictional works. Put in simplest terms, the act of creating fiction is such that it demands both a subjective and objective stance on the part of the writer. It might even be argued that no writer of fiction can write without dealing in some way with this essential duality.

A text exists as an object in a variety of senses. It is a physical object, a manuscript or a book with a cover and pages. As the Formalists and Structuralists of the twentieth century argued, the pages themselves can be seen to contain yet other objects -- letters, words, paragraphs, all arranged so as to occupy a space. But so too a text is an object in the sense that it is a creative output: it is an idea made manifest, moved outside of the mind. As such a statement suggests, it also possesses a subjective component. A story must begin within the mind. It exists internally for the author and is necessarily a part of his consciousness. Whether or not the characters spring directly from his experience, they are certainly the product of his consciousness and he exercises some measure of control over their existence. Furthermore, the goal of fiction is to engender that subjectivity in the reader, to create an artificial environment in which the reader can invest his own consciousness. Thus the operation of a fictional text is to move from the artist's subjective experience, to an objective representation of that experience, to the reader's subjective experience of that representation.

To put these observations in more concrete terms, the work of fiction is a world of sorts. Any novel or short story can be considered as occupying a place somewhere between the real world and the unreal, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say it is a place that participates in *both* reality and unreality. These are worlds that are experienced, at least in a psychological way, by both the writer and the reader. We carry information about people, places, and events taken

from such works around in our memories in the same way that we would information about our co-workers or schoolmates, as though we had actually met them or visited them or experienced them. At the same time, such fictional worlds are undeniably worlds removed from our own. Except in unusual circumstances, we are not invested in the fictional world to the degree that we are invested in our own. We are able to stop and start a story, to modify in our imaginations how characters appear, to reject the work entirely if we so choose. Most importantly, we are able to step outside of it, and in this sense a story allows us to view such worlds from a more objective standpoint. Thus, the fictional world exists in a subjective sense, as capable of being experienced, and in an objective sense as capable of being judged from some critical distance. It is this notion of fiction as simultaneously a real and an unreal, or a subjective and objective, place that is the foundation for my argument.

Regarding fiction in these terms is based on more than mere observation and speculation, however. Rather, there are important psychological reasons why we experience fiction as a "middle ground." In fact, the desire to experience the world from both a subjective and objective standpoint simultaneously is an innate characteristic of being human. Such a desire is rooted in our childhood development. D.W. Winnicott's work on what he terms the "transitional object" in childhood provides a useful framework for understanding how this works. Winnicott begins by pointing out that an infant initially experiences the world as absolutely subjective; he views everything around him, all he can see, as an extension of his own body: "The mother, at the beginning, by an almost 100 per cent adaptation affords the infant the opportunity of the *illusion* that her breast is part of the infant. It is as it were, under the baby's magical control. […] Omnipotence is nearly a fact of experience" (11). Healthy development, of course, requires that the infant come to understand that the world is separate from his own body; but in order to do so,

he must pass through an intermediate stage. Winnicott hypothesizes that this may occur when the baby's natural inclination to suck his thumb or hand, or to stroke his face – actions that are definitely subjective in that they involve his own body – becomes accidentally caught up with an object such as a blanket or soft toy, so that the object becomes an element in the subjective experience. Unlike his thumb, however, the object can be taken away. Thus the transitional object comes to operate as both a part of the infant's subjective experience and distinct from that experience, a part of an objective, "other," reality.

But Winnicott goes further. He argues that the need for this intermediate area, between objectivity and subjectivity, becomes an integral part of human existence: "the third part of the life of a human being, a part we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute" (2). As the child develops, the original fulfillment discovered in simultaneous objectivity and subjectivity manifests itself in the impulse to play. The theory of play has several components. First, "Baby and object are merged in with one another. Baby's view of the object is subjective and the mother is oriented towards making actual of what the baby is ready to find." Then, "Confidence in the mother makes an intermediate playground here, where the idea of magic originates, since the baby does to some extent *experience* omnipotence. […] I call this a playground because play starts here. The playground is a potential space between the mother and the baby or joining mother and baby" (34).

Finally, such play is for Winnicott the foundation for later artistic development. For one thing, words are viewed as simply another sort of transitional object: "an infant's babbling and the way in which an older child goes over the repertory of songs and tunes while preparing for sleep come within the intermediate area as transitional phenomena" (2). Thus play with words is

equated with other kinds of play; words become an intermediate reality. But he goes on to argue, "It is assumed that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.). This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play" (13). In these terms, the act of creating fictional worlds can be seen as predicated on the need, established in infancy, to fashion objects that can be experienced both subjectively and objectively.

This view of art as connected to play is not restricted to psychological texts. In his theoretical work on the foundations of representational arts, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Kendall Walton makes an argument similar to that of Winnicott's, writing that, "The activities in which representational works of art are embedded and which give their point are best seen as continuous with children's games of make-believe" (11). As in Winnicott, the human impulse to create is regarded in Walton as springing directly from our childhood need to fuse subjectivity and objectivity. Walton develops a rather complicated argument for how this operates. The specifics of this argument are not especially relevant here, but his formulation of the essential problem is:

> Our prereflective thoughts about what links can obtain between the real world and fictional ones are strangely schizophrenic. On the one hand, fictional worlds and their contents seem insulated or isolated in some peculiar way from the real world, separated from it by a logical or metaphysical barrier. That, indeed, is why we call them different *worlds*. […] On the other hand, we seem to be in *psychological* contact with characters, sometimes even intimate with them. We have epistemological access to fictional worlds; we know a great deal about what

> happens in them. Often we are privy to characters' most private thoughts and feelings. And we respond to what we know, apparently in many of the ways in which we respond to what we know about the real world (191-192).

If it is clear, then, that the need to achieve simultaneous objectivity and subjectivity is fundamental to being human, and even more fundamentally an aspect of the fictional worlds we create, it seems only logical to examine the stories we produce looking particularly at this duality and how it operates.

Of course, it would not be entirely accurate to say that the issues associated with this duality had never been explored. After all, Plato deals with them in *The Republic*, where he describes poetry as "third from what *is*" (281). In doing so, he is emphasizing the illusory nature of art, the world of "seeming" that an artist creates. For him, this is art's dangerous aspect, in that it offers those who know nothing of "truth" to claim truth or "reality" simply by creating an artificial reality. Art is "easy to make for the man who doesn't know the truth – for such a man makes what looks like beings but are not" (283). Ultimately, such fears are founded on the possibility that those who view art will be unable to tell the difference, a recognition of art's ability to mimic reality at the same time that art is distinctly different from that reality.

Wordsworth deals with the question of what the artist's eye and ear "half-create,/ And what perceive" (107-108). The world of "Tintern Abbey" is a real world that he experiences, but it becomes as well a place within the mind, as he points out when he says that it will become "life and food for future years" (65-66). More than this, it has become a world unto itself in the poem, a world of "mountain-springs," (3) "these plots of cottage-ground and orchard-tufts" (11) and with an imagined "hermit's cave, where by his fire/ The hermit sits alone" (22-23). Thus, the poem itself exists as the embodiment of how the process of creation can endow a work with a

kind of reality. The real world is transformed imaginatively into the world of the poem, marking the poem as occupying a middle ground between reality and unreality.

More recently, Norman Holland has pointed out from a critical standpoint ways that fictional worlds exist as simultaneously real worlds and pseudo-worlds. He makes his assertions based on how works are read. In the introduction to *The Dynamics of Literary Response*, he writes of "the basic question confronting the textual critic: What is the relation between the patterns he finds objectively in the text and a reader's subjective experience of the text? […] Everyone who thinks about literature faces the task of establishing a conceptual bridge between objective and subjective views of literature" (xv). Holland draws attention to several ways in which the text is experienced. He begins by adopting a psychological framework to explain that a work of literature taps into our deepest subconscious fears and desires. Those traumas of childhood that we repress but that make themselves felt through typically unconscious means, are also accessed when we read a work of literature. As Holland puts it, the work "transforms" those unconscious elements so that we are, in our most primal being, affected by the story: "Psychoanalytically the reader replaces the danger of phallic woundings, rape, beheading, wearing asses' ears, helplessness, mental impotency or sexual – by submission to a mother's nurturing but also murderously powerful love" (25). Thus at the very deepest levels, we live out internally what takes place in the fictional worlds we encounter: "It is from such deep and fearful roots of our most personal experience that literature gets its power and drive" (30).

Holland goes on to argue that the process of reading a work of literature involves mentally reconstructing descriptions and events. In doing so, we necessarily invest ourselves in the work: "if the literary process is succeeding, we are not only devouring the object; we are making our minds like it or it like our minds" (76). Here again, psychologically, the work of

literature affects us in a profound way, an indication that the fictional world does, in fact, exist for us in ways similar to our "real" world's existence.

At the same time, however, Holland recognizes that there is an element of our minds that refuses to allow us to be completely overtaken by the experience of a text. First, our analytical abilities keep us at a distance. To form judgments about character development, plot structure, or even whether or not we like the story, is to be constantly reminded that the worlds we encounter are artificial. Furthermore, "we still have other ego functions: putting letters together to form words, remembering what happened before, and guessing at what will happen next, judging probability, and the rest" (87). In such ways we are necessarily outside the text at the same time we are inside it.

Phenomenological critics have made arguments similar to Holland's, again by looking specifically at how readers experience a text. They too have suggested that there is a vacillation between the subjective and objective experience of a work of fiction. Roman Ingarden, for example, explores the way in which readers accept or reject a text based on the language contracts between author and reader. Ingarden argues that there are two kinds of reading, "passive" and "active." In the first of these, a reader is only concerned with the single sentence being read at a particular instant: "One is occupied with the realization of the sentence meaning itself and does not absorb the meaning in such a way that one can transpose oneself by means of it into the world of the objects in a work" (38). It is this transposing of oneself into the text that constitutes "active" reading, where "we project ourselves in a cocreative attitude into the realm of the objects determined by the sentence meanings" (40). Ingarden builds upon these two types of reading to assert that reading a literary text involves filling in the open spaces left by the author. Thus the reader becomes, in his terms, a "cocreator." The end result is that this theory,

like Holland's, relies on the idea that there is a kind of back and forth action for the reader, in this case between reading sentences to gain an objective meaning and reading them such that one becomes subjectively involved in a fictional world.

Mario Valdés, in *World-Making: the Literary Truth Claim and the Interpretation of Texts* examines the cognitive processes of a reader from the standpoint that any sentence contains a truth-claim within it that the reader can either accept or reject. He identifies several types of such claims: there are those based on empirical fact, those based on verisimilar representation, and those based on the authority of the narrative or authorial voice. In the literary work, however, the most important type of truth-claim is that of consistency: is the claim being made valid in the context of the world created by the work? (20-22). In order to evaluate such a claim, the reader must be engaged in the world of the novel, must be able to live subjectively in that world in order to judge whether such a claim is consistent with that world. For Valdés, the proper role of criticism is to alternate between experiencing that world subjectively and moving outside of that world so that one can comment on that world's consistency.

Finally, in surveying the critical and scholarly approaches to fiction's simultaneous subjective and objective reality, the work of Joseph Frank deserves special mention. The focus of most of the critics mentioned so far is on proving the text's ability to draw a reader in subjectively. Frank's writing looks at the text in a somewhat different light; he offers the first critical examination of the work of literature as a "space" as opposed to an experience. In his important essay inspired by Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, he addresses the ways in which writers, particularly those of the Modernist period, work to turn the temporal nature of the novel into something closer to the visual arts. In his conception, the novel of the period often relies on spatial components to achieve its effects: "All these writers ideally intend the reader to

apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence" (10). In emphasizing space over time, such writers as Joyce, Proust, and Barnes, "can be properly understood only when their units of meaning are apprehended reflexively in an instant of time" (18). In other words, the works of these writers require that the reader hold the entire scene of the novel in his mind.

There is some similarity here to my stated premise, especially in that to see the work in this way means turning the world of the novel into an object, one that can be held wholly in the mind, turned this way and that in the light, and regarded from multiple angles. However, my own conception of this fictional world is different from Frank's in a number of ways. Key among them is that where Frank asserts that the text can only be re-read and never simply read, that only as a complete object can it be understood, I would argue that the text remains an experience for the reader, that the participation of the reader in a "world" begins from the opening sentence of a work and continues throughout. Furthermore, while Frank doesn't entirely dismiss the fact of a subjective element in the text, his primary interest is in the text as object. I would argue, in contrast, that the text is primarily a subjective experience, and that the moments of objectivity are far more isolated than his theory would suggest. I regard the world of a novel or short story primarily as a world the reader inhabits rather than one he views from without.

Ultimately, the emphasis in all of these critics, in Holland, Valdés, Ingarden, Walton, even Plato, falls on the way a reader experiences a text.[1] Yet if we accept the notion that the fictional world is a place that can be experienced subjectively and objectively by the reader, how much more must this be so for the writer? For, while the reader must reconstruct the world on

[1] Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," is written from the vantage point of a poet, but in fact it draws our attention to an aspect of human experience in general rather than to his experience as a writer.

the page, a process that necessarily keeps him at a distance, the writer contains within himself the entirety of this world, whole and complete. Thus it is far more subjective for him than it could be for any reader. At a minimum, the author is a direct participant in those places he describes because he is their creator. At the same time, he is far better able to understand how a text creates objectivity, in that the process of writing necessitates moving that subjective experience, that lived experience, onto the page. It is the task of a writer to rip those internally held images from out of himself and to encode them into a language that can never truly live up to the internal images. Thus the writer simultaneously experiences the work as subjective and objective in ways that a reader never truly can.

My dissertation, then, starts from this point: an author is driven by the need to include both subjective and objective elements in his or her work. Beyond this foundational point, however, the focus of my study is to show that this essential duality is encoded by writers in their works, either consciously or unconsciously, through a variety of strategies.

One of the principle difficulties in making such claims about the nature of fiction, however, is that they are applicable to essentially all fictional writing. One might go back in literary history as far as Homer's *Iliad*, for example, and note the ways that it includes moments of subjectivity in which single warriors do battle, and likewise moments of objectivity, in which the entire battlefield can be seen from above. One could study Shakespeare's soliloquies as examples of the playwright seeking to transcend the subjective moment of his play, to step outside the boundaries of the text and comment upon the action. To examine the entire history of this phenomenon, then, would be an undertaking far too vast for a single study. I have chosen, therefore, to limit the present discussion in two important ways.

First, I have limited my analysis to those works written during a fifty year period -- the latter quarter of the nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth. My rationale for such a limitation is that it is in this period that the duality of subjectivity and objectivity in literature first takes on a particularly pressing importance for writers. One might go so far as to say that writers become self-conscious about this aspect of fiction for the first time.

There are a number of important factors influencing this heightened awareness. As many critics have pointed out, the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, exerted a tremendous influence on the realist/ naturalist period that followed that publication. Conrad Ostwalt argues that Darwin's work "contributed to a new way to think about the world and one's place in the world" (29). The metaphysical conception previously held of the universe as somehow ordered and unified was thrown into question. It is only natural that such questioning would affect the development of art in general, and the construction of fictional narrative in particular. While a desire to believe in an essential unity in the universe persisted, such a desire was tempered by this new understanding that, in fact, nature contained a degree of chaos as well. These two struggling sides, one in which man continued to believe that some sense could be made of the world, and one in which that sense was denied, essentially correspond to the subjective/ objective duality generally inherent in fiction. Man still needed a belief in a divine creator, an objective force that brought order to existence. At the same time, Darwin had made it increasingly difficult to see beyond the day-to-day subjectivity of animal existence. Thus it makes sense to conclude that a concern for the conflict between order and chaos would translate into a hyper-awareness of a similar kind of conflict in fiction.

Donald Pizer too asserts that Darwin's work cast a long shadow over the Realist/ Naturalist period. In *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth Century American Literature,* he

argues that this influence took two sometimes opposing forms: “the crude determinism of impersonal evolutionary law juxtaposed against a faith in a private vision” (xiii). In the important writers of the periods he finds these two forces intermingled. He points specifically to Howells, Twain, and James as writers who manage to make their individual characters represent larger humanistic goals and concerns: “The three writers, in short, dramatize a vision of experience in which individuals achieve that which is still a goal for mankind at large” (7). He goes on to point out that the use of symbolism in the period was very much tied to such a duality, that the use of common objects, “the gold tooth, rocking chair, and superficial head wound” to represent “complex and elemental emotions of pride, desire, and fear” (39) set up an essential tie between the inner and outer levels of experience.

Eric Link actually finds a parallel between Darwin and the writers of this period in terms of creative method. Link draws on comments by Midwestern author Maurice Thompson, a friend of William Dean Howells:

> I should think fiction-makers might profit greatly by Darwin’s method. It was a double method; the microscopic analysis (the attention to the most commonplace details, the worship of facts, so boasted of by the realists) was one lobe, the other was stupendous synthesis that casts over these details a grand romantic interpretive frame that is even more imaginative […] than the tales of Edgar Allan Poe (44).

Beginning from this point, Link makes a generalization about the works of this period: “Darwin’s ‘double method’ also describes fairly accurately the fictional method of many naturalistic narratives that not only pay close attention to minute detail, but also incorporate elements of naturalist theory that act as vast synthetic frames through which to interpret the

smaller details of the narrative" (44). In other words, not only the theory behind Darwin but his very methods helped make the subjective/ objective duality a conscious concern for the writers of the time.

In addition to Darwin's work, however, there were at least two other important writers who brought attention to questions of objectivity and subjectivity. The first of these was Saussure. His *Course in General Linguistics* with its famous formulation that "The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (67), essentially established that words were nothing more than symbols. Such an idea would necessarily have caused writers of the time to question what had been previously taken for granted: the objective meaning behind the communicative act. Writers then were faced with a new kind of anxiety: the fear that direct communication with a reader was finally impossible. Without question the recognition of this fact would have spurred artists to consider the very nature of art itself, prompting an increased awareness of how the work navigates between inducing subjective experience in a reader and attempting to convey some objective truth directly from the author.

While Saussure's work was not published until 1915, it is clear that many of his ideas were already in the air in the late nineteenth century. In her examination of linguistic history Olga Amsterdamska has written that "Saussure's philosophical revolution, after all, was not entirely unique. The idea that facts are not empirically given entities but constructs created by scientists and dependent on the contexts in which they are investigated, can be found in a number of quite different idea systems proposed around the turn of the century" (201-202). Such a statement makes clear that the recognition that simple correspondence between words and meaning was impossible had already begun to be made long before it was established in

Saussure's work, despite the groundbreaking significance that particular work has gone on to achieve.

At or around the same time, Freud began to make assertions not so very different from Saussure's, if from a slightly different vantage point. Freud made clear the fact that what we take to be our objective views of reality are, in fact, very limited subjective experiences. In the end, his theories aruge that the individual is essentially trapped in his own subjective perceptions of the world and that access to any sort of objective truth or reality is impossible. As with Saussure's linguistic argument, Freud's psychological theories would certainly have had an impact on the thinking of writers of the period, at the very least making them hyper-aware of the inability of any text to truly convey an author's interior conception of the world. Thus questions about subjectivity and objectivity would have had particularly immediate importance.

Finally, there is the fact that significant new media were arising during this period. The photograph especially, which had become steadily more important and common during the course of the nineteenth century, had a strong role in helping to remind artists that some degree of control over our existence had been forever lost. Carol Shloss has traced this development over the course of the century, pointing particularly to the way a photograph speaks of "enclosure and separation" (4). In framing a subject, the photograph isolates, emphasizing our separation from one another. Yet, as she points out, the photograph also has the ability to offer objectivity on a scene. As she puts it, a photograph navigates the space between subjectivism and objectivism: it is "Suspended between self-knowledge and lack of panoramic knowledge, aware but unable to measure" (5). Here then was an invention that suggested in a direct way a dual view of the world. As Shloss has suggested, it changed in significant ways how artists in other mediums came to regard their own aims.

In addition to limiting my work in terms of period, I have also chosen to concentrate specifically on American texts. This too has a certain important basis. America has, by and large, always been a country oriented towards space and movement within that space. A number of historians have argued that because of the way it was founded, explored and settled, Americans have maintained a certain relationship to the land unlike the inhabitants of any other country. Henry Nash Smith, for example, writes that, "The character of the American empire was defined ... by a relation between man and nature – or rather, even more narrowly, between American man and the American west" (187). Frederick Turner has made a similar argument, suggesting that the lure of America from the time it was first settled by Europeans was based on the lack of a malleable landscape in Europe: "Here writers had no recognizable cultural context within which they might work. They had lost that mental map that had been theirs in the Old World, that had allowed them to appreciate without precise formulation – and without the need for it – the rude megalith in the midst of the plowed and furrowed field" (14). Elsewhere, Turner describes this as a "void," a place in which man came to feel insignificant. In other words the American landscape and our experience of that landscape, predisposed writers to be aware of their own isolation from others in ways similar to those that Freud's or Saussure's theories had. It is a fairly straightforward exercise to find American writers -- from Walt Whitman to Jack Kerouac – who have found in this same landscape a means of addressing this isolation. American writers seem always to be trying to overcome the isolation created by the land by turning that land into a unifying force.

In structure, my dissertation is divided into four main chapters, each dealing with a different American writer from the period. These four writers, Henry James, Stephen Crane, Upton Sinclair, and Willa Cather each dealt with the subjective/ objective duality in his or her

own unique way, and yet their techniques influenced their contemporaries and have had important repercussions for writers since.

The first of these chapters treats Henry James, the writer who, it might be argued, first seemed to recognize the simultaneous pulls of objectivity and subjectivity as an artistic problem. Throughout his career, this problem becomes an element of plot, particularly when a story or novel centers on an artist figure, as so many of his works do. It is a frequent subject of his criticism, where he deals with a central paradoxical dilemma for the writer: in creating a realistic representation of the world, the artist must necessarily employ artifice: the greater the verisimilitude, the greater the artifice. But the objective/subjective problem is most apparent in the narrative figures James uses to guide his fictions. These figures operate as stand-ins for James himself, and allow him to demonstrate the difficult position of the artist, the constant balancing act he must perform. Using *The Portrait of a Lady* as my primary text, I explore the various dimensions of this balancing act.

In the second chapter, I turn to Stephen Crane, and particularly *The Red Badge of Courage*. As Crane's writing in "The Open Boat" demonstrates, he had a nagging desire as a writer always to convey immediate experience and to offer a larger, distanced view of that experience. In visual terms, he wanted both his close-ups and his panoramic shots. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, he seems to have developed a method of achieving both. By having his central character move freely about the battlefield, he allows the reader to see both the first-hand perspective of warfare and the larger battlefield as a whole.

Crane's experiments with movement in space had important implications for Upton Sinclair, the subject of my third chapter. Sinclair, too, has the central character of *The Jungle*, Jurgis, move restlessly about his landscape, and to similar effect. Sinclair, however, represents a

shift towards a socially concerned brand of American Naturalism, one eager to make broad statements about the state of America in the early twentieth century. As such, his work springs from a different motivation than that of Crane, specifically the desire to make his readers feel the sting of poverty and oppression at the same time he sought to make broad, sweeping generalizations about the root causes of that poverty and oppression. Additionally, Sinclair draws on another important technique in addressing both the objective and subjective demands of his socially motivated fictions: he relies on the outsider figure in order to provide distance and perspective on the world he portrays, allowing him to show the individual viewpoint and at the same time imbue that viewpoint, because it is an outsider's, with a certain critical distance.

Finally, I turn to Willa Cather, a writer who, like James, was deeply concerned with the position of the artist in relation to both her own work and the larger world. Where James found tension in this position, however, Cather embraces it. For while James saw the role of the artist as a delicate balancing act between realism and technique, Cather seems to argue that greater artificiality actually fosters a greater sense of realism. In her many celebrations of the amalgamated object, the land in *O Pioneers!*, the soup in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the diary of *The Professor's House*, she makes clear her belief that the *constructed* art is the most beautiful art. Particularly in *My Antonia*, Cather works to show that the more seams that exist in her story the truer to life, the more fully realized, her imagined world becomes.

In the end, I offer a conclusion that seeks to delineate some of the lessons we can take from these four authors. Additionally, I look at how they have affected writers in the past hundred years. In many ways the problem they first grappled with, the difficulty of moving fluidly from objective to subjective points of view in a single fictional text were not new, but

these writers were among the first to recognize it, and the techniques they developed have helped to guide writers ever since.

CHAPTER TWO

HENRY JAMES: THE AUTHORIAL DILEMMA

Henry James wrote during a key period in the development of American fiction, and indeed in the development of fiction generally. He was himself aware of the turning point that the novel and short story had reached; *The Art of Fiction* is nothing if not an attempt to address this crucial moment and to help establish fiction's importance as an artistic genre. There, James writes, "Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call *discutable*. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it" (*Tales* 376). I would argue that this new "consciousness" James points to is the recognition, brought on by events and forces I have already delineated, of fiction's inherent subjective/ objective duality – of fiction as "alternative world," one capable of being experienced as "world," but also capable of being examined from some critical distance. One might regard this "consciousness" in other words, as similar to that of Adam and Eve after having eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – fiction's consciousness of its own existence, its own flaws, but also its own power. James was, in many ways, the ideal writer to foster this new appreciation of fiction. His psychological makeup, temperament, and artistic sensibilities all combined to give him unique insight into the fictional double vision. As a result, James was among the first writers, not only to recognize this duality, but to incorporate it consciously into his works. And if, perhaps, he did so with some degree of unease about how the two sides might be resolved -- more so, for example, than writers who were to follow him --, the most remarkable

aspect of James's work may be that he found ways to turn even this unease to his artistic advantage.

* * *

In his monumental study of Henry James, Leon Edel emphasizes James's early adopted role of "observer" as key to his eventual development as a writer. Edel writes of the boy's "favorite pastime of watching" (33), and of "the extent to which 'picture' entered into the experience of the young Henry" (29). This development in James is not especially surprising given Henry Sr.'s attitude towards education, his "horror of dogma and moral judgments." Never allowed to remain in any school or with any teacher for long, indeed never given any "standard by which to judge the facts of the life he saw around him," Henry Jr. "felt himself forced […] to pay attention to everything and by this process to seek to bring order, reason and common sense into the world's chaos" (37). But if this state of affairs was unsettling at the time, Edel, apparently drawing on recollections from James himself, reminds us that in the end it yielded fortunate consequences: "The novelist reasoned that this free-and-easy mode of education – or absence thereof – was the best thing that could have happened to him: it made him 'convert' – everything had to be translated into his own terms and rendered in the light of his own inner resources" (37). What began as a kind of defense mechanism, then, would eventually became the foundation for James's artistic technique.

The "conversion" James performs seems at first to be a kind of trade-off of subjective experience for objectivity. Rather than participate directly in events unfolding around him, James chose instead to simply watch and in this way to gain distance, the better to understand and impose "order, reason and common sense" on those events. Edel finds this behavior

particularly in evidence in James's relationship to the women in his life, arguing, for example, that Minny Temple's death at a young age allowed Henry to turn her into a "statue" of sorts:

> Minny alive had been a constant reminder to Henry of his inarticulateness and his fear of asserting himself. Minny gradually sinking into decline could renew his strength. Dead, Minny resided within the walls of his mind. He did not have to marry her and no one else could, neither John Gray, nor William, nor Wendell, none of the clever young men who surrounded her at Conway or in the ballrooms of New York. Minny was now permanently his, the creature of his imagination (111).

The implication here is that James, at least in this instance, was saved from the prospect of having actually to live life, with all the messy relationships and potential rejection that might entail. Instead of the subjective experience of life with Minny, he could turn her into an object, one fixed and inviolable. Further she could then be reborn as a "character," as she was to be in *The Portrait of Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*, a figure to be posed in whatever ways the artist might desire. Edel describes in similar terms James's relationship with his mother, and his reaction to her death in 1882: "In life he had had to share her with his father, with William, and his younger brothers and sister. Now in the depths of memory and imagination, she belonged to him" (274). And for Edel, this defines James's process in general as artist, of turning the world around him into a fictional universe over which, as creator, he could exert total control. He did, after all, possess a well-known penchant for taking snatches of gossip and, having made them his own, turning them to profit as plots in his stories. Further, as R.P. Blackmur notes, "He never wanted to hear all the facts, which might stupefy him, but only enough to go on with, hardly

enough to seem a fact at all" (*Art of the Novel* xxiii). Facts were less interesting as part of a relayed experience than they might be as components of the artist's framework.

But one might just as easily see this behavior as operating in the opposite direction: that is, James was able to turn the activity of observing into a subjective enterprise. In this sense, objectivity *was* experience for the writer. In the case of Minny Temple, for instance, James takes his view of her from without, at an objective distance, and internalizes it, making it his own, so that the objective reality of her person is made subjective in the most intimate, and perhaps extreme sense of this term. That is, in one sense, he was actually able to possess her. Further, placing her into the world of his fictions allowed him to create psychological experiences of her, allowing him to interact with her figure, even while he was able always to keep control of where those experiences might go.

In sum, objectivity and subjectivity are both crucial to James, the two constantly replacing one another, crossing and re-crossing in an odd sort of dance. As "observer" he watched from a distance rather than experiencing directly, and tried to impose objective order on what he saw. At the same time, he created subjective experiences, whole worlds out of those various "objects" he accumulated. We find in James a kind of living illustration of D.W. Winnicott's speculations about the nature of childhood play and its relationship to the creative mind. Winnicott argues, as we have seen, that the confusion between subjective and objective realities, between what is a part of us and what is not, is with us from birth and is never entirely resolved. It is in play that the developing child begins to work out the relationship between the two, in an effort to make distinctions and to grapple with how they are interconnected. The object in play is simultaneously a part of the subjectively imagined world of play and an object that will be put away once the period of play has ended. It is in the arts where the distinction

most continues to be explored in our adult existence. Much like the child's toy, the work of art is both a world we can enter and experience, and an object that can be put aside once we are "done" with it. Under this theory James, all great artists in fact, are more capable than most of moving fluidly from one pole to the other.

If subjectivity and objectivity are both essential to the artist, the competing pulls of the two create intense pressure, both on the artist and the work. On the one hand, the artist seeks to create a fictional space; thus he first must know that space from *within*. On the other, in order to create such an environment, he must be able to shape it, to impose form and order. He must be able to exist above that world, to see it at a remove, with the objectivity of the "creator." James recognized the tension from these competing demands; in many of his best works this tension is portrayed, at least outwardly, as a kind of anxiety.

In *The Insecure World of Henry James*, Ralf Normann catalogs a number of ways that James's anxieties betray themselves, and in most cases, these insecurities can be traced back to this objective/ subjective struggle. For example, Normann identifies what he terms the "finding a formula-formula." As he explains, many James characters invoke verbal formulas as a way of trying to work some "verbal magic," to manipulate people and events. Always, however, they do so with the understanding that their efforts are ultimately doomed to failure: "In verbal rituals such as emphatic affirmation, formula-finding etc. the characters reveal a desperation which stems from an intense wish to believe that language *can* govern reality, coupled with an ambiguous doubt as to whether it is possible after all" (131). This simultaneous investment in words accompanied by insecurity about them might be phrased as a conflict between subjective and objective modes of thinking. Winnicott, in fact, claims that words, like toys, possess a kind of intermediate existence between objective and subjective reality – between the "real" world

and the imagined one. As Saussure recognized during James's own lifetime, words suggest a reality, but at the same time remain objects separate from that reality. In the failure of these "verbal rituals," then, James seems to show his awareness of both the temptation to enter the subjective world, where our words control events, and the necessity of recognizing the limits of that world.

James works this conflict directly into his plots, exploring the repercussions that arise when the subjective and objective collide in art. In his preface to *The Tragic Muse*, in fact, he defines "the conflict between art and 'the world' " as "one of the half-dozen great primary motives" in literature (*Art of the Novel* 79). In "The Beast and the Jungle," James considers the dangers to be found in giving in completely to the pull of imagination. What happens, in other words, when the artist begins to invest more fully in his own imagination than in "reality"? John Marcher's is a tale of a man blinded to the possibilities for love that exist right in front of him. But the blinders he wears are the product of his own mind, the romantic belief in his own impending "moment" of crisis – the "crouching beast in the jungle" -- a moment which never quite materializes. Caught up in endless speculative fantasies about what the crisis will turn out to be, he never sees the love that May has for him, and the possibilities for *real* happiness that she represents. Essentially, he never lives. Only in the end, while visiting May's grave does he come to recognize his own folly, the fact that, in contrast to the graveside stranger, Marcher has no one to mourn: "No passion had ever touched him" (*Tales* 338). The world of imagination offers subjectivity, but when we fail to recognize that world as *object*, distinct from real life, we run the risk of losing entirely our hold on reality.

Spencer Brydon, of "The Jolly Corner," is also greatly concerned with his own imagination. James even uses a similar metaphor to connect the two men. Brydon, he writes,

"had been introduced to no sport that demanded at once the patience and the nerve of this stalking of a creature more subtle, yet at bay perhaps more formidable, than any beast of the forest" (*Tales* 353). Here, though, is a difference. In contrast to Marcher, Brydon "stalks" his beast, a demonstration of just how much more control he has over his imagination than does Marcher. Marcher, as is made clear in the beginning of "Beast in the Jungle" never really lives in the actual world. When he attempts to guess his connection to the vaguely familiar May Bartram at a party, James writes that he "devoted more imagination to her than to all the others put together," (*Tales* 304) but his "imaginative" recall is consistently wrong: "Marcher flattered himself that the illumination was brilliant, yet he was really more pleased on her showing him, with amusement, that in his haste to make everything right he had got most things rather wrong" (*Tales* 305). Marcher's world, in other words, is purely subjective and, by implication, the product of complete self-absorption. Not only is it based in imagination rather than reality, but it is only imagination, without connection to reality.

In contrast, Spencer Brydon seems to possess almost too much objectivity. He has lived all his life at a distance, overseas and apart from his family, and even the creation he attempts to summon up he tries to control. He is the "master" (*Tales* 345) of the jolly corner where the ghostly apparitions appear, and at another point, he is described letting himself into the house, "with the assurance of calm proprietorship" (*Tales* 352). Further, the ghosts he imagines are, he at least believes, under his control: "they weren't really sinister; at least they weren't as he had hitherto felt them – before they had taken the Form he so yearned to make them take" (*Tales* 353). Yet to control is not necessarily to be a part of; control can be exerted at some remove from experience. In the end Brydon can only look at the ghost of himself -- never interact with it, never become it -- and as a result, he finally rejects what he has made. Alice tells him in the

end, “And as *I* didn’t disown him, as *I* knew him, -- which you at last confronted with him in his difference, so cruelly didn’t, my dear – well, he must have been, you see, less dreadful to me” (369). Where Marcher refuses to see the limits of the imagination, Brydon seems unable to see the limits of objectivity, to understand that his creation, to a certain extent, has a life of its own. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Alice’s statement, however, is the irony that, because she has lived so long with the fictional image, she gains some objective perspective on it. She can recognize it as image. Thus we see here that both halves of the subjective/ objective duality rely on each other.

But even when the two do seem to exist in an uneasy balance, James suggests there is a tremendous tension, a sort of perpetual anxiety for the artist. It is this anxiety he dramatizes in “The Middle Years.” The central protagonist, Dencombe, encounters a young man reading a novel Dencombe himself wrote. Dr. Hugh is entirely lost in this fictional world, and as the story progresses, Hugh comes to represent the sacrifices Dencombe has made for the sake of art, his own regrets, much like those of John Marcher, at having lived more in his fiction than in the real world around him: “Don’t you know, I want to what they call ‘live’” he tells Hugh (*Tales* 222). Yet, his feelings are not entirely of regret. In the final pages, he speaks of writing in reverent terms: “It *is* glory to have been tested, to have had our little quality and cast our little spell” (227). It is as though, while he is in his imagined world he wants nothing more than to escape to reality, but once he has gained some objectivity, he can recognize the value in what he has wrought. In the opening scene of the story, this paradox becomes strikingly apparent. Dencombe first spies Dr. Hugh, walking along the beach with his two female companions. His imagination immediately springs to life, as he probes the nature of the relationships among these three: “What, moreover, was the use of being an approved novelist if one couldn’t establish a

relation between such figures?" His pride in his own artistic abilities is apparent. Especially telling is the use of "a" rather than "the" here. Dencombe is not so much interested in *determining* the proper relation between the three as he is in *making* some relation between them, of making of this real scene an imagined one. Yet even as he does so, the figure he most fixates on is that of Doctor Hugh: "His book was a novel; it had the catchpenny cover, and while the romance of life stood neglected at his side he lost himself in that circulating library" (*Tales* 212). Even as he recognizes art's ability to give meaning to the real world around him, even as he is in the very act of making that meaning, he must simultaneously accept the fact that art is removed from reality, and that something is lost in its removal. Art gives us the opportunity to make meaning of our world, and yet, we must always remember that it is not our world.

What is perhaps most clear in these plots is that James recognizes the pressures inherent in artistic creation. But these pressures were more for James than merely a subject for a few scattered stories. James, as much as any artist ever has, understood the value to be gained from tension, even if that tension sometimes produced personal distress for the artist. Conflict is, of course, a key element in all good fiction; forces in opposition drive most stories to their ultimate resolutions. For James, however, conflict is not a means to an end but rather an end in itself. Even his early critics were aware of this aspect of his work. Joseph Warren Beach, writing in 1918, phrases it well: "James deals with moral values […], but he is not concerned with them in their practical aspect. He is not setting out to recommend the right and give warning against the wrong. He is not even trying to make clear their nature as right and wrong: his aim is neither scientific nor ethical" (27-28). Which two sides are opposed is unimportant to James; nor does the eventual outcome of the conflict seem to matter; the struggle itself, however, is essential. Put in concrete terms, answering the question of whether Daisy Miller is a victim of society's

conventions or a victim of her own flouting of those conventions, is far less important than the question itself. James revels in the collision between the two competing ideologies, accepting it as it is rather than offering, or even seeking, resolution.

It is not particularly surprising then that in critical formulations of his own art, James also seems to privilege a kind of conflict. In the oft-quoted description of what a novel should be, from his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, he explains,

> Here we get the high price of the novel as a literary form – its power not only, while preserving that form with closeness, to range through all the differences of the individual in relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties and outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man (or, so far as that goes, from man to woman), but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould (*Art of the Novel* 45-46).

The genre, in other words, offers unique possibilities for portraying an "artificial reality," a world we might experience in the same way we experience our everyday lives. The "strain" lies in the fact that, despite this possibility, the novel continually undoes its own work. It can never truly replace reality because the truer to reality it becomes, the more "art" is needed to sustain that illusion. The novel allows, for instance, a writer to depict a character from every conceivable vantage point, and in so doing to create a genuine and, as James describes it, "intense" picture of that character's consciousness. Such a work is designed to place the reader into the most intimately subjective experience possible, to allow us almost to become that character. And yet in so doing, the novelist must utilize technique to such an extent that the picture he creates must necessarily betray its own artificiality. Paradoxically, then, the closer a

work comes to realizing a true portrait of a character's interiority – "the more true to its character" it becomes – the further it actually moves from achieving this aim.

James makes this point on several occasions. In the preface to *Roderick Hudson*, he describes the difficulties in limiting the scope of any story. For the very first difference between reality and the created reality is in the limited compass of the novel itself: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so" (*Art of the Novel* 5). It is for James, the "most interesting question the artist has to consider. To give the image and the sense of certain things while still keeping them subordinate to his plan" (*Art of the Novel* 14). He continues: "no action, further, was ever made historically vivid without a certain factitious compactness" (*Art of the Novel* 15). The problem is using "form" to represent images "realistically." But even when his comments are less pointedly about imposing "form," this importance of an *ordered* reality is always a consideration. To craft a work around Isabel Archer for example, requires "*organizing* an ado" [my emphasis] (*Art of the Novel* 48). In describing his choice of an "infirm and ill" figure as central in *The Wings of the Dove*, he notes that it will "require much handling" to come off successfully (*Art of the Novel* 289). Creating a subjective experience always requires the objective eye of the artist.

In the preface to *The Ambassadors*, we find perhaps James's clearest description of the creative "process":

> Art deals with what we see, it must first contribute full-handed that ingredient; it plucks its material otherwise expressed, in the garden of life – which material elsewhere grown is stale and uneatable. But it has no sooner done this than it has to take account of a *process*. […] It's all a sedentary part – involves as much

> ciphering, of sorts, as would merit the highest salary paid to a chief accountant (312).

Here it is clear that art begins with objectivity, taking its elements from "the garden of life." Those objects become part of an imagined world, but again, only through a great deal of "*process*." The writer's job is to create the illusion of an alternative world, but he must also be willing to work upon it as craftsman, always able to draw away and see his work as object in addition to viewing it as experience.

Even in the structure and intent of the prefaces themselves, James illustrates this duality. On the one hand, the overarching intent of these prefaces is to provide a critical viewpoint on these several works. As John Pearson argues, in *The Prefaces of Henry James,* in these essays, James is "instructing his readers how to appreciate and discriminate Jamesian literary art" (2). In doing so, however, he cannot resist returning again and again to the "thrilling tale" the "wondrous adventure" (*Art of the Novel* 4) of how each came to be written. We are whisked away to the "rather dusty but ever-romantic glare of Piazza Santa Maria Novella" (*Art of the Novel* 7) or to the "bristling curve of the wide Riva" in Venice (*Art of the Novel* 41) to hear how this or that work came slowly to life from a mere germ of conversation or came within a hairs-breadth of being delivered late to the publisher. We see the work under discussion from a critical distance, but always embedded in a tale of how it came to be. Here again, as in so many places in James, we are asked to keep one eye on the story -- the experience -- while we meanwhile marvel at the technique of the artist who lived it.

It is, in fact, James's genius that he was able to see that fiction, if it was to be vibrant, must exist upon the tensions created by the simultaneous convergence of both subjectivity and objectivity. In his most extended works, this recognition becomes more than theoretical

proposition. It becomes a central aspect of his method, and as a result, a tension woven into the very fabric of his creations. In these works, James constantly reminds us of this convergence, constantly showing us how and where it occurs.

The Portrait of a Lady serves as a good illustration of this method, in part because of its importance to James's body of work. The novel represents the earliest "complete" formulation of James's artistic principles. Most critics regard it as the culmination of his first, apprenticeship period as a writer, the master work that defines his writing up to this point. Edel, in dividing James's life into three periods, places *Portrait* at the end of his first section, designating it as an endpoint achievement. Even earlier than Edel, however, Cornelia Kelley, in her analysis of James's early work, published in 1930, ends with *Portrait*, noting, "One observes finally James really and conclusively emerging as a novelist in *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1881" (17). James himself calls it "to the author's own sense, the most proportioned of his productions after 'The Ambassadors'" (*Art of the Novel* 52). Not only, then, does the novel offer the first glimpse of James as a mature writer -- the first opportunity to examine his fully-formed attitude towards his craft -- but it also offers important insight into how his attitudes are developed in his later work in more and more sophisticated ways.

Additionally, however, *Portrait* is particularly germane to any discussion of how James applied his artistic principles in his work. As several critics have rightly noted, James's novels are especially interesting for the ways in which their themes are simultaneously acted out by the characters in the stories, and, on the level of technique, woven into the very fabric of the work. This is often brought up in regards to his later novels. In writing of *The Ambassadors*, F.O. Matthiessen observes, "What Strether *sees* is the entire content, and James thus perfected a device both for framing and for interpreting experience" (45). Ian Watt takes this notion further,

in his famous analysis of the first paragraph of *The Ambassadors*, suggesting that James encodes his thematic principles into the very syntactical structure of the novel: "The most obvious features of what Richard Chase has called Henry James's 'infinitely syntactical language,' can, then, be shown to reflect the essential imperatives of his narrative point of view; and they could therefore lead into a discussion of the philosophical qualities of his mind" (80). If we accept the idea that James created novels as a complete package, where theme and execution work integrally towards a single objective, it seems obvious that *Portrait* represents one of the most important illustrations of his artistic principles in action. The very title of the novel -- announcing itself as a work of art, a "portrait" -- makes clear that art will be his chief concern. What actually occurs in the novel is that James both actualizes the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in the characters and plot, and encodes this same tension within the book's structure.

On a thematic level, the story stresses the inescapable fact that we all tend to turn objective reality into our own subjective viewpoint on that reality. This is primarily dramatized in the way every other character in the novel seeks to objectify Isabel, to work out "the unseen from the seen," but always with his or her own agenda in mind. Put another way, each character seeks to make Isabel into an actor in his or her own private play. Obviously, the character most guilty in this regard is Osmond, his habit of collecting clearly intended to suggest his total inability to see anything in Isabel beyond her value as a possession: "He said to her one day that she had too many ideas and that she must get rid of them. […] He had really meant it – he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance" (*Portrait* 359). However much we may want to condemn Osmond as an insensitive brute, he is far from being the only character who sees Isabel in this manner. Ned Rosier, a budding collector in his own right, looks

to Isabel to champion his relationship with Pansy. He too can see only a single aspect of her personality, a fact illustrated by his first view of her at the Osmond house, "framed in the gilded doorway […] the picture of a gracious lady" (*Portrait* 310). To "picture" her in such a light is to attempt to impose limitations on her, to attempt to confine her to a single, specific role. Similarly, Caspar Goodwood is fixated on making Isabel his wife, even after she has married Osmond. At one point, he remarks quite coldly, " 'I'd rather think of you as dead than as married to another.'" (*Portrait* 277). Such a comment demonstrates just how deeply Goodwood desires to arrest Isabel's image: if she is not to fulfill this image, he prefers to create another static representation of her in his mind – that of her frozen in death. Women are equally inclined to objectify Isabel. Mrs. Touchett fancies that she has a true picture of what her niece needs, noting to Ralph, "I found her in an old house at Albany, sitting in a dreary room on a rainy day, reading a heavy book and boring herself to death. She didn't know she was bored, but when I left her no doubt of it she seemed very grateful for the service" (*Portrait* 47). Her initial view of Isabel is conveyed in static terms, showing how little she sees of Isabel's interior life, but equally important is Mrs. Touchett's implication that she has helped Isabel to realize her proper role. She too imagines Isabel as she would have her be.

Even Ralph, the one proponent of Isabel's freedom, and consequently the least likely to seek to limit her possibilities, sees his cousin in a very particular light. It is no accident that Ralph, like Rosier, first catches sight of Isabel "in the ample doorway" (*Portrait* 25), framed as it were, just as Ned sees her later. But Ralph's habit of objectifying Isabel is made much more explicit as the novel develops:

> If his cousin were to be nothing more than an entertainment to him, Ralph was conscious she was an entertainment of a high order. "A character like that," he

> said to himself – "a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It's finer than the finest work of art – than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian" (*Portrait* 63).

Ralph's vision of Isabel is essentially no different than that of Osmond; by crafting an imaginative -- what might even be termed an "artistic" -- representation of what he wants her to be, he essentially invents a set of desires he believes her to hold.

Though she is the primary focus of such objectification, Isabel is equally guilty of judging people based on outward appearances. As Edel phrases it, "Isabel and Osmond are then, for all their differences, two sides of the same coin, two studies in egotism – and a kind of egotism which belonged to their author" (260). Over and over again, we are told that she regards those around her in very specific, singular ways. On first seeing Warburton's house, "it seemed to her a matter of course that it should be a noble picture" (*Portrait* 75). When she is introduced to Osmond, she carries away "an image from her visit to his hill-top which her subsequent knowledge of him did nothing to efface" (*Portrait* 237). The key moment for her in the novel, the one in which she first discovers Osmond and Madame Merle in intimate conversation is termed "an image […] like a sudden flicker of light" (*Portrait* 343). As long as it remains only an image for Isabel, this particular picture masks the reality that the two are working in collusion and plotting to use Isabel for their own ends. Only when the Countess Gemini forces her to see the reality beneath what she saw can she understand what has been done to her. Her final meeting with Serena Merle illustrates just how difficult it is for her to look beneath surface appearances: "The effect was strange, for Madame Merle was already so present to her vision that her appearance in the flesh was like suddenly, and rather awfully, seeing a painted picture

move" (*Portrait* 456). It would seem, then, that the inability to see depth in others is not presented as a character flaw in the novel, but rather as a condition common to man.

More interesting than Isabel's objectification of others, however, is her habit of objectifying herself. She is described throughout the book as regarding herself as though from an exterior perspective. Early in the novel, for example, she thinks, "one should try to be one's own best friend and to give one's self, in this manner, distinguished company" (*Portrait* 54). Likewise, when she insists to Caspar Goodwood that she never planned to deceive him by marrying Osmond, she speaks as of someone else: "No one can be more surprised than myself at my present intention" (*Portrait* 280). Ralph's opposition to her marriage, "made her own conception of her conduct clearer to her" (*Portrait* 294). To see herself from outside is, to a certain extent, to concern herself with surface impressions, just as others seem to do. The overwhelming number of references to her "masks," and to the fact that she is playing a role, further emphasize this point: "Isabel looked at herself in this character – looking intently, thinking she filled it with a certain grace" (*Portrait* 264); "Isabel at present, in playing a part before her cousin, had the idea that she was doing him a kindness" (*Portrait* 364); in her dealings with Madame Merle after her wedding, "She played her part with the tact that might have been expected of her" (*Portrait* 274). Even more striking than these references to her as filling a role, are those places where she envisions herself literally as an object: "She felt older – ever so much, and as if she were 'worth more' for it, like some curious piece of an antiquary's collection" (*Portrait* 276). She has made of herself a work of art.

Amidst all of these speculations, of course, it is important to take account of Madame Merle's formulation of "self": "One's self – for other people – is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps –

these things are expressive" (*Portrait* 175). One might go so far as to say that Isabel takes these statements to heart to such an extent that they color her behavior up until the final pages of the novel, that they dictate her own tendency to objectify, and to view herself not from within, but rather from a vantage point outside herself, from whence she believes others regard her.

If every character in the book regards those around him as objects, ultimately these objects are part of intensely subjective fantasies. Osmond sees Isabel in only one way, but she becomes a character he can manipulate to his own ends in his own imagined world. Ralph Touchett, Ned Rosier, Serena Merle, all become the authors of their own private stories, with Isabel filling various pre-determined roles. On one level, James seems almost sympathetic towards such behavior. After all, it is akin to what he himself had done with Minny Temple's memory. There is a sense, in fact, in which he seems to be suggesting that trying to make sense of outward appearances and then incorporating them into our subjective experience of life may be all we as humans are capable of. Yet clearly there are dangers to be found in this philosophy. If nothing else, Isabel's insistence on clinging to her surface impressions demonstrates time and time again that the inability to see with depth can be a serious disadvantage. It leads her to mistake Osmond's intentions, Osmond's relationship with Madame Merle, and Lord Warburton's true reason for courting Pansy, and in each case her mistakes bring her increasing unhappiness. Only the recognition that there are limitations to subjectivity allows us to step back from the world we have created for ourselves and see it with critical eyes, and too often it is this ability that seems to be missing in most of the novel's characters.

The interrogation of the objective/ subjective duality is not limited to the plot of the story, however, but manifests itself on a meta-fictional level as well, as an important element in the novel's construction. Specifically, James dramatizes an author's inability ever to truly know in a

subjective manner his characters' consciousnesses. While this may seem to fly in the face of much accepted James criticism, it is, in fact, not nearly so drastic a suggestion as it might seem. The attempt to set the principle action of a novel in the development of a character's consciousness is undeniably James's stated goal and what he considers to be the aim of the novel: " 'Place the center of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness,' I said to myself,' and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish" (*Art of the Novel* 51). Nevertheless, as is clear from the metaphors in his critical writing, he recognizes the inherent limitations in this pursuit. What results is a paradox: in order to create the most complete picture of a character he must manipulate the reader to such an extent that the portrayal loses its illusion of truth. Put another way, art offers subjectivity, but subjectivity that can be attained only through objectivity.

In order to enact this paradox, James employs a narrator, at once one with himself, and yet a distinct voice and character in his own right. Wayne Booth has commented, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* on the way a writer creates what he terms "the second self," a representation of himself as artist: "As he writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal 'man in general' but an implied version of 'himself' that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works" (70). Further, this voice is the sum total of the author's many techniques: "The 'implied author' chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" (74). For Booth, this authorial voice is, in most cases, different from a novel's narrator. It is, instead, a voice arising out of an author's style. In the case of *Portrait*, however, the narrator does seem to fulfill this role for James, becoming both a dramatized voice in the novel, and a stand-in for James the

writer. David Seed goes further, in fact, suggesting that the notion of a separation between narrator and author is a modern invention:

> It is by now, for instance, a commonplace that the narrator should not be identified with the author, but James does not make such a sharp distinction. He mentions the narrator as such very rarely indeed, and then only as projection of the author. Thus, in his notebook entry for June 4th 1895 he mulls over the possibilities of method for his tale 'The Next Time.' First he considers making the narrator a character within the tale […] but then decides on an alternative: "*I* became the narrator, either impersonally or in my unnamed, unspecified personality" (503).

The narrator in *Portrait* and the authorial voice Booth identifies should then be regarded as having the same intentions if not actually being seen as one and the same. The narrator is, in these terms, the instrument used to convey "the sum of his [James's] choices."

While Booth's comments are made in a general literary sense, Dana Ringuette has applied a similar idea to James in particular, focusing on the persona he creates in his prefaces. Her article on "James's Revision" seeks to identify "what sense of artistic 'self' – is yielded by James's notion of 're-seeing'" in these critical responses to his earlier creative productions (116). In other words, she views James the later writer of the prefaces, as a voice distinct from James the writer of the earlier novels. What such an argument demonstrates is that James was able to regard his work from an objective standpoint. In fact, it seems clear that this ability was not only a product of encountering himself across the distance of time. Rather, James had a sense of this implied "second self" even as he was writing. In the specific case of *The Portrait of a Lady*, he utilizes this creative persona to demonstrate what he sees as the essential struggle of artistic

creation. He can showcase the elements of writing, the many means by which a character can be understood, while at the same time illustrating that this effort is finally doomed to failure, that in the end, even the narrator, as god-like creator, can only create an objective work of art, a "portrait" of a lady. The narrator as a character does everything within his power to control the action, to paint this portrait in the most realistic terms, but he, and by implication the author himself, must ultimately fail.

Thus, this narrator works to create a self-consciously artistic piece of writing, an object, utilizing all the techniques at his command to develop his picture of Isabel. It is important to recognize, to begin with, the way in which the title itself points out the fact of this picture's static nature. It is to be a "portrait," with all of the connotations of a fixed image and objective gaze that this word brings with it. It is not surprising, then, that many of the techniques utilized in the novel have the effect of achieving such a static image.

For one thing, the novel frequently creates a spatial as opposed to chronological rendering of events. This begins with the opening scene, set as it is in a landscape, and deliberately designated multiple times by the narrative voice as a "sketch." Things do not so much happen in this landscape as exist imagistically in space. Besides the fact that virtually no action takes place during these opening scenes, none of the characters is clearly identified; Lord Warburton is not named until the fourth page, Mr. Touchett until the sixth page, and Ralph not until the first sentence of chapter two. Instead, the narrator relies on outward appearance as a reference marker, the marker changing with each new mention. Ralph, for example, is first described as one of Mr. Touchett's companions who "looked with a certain attention at the elder man" (*Portrait* 17), then as "the son" (20), as the "gentleman in the velvet coat" (20), "the ugly young man" (21), "the other young man" (21), and "young Mr. Touchett" (23). One might at

this point recognize that there is more of sculpture in this art than canvas portraiture; each character is not only drawn, but in a sense lifted and held before the light, turned from every conceivable angle in order to fix his outward characteristics for the reader. The effect is two-fold. First, without question the reader is given a greater and greater amount of information with which to understand the character of these men. At the same time, however, their characters are kept at a certain distance. There is a world here, but it is one we see rather than experience. In fact, this is in many ways a small-scale version of James's method throughout the book, specifically in his creation of Isabel's portrait. As with the men pictured here, Isabel becomes better known over the course of the novel, at the same time she becomes more impossible to truly understand.

When chronological events do occur, the strict chronology is frequently disrupted. So we find, for example, Isabel's entrance in the novel -- and her introduction to Gardencourt -- is interrupted by a flashback to her meeting with her aunt, "One wet afternoon, some four months earlier" (31). But this too, is interrupted by scenes from Isabel's childhood, and information about a quarrel between Mrs. Touchett and her brother from many years before. Other time-shifts occur in similar ways. The narrator digresses to provide Ralph's background -- "He began with being a young man of promise" (44) – and describe Isabel's interview with Caspar Goodwood before leaving for England. There is also a curious omission of certain important events in Isabel's life. We are never offered, for example, the story of her marriage, the event that would seem to be the most crucial of the story, the turning point of her life. Instead, the story leads up to this moment and then abruptly shifts to four years later, eliding not only her marriage, but the souring of her relationship with Osmond and the death of her only child. By omitting such scenes, the narrator draws our attention away from events and towards an attempt

to understand Isabel herself. In other words, this technique emphasizes her image as opposed to her movement and development over time. The end result of such interruptions is that Isabel is pictured whole rather than as an evolving personality. This is not to suggest that she does not develop over the course of the novel, but that such development – based necessarily on temporality -- is downplayed in favor of a more imagistic representation.

Even more important in terms of this objectifying impulse is the use of the "satellites" so frequently mentioned in James studies, and first introduced as a concept by James himself in the preface to *Portrait*. The stated purpose of such characters is to offer multiple views of the central character, in this case Isabel, in an attempt to elucidate that character: "Place meanwhile in the other scale the lighter weight (which is usually the one that tips the balance of interest): press least hard, in short, on the consciousness of your heroine's satellites, especially the male; make it an interest contributive only to the greater one" (*The Art of the Novel* 51). If, then, each and every character in the novel objectifies Isabel in some way, this is important to the development of the portrait as a whole. Each character offers a different vantage point from which to view Isabel. The end result is that she becomes a kind of object that the reader may hold in his mind's eye.

Although, as has been rightly noted by critics, Isabel's interior becomes increasingly important over the course of the novel, at the same time it is apparent that her interiority, in many ways, is merely another vantage point from which to judge her character. The narrator makes nothing of moving fluidly in and out of that consciousness as it suits his purposes, highlighting only certain personality traits while hiding others. So, for example, the first book ends in Isabel's consciousness, as she regards Lord Warburton but remains ignorant as to his thoughts. The second book, however, opens squarely in Warburton's consciousness, with no knowledge of

Isabel's interior: "Why should she mark so one of his values – quite the wrong one – when she would have nothing to do with another, which was quite the right? He was angry with himself for being puzzled, and then angry for being angry" (*Portrait* 255). In several scenes, this movement from one consciousness to another is even more radical. The chief example occurs during Isabel's interview with the Countess Gemini late in the book, where she learns the truth about Madame's Merle's relationship to Osmond. After a brief initial conversation between the two, Isabel retires to her room, where the narrator tells us, "It seemed to her that only now she fully measured the great undertaking of matrimony" (*Portrait* 449). On the following page, the action has moved decidedly outside the bounds of Isabel's mind: " 'I had no idea,' said Isabel presently; and looked up at her in a manner that doubtless matched the apparent witlessness of this confession." A few sentences later, there is a passage even more removed from Isabels' thoughts: " 'Oh, no idea, for me,' Isabel went on, 'ever *definitely* took that form.' She appeared to be making out to herself what had been and what hadn't" (*Portrait* 451). Suddenly, we are placed in the position of judging Isabel's thoughts based solely on how she appears. What one can take away from this passage is the sense that, however much James is interested in portraying Isabel's consciousness, it is only one trick in his bag, yet one more angle from which to view her.

This narrative voice is clearly at pains to make his presence felt, particularly as the creator of the story. James is critical in "The Art of Fiction" of writers who betray the artificiality of their work, writers like Trollope who "concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only 'making believe'" (*Tales* 378). Seed argues that, in fact, this is not a criticism of the use of an intrusive narrator so much as a criticism of "a lack of discretion on the author's part, either for trying to force the reader's reactions or for failing to respect the fictional

subject" (509). Yet if he felt that the narrator should not interfere with the reader's perceptions of the characters or events, this did not necessarily preclude his desire to demonstrate the constructed nature of the text. The narrator in this instance is almost deliberately intrusive. These intrusions go beyond the number of times he refers to Isabel as "our heroine" or himself as her "biographer." Far more significant are those places where he reminds the reader that he is controlling the experience. In glossing Isabel's trip to Florence prior to her marriage, he says plainly that it involves information unimportant to the story: "Isabel came back to Florence, but only after several months; an interval sufficiently replete with incident. It is not, however, during this interval that we are closely concerned with her" (270). On other occasions, he confesses to distorting the actual events: "it must be observed, parenthetically, [Madame Merle] did not deliver herself all at once of these reflexions, which are presented in a cluster for the convenience of the reader" (172). To pronounce that important events are being omitted is to maintain the façade of the real, to move beyond what James feels is Trollope's clumsy narrative technique, but it is also to make apparent the fact that the reader is being deliberately manipulated.

In fact, it is this manipulation that points to the limits of his control. True, he works to shape our view of Isabel, to craft the complete portrait, but in the end, this is finally an impossible thing to achieve. At a number of points throughout the novel, he is not entirely able to arrest her image, and at such moments she is able to escape from his gaze. Nowhere is this more apparent, however, than in the novel's final pages. Having allowed us to view Isabel both inside and out, the narrator strangely seems to lose track of her on both levels. As she considers Goodwood's offer of marriage, the narrator describes her conflicted emotions:

> The world, in truth, had never seemed so large; it seemed to open out, all around her, to take the form of a mighty sea, where she floated in fathomless waters. She had wanted help, and here was help; it had come in a rushing torrent. I know not whether she believed everything he said; but she believed just then that to let him take her in his arms would be the next best thing to her dying (*Portrait* 489).

James delves into Isabel's mind here, but lost in the metaphors of the sea and in the interest in what Isabel, after all, will do, is the curious admission that the narrator himself does not know all, cannot see entirely into Isabel's soul. What follows makes this moment crystal clear. It is "when darkness had returned" that "she was free" (489), suggesting that it is her ability to make herself unseen that finally frees her from the objectifying eyes of the world. The narrator, too, is a part of that world, and she manages to escape from him as well. He can tell us that she "knew now" the path she should take, but he does not offer any further details, hinting that he does not actually know. Furthermore, he is unable to provide any sort of concrete conclusion to her story. Rather we must be content with yet another outward vision of her, this time from Henrietta Stackpole and Caspar Goodwood.

In the end, what are we to make of this dual narrator? First, we must admit that he has done a masterful job of creating a work of art -- that he is the consummate creator, the master artist. At the same time, the novel demonstrates that a work of art can go only so far. Yet even this limit allows the work to recapture a measure of subjectivity, a sense of the "reality" of this imagined world. For in Isabel's escape is dramatized the limits of objectivity. To some extent the world has gained a measure of "reality," in that the author can no longer entirely control it.

The Portrait of a Lady is certainly not James's last attempt to deal with the struggle between reality and representation in his work. It is a theme that appears in virtually all of his

writing. Strether's awakening occurs at the home of the great artist Gloriani. In *The Wings of the Dove*, Milly comes face to face with her own mortality, envisioned in a Bronzino painting. In *Portrait*, however, this struggle exists at every level of the novel's artistic presentation. As a result, it offers a unique opportunity to explore how James regarded this struggle as an artist. To examine the work in detail is to realize that James is interested not in some vague artistic formula, but rather in exploring what happens when art and reality collide.

We might also recognize that James wrote at a particular moment in the history of the novel's development, a point at which the novel was just beginning to be understood for what it represented and for what possibilities it offered. James, as his critical arguments make clear, was keenly aware of this moment. Thus in James we find the collusion of a number of important forces, his own psychological background making him especially able to see the nature of fiction, its simultaneous objective and subjective demands in a way that no other writer before him had been able to.

CHAPTER 3

STEPHEN CRANE: THE REALITIES OF SPACE

Stephen Crane was no less an "observer" than Henry James, but while James might more precisely be described as a *passiv*e observer, Crane was constantly on the move. Where James learned to fuse subjectivity and objectivity by relying on an inner "converter" that rendered what he saw into internal, personal experience, Stephen Crane was of a much different temperament and, as a result, drawn to a very different method for dealing with the problems of subjectivity and objectivity in fiction. As a journalist, Crane certainly understood what it meant to "watch" and then render what he saw into prose; yet, as his biography makes clear, he never seemed fully content simply to watch. He constantly struggled, as so many of his own characters do, with a deep-seated desire to participate in the action he was assigned only to report. As a result, his work is in many ways contrary to James's in its approach. James often tries to turn his fiction into portraiture, ultimately failing for the reason that he also wanted so much for those portraits to become subjectively "real." Crane seems to attempt the very opposite. He almost wants to deny the static nature of his works entirely, attempting to make them "real" by including as much movement as possible; despite his best efforts, though, he must always admit that his works are, in the end, artificial: his role as objective creator must always bleed through. Nevertheless, he was remarkably adept at finding ways to make his objectivity serve his subjective purposes, and his subjectivity satisfy his objectifying impulse.

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As J.A. Ward has suggested, one key component of James's style is his turning of the typically chronological nature of narrative into something more spatial in effect. Ward identifies a number of techniques in James that contribute to this spatiality, such as his tendency to utilize foreshadowing and flashback as the primary means of describing events rather than actually presenting them as they happen. The events, then, become part of the characters' internal processes, rather than operating as events in themselves, and action is minimized in favor of vision. To the extent that movement does occur, Ward points out that it is often isolated in space, and mainly works as a means of developing a character: "deepening is usually effected not by movement in time (though this is inevitable), but by the movement in place […]. James regards [such movement] not as a growth or development but as the establishing of the proper conditions (or relations) for the exhibition of the central character's identity" (112-113). Put another way, James moves us about within his picture, so as to give the most complete view of that picture, but such movement has nothing to do with time or motion (or, at least, these are only unintentional byproducts). Here again, we see James grappling with the simultaneous subjective and objective demands of his art. On the one hand, he allows the reader access to the inner workings of his characters' minds – allows us to experience these characters more subjectively. In doing so, though, he must fix those characters in space and time creating a flattening effect and an objective portrait of those characters: we see them entire, but also, and inevitably, from some distance. We do not participate in their lives so much as observe them as though they were a painting hanging on a wall. To be sure, this painting is one with amazing depth, one that captures characters' emotional and psychological nuances, but it is a painting nonetheless, and consequently always contains a static component.

On occasion, James takes us literally to some distance from a scene, reinforcing the feeling of his work as portrait. So, for example, in the opening of *A Portrait of A Lady*, he begins from a point above the landscape, offering a view of the entire lawn of the "English country-house," with its unnamed figures placed just so, and its shadows "straight and angular." His diction here helps provide distance by highlighting the artificiality of the image: "this simple history" begins in "an admirable setting" (17); the paragraph ends with James's assertion that it is a "peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch" (18). Most interesting of all, however, James suggests the image of a map or picture in his opening lines, noting that he is "beginning to unfold" his history. The implied metaphor works to turn the entire novel into a spatial as opposed to narrative work. We see this space from above, and all that is to follow in the novel becomes a world *beneath* the gaze of both reader and author.

In *The Ambassadors*, James uses a balcony to create a similar kind of objective distance, though in this case the effect is far more complex. In this later novel, James employs the character of Strether as a developing consciousness. If Isabel comes to awareness of her "real" self by the end of *Portrait*, the tension lies in whether or not the narrator – or indeed Isabel herself -- will allow this awareness finally to occur. In *The Ambassadors*, in contrast, Strether always seems vaguely aware that there is a "real" world beyond the one in which he has existed up to now, and the novel as a whole shows his gradual movement from the confines of the "fictional" world, into that greater reality. This movement occurs both in terms of the actual plot (with Strether escaping from the smallness of Woolett – and his own limited awareness -- into a world of larger possibilities, where he sees things as they "really" are), and in terms of the meta-story of the novel, in which Strether is allowed by James the creator to break the bounds of the page (in ways reminiscent of Isabel's escape in *Portrait*). In setting up this gradual awakening,

James relies on a number of spatial devices to help illustrate his point, but these are not merely imagistic devices – symbols -- designed to reinforce his theme; rather, they demonstrate James's own understanding of his role "above" the fictional landscape, and his recognition that Strether must "rise" above this landscape as well if he is to reach a state of complete awareness.

To give but one instance of such imagery, there is the balcony of Chad's house. Early in the novel, Strether searches for the house among the streets of Paris, but always with a hypersensitive awareness that he himself is the one being "observed." Having found it at last, he stands before it for some time considering its various architectural and design elements, among which is the balcony, which he notes, "didn't somehow show as a convenience easy to surrender." The straightforward meaning of the phrase has to do with reminding Strether of how difficult it will be for him to get Chad to give up his life of leisure in Paris, but the use of the word "surrender" here certainly suggests that the balcony represents another kind of challenge for Strether himself, a battle he must fight if he is to persuade Chad to his – or to be more precise Woollett's – point of view. And likewise, it is a challenge for Strether in a more important sense, though in a sense he does not yet recognize. He must struggle to attain a higher point-of-view for himself, both in terms of seeing life from Chad's perspective, and on a metaphorical level, for seeing life from the artist's viewpoint, if he is finally to escape the page or frame in which he has been placed.

All of these readings are reinforced by the fact that Strether has deliberately put *himself* in position to be seen: "the chance he had allowed for – the chance of being seen in time from the balcony – had become a fact" (70). Bilham is observing Strether from above, and there is in this scene, the implication that Strether – at this early point in the novel -- surrenders himself to this scrutiny, on the part of Bilham and on the part of the author. Later, near the novel's end, there is

another scene on the balcony. This time Strether meets Chad there to confront him about his relationship with Madame de Vionnet. As he waits for Chad to arrive, "He spent a long time on the balcony; he hung over it as he had seen little Bilham hang on the day of his first approach" (298). We can see in this image that a literal shift has taken place for Strether in terms of his perspective. An interior shift has taken place as well: Chad ends the chapter by noting that perhaps Strether has gained what he terms "rather too much" imagination over the course of his stay in Europe (307). Strether is moving closer and closer to understanding the events from the author's viewpoint. Thus James was able to discover a useful apparatus from his tendency to objectify: objectification becomes a kind of symbolic plot structure, one in which Strether takes the reader subjectively along the path to greater and greater awareness or what might be termed greater and greater objectivity.

For all their differences in temperament and approach, Crane, in "The Open Boat," includes an image remarkably similar to James's in *The Ambassadors*. In the opening paragraph of the story, as Crane sets the scene, he emphasizes the fact that the vantage point for the men is limited to eye-level, stressing that they can see little beyond the waves in front of them, that "none of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them" (*The Open Boat and Other Stories* 3). Crane limits the reader's perspective as well. The story is told in such a way that we become one of the members of this pitiful band of shipwreck survivors. We not only *see* what is occurring in the boat, we find ourselves *actually* in the boat. In part this is due to the vividness of Crane's imagery, in such descriptions as, "A seat in his boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking broncho, and by the same token, a broncho is not much smaller" (4); but additionally, he speaks directly to us, placing us in an imagined vessel and using "you" and "one," in an effort to involve us in a direct

way: “A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that after successfully mounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it […]. In a ten-foot dingey one can get an idea of the resources of the sea in the line of waves that is not probable to the average experience, which is never at sea in a dingey” (5). We are encouraged to participate in the action, or at the very least to imagine that we are present to witness it. The realism of the scene is heightened even more by the fact that Crane provides access to the characters’ thoughts and emotions. “The correspondent,” he writes, “pulling at the other side, watched the waves and wondered why he was there” (4). The effect of such information is that we are encouraged not only to visualize these events, but also to feel what these men feel. For the most part, then, Crane’s writing tends to heighten the experience for the reader, increasing our investment in the situation’s reality and our feeling that we are a part of that reality.

In the midst of this subjective rendering of events, however, Crane inserts a jarringly new point-of-view:

> In the wan light, the faces of the men must have been gray. Their eyes must have glinted in strange ways as they gazed steadily astern. Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtlessly have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had no time to see it, and if they had had leisure there were other things to occupy their minds (5-6).

The passage is a clear aberration in the story. For this single moment Crane shifts the perspective so that events are shown from above rather than from eye-level. Admittedly, the narrator qualifies the description, placing it in hypothetical terms: “Viewed from a balcony the whole thing *would* doubtlessly have been weirdly picturesque.” Still, while this qualification may allow him to maintain the illusion of subjectivity -- since he never actually admits to leaving

the boat -- Crane manages to achieve a measure of objectivity all the same. This change in perspective also includes a significant, if temporary, shift in how the story is told, specifically in the move from an omniscient to a limited narrator that occurs briefly at the beginning of the passage. Despite the fact that Crane has been willing to describe characters' thoughts up to this point, suddenly the narrator distances himself from the events, unable to say with any certainty what color the men's faces "must have been." Taken together, these changes in perspective and point-of-view suggest an attempt to achieve some sort of distance from the scene, to gain objectivity on what he otherwise describes in subjective terms. Like James, Crane manages to include two very different, and in some ways contradictory viewpoints, allowing us at one and the same time the men's perspective and a larger, more complete view of what is "unfolding."

Yet while both writers seem to encode their own objective, author's viewpoint into their works, and in sometimes strikingly similar ways, a close look at both passages demonstrates an important difference. While James uses the balcony in a positive sense, as a level to which Strether is striving to rise, Crane's use of the balcony seems almost grudging, the suggestion being that perhaps this hypothetical objective viewer might not understand completely the events going on below. The events *seem* picturesque from the balcony, but the narrator hints we should feel a measure of guilt for regarding them in this way and thereby escaping the misery that must, in fact, be their *experience*.

In a letter of 1895, Crane disputes James's assertion that the novel should strive for "disinterested contemplation":

> What, though, does the man mean by disinterested contemplation? It won't wash. If you care enough about a thing to study it, you are interested and have stopped being disinterested. That's so, is it not? (Berryman 103-104).

The comment demonstrates how Crane understood writing as action, not merely in the physical sense, but in the sense of writing as passionate intellectual engagement for writer and reader. One can feel in this Crane's emphasis on the subjective in literature, on crafting his works such that they were experiential rather than observational. Of course, James himself was not quite as "disinterested" as Crane, or indeed James himself, seems to have been convinced. He manages, in the end, to find a route to subjectivity through objectivity. Furthermore, Crane viewed his own works with a measure of objectivity. Nevertheless, Crane's letter makes clear one of the key differences between the two writers – for James, the text tended to become a picture, with the characters attempting (and at times succeeding) to find ways out of that picture's limiting space. For Crane, in contrast, the work of art might still be restrictive, as a "work of art," but he was always actively seeking to blur the lines between the actual and fictional worlds. In other words, like James, Crane too felt the pull of objectivity, the desire to see his work as just that – a work, put together with all the skill and technique of a craftsman. Such a pull is apparent in those shifting perspectives in "The Open Boat," whether or not the viewpoint is ultimately dismissed. However, if Crane understood the importance of the objective view, he worked where possible to fuse it with subjectivity in an effort to erase the boundaries of his fictional world, to make of that world something "real."

The chief manifestation of this difference is in the much more "active" scenes that appear in Crane. In contrast to the reflective tableaux that often fill James's works, where for example Isabel must virtually pry herself out of the "portrait" being painted of her, Crane's characters roam widely through his imagined landscapes. Among other things, this movement in Crane shows a kind of restless energy on the part of the writer himself.

The energy in his fiction seems to spring directly from his life, and particularly his upbringing. Crane's father, a Methodist minister, kept the family "always on the move" from Newark, New Jersey, to Bloomington, to Patterson (Stallman 6). Upon his father's death in 1880, Crane's mother moved the family from Port Jervis to Roseville, back to Port Jervis, and finally to Asbury Park. His college career would be no different, with Crane spending one semester at Pennington Seminary in Pennington, New Jersey, before moving to Claverack College and Hudson River Institute, transferring to Lafayette College, and finally spending a semester at Syracuse University before leaving college behind for good. And from the beginning of his journalistic career, when he first began work as a reporter for his brother Townley's agency, he was driven by his seemingly boundless energy: at sixteen, "he covered miles of hot sandy roads on a bicycle to collect the names of hotel guests arriving for Ocean Grove's Methodist assemblies" (Stallman 11). Throughout his career as a journalist, he would remain "on the move," from the streets of New York to the battlefields of Greece and Cuba. Even in his final year, with his health in wretched condition, Crane's wife Cora was forced to intervene to prevent him traveling to Transvaal, where he planned to cover the Boer War (Stallman 475).

Further, once dispatched to a location, Crane was rarely content merely to watch from the sidelines. Stallman writes that "as a war correspondent he [Crane] thought of himself as a soldier" (407) and told his friend and fellow journalist, John Northern Hilliard "more than once that his fondest desire was to die in battle" (394). The conception of journalism as an "active" pursuit was perhaps not entirely a fantasy of Crane's. During the Spanish-American War, for instance, "newspapermen would be treated as spies" and imprisoned or in some cases garroted (360). Beyond the dangers of the job itself, though, Crane frequently took opportunities to become more directly involved in the fighting he was sent to report. During a battle at Cuzco,

Cuba, for example, Crane was utilized as an aide, carrying messages and performing reconnaissance for the U.S. side, and in one instance so exhausted himself bringing water supplies up from the rear lines that a rumor began to spread that he had been shot (371).

Michael Fried, in "Stephen Crane's Upturned Faces," argues convincingly that Crane was haunted by the choice he had always to make between journalistic/aesthetic objectivity and active involvement. As Fried describes it, Crane's work as a journalist made him even more disturbed by this choice than was Henry James. James's stories reveal a deep concern over whether the retreat into the world of fantasy might rob a writer of his chance to live in "reality," but in Crane this concern seems much more primal. The writer in Crane's fiction is forever caught between seeing and doing: as Fried puts it, "a hovering between inanimateness and animateness captures perfectly the ontological status of writing for the writer" (123). This dual status of existence for the writer appears, as Fried notes, throughout Crane's work, in "The Open Boat," "When a Man Falls, a Crowd Gathers," and most strikingly in "Death and the Child," where the correspondent makes the decision that he can no longer merely report but must instead to take up arms alongside his Greek brothers.

Fried argues that ultimately this desire to engage rather than remain an observer, led Crane subconsciously to include himself in all his writings, in an effort to fuse the world of the text with the world of reality, to *make* perhaps the text real by entering it. So, for instance, he has a tendency to use words that begin with S. and C.:

> The letters themselves are of course Crane's initials – he often signed his correspondence 'S.C.' – which suggests that there are narcissistic reasons for their foregrounding in his prose, though perhaps this narcissism itself partly reflects the perception that a sheet covered with his handwriting is in a sense *all him*" (148).

Fried also sees the body images in Crane as representations of written text:

> the implicit contrast between the respective 'spaces' of reality and literary representation – of writing […] – required that a human character, ordinarily upright and so to speak forward-looking, be rendered horizontal and upward-facing so as to match the horizontality and upward-facingness of the blank page on which the action of inscription was taking place (100).

As this argument indicates, horizontal bodies can be viewed from above, by the characters, the reader, and the author. Ultimately, the effect is similar to that achieved in James's *The Ambassadors*, with images of the author looking down on his crafted world (which Fried argues Crane regards as sick or "dead," since writing never quite manages to be life) woven into the fabric of the story itself.

As Fried makes clear, Crane was desperate to make his fictional worlds "real." That urge to create "reality," involved two important impulses. First, the imagined place needed full development. Only by creating a complete landscape could that landscape become "real." It is unsurprising, then, that Crane tended to work with very particularized settings, writing multiple stories all set within the same general locations, as though he were attempting to develop those locations in absolutely complete detail. There are his "Sullivan County Tales and Sketches, ""Whilomville stories," "Mexican stories," and "New York" stories. Often these begin with a description of place, as with Whilomville:

> Although Whilomville was in no sense a summer resort, the advent of the warm season meant much to it, for then came visitors from the city – people of considerable confidence – alighting upon their country cousins. Moreover, many citizens who could afford to do so escaped at this time to the sea-side. The town,

> with the commercial life quite taken out of it, drawled and drowsed through long months during which nothing was worse than the white dust which arose behind every vehicle at blinding noon, and nothing was finer than the cool sheen of the hose sprays over the cropped lawns under the many maples in the twilight (1).

The personification of the town, in phrases such as "the warm season meant much to it" and "drawled and drowsed through long months" help stress the town's importance to the stories (as does titling the collection "Whilomville"). And in the individual stories Crane works to flesh out the town, poking into as many possible corners of it as possible trying to suggest its fullness. The children of Whilomville roam widely through the streets and surrounding woods of the town, from the small sweet shop and the barber shop in "The Angel Child" to the local school house in "Shame," and the Presbyterian Church in "A Little Pilgrimage."

Additionally, though some characters such as Jimmie Trescott seem to dominate these stories, Crane includes a number of lesser characters as well. In each case, he not only introduces the character, but provides an entire history for that character. So, for instance, William Neetje, the barber who creates havoc by cutting the children's hair in the opening story, "The Angel Child," need not have been developed in such detail in order to have served his function. He does not appear again in the collection, and his description has no particular bearing on the story at hand:

> It becomes necessary to say a few words concerning Neeltje. He was new to the town. He had come and opened a dusty little shop on dusty Bridge Street hill, and although the neighborhood knew from the courier winds that his diet was mainly cabbage, they were satisfied with that meager data. Of course Riefsnyder came to investigate him for the local Barber's Union, but he found in him only sweetness

> and light, with a willingness to charge any price at all for a shave or a haircut. In fact, the advent of Neeltje would have barely made a ripple upon the pla cid bosom of Whilomville if it were not that his name was Neeltje (7).

What follows is an inset story explaining the town's attempts to discover just how such a name should be pronounced, before Crane at last returns to the story at hand. Crane almost seems to use the characters to create a sense of place rather than the other way round, in the hopes that this space will as a result be rendered more "real."

The same effect is accomplished in a different way in linked stories such as "The Open Boat" and "Flanagan." In the second of these stories, Crane returns to the earlier work, to expand on events that had happened prior to the shipwreck. Importantly, though, he not only describes how the four men came to be in the little rowboat in the first place, but also jumps ahead in time, to the final moments of "The Open Boat," this time told from a radically different perspective. Suddenly shoreline figures seen only at a distance in "The Open Boat" – at such a distance that they become essentially symbols to the men, representations variously of hope and despair – are given their own reality. While there are several effects of this added perspective (it helps, for example, to mark the insensitivity of the shore party, offering a possible social commentary on the upper classes) at least one of these effects is to humanize those "symbols," to provide them their own reality rather than simply an imagined one – both in the sense of the men in the boat and the sense of author. Doing so allows Crane to expand the boundaries of his imagined world.

The second important device for Crane, in trying to fashion "real" worlds is that these worlds must be active; they are always about movement. Crane eschews the Jamesian drawing room for the streets of New York and the battlefield at Chancelorsville. There is, of course,

brute physicality in works like “The Blue Hotel,” where Johnny and the Swede fight it out on the frozen ground behind the hotel, or in *Maggie*, where Jimmie takes on Pete and destroys an entire bar in the process, but the physicality is not always violent. In a simpler sense, these characters are always seen in action. After the opening of *Maggie*, for instance, we follow Jimmie and his father through the streets of the Bowery until “Eventually they entered a dark region, where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter” (106). Here, where Jimmie and Maggie are raised, things are perpetually in motion: “street infants played or fought […]. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners.” The street itself seems to move: “The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels” (106).

To a certain extent, these two components in Crane’s work seem to satisfy, for him, the twin demands of fiction: movement allows him to generate subjectivity, as the reader is drawn in to the action over and over again; in contrast, by creating fully realized worlds, he seems to privilege the desire for objectivity, crafting worlds that, from a distance, are fully formed.

This split vision has been examined from a slightly different point-of-view by those critics interested in Crane’s impressionism. A number of scholars have noticed that one of the chief effects in Crane is the ironic contrast he sets up between characters’ viewpoints and what he subtly suggests is the “truth” underlying a given situation. In *Cylinder of Vision*, Milne Holton focuses on “vision” rather than impressionism explicitly defined, but his argument relies on a recognition that Crane renders subjectively what his characters *see*: “it is for the artist simply to render the impression of the thing as it is apprehended by the senses. In doing so, he

has come as close as is humanly possible to representing the thing itself" (7). For Holten, this subjectivity is only one half of the equation since Crane also wants to render the "thing itself" in ways that go beyond the "humanly possible." The result is "a kind of double vision." Impressionism requires that he produce limited visions of the world, visions that can never be verified, but his "naturalism" demands that he make clear the reality of the world around him. The result, in Holten, is that Crane's work "achieves irony": "there is an implicit contradiction which must either diminish the value of his work or must generate from it a statement implicit in which is a kind of double vision, an ironical paradox" (7). Such a statement seems just another way of explaining that Crane wants to utilize both a subjective and an objective viewpoint.

Those critics who look more directly at Crane's "impressionism" make a similar point: impressionism demands we accept that our vision of the world is ultimately imperfect, that it is always subject to being obscured in one way or another. Thus, as James Nagel points out, the clear relationship to the impressionist painters is that so often a painted scene is not rendered purely in some "ideal" state, but rather in terms of what might "really" be expected to be seen: "reality is a matter of perception; it is unstable, ever-changing, elusive, inscrutable" (13). Nagel finds a similar technique at work in *The Red Badge of Courage*, where what Henry Fleming sees is often at a distance, which like fog serves the purpose of obscuring (12).

Obviously this approach to literature strives to its own sort of "realism," a realism that privileges subjectivity – an internal reality as opposed to one that is external:

> Of particular interest is the obscuring of vision in Impressionistic painting, a systematic limitation of the sensory reception of the essentials of scene. Such obscuring is generally the result of natural phenomenon (trees, fog, snow,

> darkness, distance) or, less often, problems arising from human civilization (smoke, flags, buildings, crowds) (Nagel 12).

Interestingly, though, what critics often overlook is the effect this obscuring has on the viewer in terms of space. Specifically, to view a landscape obscured by fog is to recognize the great depth of the landscape beyond what we can see. It is to suggest that, if we are offered a picture of a barn, for example, we also are being given a new awareness, implicit in impressionism, that there is more to the picture than the barn itself, that reality lies behind it as well, and indeed beside it and above it. In other words, the very subjectivity of impressionism creates a kind of objectivity, demanding that we recognize – in an objective way -- the very subjectivity of our vision.

As this discussion of impressionism suggests, Crane's brilliance was his ability to find techniques that would address the two components of fiction, subjectivity and objectivity, at one and the same time. Thus his use of distanced vision and constant activity, though they might seem to correspond to objectivity and subjectivity respectively, actually have a much more complex relationship to these two fictional poles. If Crane utilizes broad vistas as a means of generating objectivity, he is able to turn the same technique to his advantage in terms of subjectivity. The movement to a point above the action, for example, has the advantage of providing distance, but it also results in a greater sense of the wholeness of the scene below; it allows the reader, in other words, a greater sense that this world is complete and real, which, of course, adds to the subjective reality of that world. The opposite is equally true. Though Crane's characters are always in a state of energized activity, he is able to use this not only in a subjective sense, as a means of drawing the reader in to the action, but in an objective sense as well. Characters travel about the countryside of *The Red Badge* or the New York streets of *Maggie*, allowing us to see as much of the fictional world as possible through the characters'

eyes. We are allowed to become them because they are nameless. Yet in traveling restlessly about the streets of New York we gain that bird's eye view in that we are allowed to see so much of the Bowery that we can create a complete picture of it in our minds – we can, in other words, see it objectively because we have had the subjective experience.

One of the best examples of how Crane manages to interweave so many varying perspectives is *The Red Badge of Courage*. There Crane manages to utilize all of these techniques in order to craft a world that is both fully developed, and active, subjectively experiential and objectively whole.

There are a number of important moments in the novel where Crane the writer, with his objective view of the world he has created, can be readily discovered. Chief among these is the opening paragraph, in which he moves, in an almost filmic way, from a point above the events to a close up of Henry. Crane describes how the "retiring fogs" reveal an army "stretched out on the hills, resting" (1). The lines point to the "impressionism" in Crane, with the fog working to obscure our vision, but equally as important, this is no character's vision but rather the narrator's. Further, he can see here an entire army. There is the use of the phrase "stretched out," which implies a body flat against the ground, or from another perspective a viewer looking down from above. There will be other moments throughout the novel where Crane takes us to some point above the action. Sometimes these come from the eyes of Henry: "the youth saw that the landscape was streaked with two long, thin, black columns which disappeared on the brow of a hill in front and rearward vanished in a wood" (14). Later, his regiment mounts "the hill on the farther side" from whence he can see "Spread over grass and in among tree trunks […] knots and waving lines of skirmishers who were running hither and thither and firing at the landscape" (21). At other times, it is clear that the objectivity belongs to the narrator. So, for example,

though “the youth, light-footed, was unconsciously in advance” during the first charge, the narrative tells us that “the center careered to the front until the regiment was a wedge-shaped mass, but an instant later the opposition of the bushes, tress, and uneven places on the ground split the command and scattered it into detached clusters” (102). Here again, the description insists on being read as a figure seen from above.

So too, the avoidance of proper names helps Crane to achieve a level of objectivity. Even his central character is referred to for the most part as “the youth” rather than “Henry” or “Henry Fleming.” And many characters, such as the “cheerful soldier” never get a name at all. Again, the result is impressionistic, in that we feel Henry’s confusion during the course of the novel’s events, his struggle to make sense of the faces and events around him. Yet, too, it helps to establish distance for us. It forces us to consider Henry as but one soldier among many rather than as an individual. This is not to deny that we are intensely focused on him as an individual, seeing events through his eyes and following his psychological and emotional development in great detail. But Crane periodically wants to remind us of his universality, an attempt, in Holton’s terms, at providing a “naturalistic” sense of the events. To reinforce this feeling of universality, Crane also vacillates throughout the book between Henry’s experience and discussing the experiences of the army as a whole. Thus even on the first page we begin by looking at the river “purled at the army’s feet” (1). Or later, “the regiment seemed to draw itself up and heave a deep breath” (100). In each case, the experience of Henry becomes the experience of all, and we recognize that what Crane writes is not simply a subjective story, but a story that he intends to have universal social implications.

Movement in the novel also has a dual function, and again Crane hit on a strategy in *Red Badge* that would allow him, through this movement, to combine both objective and subjective

viewpoints into a single technique. Specifically, he utilizes the element of movement in order both to heighten the sense of subjectivity and allow for a larger objective sense of the battlefield as a whole – by having Fleming travel far and wide over the course of the novel, Crane is able to give the reader a glimpse of all the various components of that battlefield. Ultimately, he offers a view of that battlefield that is whole and complete, that might be held in the mind, as it were, and seen from a variety of angles. In order to accomplish this, Crane employs a plot structure reminiscent of the picaresque, allowing Henry to grow as an individual, as he simultaneously shows us multiple areas of the battlefield.

While the novel has not been associated with the picaresque, there are certain reasons why it might usefully be considered as one. The picaresque was certainly not unknown to writers of the time. Twain's *Huckelberry Finn*, for instance, shares a great many similarities with the first Spanish picaresque novels.[2] Crane's close friend and sponsor, William Dean Howells, had always high praise for the first "novel," the picaresque *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Further, Crane was clearly conversant and comfortable with the form, as his use of it in *The O'Ruddy* readily demonstrates. Crane's fiction is often episodic. In terms of *The Red Badge* it is worth noting that it was first published (publicly) in episodic installments, and Crane emphasizes this episodic nature by frequently using phrases associated with tales, each of which has the effect of disorienting us in time, forcing us to begin anew: "Once a certain tall soldier developed virtues and went resolutely to wash a shirt" (1); "Once a man fell down" (14); "once the line encountered the body of a dead soldier" (22); "Once he found himself almost into a swamp"

[2] Crane was not especially fond of Twain's work, but his dislike had more to do with what he saw as the "artist-clown" (Stallman 85) in Twain than with the structural qualities of his work.

(45). Even Henry Fleming himself looks back at one point and notes, "There had been many *adventures*" (92), a word often associated with the picaresque.

There are actually a great many affinities to be found between literary impressionism and the picaresque, a fact that becomes more apparent with a greater understanding of the picaresque. The form was initially used by Spanish writers during a period roughly corresponding to the Spanish Inquisition. These works most often concern a central figure -- a "picaro" – who is perpetually seeking an identity, and whose episodic adventures involve encounters with various representations of social stereotypes. Claudio Guillen, one of the earliest scholars of the picaresque, notes that the early Spanish picaresque novels all included the important theme of "the dynamic relationship of the individual and his active career in a social and economic environment" (48). Alexander Blackburn, expanding on Guillen's definition, is quick to note that the picaro is not "the individual of antiquity [who] may come into conflict with his environment, but, doing so, he is always in the wrong because the world he moves in or out of is a static, timeless continuum" (19). Rather, "The picaro's loneliness is by contrast the outgrowth of the sense of failed identity, of the instability of an inferior social standing, and of the failure to find human solidarity" (20). This, in Blackburn's terms, is the root cause of the picaro's "compulsive restlessness." And yet, "those whom the picaro encounters on the road tend to reflect his own lack of significant reality, and his jerky, episodic journey is thus precisely the form this experience takes. The more he seeks the more disintegrated he becomes" (20). Ultimately, this "disintegration" is the "undoing of a previously formidable orthodox tradition,

the collapse of personality or its submission to an experience of nothingness" (22). The picaro's collapse or disintegration, then, is suggestive of the larger collapse of society in general.[3] As Blackburn describes it, each episode or "education unit" "shows increasing anxiety and loneliness culminating in a partial breakdown of objective reality" (42), and "a shift from the view of reality as absolute to the view of reality as relative" (50). The picaro is constantly coming into contact with new ways of seeing the world, and he attempts to assimilate each, only to have each ultimately break down and be replaced by another. As Blackburn suggests, the ultimate lesson of such continued collapses is that reality cannot be trusted – that we must accept that reality is individual, that it is subjective and made out of each of our own viewpoints. What the picaresque accomplishes, it turns out, is remarkably similar to what impressionist critics often describe impressionism as accomplishing. In fact, as Blackburn explains, the effect of the picaresque novel is rendered primarily through the irony created by multiple levels of seeing:

> Lazarillo, the witty, vulnerable, initially truthful boy, appeals to the reader's sympathy and trust as might a virtuous hero; at this level of response, we may indulge his pretensions to nobility as, at worst, adolescent fantasies. But the boy's story is being narrated by a mature Lazaro, who is not only complacent, odious, and spiritually dead, but who has also suppressed, if he has not altogether extinguished, that earlier possibility of internal truthfulness. […] In maturity, Lazaro can no longer be relied upon to see himself (36).

Though impressionism tends to rely on third person points of view, certainly this description seems remarkably similar to Nagel's in terms of the irony created by the difference between

[3] Stuart Miller, offers a list of picaresque traits, noting such things as an episodic plot, an often chaotic structure, that involves "an innocent developing into a picaro because the world he meets is roguish," (65) and a decided "lack of personality" (78) on the part of the picaro.

Fleming's subjective viewpoints and the subtle reminders of the more objective reality of events. Perhaps it makes sense then, that Frederick Monteser, in *The Picaresque Element in Western Literature,* finds a great many parallels between the time period that produced the first picaresques and the late nineteenth century in America. He notes that the picaresque originally arose from the environment of the Spanish Inquisition: "The result was that gore, hardship, and tragedy are sprinkled liberally throughout the pages of *Lazarillo do Tormes, Guzman de Alfarache, Celestina,* and the rest of the canon. It seems almost as if there were a continuing competition to portray the worst possible situations in the most vivid manner. What else is 20th century American Naturalism?" (105).

It is easy to see, then, why an impressionist like Crane would have been drawn to the picaresque as a form. And though it is not often seen as such, his most "impressionist" work, *The Red Badge of Courage,* might usefully be examined as an example of a picaresque. Henry Fleming is, after all, searching for an identity. Leaving home (as a youth) with one conception of himself, one based on the heroic stories he has been read, he is soon confronted with another paradigm of battle, one proffered by the soldiers he meets at training camp. But this conception of himself disappears as well, once he is faced with the prospect of real battle. As it unfolds, the entire book describes the restless progress for Fleming about the battlefield and its surrounding areas in search of that clear identity, and his constant failure to discover it.

Though it might not fit the picaresque model in every respect, considering the novel as an example of the genre is worthwhile. As with most picaresques, *Red Badge* essentially begins with Fleming's decision to leave home to seek his fortune. Despite his mother's objections, he is convinced that glory waits on the battlefield. He is naïve, believing the stories of valor he has read as a youth "on the pages of the past": the "Greeklike struggles" with "large pictures

extravagant in color, lurid with breathless deeds" (3). This naïveté too connects him to the picaro. The picaro's journey involves a constant search for identity, and a constant failure to discover that identity. He travels the roads of life meeting one character after another, each of whom he believes has the answer to how life is to be lived. In the end, however, each turns out only to be a trickster of one sort or another. The picaro must ultimately overcome this trickster by outwitting him at his own game, and the picaro's progress is defined by a series of episodes in which he outwits one "teacher" only to move on to confront another.

The pattern plays itself out in *Red Badge*. Once he has arrived in camp, Fleming quickly comes to realize that his early fantasies about war are at odds with his internal feelings. Significantly, he feels himself the outsider, the only soldier who lacks this strong identity and courage. The stories from his childhood are revealed as just that, when he begins to consider the actual prospect of fighting in battle. Consequently, he must seek a new "teacher," a new voice to guide him through his next "episode." He finds this teacher in the figure of Jim Conklin. He has seen "the tall soldier" celebrated for his news of an impending deployment, and for his authority and courage in defending the veracity of that news. Thus Conklin for him is established as heroic, a representation of knowledge and wisdom. Desperate to understand his own feelings of fear and inferiority, he asks Jim, in an effort to untangle his confusion, "Think any of the boys'll run?" (9). Jim offers his philosophical viewpoint on the possibility, suggesting that, though some may run, once under fire he believes their reactions will become automatic and carry them through. Fleming probes further: " 'Did you ever think that you might run yourself, Jim?' " (10). Jim offers a more personal philosophy of "running": " 'Well,' said he profoundly, 'I've thought it might get too hot for Jim Conklin in some of them scrimmages, and if a whole lot of boys started to run, I'd run like the devil, and no mistake. But if everybody was a-standing and a-

fighting, why, I'd stand and fight. Be jiminy, I would. I'll bet on it' " (10). In these statements, Jim provides Henry with two salves for his troubled mind – first that being caught up in battle tends to erase thoughts of running, and second that he himself might run if the situation called for it. Henry "felt gratitude" (10) for this piece of wisdom, adopting it as his own philosophy.

Once the regiment does actually receive orders to march, however, Fleming panics once again, his earlier comfort replaced by a new feeling of confusion. His sense of isolation returns: "He felt alone in space when his injured comrade had disappeared. His failure to discover any mite of resemblance in their viewpoints made him more miserable than before. No one seemed to be wrestling with such a terrific personal problem. He was a mental outcast" (18). To phrase this in terms of the picaresque tradition, Henry recognizes Conklin as a "trickster," a figure whose philosophy is proved to be ineffective in dealing with the problems of life.

One important consequence of this realization is that he already, at this early point recognizes that survival depends on outwitting others, and indeed, himself. His development from this point is both long and episodic, a series of encounters with one philosophy and another. He decides that the government is to blame: "it occurred to him that he had never wished to come to the war. He had not enlisted of his own free will. He had been dragged by the merciless government" (21); using this new philosophy he confronts his previous teacher, Jim Conklin: " 'I can't stand this much longer,' he cried. 'I don't see what good it does to make us wear out our legs for nothin' " (24). Later, during a particularly fierce moment in battle, he convinces himself that his entire regiment is fleeing in the face of an insurmountable enemy, and believing this "trick" drops his gun and runs away. He discovers the wounded walking slowly back from the battlefield towards the rear lines.

There he encounters new figures with their own brand of advice. The most vocal of these is the "tattered sergeant" who, with Henry, witnesses Jim Conklin's death. Fleming is obviously shaken watching his former friend and "teacher" dying in front of him. The "tattered sergeant," however, offers a new viewpoint on the event: "He's up an' gone, ain't 'e, an' we might as well begin t' look out fer ol' number one. This here thing is all over. He's up an' gone, ain't e'? An' he's all right here. Nobody won't bother 'im. An' I must say I ain't enjoying any great health m'self these days" (57). Once again, Henry is taken in by this way of seeing the world, and, as the picaro, soon uses it to overthrow the very person from whom he has learned it: "The youth, looking at him, could see that he, too, like that other one, was beginning to act dumb and animallike" (60). The fact that he refers to Conklin as "that other one" demonstrates that he thinks only of himself now, unwilling to waste emotions on others. Having invested in this way of thinking, he turns on the one who taught it him and leaves him too dying alone in a field.

As expected by this point, his ego-centric view of the universe is quickly challenged and he is forced yet again to revise his internal principles. Finding himself suddenly in the midst of a mob of fleeing soldiers, he tries desperately to ask someone from what they are running, only to have a soldier he's grabbed to question strike him a blow on the head. Clearly the man is operating on the philosophy of "look out fer ol' number one," and this time Fleming himself is the victim. The "man with the cheery voice" who comes along and helps him find his regiment in the dark only serves to reinforce the failure of this philosophy.

By this time in the novel, however, Fleming the picaro has reached the point where he has lost the potential to fill the empty void where his identity should be. He has become the "trickster, the "confidence man." Reaching his own company, he allows Wilson to tend his wound and passes this wound off as the result of a bullet. Further, he constantly seeks to outwit

those he encounters from this point on, so ingrained is this process within him. He has come to feel himself "superior" (84) to others: "how could they kill him who was the chosen of gods and doomed to greatness" (85). On the basis of this feeling of superiority, he plans to confront Wilson about the letters Wilson had given Fleming before the first battle, letters he had asked Fleming to deliver, believing he himself would die in the first salvo. Discarding his former "fear of his friend" and the "questionings," "He now rejoiced in the possession of a small weapon with which he could prostrate his comrade at the first signs of a cross-examination. He was master. It would now be he who could laugh and shoot the shafts of derision" (84).

Perhaps the important question, in considering this novel as a picaresque is, to what end does Crane use the form? Some answers can be discovered by looking at the effects of the more traditional picaresque. As Blackburn points out, the picaro is someone who constantly feels an outsider to society, who is essentially seeking some way in to that society. Thus in a sense, the society comes to serve as his definition of himself. The constant trickery he encounters becomes his identity, and he eventually becomes a confidence man himself. What this ultimately reveals is that society itself is hopelessly flawed, that it is nothing more than a confidence game. So too, the chaotic structure of the picaro helps to reinforce the fact that society at large has reached a point of disintegration:

> His story was told on two planes, individual and social, brought together artistically in the form of autobiographical self-revelation. On the one hand, there was the society that deformed the individual and helped to make him a stranger. On the other hand, there was the individual whose search for identity within society led to an anguished sense of failure. Crossing the fine line between adventure and exile, conformity and heresy, innocence and damnation, the

> disintegrating picaro of the classic, Spanish picaresque novels projected, in sum, a dark predicament of his age (92).

What this suggests, is that Crane's method includes an implicit social commentary, one that insists that ultimately there is no "truth," that the world is made up of con men, each trying to one-up the other. The picaro, in climbing this ladder, finally arrives at a point at which he himself is morally bankrupt, only able to exist in his own games, and now believing in the con he has created for himself. So Henry ends the novel believing that at last he has come to terms with his own identity, when in fact this is merely another in a series of shams he has perpetrated on himself. At the same time, Henry's moral bankruptcy is representative of society's. This seems to be Crane's view, in a simple sense. One need only look at works like *Maggie*, or "The Men in the Storm" to see that he was uneasy about the existing social structure. In the latter story appears a description of homeless men standing cold in the snow waiting for the shelter to open, while in a dry goods shop across the street, can be seen

> the figure of a man. He was rather stout and very well clothed. His beard was fashioned charmingly after that of the Prince of Wales. He stood in an attitude of magnificent reflection. He slowly stroked his moustache with a certain grandeur of manner, and looked down at the snow-encrusted mob. From below, there was denoted a supreme complacence in him. It seemed that the sight operated inversely, and enabled him to more clearly regard his own delightful environment (*The Open Boat and Other Stories* 235-236).

It is difficult to read such a passage and not recognize this unease, even if it is not as clearly defined as in a writer like Upton Sinclair.

In *The Red Badge* this disintegration is in part implicit in Fleming's emptiness, as it is in all picaresques. Yet too, there is the figure of the general that comes up over and over again in the novel. He is a figure who represents a height to which Fleming seems to strive, and yet he represents simultaneously the emptiness of such heights. We are reminded of this fact when, immediately after hearing the general speak of the regiment as "mud diggers" (114), Fleming and Wilson return to camp and are told that they were commended by the colonel for having held the colors aloft in the skirmish. In the wake of this news, "They speedily forgot many things" (116). The criticism and praise are mixed and Crane suggests here that this is a means by which those above can control those below, a lesson that might be equally applied to his own time as to the battlefield at Chancelorsville.

Crane's structure has one other important purpose as well, though. Fleming, in traveling about the battlefield, not only gives us a subjective, active viewpoint on the battle – he also provides a complete picture of the battle. As he travels he encounters the artillery battery, overhears the generals giving orders, and witnesses the after-affects of war on the wounded. Each encounter gives us a new piece of the puzzle that eventually becomes, by novel's end, a bird's-eye-view of the battlefield as a whole. In other words, the very strategy Crane uses to create subjectivity has the secondary effect of providing a measure of objectivity, a sense of this space as whole and complete.

If James creates subjective portraiture, Crane might be said to have created objective engagement. Both writers feel the pull of the two poles of fiction, and both apply their own personalities to navigating between these two poles. As successful as both were, however, they could never completely rationalize the two, never feel completely confident that they had combined the two in any sort of easy mixture. James cannot resolve the two in *Portrait* and so

eventually admits defeat in the end by allowing Isabel to escape the novel altogether. Crane wants to allow experience to dominate his novel, to offer a completely individualistic view of the world, but he can never resist reminding us, through the use of an objective narrative voice, that this individuality is apparent in its flaws. Consequently, in both writers, there remained an uneasy tension in their works, a tension that has often led to frustration on the part of critics, and indeed radically opposed schools of thought as to where each author should be placed historically and generically. But in addition, this tension is, in part, what helps to drive them as writers, and in the end, what helps to drive their works.

CHAPTER 4

UPTON SINCLAIR: WORLDS OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Upton Sinclair, like Henry James and Stephen Crane before him (and Willa Cather after him), was apparently psychologically predisposed to see the world from the dual perspectives of objectivity and subjectivity, and he, like them, employs this dual perspective throughout his works. His embrace of these two fictional poles as a writer, however, was driven by demands somewhat more practical than were those of James or Crane. These earlier writers seem to discover an internal subjective/ objective pull -- both within themselves and within the story -- and attempt to write their way out of this duality; Sinclair, whether or not he was motivated by any internal psychological struggle, was also forced to address this duality because of his more conscious choices of purpose and material. Sinclair's aspirations went beyond merely crafting a work of art. Rather his works were designed with the specific intention of effecting social and political change. In many ways, the quality of his imagined worlds, their ability to succeed as alternate "realities," was important only in so far as they might push the reader to invest in his larger political messages, to embrace change in the real world. Engaging the reader in a *subjective* experience thus allowed him to propagate his message in a broad, *objective* sense.

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Sinclair, like the other writers in this study, learned from childhood to see life from two competing perspectives at once. Yet the duality he faced was more overt than was that of Crane and James, and, as a result, his manner of addressing the objective/ subjective duality in his

writing was somewhat more overt as well. Both of these earlier writers dealt with an internal struggle, between merely observing their environment and actively participating in it; on some level both were driven by an inability to separate the larger world from their own personal experience of that world. They seem perfect illustrations of Winnicott's theoretical arguments about art as the natural outgrowth of childhood psychological development. Sinclair, while he may indeed have internalized this same psychological dynamic, additionally lived a double life in a more concrete sense. Specifically, as he explains in his 1932 autobiography, "all my life I was faced with the contrast between riches and poverty" (*American Outpost* 140). Eventually, his exposure to this contrast would lead him to embrace socialism, but as a child his conception of the world was less about philosophical propositions than about the simple fact of day-to-day existence. The constant exposure to two very different social classes eventually led him to the same kind of bifurcated vision that Crane and James developed on a seemingly subconscious level.

From the time Upton was around ten years old, his family "lived a hand-to-mouth existence […] sliding steadily downward through a series of boardinghouses that catered to displaced southerners like themselves" (Arthur 4). Sinclair, a prolific autobiographer, wrote a good deal about his family's itinerant lifestyle, and their adopted motto – "cheaper to move than to pay rent" (*American Outpost* 22). He describes how he was often awakened in the middle of the night "to join in the exciting chase of bedbugs" (*American Outpost* 4), and how he was frequently sent out to comb the streets in search of his alcoholic father, dragging him home from "the gutters of the Bowery and off the tables of saloons" (Mattson 18). Yet for all their miserable circumstances, his father and mother were the product of Southern aristocracy, and even while they lived in poverty, they worked to instill in their children a sense of Southern

gentility. Early on, then, Sinclair lived with two sets of social values, and this almost schizophrenic existence was only reinforced by his frequent trips to stay with wealthy relatives, especially his mother's sister, who owned a prosperous country estate near Baltimore. While there he lived in a world completely at odds from the one he normally inhabited, of tenements and street gangs. At times the contrast between poverty and privilege must have seemed especially keen as when, for example, he would travel in a single afternoon from his home in Hell's Kitchen to the Waldorf-Astoria, "where wealthy family members sometimes took young Sinclair for lunch" (Mattson 23).

Never really a member of the socially aristocratic set, Sinclair developed an early aversion to the "conspicuous consumption" he encountered among these relatives; though he certainly understood the world of wealth and prominence, he essentially only experienced it as an outsider, always in the end returning home to a shabby apartment. Yet, despite his later decision to champion the cause of the economically downtrodden, he was never entirely a member of the under classes either. As a child, he was frequently teased by his playmates for his Southern accent, and in return he usually referred to them as "toughs." Though his use of the term is somewhat endearing -- "That year among the 'toughs' helped to save me from the ridiculous snobbery that would otherwise have been my destiny in life" (*The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair* 21) – and demonstrates an appreciation for the enlightened attitudes his difficult childhood brought him, it also suggests that Sinclair regarded himself in his youth as somehow distinct from these childhood friends. Essentially he was both an insider and an outsider in both of the lives he led. As a result, he was able, throughout his many works, to delve deeply into the lives of both the wealthy and poor, but always also with an ability to see both classes from a

detached point-of-view. In one of his autobiographies, *American Outpost*, Sinclair draws attention to the effect of his upbringing on his career as a writer:

> Readers of my novels know that I have one favorite theme, the contrast of the social classes; there are characters from both worlds, the rich and poor, and the plot is contrived to carry you from one to the other. The explanation of this literary phenomenon is that, from the first days I can remember, my life was a series of Cinderella transformations; one night sleeping on a vermin-ridden sofa in a lodging-houses, and the next under silken coverlets in a fashionable home (12-13).

He intends this passage as a justification of sorts for his socialism. He stakes a claim here to direct knowledge of both wealth and poverty, and subtly implies that anyone who had seen both sides of the economic coin could not fail to recognize the injustice inherent in a capitalist system. At the same time, though, the statement shows how, from childhood, he would have developed an ability to see things from two vantage points simultaneously, in this case through the eyes of the rich and poor.

There were other ways too in which Sinclair learned to see the world from two simultaneous points of view. Like Crane, he worked as a reporter and journalist, which demanded a degree of objectivity, a distance from the subjects he was sent to investigate. Yet he was also drawn, from childhood on, to literature, and particularly literature as a form of escapism. This passion, like so much else in his life, seems to have been the direct result of the poverty in which he was raised. As one biographer describes it, "he was continually immersed in books. Partly out of sheer enjoyment, partly to shut out the distractions and dissensions of their cramped household, he escaped in *Gulliver's Travels*, the tales of the Brothers Grimm and Hans

Christian Anderson, the dime-novel adventures of Horatio Alger" (Arthur 5). Sinclair himself argued that, "The sordid surroundings in which I lived made me into a dreamer. I took to literature because that was the easiest refuge" (*American Outpost* 12). He also writes eloquently of an important epiphany, during which the worlds of literature and reality apparently fused in his mind:

> My mind on fire with high poetry, I went out for a walk one night. I do not know my age at the time, but it was somewhere around eighteen or nineteen, a winter night, with hard crunching snow on the ground and great bright lights in the sky; the tree branches black and naked, crackling now and then in the breeze; but between times silence, quite magical silence – and I walking in Druid Hill Park, mile on mile, lost to the world, drinking in beauty, marveling at the mystery of life. Suddenly this thing came to me, startling and wonderful beyond any power of words to tell; the opening of gates in the soul, the pouring in of music, of light, of joy which was unlike anything else, and therefore not to be conveyed in metaphors. I stood riveted to one spot, and a trembling seized me, a dizziness, a happiness so intense that the distinction between pleasure and pain was lost" (*American Outpost* 76-77).

As he continued walking, he began to see, in the people and places he encounterd, the literary settings and characters he had come to know so intimately from his reading:

> Then came the melancholy Prince of Denmark, and Don Quixote – I must have been reading him at this time. Also Shelley – real persons mixed with imaginary ones, but all equal in this realm of fantasy. They held conversations, each in his own character, yet glorified, more so than in the books. I was laughing, singing

> with the delight of their company; in short, a perfect picture of a madman, talking to myself, making incoherent exclamations. Yet I knew what I was doing, I knew what was happening, I knew that this was literature, and that if I could remember the tenth part of it and set it down on paper, it would be read (77).

What he discovers is what James and Crane too discovered – that literature was a world one could enter and live through, no less than was the "real" world around him. In short, literary writing represented for him an almost total subjectivity, just as journalism could be a medium through which to look objectively at people and events; both were useful, and powerful, means of expression. It is unsurprising, then, that once his sympathies became entangled with his journalistic assignments, once he was writing to instigate change rather than merely to describe conditions, the two – subjectivity and objectivity – would coalesce into a single method.

Ultimately, Sinclair's biggest problem as a novelist was the one faced by all novelists with a social message – how to present a social argument without diminishing the "art" they are creating – how to combine commentary with action in one single work. This conflict, like so many others in Sinclair's life, can be couched in terms of subjectivity and objectivity: subjectivity seems necessary if a reader is to invest in the reality of the fictional world; objectivity is required to apply the social message on a scale broader than any single story. To a certain extent, his facility with fiction and journalism, and his recognition that they could be successfully paired, helped Sinclair overcome this problem. In his best works, he moves fluidly between one and the other, drawing the reader in with a detailed story and rich characters, and propagating his message by including as much factual data as he could amass. In fact, his work, along with that of other writer/ journalists of the period such as Theodore Dreiser, has frequently been described as the forerunner of the "New Journalism" movement that developed in the

1970s.[4] Writers from both eras tried to meld journalism and fiction, reality and imagination, hoping both to enliven their journalism and ground their fiction in social realities. The literary works from this earlier period, such as *An American Tragedy* and *McTeague* were the first of what later came to be termed, "nonfiction novels," and they allowed their authors to turn the novel, for a time at least, to social purpose.

Sinclair's writing was more than merely a combination of fiction and journalism though. In a work like *Oil!*, he uses a variety of techniques for combining subjectivity and objectivity. In many cases these techniques seem quite similar to those of Stephen Crane. Much like Crane, he employs views from above the landscape, particularly in the early portions of the novel. In the opening lines, Sinclair writes of "The road," which he imagines as "a ribbon of grey concrete, rolled out over the valley by a giant hand" (1). The effect is similar to that of a panning shot in film, where the camera moves slowly closer and closer to the specific subject of the film; it helps to remind us that this specific story is only a representative slice of a much larger reality. The central setting of this first chapter is a car, and as this car climbs steadily higher into the mountains, the vistas become ever more spectacular: "Hill below hill dropping away, and a landscape spread out, as far as forever." Then, as if to prepare us for the novel's constant movement back and forth between aerial objectivity and the more pressing subjective matter making up this particular story, the car quickly begins its descent: "They slid down, and little by little the scenery disappeared; they were common mortals again, back on earth" (8).

The names in these opening chapters, again as in Crane, are deliberately obscured. We know the two characters only by their relationship to one another, "Dad," and "the boy." As in the *Red Badge of Courage*, there is a kind of double effect in the use of such generic references.

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[4] See *Art for Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair*

On the one hand, they serve to distance us from these characters, an effect that is reinforced by the general tone of these chapters, in which we are offered no real idea of where they are in space, or where they are heading, only that they seem to appear from nowhere in an almost empty landscape, an empty canvas as it were. We are urged to see these characters as symbols, carefully placed in a manufactured environment in order to convey a specific message. On the other hand, the relationship between the two is established as close through the use of the name "Dad," familial in its literal meaning, and connotatively suggestive of intimacy. And this close connection is developed throughout the first chapter, as in the first description of the two:

> Dad wore an overcoat, opulent in cut, double-breasted, with big collar and big lapels and big flaps over the pockets […]. The boy's coat had been made by the same tailor, of the same soft, wooly material, with the same big collar and big lapels and big flaps […]. Dad wore driving gauntlets; and the same shop had had the same kind for boys. Dad wore horned-rimmed spectacles; the boy had never been taken to an oculist, but he had found in a drug-story a pair of amber-colored glasses, having horn rims the same as Dad's (1).

We feel subjectively the bond between the two characters, even as the generic quality of their names keeps us at a certain distance.

In comparison to Crane, however, Sinclair integrates his objectivity into the text in a more fluid manner. Where Crane's objectivity was the result of the narrator's need for a larger perspective ("viewed from a balcony the whole thing would have seemed oddly picturesque"), Sinclair turns this objectivity into his protagonist's point-of-view. By making of this protagonist, soon identified as Bunny, a kind of blank slate, Sinclair fuses objectivity and subjectivity, allowing subjective experience -- because it is the experience of an innocent -- to serve as

objective comment on that experience. Where Crane navigates between the limited point-of-view of his character and his narrative desire to present a complete world, Sinclair is more interested in how subjectivity might allow him to make a political statement.

Bunny is but a child of eight, and sees his father, and indeed everything around him, as larger than life. The novel becomes a bildungsroman, one in which he slowly grows and develops, learning more and more about the world, and especially the two systems that seem to govern that world, capitalist and socialist. His father, an oil baron, seems figuratively to tower over him, dictating who he is and what he will become. His father's influence is challenged, though, by the equally larger-than-life figure of Paul Watkins, whom Bunny meets outside while his father is working on an oil deal with neighborhood investors. Paul, having grown up in poverty, leads a difficult life over the course of the book, and Bunny's attachment to him, bordering on idolatry, is placed against his adoration for his father as the novel's central conflict. We are given, symbolically, the two roads we might take, the two roads, like those seen from above the landscape in the novel's opening pages, between which Bunny must decide: socialism and capitalism. Clearly these two paths are larger than the bounds of this story. Yet at the same time, they are firmly grounded within the story – we invest in their reality. Paul, Bunny, all the characters, become real for us. As a result, we make the journey with Bunny both experientially and symbolically, both subjectively and objectively. The result of the novel, of course, is that Bunny's education, his development, becomes a template for the reader. We follow Bunny through his growth, and in witnessing what he witnesses, we become him. We too are educated. Thus the subjective experience of Bunny's life becomes a means of pushing forward Sinclair's objective views.

It is in *The Jungle*, though, Sinclair's most successful novel, that we can see him at his most ingenious. In *Oil!*, Bunny is an outsider to events, his youthful naïveté making him almost a surrogate reader, a figure who comes to Sinclair's ideological arguments with an open mind. A similar effect is achieved in *The Jungle*, but in this case, it is less a blank slate on which Sinclair projects, than a knowing, if still distanced, observer. As a result, Sinclair achieves a more balanced fusion of subjectivity and objectivity (at least up until the final chapters), because his central character is allowed to have a much more highly developed personality. Bunny's experiences are subjective, but because the novel makes him so naïve initially, he always feels like a symbol rather than a flesh-and-blood person. In contrast, Jurgis Rudkis, as immigrant, comes to understand the meat-packing world of Chicago in the most intimate ways, and as a result we too experience it as almost completely subjective. It is difficult to think of a book more graphic in its descriptions or one more capable of producing real physical and emotional responses in such a direct way. We inhabit the experience. Simultaneously, and because events occur to immigrants in particular, these events are instilled with an innate objectivity – we see this world with an outsider's eyes.

The opening chapter is essential to the work as a whole, a fact which has been noticed by a number of critics. Orm Overland, for example, praises the chapter as "one of the most poignant sketches in American literature of a common experience of immigration" (8). It is the second half of Overland's statement, however, that has become influential in the scholarship on the chapter, in which he defines that experience as, "the loss of culture in all its complexities – including language – and the acquisition of poorly understood fragments of a new one." Drawing on this analysis, Anthony Arthur points to the fiddler at the party, Antonas, as a pivotal figure in the chapter, who "through his art holds the party together, providing the bridge between

the old world and the new" (50) and who by the party's end is playing "a popular American tune, of which they know only first line: 'In the good old summer time'" (50). Such critics see the novel as a critique of America's treatment of immigrants, its tendency to strip them of their culture and values; certainly that is an important element in the work, though perhaps focusing on it is to regard an early 20th century novel with early 21st century eyes. Yet I would argue that this opening chapter with its emphasis on the Lithuanian culture serves a more important purpose. Sinclair, from the beginning, wants to make of America a new land, to defamiliarize America for us.

Ironically, in order to accomplish this, he first works to distance the reader from Jurgis and his family. So, for instance, the inclusion of Lithuanian words in the first few paragraphs – "*Z. Graiczunas, Pasilinksminimams darzas. Vynas. Sznapses*" – puts us at a disadvantage in terms of the interior world of the wedding party itself, a Lithuanian world. The narrative voice actually draws attention to this fact: "The reader, who perhaps has never held much converse in the language of far-off Lithuania, will be glad of the explanation" (3-4). We are glad indeed, since we begin as "outsiders," unable even to understand what is being said.

But Sinclair's efforts at defamiliarization do not stop at this point. Of equal importance is his movement back and forth between past and present tense, and the shift from an objective to a subjective viewpoint on the scene. So, before the first break, he writes, "Those who were still older, and could reach the tables, marched about munching contentedly at meat bones and bologna sausages" (5), a view of events from without. Yet in the next section things have changed; we are no longer the foreign outsiders: "Suddenly some of the steam begins to advance, and peering through it, you discern Aunt Elizabeth, Ona's stepmother – Teta Elzbieta, as they call her – bearing aloft a great platter of stewed duck" (5). The effect of the sentence's structure

is to pull the reader slowly into this world, most obviously through the use of "you" and present tense. Ultimately, we find ourselves at the party's center, dancing with abandon: "The little person who leads this trio is an inspired man. His fiddle is out of tune, and there is no rosin on his bow, but still he is an inspired man – the hands of the muses have been laid upon him. He plays like one possessed by a demon, by a whole horde of demons. You can feel them in the air round about him, capering frenetically" (6). In fact, this movement from outside to inside was the experience of Sinclair himself, if his description of how the chapter came to be written is to be believed. In later years, recollecting his time researching *The Jungle*, he wrote of following a wedding party into the back of a saloon one Sunday afternoon in Chicago: "There were my characters – the bride, the groom, the mother and father, the boisterous cousin, the children, the three musicians, everybody" (156). In other words, the imagined scene is based on reality, with real and fictional characters and events becoming one. More important than Sinclair's use of a "real" scene, though, is his description of how he remembered that scene, how he sat against one wall, "imagining, engraving the details on my mind. It was two months before I got settled at home and first put pen to paper; but the story stayed, and I wrote down whole paragraphs, whole pages, exactly as I had memorized them" (*American Outpost* 156). Such a description helps to solidify the way a scene -- a world -- develops in a writer's consciousness, is carried by him until it is eventually put down on paper. It is an enactment of how a writer takes an objective reality and, internalizing it, makes it his own.

This first chapter, then, is key to setting up all that follows in the novel. For it captures at one and the same instant -- and on multiple levels -- the feeling of outsider and insider. More specifically, we become insiders as the chapter progresses. The strategy is remarkable in its ability to shift our perspective. It allows Sinclair to begin the novel by making us outsiders *with*

these characters; when once they leave the protective confines of the hall itself and return to the world at large, where they are decidedly set apart as immigrants, we too are set apart. In other words, we begin as outsiders to these immigrants, as objective watchers of their revels, only to be made one of their number so that, at chapter's end, we experience subjectively the events that follow; but precisely because we experience subjectively, because we can see from their perspective, we also gain a measure of objectivity about what they encounter. Once we are one of them, Chicago becomes a world from which we are – like them -- estranged, a world that we will experience, but that we likewise experience always with the objectivity of foreigners.

As critics of political novels have noted, the most difficult aspect of writing a "social" novel is navigating between these two viewpoints:

> Politics is by its nature a public enterprise; it is embodied in the patterned relationships human beings develop – in the more momentous instances, in arenas implicating millions – as they formulate and contest the rules through which whole societies or their subdivisions are bound. Great literature, on the other hand, acquires its compellingly universal qualities through synecdoche: It induces readers to accept a part – generally, a very small, sharply etched cast of characters – for a much larger whole (Von der Muhll 26).[5]

Put another way, writing a political novel requires that the writer consider the large picture of society (objectivity), while still developing individual characters and scenes. It is this that Sinclair is attempting to accomplish in *The Jungle*.

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[5] Joel Kassiola, writing in the same volume, terms this aspect of literature its ability to offer a "virtual experience" (53): drawing on the important literary theorist Susanne Langer, he argues that literature's job is "to create the appearance of 'experiences,' the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life" (57). Kassiola argues that this is what makes literature an ideal medium for addressing political issues.

As is clear in the opening chapter, he overcomes this difficulty in large part through strategies of defamiliarization, an approach he borrows from a very particular sort of social novel, the dystopia. This is a genre Sinclair would certainly have been familiar with, not least because it was experiencing a kind of revival of sorts during the period, and for precisely the same reasons that Sinclair found it useful – the dystopian novel's structure provides for an easy movement between subjectivity and objectivity. Sinclair not only read Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, but felt strongly enough about it to pressure his first wife, Meta, into reading it as well. Additionally, he encouraged Meta to read Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics*, and it would make sense that he would likewise have been aware of Gilman's dystopian work *Herland*. He was an admirer of Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* (Harris 60), and he read widely in H.G. Wells, from whom he certainly would have learned that the science fiction/ dystopian novel can have a powerful social impact.

In its purest form the dystopian (or utopian) story involves a shift to another time or place from the one the writer actually inhabits. Darko Suvin, in 1979, laid down the principles of science fiction, a form often closely associated, and which he himself often associated, with dystopian/ utopian fiction:

> it should be defined as a fictional tale determined by the hegemonic literary device of a *locus* and/ or *dramatis personae* that (1) are *radically or at least significantly different from the empirical times, places and characters* of 'mimetic' or 'naturalist' fiction, but (2) are nonetheless – to the extent that SF differs from other 'fantastic' genres [..], simultaneously perceived as *not impossible* within the cognitive (cosmological and anthropological) norms of the author's epoch (viii).

Simply put, the genre involves a world similar to our own, but somehow removed from our own in either space or time. This would seem to disqualify *The Jungle*, and yet ultimately, the goal of setting the story in another epoch, is to generate a defamiliarization with the contemporary epoch: "it [the alternate time/place] is – potentially – the space of a potent *estrangement*, validated by the pathos and prestige of the basic cognitive norms of our times" (viii). Elsewhere, Suvin elaborates on this concept of "cognitive estrangement" a term he borrows from Brecht: "Whether island or valley, whether in space or (from the industrial and bourgeois revolutions on) in time, the new framework is correlative to the new inhabitants. The aliens, utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers – are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world" (5).

Sinclair does not choose, as did some of his contemporaries, to remove his story in time, but he does manage to remove it, at least in a sense, in terms of place. In fact, there was already an American literary tradition ready to hand for Sinclair, in the form of regionalism, that allowed him to effect this removal. American writers had been exploring regionalism for some time, in part driven by the very real physical movement that was taking place in the country, with Westward expansion, but also mass migration from the South to the North. These migrations within the country and immigration from without, led to a heightened awareness of "otherness." Writers began to use the resulting social anxiety both because it was a fact of life, but additionally because it offered a new motif for exploring the country. As a result, these works are typically not written from the perspective of a local – someone who understands the region --, but rather from that of an outsider who comes into contact with what represents the "foreign." The reader fittingly explores this region from the perspective of someone who comes to it with no knowledge.

It is fairly easy to find examples of such regionalist strategy from the period in which Sinclair wrote. *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, for instance, offers a picture of eastern Maine, seen through the eyes of someone new to the area: "After a first brief visit made two or three summers before in the course of a yachting cruise, a lover of Dunnet Landing returned" (2). This nameless foreigner offers us views of this small town as though we too were visitors, introducing us to Mrs. Todd, Captain Littlepage, and Mrs. Blackett, all representatives of the area's population. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* makes a similar foray into the South, and here again, the characters are outsiders, from "the region of the Great Lakes" (1) in search of more temperate climate. Their status as outsiders allows Chesnutt to place the natives of this area in a very particular light, and to comment on their personalities and actions from an objective viewpoint. Eggleston's *Hoosier School Master* and *Circuit Rider* rely on a similar structure, and detail a fresh view of rural Indiana.

Sinclair had access as well to works that employed this formula specifically to advocate social change. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for instance takes us through a variety of potential government systems, from the mob rule of Arkansas, to the monarchy represented by the King and the Duke, and all by allowing his central characters to view these various social systems from the standpoint of outsiders to the community. More contemporary to Sinclair would have been Hamlin Garland and Theodore Dreiser. Garland's most notable work, *Main-Traveled Roads*, suggests even in the title, the importance of movement, and throughout the stories of the collection characters encounter for the first time, or re-encounter after some length of time, the towns of the American Prairie, a fact which allows them to see this area in new ways. In "Up the Coulee," William McTurg returns to the landscape "on which his baby eyes had looked thirty-five years ago" (55); in "The Return of a Private," Edward Smith returns home

from the Civil War with a new perspective on the important things in life; and in "A 'Good Fellow's' Wife" James Sanford comes to "Bluff Siding" to open a bank. Dreiser too employed the convention of "fresh eyes," using Carrie Meeber, for example, as his protagonist in *Sister Carrie*, a young girl from the country whose "rudimentary powers of observation and analysis" (2) make her the ideal objective viewer of Chicago. Even a work such as Chopin's *The Awakening*, not normally associated with migration, pits Edna's protestant upper South upbringing against the Creole culture she encounters in New Orleans. As we are reminded throughout the novel, Edna is "not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles" (639).

Sinclair adopts this notion of "other" world and plays on it throughout the novel. While it may be true that Jurgis and his family give up their immigrant identity, they remain at a great distance from the world of Chicago; they remain foreigners. Before they leave Lithuania, America is "that country" where "rich or poor, a man was free, it was said" (23), and they continue to characterize America in similar terms throughout the novel. They arrive to find an old family friend who teaches them about "all the pitfalls of this new world" (26). When Jurgis first comes into contact with unions, "it made him begin to pay attention to the country" (91). When he is first jailed, he comes before the magistrate, but Jurgis, "knew little of the laws" (156). When his son dies, and Jurgis at last makes the decision to live only for himself, it is against the world that he vows to struggle: "he was going to fight for himself, against the world that had baffled him and tortured him!" (211). He is fundamentally set apart from the world he inhabits. Chicago – or in a larger sense America --, then, becomes very much like a dystopian landscape. As readers, we already know this world, and in the dystopian novel, the writer would take us to another time so that we could see through an objective lens the world we inhabit.

Sinclair instead forces us to see this same world from a standpoint of objectivity, by making it a "new" world for us, by having us see it as "other."

As if to reinforce the dystopian feel, Sinclair works to incorporate fantastic images into his tale, describing setting and events in terms that might be just as well suited to a fantasy novel as to a novel of realism. The home of Master Freddie is described as "the great castle […] dark and impregnable" (243). The narrator says of Ona's boss, Miss Henderson, "She had the temper of a hyena, and soon the place she ran was a witch's cauldron. There were some of the girls who were of her own sort, who were willing to toady to her and flatter her; and these would carry tales about the rest, and so the furies were unchained in the place" (106). Their neighbor, Grandmother Majauszkiene is likewise "a very old witch."

But if this is a dystopian society – a malfunctioning vision of "another world" of what sort is this world? Anthony Arthur has suggested a connection to Dante's *Inferno* in the novel – "By the time Jurgis is able to work again, someone else has taken his job. He finds a job in a fertilizer plant, an even lower circle, as Sinclair notes, in his Dantean hell" (51). Arthur's reference points us to the moment when Jurgis must, in despair, turn to the only job remaining to him: "There are all stages of being out of work in Packingtown, and he faced in dread the prospect of reaching the lowest. There is a place that waits for the lowest man – the fertilizer plant!" (127). In places, such as this one, references to *The Inferno* are direct. Jurgis finds, early in his experiences at the packing plants, that there are a number of lesser industries that feed off the central processing plant, each "a separate little inferno" (97); later, he describes the detention hospital, where vagrants are taken by the police as "a miniature inferno" (230). So too references to demons, devils, and hellfire appear throughout. The smoke from the factories seems to rise "from the center of the world […] where all the fires of the ages still smolder" (25);

there are cesspools with an odor of "all the dead things of the universe" (28); as the family begins to discover the real costs of their new home, "It was sickening, like a nightmare, in which suddenly something gives way beneath you, and you find yourself sinking, down into bottomless abysses" (70); when Ona begs forgiveness of Jurgis after she has been raped, her cries are "like listening to the moan of a damned soul" (149).

The first complete view of Packingtown helps reinforce this hellish atmosphere. The family, on their second day in Chicago, tours the meat-packing plants. They begin on the upper floors. Once again, Sinclair plays on the role of these people as foreigners in order to convey the scene as an outsider might see it, to provide some objectivity on what would otherwise pull a reader in to the most subjective, and unpleasantly intense, kinds of experiences. To highlight this objectivity, they are placed in "a long, narrow room, with a gallery along it for visitors" (34), a place designed for watching. There they do watch, as the giant machine of the factory works below them:

> Upon both sides of the wheel there was a narrow space, into which came the hogs at the end of their journey; in the midst of them stood a great burly Negro, bare-armed and bare-chested. He was resting for the moment, for the wheel had stopped while men were cleaning up. In a minute or two, however, it began slowly to revolve, and the men upon each side of it sprang to work. They had chains which they fastened about the leg of the nearest hog, and the other end of the chain they hooked into one of the rings upon the wheel. So, as the wheel turned, a hog was suddenly jerked off his feet and borne aloft (35).

Afterwards, "The party descended to the next floor, where various waste materials were treated"; below this, they examine the level where the workers "took out refuse"; in other places, "men

were engaged in cutting up the carcasses" (38). The tour goes on through the pickling room, and cellars full of salt pork, and always the emphasis remains on layers, the downward spiraling levels that make up this industry, and it is difficult to avoid seeing this complex as other than "circles" in a Dantean Hell. In the end we are left with a very complete picture of this place, one based in Jurgis's experience, but that also goes beyond the experience of any one man, to offer us an objective view of Packingtown as a whole.

But if Dante's inferno is referenced, it is not the defining image for the novel as a whole. Rather, Jurgis escapes, in a manner of speaking, from the Packingtown plants. He works for a steel factory. He roams the countryside, living life as a hobo and itinerant farm worker. He works as a builder of a subway route. He returns to Chicago and spends a night with one of its wealthiest of citizens. He spends some time with the criminal element in the city – both in prison and out of it -- and ultimately works his way up to involvement in the political world. Each milieu is described as its own "world": "And so Jurgis got a glimpse of the high-class criminal world of Chicago" (251). All of these "adventures" are essential to Sinclair's project, in that he needs to represent the entire system as flawed rather than just any single aspect of it. As bad as the meat packing industry might be, this was not his target. As he himself would write after the book's publication, "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach" (*American Outpost* 175). After all, if only the Packingtown district was guilty of dishonesty, he could not really make a case for socialism. Only if the problems were systemic, and the result of capitalism through and through, could socialism offer a viable alternative. Thus like the dystopian novels both before and after, *The Jungle* is designed to show us the totality of a "world" rather than merely any single aspect of it. Sinclair merely uses his own world as nightmare, rather than treating it as the result of some future excesses.

So important was indicting this system to Sinclair, that he is not content to leave his larger, objective points entirely in the hands of Jurgis. The novel throughout moves restlessly back and forth, from subjectivity to objectivity, showing on the one hand the vicious struggles Ona and Jurgis must endure and on the other a larger, comprehensive view of Chicago. For the most part, this movement is fluid, and the two perspectives maintain a remarkable symbiosis. At times the descriptions of the family's misery are incredibly heart-wrenching, playing on our subjectivity in an attempt to make us as much a participant in their misery as they are. When Marija arrives to find a run on the bank where her money has been deposited, "All the blood went out of her face for terror. She broke into a run, shouting to the people to ask what was the matter, but not stopping to hear what they answered, till she had come to where the throng was so dense that she could no longer advance." The description alone helps to create this subjectivity, but Sinclair draws us closer into Marija's panic with a series of questions: "Had something gone wrong with the bank? […] Couldn't she get her money?" (112). As Ona dies, Sinclair's descriptions are again intense:

> Then suddenly her eyes opened – one instant. One instant she looked at him – there was a flash of recognition between them, he saw her afar off, as through a dim vista, standing forlorn. He stretched out his arms to her, he called her in wild despair; a fearful yearning surged up in him, hunger for her that was agony, desire that was a new being born within him, tearing his heartstrings, torturing him. But it was all in vain – she faded from him, she slipped back and was gone. And a wail of anguish burst from him, great sobs shook his frame, and hot tears ran down his cheeks and fell upon her. He clutched her hands, he shook her, he

> caught her in his arms and pressed her to him; but she lay cold and still – she was gone – she was gone! (188).

While the passage might be criticized as too overwrought, the effect of the description is to draw the reader in, to put him through the same emotions, and again, Sinclair finds a way to move subtly from an outside view of Jurgis to an inner understanding of his anguish, ending the paragraph with emotions that seem to come from within rather than without. Suddenly the reader is inside Jurgis as he thinks the final thought, "she is gone!"

And yet, Sinclair is unafraid to step outside of this subjectivity and offer an objective view of the capitalist system. This happens in a number of different ways. At times there is straightforward comment: "If we are the greatest nation the sun ever shone upon, it would seem to be mainly because we have been able to goad our wage-earners to this pitch of frenzy" (198). At other moments, he remains close to Jurgis, but offers an ironic comment on Jurgis's knowledge: he notes, for instance, that "Poor Jurgis might have been expected to make a successful beggar," but tells us that, in reality, professional beggars are better at faking disability than Jurgis is at using his real one (229). At other times, he offers the larger picture, and it is one that Jurgis might be expected to know, but not necessarily Jurgis's direct knowledge: often this involves historical events going on during the time period: "All this was in June; and before long the question was submitted to a referendum in the unions, and the decision was for strike" (263).

Most important of all, though, are those moments when Jurgis himself comes to recognize the truth of what is being done to him, for it is in these moments that Sinclair is most able to combine his objective sense of Chicago life with Jurgis's own subjectivity – or, to put it another way, Jurgis subjectively arrives at a moment of objective clarity:

> Jurgis could see all the truth now – could see himself, through the whole long course of events, the victim of ravenous vultures that had torn into his vitals and devoured him; of fiends that had racked and tortured him, mocking him, meantime, jeering in his face. Ah, God, the horror of it, the monstrous, hideous, demoniacal wickedness of it! He and his family, helpless women and children, struggling to live, ignorant and defenseless and forlorn as they were – and the enemies that had been lurking for them, crouching upon their trail and thirsting for their blood! That first lying circular, that smoother-tongued slippery agent. That trap of extra payments, the interest, and all the other charges that they had not the means to pay and would never have attempted to pay. And then all the tricks of the packers, their masters, the tyrants who ruled them (177).

Yet in contrast to Crane, Sinclair's objectivity, his view of the Chicago (and ultimately American) society as a whole is not meant merely for the purposes of mirroring or imitating reality. Instead, Sinclair had a more obvious intention. The world he creates seems less to mirror the "real" world, than to show that "real" world as less real – as, in his mind, a system, a machine into which we have all been fitted, like Jurgis, as cogs.

Sinclair understood that he was maintaining a delicate balance in *The Jungle*, moving back and forth between objective and subjective viewpoints. In fact, he recognized that this balance had been undone near the novel's end. He describes this as the result of deadlines:

> The last chapters were not up to standard, because both my health and my money were gone, and a second trip to Chicago, which I had hoped to make, was out of the question. […] I ran wild at the end, attempting to solve all the problems of

> America; I put in the Moyer-Haywood case, everything I knew and thought my readers ought to know (*American Outpost* 161).

"Attempting to solve all the problems of America" is simply another way of saying he lost sight of the specific case of Jurgis, the subjective vantage point, including in these final chapters only the larger picture, the objective view, of the injustice in America. Once objectivity began to weigh too heavily, the novel could no longer maintain its forcefulness.

Over the hundred years since Sinclair published *The Jungle*, it has become the last remaining brick in the edifice of his literary reputation. To the extent that he is written about, this is the only book that usually receives any attention, and even so, scholars and critics tend to devote the bulk of their efforts to uncovering the social and political elements to be found there. Where Crane, James, and Cather, have come to be regarded as important "artists," Sinclair is more often viewed as a political figure. In part this is related to the shift in criticism that has happened since he wrote, a tendency that began with New Criticism, to discount writers with a social agenda in favor of those writers with a stylistic agenda. In many ways this is a shame, as Sinclair was far from being merely a hack writer, or some mouthpiece of the socialist movement in America, despite the ways in which even he himself sometimes described his body of work. In fact, his writing is stylistically rich and developed. But leaving this argument aside, his work, though perhaps less subtle in both its purpose and methods than that of Crane or James, allows us to see, in a more obvious way, how the pull of objectivity and subjectivity work in fiction. He creates a kind of dystopian world that the reader can inhabit, a world that mirrors this one, but allows us to see this one with new eyes; and in some sense all of fiction accomplishes the same task, if often in less overt ways. Sinclair's work, then, offers an important prism through which

to look at these other writers, through which to gauge how the fictional world reflects on "reality."

CHAPTER 5

WILLA CATHER: SUBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIVITY IN HARMONY

Willa Cather employed the strategies of many of her literary predecessors for dealing with the twin demands of objectivity and subjectivity. Much like Crane, for example, she sometimes takes us above the landscape as a means of offering a visually broad perspective on events. Early in *O Pioneers!*, Ivar describes for the young Emil a literal bird's-eye-view of the prairie:

> See, little brother, they have come from a long way, and they are very tired. From up there where they are flying, our country looks dark and flat. They must have water to drink and to bathe in before they can go on with their journey. They look this way and that, and far below them they see something shining, like a piece of glass set in the dark earth. That is my pond (28).

It is no coincidence that Ivar is the character who can cast himself into this new perspective, for he is an outsider, both as an immigrant, and because of his social status within the immigrant community. Like Sinclair, Cather understood what could be gained by seeing a society from a cultural distance and used characters like Ivar to great effect throughout her works, from the French Father Latour of *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* to the Bohemian Shimerdas of *My Antonia,* to the wandering Tom Outland of *The Professor's House*. Indeed, Cather seems to have discovered her own unique "voice" only after gaining a similar sort of "outsider" perspective. Traveling for the first time to the American Southwest and then returning to her childhood home

in Nebraska, she was suddenly able to see that childhood landscape with absolutely fresh eyes. Only then did she leave the "shallow" *Alexander's Bridge* with its "conventional pattern" behind and begin *O Pioneers!*, a book she described as the first written "entirely for myself" (*On Writing* 91-92). Her fascination with such moments, with discovering where the artistic perspective originates, is perhaps the most salient theme in her work, and this fascination ties her directly to Henry James, the writer with whom we began. Much like James's works, Cather's are filled with artist figures. Yet while she shares his belief that the artist always faces the competing pulls of the subjective and the objective sides of fiction, her attitude towards this situation is markedly different. Cather, in contrast to James, seemed to possess relatively little anxiety over the dangers this duality might represent; rather, she saw it as what was *beautiful* in art, and indeed what was beautiful about the human consciousness. In overcoming what remained a tension in James, she offered an important alternative to many of the anxieties of her own age and a prescient picture of how late twentieth-century writers could overcome the same tension.

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Willa Cather was an artist deeply interested in what it means to be an artist, in discovering just how the creative process works. Virtually every one of her novels and stories deals at some point, whether directly or indirectly, with the importance of art and the artist. Sister Colette Toler, in an early essay on Cather's artist motif, identifies over 32 separate artist figures in Cather's fiction, and this by taking into account only those figures that are portrayed overtly as artists.[6] In fact, many more of her characters with no outward connection to art, are

[6] Toler does not include among her list of artists characters such as St. Peter Godfrey and Jim Burden, presumably because her interest is in artists who are both "creative," and

described in "artistic" terms. Alexandra of *O Pioneers!*, for instance, shapes the land such that it becomes her "creation." The narrative voice tells us that, "A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (33), and Alexandra becomes the illustration of just this sort of artist – artist as pioneer -- one who perhaps sees more deeply than any "artist" ever could because she molds life as opposed to a mere object. Carl, himself a kind of failed artist, remarks on his own inability to see the beauty of the Midwest: " 'I would never have believed it could be done. I'm disappointed in my own eye, in my imagination' " (73), and contrasts this failure with Alexandra's success: " 'I've been away engraving other men's pictures, and you've stayed at home and made your own' " (79). There are two things we might gather, then, from Cather's interest in the artist. First, art was so important a subject that it shades most of her characters and plots. But we might also say the opposite, that her interest isn't in art at all, but rather in ways of seeing. Art was not an occupation, but rather a way of understanding the world, a means of filtering experience, and not restricted to "artists" only, but an aspect of consciousness generally. Many might have this consciousness without becoming artists, but certainly no true artist could create without this sense. It is with this fundamental principle in Cather that we must begin if we are to understand her own artistic creations.

In his study of her artist figures, *The Imaginative Claims of the Artist in Willa Cather's Fiction*, Demaree Peck, perhaps drawing on David Stouck's earlier study[7], argues that Cather's essential story, told over and over again throughout her works, is "the artist's quest to achieve

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"professional." Her list might also be enlarged if we were to consider characters like Alexandra Bergson, who creates beauty from the barrenness of the prairie, as "artists."

[7] Stouck, David. *Willa Cather's Imagination*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975. Stouck sees in Cather a conflict between life and art, one that is never fully resolved. Like Peck, however, Stouck believes that it is always the artist's desire "to transcend the limitations of experience and create images or pictures which resist time and change" (2).

imaginative dominion of her soul." Peck defines this "imaginative possession" as an "act by which Cather's protagonists, serving as her surrogates, lay claim to the world as their own mental property" (30). Peck sees Emerson as the most important influence on Cather's thinking:

> Cather's characters absorb the world in order to recreate an imperial self. Emerson provided Cather with the best model for her peculiarly American ideal of imaginative possession; her characters enjoy a special inheritance according to the same laws that govern Emerson's imaginative assimilation of nature as an extension of the self (31).

In Peck's opinion, then, Cather as an artist is constantly seeking, with her artist characters, to create a fictional universe somehow better than that of our everyday lives, into which she can then escape. Or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that by experiencing the world in a totally subjective manner, she can make of that world what she will.

Cather's characters do often seem to retreat into a world of their own making. Alexandra has the fantasy of the corn god; Jim Burden in writing down Antonia's story seeks to claim some kind of imaginative dominion over his own past and this figure he once knew; St. Peter does the same, retreating into his work and into Tom Outland's story, and finally almost willing to end his life in order to enter his imagination. Cather herself makes remarks that would seem to support this reading of her characters and of she herself as writer. In an article written for *The Commonweal*, she responds to the question of escapism's place in literature: "You were asking me what I thought about a new term in criticism: The Art of 'Escape.' 'Isn't the phrase tautological? What has art ever been but escape?" (*On Writing* 18).

Yet for all her forcefulness as a critic, and her ability to be remarkably plainspoken in her critical writings, Cather the critic was never simple. If she seems to advocate a total immersion

in the world of art, the absolute subjectivity of the novel's world, she recognized the importance of distance as well. In dealing with Cather's artists, one of the works Peck draws on for illustration is an early story, "The Treasure of Far Island." In this story, a famous playwright, Douglass Burnham, returns to his prairie home, in much the same way Cather herself frequently did during the early part of her career, a kind of local hero to the townspeople and especially to his own family. There he encounters an old childhood friend, the former tomboy Margie, now grown up and very much a woman. The two relive their youth, first through conversation, remembering the worlds of fantasy they had created as children, and then in actuality, by visiting the local islands and looking for a treasure they had buried long ago. As Peck notes, it is childhood fantasy and his ability to retain his childish imagination that spark the genius of the adult playwright. Margie says early in their re-acquaintance, " 'I have grown up and you have not. Some one has said that is wherein geniuses are different; they go on playing and never grow up" (273). Later the narrator describes in more detail the child's ability to create an alternative world:

> A child's normal attitude toward the world is that of the artist, pure and simple […]. There are maps and pictures formed by cracks in the walls of bare and unsightly sleeping chambers which make the beautiful; smooth places on the lawn where the grass is greener than anywhere else and which are good to sit upon; trees which are valuable by reason of the peculiar way in which the branches grow (275).

Cather already understood, from her own experience, what the child psychologist D.W. Winnicott would posit theoretically several decades later: the deep connection between the world of childish play and the artist's creation. As Peck would have it, however, in the end the

imagination, the subjective, always wins out in Cather. Douglass is able to persuade Margie that the fantasy world of their youth is real, and in so doing, that they belong together. Margie protests that " 'We neither one of us could go on feeling like this. It's only the dregs of an old enchantment,' " but Douglass replies, " 'Then weep, my princess, for I will wake you now!' " As if finally to seal the enchantment, Cather ends the story with an unusually flowery final paragraph in which "they had become as the gods who dwell in their golden houses, recking little of the woes and labors of mortals, neither heeding any fall of rain or snow" (282).

It is worth recognizing, however, that the central character can't recapture that childhood fantasy world in any simple way. Whether or not he manages to achieve a kind of escape to this world, as the final words suggest, the seams are allowed to show through. In particular Cather reminds us that what Douglass calls up is not, in fact, what it was before. Rather it is a condensation of those earlier times, a memory distilled down to it best essence. As Margie explains,

> It is strange how those wild imaginings of ours seem, in retrospect, realities, things that I actually lived through. I suppose that in cold fact my life was a good deal like that of other little girls who grow up in a village; but whenever I look back on it, it is all exultation and romance – sea fights and splendid galleys and Roman triumphs and brilliant caravans winding through the desert (280).

Her memory is selective; it is a subjective rendering of events. What matters, though, is that she recognizes this fact. Even as they claim the fantasy, there is a recognition of its artificiality. Margie, and ultimately Cather herself, understands that this imagined world is the product of a purification that happens over time, in which we hold on to those things that are most important until the memories come to tell their own story. We find this over and over again in her work:

the value of refinement. It is St. Peter reflecting on the past as he struggles with his future, idealizing Tom Outland's work so that he can continue with his own. It is the soup, of which Father Joseph is so proud, but which Father Latour reminds him is "the result of a constantly refined tradition. There are nearly a thousand years of history in this soup" (38). Ultimately, while we experience the beauty of the created object, we are reminded of its artificiality, in the sense that it does not correspond in a one-to-one relationship with reality. But, in fact, Cather revels in showing us that artificiality. While she is certainly keen on making her escape to the imagined world, to absolute subjectivity, she is equally at pains to point up the very fact that it is an escape, and in so doing, she pulls us to a level of objectivity, so that we may see and recognize what it is the artist has wrought. The two then are absolutely essential for the vision, objectivity actually heightening our sense of wonder at the beauty we experience subjectively. This celebration of fusion is in marked contrast to James's deep anxiety over the same mixture of elements. Where he fretted over whether he might lose his grip on reality if he retreated into a world of his own making, Cather asserts that the process of distilling memories over time leaves the artist with a world that is simultaneously more real and more beautiful than any that exist in the moment.

Of course, one can see in "The Treasure of Far Island" how Cather's own biography might have played a role in helping her to think this way. Like Douglass Burnham, Cather returned often to her childhood home as she grew older, learning to see it with other eyes than those of a native. But even before she left Red Cloud, she came to the town as an outsider, moving to the prairie from Virginia. She was not the immigrant that Jurgis is in *The Jungle*, or that Antonia is in Cather's own work, but certainly she would early on have seen this land both subjectively in her day to day life, and with the objectivity of an outsider who was not born there.

This pattern repeated itself throughout her life in various guises. She experienced the normal changes in her surroundings when she moved away to school and when she began her new career. Perhaps most telling, however, is the shift that occurred with her first trip to the American Southwest, a trip that is almost universally regarded as a changing point in her life and career. Phyllis Robinson writes that this journey "affected the way Willa viewed the world" (172) and describes how it shifted her view of everything she encountered after: "After the desert, the Bohemian country seemed more benign, somehow more manageable. Perhaps she was making peace with it at last" (178). Janis Stout calls it "the most momentous trip of her much-traveled life" (124). And Sharon O'Brien argues that it had "an immediate impact on the creative process" (420). The "impact" is typically described as an almost spiritual awakening, one in which, as O'Brien phrases it, Cather experienced "moments of self-abandonment and release" and made a "connection […] between the region's topography and her own plunge into the 'bottom of … consciousness'" (424). But such a spiritual effect aside, seeing this new landscape must surely have altered her perspective in general, so radically different was it from what she had seen previously. Further, when she began to write, it was not the desert but rather the prairie that she chose as subject, suggesting that Cather's awakening had to do with seeing her old life with new eyes; a change in perspective was the key to shaping that life imaginatively, in order to understand experience.

There was also a kind of subjective/ objective split in Cather's very personality. She was early captivated by drama. In her journalistic reviews of performances and performers it is apparent that she regarded the performer's task as using technique to achieve a lifelike portrayal of a character – objectivity then as a means of offering subjectivity. As Stout points out, what seemed to fascinate Cather most in her early dramatic reviews was the question of what, at root,

was the source of the actor's ability to re-create life: "In discussing these performers, she seems to have found two issues particularly intriguing: whether their 'power' was *emotional* or *intellectual* in origin and whether the artist's ego was submerged in the act of performance or enlarged" (61). And she was especially taken by performers in whom she saw a fusion of the two, "scholarly and methodical mind" and "warmth of sentiment."

In her own life, she seems to have had a sense of the dramatic as well, not only in her dabbling in acting as a young woman, but in her adoption of various personas. Whether or not these personas prove, as many recent critics have argued, that Cather was a lesbian struggling to find an identity in a world that denied what she saw in herself, they also reveal an ability in Cather to see herself both from within and from without, as others might see her, and to adopt characteristics that would shape the way these others would see her.

Thus, like James, Cather recognized the competing demands of art because her own life was a practice in navigating these demands. Her artistic philosophy and its practical application in her work is not so much the formulation of a set of literary rules, as it is an understanding of something more intrinsic, about how we all experience the world, and an attempt to bring this aspect of experience into her own work. *My Antonia* is an especially important novel for understanding how Cather addressed this duality in part because it, like James's *Portrait*, encodes the artist's struggle within its very structure. This is one reason why Cather's novel has become a key battleground in debates about her attitude towards art, and Jim Burden the particularly polarizing figure. At its heart, the novel is about the act of storytelling. The frame story, in which we meet Jim on the train, is essentially the story of how a writer comes to write: his trip across the country "reminded" him of many things, his reflections of his youth come to center around a single figure -- the symbolic embodiment of his homeland --, and he uses this

person of Antonia to give shape to his experience. Consequently, the novel seems to offer an ideal opportunity to study Cather's aesthetic principles. Yet for all Jim Burden's credentials as an "artist," he has more frequently than not been offered as an example of artistic chauvinism rather than as an illustration of what it means to be a writer. Unfortunately, this obsession with his status as *male* writer has had the effect of blinding many critics to the fact that he is merely a small part of the novel's larger discussion of art's form and function, a discussion that reveals much about just how innovative Cather was as an artist.

In a 1949 review, Katherine Anne Porter described Willa Cather as a "classic" writer who was now neglected by contemporary readers "trained too much on violence and tricks of doubling and crossing" (1). While Porter means well by her comment, Cather's work is not nearly as simple and straightforward as this statement might suggest. She might even be accused of practicing her own brand of "doubling and crossing." She made a number of important experiments over the course of her career, and *My Antonia*, though it is from the early part of that career and given less attention as "experimental" than later works like *The Professor's House*, is by no means simple in its construction. The novel's unusual structure – the choice, for example, of the title "My Antonia" despite the fact that the action of the novel focuses on Jim – may, in fact, be the reason for the many widely varying interpretations of the book. Any critic who approaches the text must deal with a number of difficult questions, each necessary to an understanding of what the novel finally means. Even the most fundamental question – whose story the novel is supposed to tell – is debatable. If Jim is the primary protagonist, then what purpose does the title serve? If, on the other hand, this is Antonia's story, why does she disappear for long stretches of time? If Cather means for the two characters to serve as twin

focal points, then we are still left with the problem of defining the nature of the relationship between them.

The difficulty of answering these questions led a number of early Cather critics to describe the work as "flawed." In attempting to read the novel as a straightforward formulation of "the conflict between memory and desire, nostalgia and ambition, in the immigrant" (7), David Daiches is troubled by the fact that in the third book of the novel Antonia – the primary symbol of the "immigrant" – basically does not appear at all. Certainly Cather's *style* might be described as clear or simple, but beneath the clarity of her prose lies a great deal of complexity in thought and structure, and Daiches's failure to allow for such complexity ultimately leads to his easy dismissal of her work.

Since Daiches's 1951 critique, the novel has been embraced, but often by critics with an agenda at stake. In her recent study, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*, Joan Acocella argues that the true beneficiaries of *My Antonia*'s problematic nature have been feminist critics.[8] The novel's difficult structure allowed room in which such critics could project their own theories and adopt Cather's as a voice in service of their own cause. Since the 1970s, the bulk of articles on Cather have pointed to the discrepancy between the title and the novel's actual events as indicative of male subversion of the feminine point of view. In this sort of reading, while Jim claims to be telling Antonia's story, in actuality he is shaping that story to fit his own self-gratifying purposes at the expense of Antonia's voice and with the aim of possessing her in some way. The "My" that Jim adds to the title at the end of the introduction, serves in this reading to demonstrates his attempt to assert some sort of male authority over Antonia. Blanche Gelfant's suggestion that Jim is an unreliable narrator – "disingenuous and self-deluded"(60) – opened the

[8] Acocella's is an eloquent and far more thorough treatment of this issue.

door to such readings. By questioning Jim's veracity, Gelfant asks us to recognize a "truth" in opposition to Jim's version of the story. Jim and Antonia are situated as competing narrative voices in a struggle that ultimately comes to be seen in terms of gender politics. Using this idea of competing voices, many of the studies that follow Gelfant see Jim not just as "deluded," but as deliberately manipulative. Such critics assert over and over again that Jim treats Antonia as nothing more than an object. William Stuckey writes, "It never occurs to Jim to question his demands on Antonia. He is too preoccupied with his ideal of her" (477). Susan Rokowski offers much the same opinion: "These are the terms that Cather incorporated into the narrative structure of *My Antonia* (1918), in which a subject (Jim Burden) writes of an 'object'(Antonia)" (xii).

There are a certain number of critical approaches that might be taken as novel within the defining parameters of this school of thought. Katrina Irving, for example, relocates the battlefield. She contends that Jim's appropriation of Antonia is not an example of a male attempting to deny a feminine perspective, but rather of a dominant culture's efforts to silence the voice of an immigrant minority. Yet despite the shift away from overt feminism, the critical outcome remains the same: Jim's tale is regarded as a vain attempt to control an uncontrollable subject, and thus as an indication of his apparently egocentric and manipulative nature.

More recent critics have begun to question the totalizing viewpoint of these arguments, at least in terms of the claim that Jim's narration entirely overwhelms other voices in the novel. In particular, there are two studies in the past ten years which regard Antonia as an "alternative" rather than a subverted storyteller within the text, a storyteller not necessarily silenced by the fact that Jim as writer controls the finished story. Both Annette Bennington McElhiney and Richard H. Millington have argued that Antonia embodies a kind of oral storytelling that constantly thwarts Jim's attempts to exert control. Both critics point to the ways in which Antonia's

narrative technique – in contrast to Jim's – fosters a greater sense of community. McElhiney writes, "Through the subtle undermining of Jim's dominant mythmaking voice […], Cather clearly, if subtly, establishes her identification with women's (Antonia's) 'outsider,' immigrant experience, not with men's (Jim's) 'insider' dominant-culture experience" (66). However, by associating Cather with Antonia both she and Millington perpetuate the notion of opposition between Antonia and Jim. Here, Jim is no longer viewed as "controlling," – indeed he becomes a rather pitiful figure, an example of an outmoded and fast vanishing culture and style -- but his viewpoint continues to be regarded as fundamentally flawed.

The paradigm of opposition between Jim and Antonia relies on a number of problematic assumptions. To begin with, those critics who hold Antonia up as a heroine silenced by a domineering male author neglect the fact that she herself operates as a "controlling" artist, and often in ways that are quite similar to those for which Jim is typically vilified. Jim is supposed to be manipulative: he refuses to allow Antonia her own voice; he makes every attempt to revise her to fit his own preconceptions of what a woman should be. Yet, in her own way, Antonia exercises every bit as much control over narrative in the novel as Jim himself. In the case of Pavel's wolf story, for example, Jim receives the story only through Antonia's translation. Further, she conditions Jim to a certain reaction to the story -- "It's awful, what he says!" (37) -- before he actually hears it. If we are to regard the storyteller as controlling, then we must admit that before Jim is able to control the larger story, he is subject to Antonia's control when he hears this interior story.

References to pictures in the novel have frequently been used to indict Jim; specifically, a number of critics have suggested that they are symbolic of his desire to impose order over his own past. The primary evidence for such arguments is Jim's assertion that "Antonia had always

been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade – that grew stronger with time. In my memory there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer" (226). Paula Wooley writes in response, "After reducing her to a new unchanging image that he can firmly stick into the photo album of his mind, Jim abandons Antonia the woman as the center of his narrative's interest" (153). However this argument ignores the fact that Antonia too is associated with photographs, and in her case these are actual rather than metaphorical. Not only does she have a picture taken of her first child, she has it placed in "a heavy frame" (195). The reality captured in the photograph is insufficient in and of itself; she must additionally place it a context that will dictate how it is received. Later, when Jim visits, she brings out "a boxful of photographs: she and Anton in their wedding clothes, holding hands; her brother Ambrosch and his very fat wife […] the three Bohemian Marys and their large families" (234). In each case, there is an emphasis on the posed nature of the representation – the marking of a specific occasion, the deliberately contrived symbol of held hands. The fact that it is Antonia to whom these photos are so important suggests that it is she who is holding on to the past, and significantly, she who privileges artificial or contrived versions of that past.

Such an assertion is only further strengthened by the stories she tells her children, stories she constantly reorganizes to suit her own purposes: as Jim comments, "One could see that Frances had come down as a heroine in the family legend" (225). In fact, Antonia makes her entire adult life into a total revision of the past. When her first child is born, she tells Jim, "I'm going to see that my little girl has a better chance than I ever had" (206), not perhaps such an unusual sentiment for a new mother. But Antonia takes this process of revision further. Several of the names she has chosen for her children – Ambrosch, Yulka, Anne, Anton, Nina – are references to friends and relatives from her childhood. Additionally, as an adult, she reenacts her

parents' lives, with an emphasis on righting certain perceived wrongs. Cuzak tells Jim, " 'At first I near go crazy with lonesomeness […] but my woman is got such a warm heart. She always make it as good for me as she could' " (235). There are clear echoes here of Mr. Shimerda's inability to cope with his "lonesomeness" upon his arrival in America. Antonia seems determined to offer Cuzak the support that her own father was never given. As all of these examples make clear, from the time Jim leaves Black Hawk, Antonia is at work to revise the past either in her own memories or through direct reenactment.

It should be apparent at this point that Jim is not alone in shaping the narrative of *My Antonia*. But even leaving Antonia aside, there are many storytellers in the work besides Jim. We are given Pavel's story of the wolves, Widow Steavens' account of the birth of Antonia's first child, as well as other smaller pieces scattered throughout the novel. Hardly have we been introduced to Jim when Otto Fuchs intrudes to tell "how he had lost his ear in a Wyoming blizzard when he was a stage driver" (11). Later, Fuchs tells the story of leaving Austria to come to America and the association he developed with a woman who bore triplets (46). Anton Jelinek tells the story of helping a priest during the time of cholera (69) and of his work in a mine in Silverton, Colorado (71). Mrs. Cutter tells the story of how her husband came to be home without her on the night he attacked Jim (160). In the final chapter, Antonia's son, Rudolph, tells the story of how the Cutters finally met their deaths. Several additional inset stories Jim relays more directly, but he gathers them from other sources. Among these is the story of how the sunflowers came to be planted on the prairie by passing Mormons, how Coronado searched for the Seven Golden Cities, and the tale of Blind d'Arnault. While the final responsibility for organizing these stories may rest in the hands of Jim Burden, it is impossible to deny that these other voices play a huge part in the novel's construction.

But even the idea that Jim is the final authority for the finished text is a somewhat dubious one. Jim's narrative is filtered through another voice, and a voice we hear before we hear his. As the frame story makes clear, we are presented with Jim's story not directly, but through the intervention of a third party. The original introduction to the 1918 edition describes this intermediary as both female and a writer, suggesting first the possibility of an editorial force at work between Jim and the reader, and, second, that control of the story does not rest entirely in the hands of a man. Indeed, this unnamed narrator sees the process of *collaboration* as the most likely means of getting at Antonia's true character: "I would set down on paper all that I remembered of Antonia if he would do the same. We might, in this way, get a picture of her" (243). Obviously this introduction is not the final word on the matter, and revisions can reveal to us a great deal about a writer's intentions. Still, the notion of collaboration was clearly in Cather's mind during the novel's composition. It should also be noted that not all traces of this second voice have been eliminated from the revised introduction. Her very presence argues for her importance as a mediator, and her comment that she and Jim spoke of what "this girl seemed to mean to us" (2) would seem to obviate the idea of Jim as a lone, "self-deluded," narrator.

Those who would point to Jim's control of the story and the use of the frame story itself as central to Cather's thought are quite accurate in their choice of emphasis. However, Jim is far from being the sole "controller." Instead, the issue of control is built into the very fabric of the novel, and it points to the essential nature of Cather's artistic vision. Removed as it is in time from the original events, and even further distorted by the intrusion of an editorial voice, the frame story points to the many layers that make up the novel, and to the patchwork nature of what is being told. These layers serve as a constant reminder to us that we are continually being distanced from the actual events of the story. The story Pavel tells of his encounter with the

wolves offers an excellent example. The story is already at a remove in time because it relates an event from the Pavels' past. Jim receives it only through the mediation of Antonia. Even before he can get it from her, however, there are further intervening factors. The story is not told to her directly, but rather to Jim's grandfather, and Antonia only overhears it. There is the process of translation that must occur before Antonia can relate the story to Jim. There is the fact that the story is not told to him immediately, but only on the ride home, creating another removal in time. A further removal occurs in the time lapse between when Jim hears it and when he writes it down. Finally, the frame story offers yet another layer of distance between the reader and the actual event. Clearly, control is exerted to shape the final version of the text. We are not offered anything approaching a pure experience, but rather a story that has been affected by a great deal of artificial interference; it simply would be inaccurate to suggest that Jim is the only source of that interference.

What matters most is the end result: this is a novel that draws attention to its own artificiality. The "My" that is affixed to the title is key, and it does point to an assertion of control on Jim's part. But the control being asserted is over the story, the recollections, rather than over the person of Antonia. Indeed, one might regard this as almost the antithesis of chauvinism, in that Jim makes plain that this is a very personal memory of events rather than laying claim to its being anything like a definitive history. More importantly, though, Cather is saying something profound about art, something quite innovative for her time. She seems to draw on ideas laid down by Plato, but she challenges his conception of the world in fundamental ways. In doing so, she introduces issues that will continue to work themselves out in literary theory over the decades succeeding *My Antonia*'s publication. Specifically, Cather is concerned

with highlighting the artificiality of writing, but also – and in direct contrast to Plato – with celebrating that artificiality.

In order to understand fully the nature of her thought, the heart of her aesthetic philosophy, it is first important to examine the foundations upon which her philosophy is based. Cather, as has been noted by several critics, incorporates a number of what might be considered "Platonic" images in her text. One of the more important of these is the image of the plow as it appears near the end of "The Hired Girls," silhouetted against the setting sun:

> Just as the lower edge of the red disk rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it. In a moment we realized what it was. On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was just sinking behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk; the handles, the tongue, the share – the black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun (156).

James E. Miller represents the phrase "writing on the sun" as a kind of "hieroglyphics" (114), as though the image appears to be written on the sun itself. In such a formulation, the writing becomes associated with the sun, as though the two are one. Acocella makes a similar connection, ultimately arguing that "The Nebraska plain turned Cather into a Platonist. […] In her work she invokes Plato's cave allegory repeatedly" (82). The presence of light thus becomes for Acocella, "the contemplation of the pure idea" (87), supposed to point us always to a deeper, more essential meaning. The problem with this characterization is that it takes into account only a portion of the passage. It neglects the key description of the plow as "magnified" across the

distance, a description suggesting shadow and distortion rather than outline. The scene does seem a direct allusion to Plato's allegory of the cave, but in the sense that the image of the plow is akin to the "shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave" (193). For Plato, these images represent only the shadow of a much greater reality. The unenlightened man is unable to perceive the true forms that reside behind the illusory projection of shadows, constantly assuming these shadows to be reality rather than the base reflections of that reality. It may be that pure reality resides in the sun's rays, but Jim describes the plow's long, distorted image, not the sun, as "heroic." The natural conclusion would seem to be that Jim is an example of just the sort of unenlightened man Plato had in mind, captivated by the false reality rather than the real.

Other references to shadow in the novel help to highlight and clarify this allusion to Plato's allegory. Early in the novel, Jim notes, "How many an afternoon Antonia and I have trailed along the prairie under that magnificence! And always two long black shadows flitted before us or after, dark spots on the ruddy grass" (28). Late in the novel, as well, there is Jim's observation, "It seemed, after all, so natural to be walking along a barbed-wire fence beside the sunset, toward a red pond, and see my shadow moving along at my right over the close-cropped grass" (222). What both passages seem to argue is that, whether or not the sun is a source of "magnificence," Jim sees only the shadow of that magnificence, not the magnificence itself.

But if shadows were only a crude imitation of ideal forms for Plato, art was even further removed from the ideal. Indeed, he insisted that poets [artists] should be banned entirely from his Republic. The reason, he argues, is that poetry – art of any kind – is essentially only the imitation of the shadow figures. In other words, the work of art is even further removed from reality – it is the copy of a copy: "painting and imitation as a whole are far from the truth when they produce their work" (286). If the image of the plow is Platonic, it might also be said that

the use of the word "writing" works as a reference to Plato's view of art, as merely the shadow of a shadow.

Such analysis seems to offer fuel to the contention that Jim is, at best, unreliable as a narrator – that his vision of the world is necessarily flawed by the fact that he fails to recognize the reality behind the shadows. His recollections of his life with Antonia are just as distorted as those two elongated shadows that seem to follow them as they walk along the prairie. But to return for a moment to the image of the plow, if we regard Jim as deluded, then we must view the other characters in the scene as equally deluded, for all of them are moved by the event; all of them privilege the shadow rather than the "reality" of the plow: "*We* sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it" [emphasis mine] (156). Ultimately, though, the constant mediation of the text, the removal of the story from direct experience, or even the pretense of direct experience, suggests that Cather herself is equally guilty of privileging such "shadows." The effect of the layers in the narrative is to move us constantly further away from reality. The novel itself stands as a monument to reliance on shadowy memories, distorted with the passage of time and the intervention of so many voices. To put this argument another way, *My Antonia* represents the apotheosis of exactly that sort of art Plato would have condemned: art that deliberately takes us away from reality.

We might almost consider Cather's literary philosophy as something like a deconstruction of narrative. Derrida and others of the deconstructionist movement, drawing on the work of Saussure, highlight the essential disconnection between the signifier and the signified. In their terms, even language itself, because it is merely a symbolic representation of an actual thing – a mediator between reality and the projection of that reality – can never truly reveal that for which it purportedly stands. It can never be more than a distortion. The result of

mediation is that the nature of the original signifier is necessarily lost (if, that is, we can every regard it as having existed at all). M.H. Abrams, in his critique of deconstruction phrases it this way: "no text, either in its component passages, or as an entity, has a determinable meaning and therefore […] there is no right way to interpret it; all attempts to read a text are doomed to be misreadings" (32-33).[9] Frederic Jameson, describing more broadly the postmodern movement as a whole, notes that, "it only clocks the variations themselves, and knows only too well that the contents [of any image or sign] are just more images" (ix). *My Antonia* seems to internalize exactly this premise, if not perhaps on the micro-level of language. Jim's story is based on the stories of others, which in turn are often based on still other sources, until we are forced to admit that there is finally no firm foundation to the narrative at all. In Derrida's terms, the result of this endless chain of signifiers is that "there is nothing outside the text" (163). In terms of this novel, it is incorrect to assert that *Jim* "misreads" Antonia because the text as a whole – Cather's text rather than Jim's -- is nothing more than a structure of interrelated "misreadings."

Derrida's critique also effectively undoes Plato's conception of forms. If every text refers only to another text, there can be no ultimate Platonic form; in Derrida's vocabulary, there is no "transcendental signified." Here again, we can see a parallel in *My Antonia*. By telescoping the story so that each layer points to yet another underlying layer, Cather seems to suggest that there is no ultimate truth beneath the layers of the story. In this way she challenges the Platonic notion of art as flawed. If there is no transcendent reality, art is freed from the criticism that it deludes us. For Cather, in contrast to Derrida, there may finally be some underlying source, some root essence of reality; but if so, it is beyond our ability to access it, at

[9] Abrams is not a Deconstructionist critic, a fact he himself readily admits in the opening of his article. However, his critique is one of the most cogent formulations of the theory that I have come across.

least in any direct sense. Instead, she seems to celebrate the way that art distorts that reality, almost as though in obscuring reality art somehow manages to reach a much truer representation of what lies beneath that reality.

Cather's more deliberate statements about art, those that appear in her essays and interviews, seem to support this reading of her work. Perhaps the single most important of these statements, certainly the one that has become the most famous, is her comment in "The Novel Demuble": "Whatever else is felt upon the page without being specifically named there – that, one might say, is created" (41). While Sharon O'Brien has made much out of the similarity of this statement to Oscar Wilde's famous formulation of his homosexuality – "the love that dared not speak its name" --, the context of the comment would suggest that Cather had something else in mind. On the previous page, she writes, "If the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a vivid and brilliant form of journalism. Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present it must select the eternal material of art" (40). Both the comparison to journalism and the idea that art should not rely on present, unmediated experience are important here. Cather argues that art must exist outside of reality and must reflect something other than our immediate sensory impressions. This, then, is "the thing not named": great art is to be discovered beyond the mundane world we inhabit, and it must stand outside that reality. It is what we feel in response to that world rather than the world itself that matters most.

Cather makes similar statements in other places. In "Light on Adobe Walls," for example, she calls art "a game of make-believe, or re-production, very exciting and delightful" (125). In an interview from 1913, she argues that "art ought to simplify" and goes on to say that "It was probably the hundred sketches that went before that made the picture what it finally became" (8). If in the former statement Cather suggests that art is removed from any conception

of a "real" world, in the latter she formulates her theory of how art might emphasize that remove by enacting within its own production an inter-textuality. In great art, the final text is less a reflection of the real than the culmination or reduction of countless previous texts.

Writing of Sarah Orne Jewett, Cather further attempts to define creativity:

> No one can exactly define this process; but certainly persistence, survival, recurrence in the writer's mind, are highly characteristic of it. The shapes and scenes that have "teased" the mind for years, when they do at last get themselves rightly put down, make a very much higher order of writing […] than the most vivid and vigorous transfer of immediate impressions (48).

It is as though the artist must consume and then digest experience before it can be turned into art. Writing is necessarily a process of ordering, controlling, or – put another way – making the real experience into something artificial. In fact, we find exactly the same process going on in Cather's own work. As Mildred Bennett has pointed out, Cather had a tendency to use the names of real people in her work. Often, however, there were no direct relationships between the original individuals and the characters she created. So, for example, she took the name James Burden from a grocery store owner in Red Cloud, though between the two there is no connection other than the name itself. But so too we have the fact that *O Pioneers!* was written after she had *returned* to Red Cloud from a radically different landscape. In the same way, her novels of the Southwest were written later than her actual experience of the place. Throughout her career, she drew from her own experience, but organized it in such a way that it suited another purpose; her art relies on that remove from immediacy.

To return the discussion to *My Antonia*, Jim is, finally, exactly the sort of artist whom Cather privileges, the sort of artist she herself strives to become. For Jim's story is the product

of memory and, more specifically, the ways in which memory shapes experience into something that is ultimately greater than the sum of its parts. And Jim is not alone among Cather's characters in shaping experience in this way. St. Peter in *The Professor's House* uses Tom Outland's story as a means of revitalizing his own work:

> If the last four volumes of "The Spanish Adventurers" were more simple and inevitable than those that went before, it was largely because of Outland. When St. Peter first began his work, he realized that his great drawback was the lack of early association, the fact that he had not spent his youth in the great dazzling Southwest country which was the scene of explorers' adventures. By the time he had got as far as the third volume, into his house walked a boy who had grown up there, a boy with imagination, with the training and insight resulting from a very curious experience; who had in his pockets the secrets which old trails and stones and water-courses tell only to adolescence (234-235).

In the end, St. Peter's writing is the fusion of experiences over time, and experiences of several characters; it is more than a correspondence of art with reality.

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* we find a similar motif. Father Latour commenting on Father Valliant's soup focuses on its heterogeneity: " 'I am not deprecating your individual talent, Joseph,' the Bishop continued, 'but when one thinks of it, a soup like this is not the work of one man. It is the result of a constantly refined tradition" (38). There is likewise the story of the town bell: " 'But they do tell a story about it: that it was pledged to St. Joseph in the wars with the Moors, and that the people of some besieged city brought all their plate and silver and gold ornaments and threw them in with the baser metals. There is certainly a good deal of silver in the bell, nothing else would account for its tone" (44). Finally, as Latour's reflections on the

varied composition of the bell foreshadow, he discovers a new kind of spirituality during his time in New Mexico, one made up of both his own Catholicism and the simplistic faiths he encounters among the native peoples. Truth, both in life and in the work of art, rests on amalgamation rather than purity. In the end, then, Jim is simply an early example in a long line of figures in Cather's work. He takes his experiences, and the experiences of those he knew, and gives shape to them, crafting something beautiful. It is not as a "male" artist, then, that he should be regarded, but rather simply as "artist."

Joan Acoccella has done a good deal in her recent work to disentangle Cather from the feminist critics who have tried to fashion her into a model for their cause. Certainly, one might regard Jim Burden as a casualty of this cause, vilified as he has been by so many who seek to make the novel about gender politics. But Jim is only a fictional character after all. A far more important casualty is Cather herself and her unique place in the evolution of literary thought. For at a time when artists seemed anxiously obsessed over the loss of transcendent meaning, when "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" became an image of pathos for a generation of writers, Cather dared to find delight in this same fragmentation. And if her work is not quite the "simulacrum" we find in today's postmodern writers, certainly there are resonances with our own time that demonstrate just how forward-thinking she was as an artist. In the end, if Jim should be regarded as "artist" rather than "male artist," so too Cather, though important as a "female writer" should also be heralded simply as a "writer."

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The objectivity/ subjectivity dichotomy, and the desire on the part of writers to find some means of including both viewpoints, has been present in literature at least since Homer's epics. Homer manages to include them both through recourse to a cosmology that allows for interaction between gods and mortals. This system enables him, in *The Iliad* for instance, at one moment to offer experiential views of the horrors and heroics of warfare, and at another to remove us to a place far above the battlefield from which the gods can survey the totality of events. When Achilles prays to Zeus in Book XVI, we rise above the action to Mount Olympus where, "Zeus who views the wide world heard him" (Book 16, 220-221); yet in the lines that follow, we find ourselves in the midst of heated battle: "Now veteran Menalaos, thrusting past the shield of Thoas to the bare chest brought him down. Rushed by Amphiklos, the alert Meges got his thrust in first, hitting his thigh where a man's muscles bunch. Around the spearhead tendons were split and darkness veiled his eyes" (Book 16, 278-284). These two passages offer widely differing vantage points on the same event, and yet the connection between the two never seems illogical. Homer worked within the belief system of his own time, which imagined an easy communication between mortals and immortals. As a result, he had a ready-made structure to hand, one that allowed for fluid movement from one perspective to another.

Closer to the time with which I have dealt in this study, and native to the United States, are transcendentalist writers such as Hawthorne and Melville. Again, through recourse to a very

particular cosmology, writers of this period were able to craft works that included both views simultaneously and in a manner that did not interfere with the internal logic of the work. *Moby Dick*, to offer but one example, relies on a constant movement back and forth between Ishmael's direct experience of events, and larger cosmic speculations about the nature of those events. Here as in Homer, the objective/ subjective duality is taken for granted to some extent – it is essentially during this period accepted as a product of the way the universe operates. Specifically, every object is regarded as the manifestation of some greater spiritual reality. Thus the whale is real flesh and blood, capable of taking Ahab's leg, but at the same time, it maintains a metaphysical existence as well, as "this leviathan [who] comes floundering down upon us from the headwaters of the Eternities" (351). In contrast to the Greeks, the transcendentalists allowed for man's ability to rise to heights of objectivity. What was the "transparent eyeball" of Emerson's "Nature," if not a prescription for how mankind might use nature as a means of attaining some kind of god-like objectivity? Yet the belief in two planes of existence, offering two perspectives on reality, was the same for both. And if the rose-bush growing outside the prison door in *The Scarlet Letter* exists as a representation, a sign offered us from some higher force, the idea that our experience is being viewed objectively from "above" isn't a structural problem that needs to be overcome; it is implicit in the very ontological tradition in which these writers were working.

What marks James, Crane, Sinclair, and Cather as significant is that by the late nineteenth century the ready acceptance of a divine objectivity had been thrown into question by Darwin and other scientific thinkers of the time. As a result, writers during this period were suddenly without the eye of God over their shoulder. This left them, first, hyper-aware of the duality. What had been taken for granted was suddenly seen for what it was – a blending of perspectives

in a single spiritual impulse. But too, it left these writers with a good deal of anxiety over how – or even whether -- this duality might be restored, both in terms of the human condition broadly, but more specifically in terms of their own work. These writers seemed in many ways to feel the need to fill this void left by the withdrawal of a creator figure. Where Hawthorne might look to God as the divine inspiration of his work, with no real need to justify his own artistic (godlike) intrusions since he was merely imitating some larger cosmic system, James and Crane had no such metaphysical blueprint. They recognized that they themselves were the ones who were ultimately pulling the strings and directing the show. This situation was at best uneasy for them. A measure of faith had gone out of the world, faith not only in God, but in a "creator." In short, they were faced with a dilemma unknown to previous generations, one that called into question the nature of art itself. If art was not the natural purview of a divine entity, and for mortal man an imitation of the act of "creation," then what purpose did it serve?

Of course, it would be intellectually dishonest to suggest that these four writers were alone in feeling the effects of these changes, or that they were somehow the only writers whose works deal with these changes in direct ways. Dreiser, for instance, certainly writes under many of the same conditions and using many of the same techniques as Sinclair. Chopin's *The Awakening* offers a study in how the subjective/ objective split can occur within a single consciousness. Garland, London, Sherwood Anderson, Frank Norris, all of these writers were dealing with the same issues, and using similar techniques, and any of them might have made useful subjects of study.

Ultimately, however, one must always pick and choose among the canon – to have included all of these writers would have been to repeat and overlap myself in a number of places. With this in mind, I tried to choose writers who were representative of the strategies that were

most often employed during the period. Further, the techniques adopted by these four writers have continued to serve as models for how to deal with subjectivity and objectivity ever since.

If Darwin's work helped suggest the withdrawal of God to a place far from his creation, man's relationship to God -- and particularly as that relationship was encoded in artistic works --, has only grown more and more distant with time. Put another way, writers of the past one hundred twenty five years have faced the same problem once confronted by Henry James and Upton Sinclair – the question of their own role as artists, and the function of art in general. And while many of the writers who followed these four found new ways of dealing with the objective/ subjective split, all typically reference the earlier techniques and strategies I have tried to delineate here.

So, for instance, many of the writers of the twentieth century have chosen to use outsider characters as commentators on the worlds about which they write. *Gatsby* is narrated by a figure, Nick Carraway, who is outsider both to the geographical and social culture of New York and to the upper class society of the time. Naturally, Fitzgerald's approach to the problem of subjectivity and objectivity reflects his own time. So, for example, he plays on the notion of outsider in new ways by emphasizing a character who is, despite his seeming objectivity, apparently unreliable. In doing so, Fitzgerald seems to assert that even objectivity has its limitations, that in the end, in the Modern world there may be no truth in an objective sense. Yet the underlying technique of using an outsider as commentator remains the same as it was for Sinclair. Indeed, without Sinclair's outsider characters, Fitzgerald's irony would have little to operate against.

So too Fitzgerald's descriptions of New York from above – where we see "West Egg" and "East Egg" from an aerial height -- offer a statement on this world as "world" in a way

reminiscent of Crane. Movement in many works of the middle and late twentieth century also reminds us of Crane and Sinclair. Faulkner's Quentin travels about Boston in search of his identity in *The Sound and the Fury*, and in a much more ironic sense, the Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying* do the same in Mississippi. Jack Kerouac, in a crossing of literature and reality makes restless movement the central motif of *On the Road*. Rabbit of Updike's *Rabbit, Run*, gets into his car one night and simply drives south until he can see his life with the objectivity of physical distance.

Postmodern writers have asked questions about the relationship of the artist and art to the world similar to those first posed by James and Cather. Much like Cather's *My Antonia*, Pynchon's works are full of multiple stories and multiple story-tellers, all helping to undermine the "reality" of the world of his novels, while simultaneously helping establish them as "real" in a sense perhaps greater than that in which we normally use that word. His worlds are, in their very artificiality, closer to our lived reality, a "reality" which has now itself become "artificial." Vonnegut, too, uses a process of uncovering in his novels, revealing truth only in fragments and establishing disjointedness to call into question our own world by calling into question the reality of his imagined ones. Indeed, in the view of Baudrillard, postmodernism as a movement is centered on the question of objectivity and subjectivity, of the "realness" of our own world in contrast to those we imagine. In his theory of a world where we are all only actors in a play, the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity become simultaneously fused *and* more distinct one from another. This way of looking at reality is the same one that James feared and Cather embraced, if they did so in perhaps less sophisticated language, a world in which the fundamental distinction between "art" and "reality," is forever blurred.

In works that offer a social prescription, Sinclair's model remains – even today -- a prominent example of how large social issues and stories of individuals might be usefully joined. Certainly the tradition of science fiction and dystopian/ utopian fiction to which I have loosely connected Sinclair, can be traced back much farther than *The Jungle*, and I do not mean to imply that he stands alone as source for later social writers. Yet his influence on later writers is important nonetheless. Even socially conscious writers who bear no relationship whatsoever to dystopia, seem to recognize – after Sinclair -- that by using certain dystopian methods they might draw readers in to an alternative reality in order to make a broad statement about the state of their own society.

Steinbeck, for one, employs many of the methods of Sinclair and Crane, shifting constantly from chapters that offer an overarching picture of the dust bowl conditions to chapters that follow the specific Joad family. At times, then, he describes this almost forced migration as the plight of unnamed thousands: "Men and women huddled in their houses, and they tied handkerchiefs over their noses when they went out, and wore goggles to protect their eyes" (5); and later, "on the road the panic overcame some of the families, so that they drove night and day, stopped to sleep in the cars, and drove on to the West, flying from the road, flying from movement" (253); until by story's end, they have reached the wretched Hoovertowns, where, "When the first rains started, the migrant people huddled in their tents, saying, It'll soon be over, and asking, How long's it likely to go on?" (554). In such chapters, he continually reminds us of the big picture, the systemic problem that lies beneath this individual family's misfortunes.

Yet even without these "objective" chapters, the family's misadventures serve as symbolic of those of their neighbors and thousands of families like them, much as Jurgis and his family serve to represent the thousands of immigrants toiling in Packingtown. The Joads *are*

these nameless thousands, and these nameless thousands are them. Subjectivity and objectivity become fused through the same process as they are in *The Jungle*.

Additionally, Steinbeck, like Sinclair, uses outsiders as key characters. Tom Joad has only recently returned from prison, and his view of family, and indeed of all Oklahoma, is that of an outsider. As a result, he is able to provide an additional level of objectivity on their subjective experiences. As he comes upon his home, now abandoned, he is astonished at the change: "Young Tom stared for a long time at the ragged willow beside the dry horse trough, at the concrete base where the pump had been. 'Jesus!' he said at last. 'Hell musta popped here'" (51). He can see in a sharpness of detail how radical the change has been, where those who lived through the failure of the land could see it only experientially, as a slow decay.

Richard Wright, another ideological writer, employs similar methods, though he applies Sinclair's strategies to the particular condition of the black man in urban America. Bigger Thomas becomes the rat from the opening scene, hunted relentlessly by the police after having killed Mary Dalton. The objective/ subjective split is highlighted through the use of an animal, who, in relation to man, occupies a place roughly equivalent to that occupied by man in God's eyes, or put another way, characters in a writer's hands. But more importantly, Bigger in the section appropriately entitled "flight," moves in fear through the city, allowing us to see the various levels of the New York social structure, particularly in terms of how these levels responded to blacks at the time. But here, in contrast to Sinclair, Wright is pointedly using this movement ironically. This is not the wanderings of Henry Fleming or even Jurgis Rudkis, a movement that ranges freely about the city of Chicago. Rather it is action that is circumscribed into a smaller and smaller space over the course of the novel. Bigger laments early in the novel that he can never become what he desperately hopes to become: a pilot, someone with the ability

to rise above the space Bigger inhabits, to gain objectivity, but also freedom of motion. As Wright writes,

> "Looks like a little bird,' Bigger breathed with childlike wonder.
>
> "Them white boys sure can fly," Gus said.
>
> "Yeah," Bigger said, wistfully. "They get a chance to do everything" (14).

Bigger's movement is less about showing us the levels of this society, then, than about showing us how limited his space really is.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* as in Cather, levels of story-telling are everything. Just as in *My Antonia*, these levels help draw us farther and farther away from reality even as they bring us closer and closer to it. Quentin, like Jim Burden, seeks to understand his own experience, to see it through objective eyes, but in doing so, he must render it forever subjective; he must take in the stories of his home and assimilate them into his own being. Thus they become a part of him, even as they lose their connection to reality. So too, Faulkner, like Steinbeck, employs an outsider in the figure of Shreve, and further removes Quentin himself from his home in the South to the rooms at Harvard, in order to offer some measure of perspective on events.

But here again, as in Wright, Faulkner's purpose is not the same as that of Cather. Where stories and storytellers in Cather seem to have the effect of drawing us away from the work, of disrupting our subjective experience, Faulkner's seem to have the opposite effect. Utilizing multiple levels of consciousness, Faulkner manages to obscure the boundaries between storytellers, fusing them all into Quentin's single consciousness. At the same time, he obscures another boundary – that between fact and fiction. Quentin, taking a cue from his father, begins to fill in the gaps in Sutpen's story as the novel goes on. In the end, as in Cather, subjectivity

and objectivity become one. However, here they do so because they are internalized in a sort of sick spiral of storytelling, whereas in Cather Jim is able, in the end, to expurgate his experience by putting his work down on paper. Faulkner's, then, is a much darker vision of art and the artist, one that almost seems to return to James's fears about the line between imagining and entering that imagined world.

In the end, however, I think the most important applications of this project may be yet to be discovered. One of the phenomena that initially drew me to this study was the shift in attitudes towards writing generally that have grown up around the development of various new media. In particular, the computer has helped to raise many questions about the role of writer and reader. Sherry Turkle, for example, has examined in detail the impact of cyberspace on subjects' perceptions of reality. As she puts it, "the computer offers us both new models of mind and a new medium on which to project our ideas and fantasies […]. We are able to step through the looking glass. We are learning to live in virtual worlds" (9). Particularly interesting is her study of MUDs. Multi-user domains (MUDs) are cyber worlds in which participants assume roles and actually create the action and descriptions of characters and events in real time, together with other users. Thus events are happening, in a sense, in reality, at least to the extent that they are being done by real people to one another, whether or not they are merely the descriptions of happenings and not the actual occurences. Indeed, Turkle reports on one instance in which a cyber "rape" occurred, an event that was apparently as emotionally traumatic for the woman involved as an actual rape would have been. Through her observations, Turkle discovered that those involved in MUDs have a tendency to fuse their two realities, with the end result that the playing space becomes a space in which they exist both as subject and object: "As players participate, they become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new

selves through social interaction. One player says, 'You are the character and you are not the character, both at the same time'" (12).

Here these participants are not merely readers, but writers as well. Thus the stress on how the text is experienced falls on the author, where most critical work on the "space" of fiction focuses on the reader. It is the creative act that allows participants to experience these environments as real. Janet Murray in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* makes similar claims about the effects of the computer. The computer allows us to have experiences that take place both internally and exteriorly: "In psychological terms, computers are liminal objects, located on the threshold between external reality and our own minds" (99). While both critics acknowledge the ability of more traditional fiction to create a similar dichotomy, they dismiss it as having a much lesser effect on the subject. Perhaps this dismissal results from their comparison of MUD-ding to the act of reading a traditional text. A more apt comparison, however, would be to *writing* a text. In fact, the act of creating a fictional world, even in the more traditional sense of an author writing a novel, places that writer in a very similar position to the MUD user in terms of an external/internal experience. Looked at from this angle, the new work being done in the area of media studies can be useful for understanding more traditional acts of artistic creation.

Ultimately, however, my goal in this study has been two-fold. The publication of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* marked a significant turning point in the history of literary theory. For nearly one hundred years, critics and scholars have relied on the fundamental bracketing off of the text, a move first preached by the New Critics. Though Derrida's work seeks in some senses to overthrow that text, he ultimately does so by focusing on the text; the work may be constantly undoing itself, but this is not ascribed to anything the author has to done instigate this undoing. Bloom, on the other hand, discovered a means of reinstalling the author as a key

component of literary studies. His application of the psychological Oedipus complex involved a shift to emphasis on the writer, and more specifically how a writer exists within a posited literary world.

While my work here is not meant to abet Bloom's, certainly it is indebted to his reclaiming of authorial intent. Though ultimately my interest is in textual effects, my work here does argue that only in understanding the authors of these texts can we begin to see how these effects were developed over time, and more importantly, why they are integral to these texts. Indeed, by returning to the psychology of these authors, I believe it is possible to see literature as a whole in something of a new light, as necessarily tapping into two distinct, and one might argue seemingly exclusive, aspects of our consciousness. The old school of authorial intent, in which the writer's pronouncements on his or her text are regarded as the final word on what that text means may be forever gone, but I hope I have gone some way in reclaiming the author as an important element of a work, if only by fusing him with his text.

Secondly, I hope that I have been able to offer a new heuristic for looking at fiction. The argument could certainly be made (and I have tried to make it myself where I could) that my focus on these four writers is too restrictive – that it could have included many more writers. Or, along the same lines, one could argue that what I have recognized is an obvious component of fiction, so necessary that it needs no close attention. This statement, though, would seem to undo its own logic – for it is precisely that which is apparent and unrecognized that most needs scrutiny. While there have been some attempts to see objectivity and subjectivity as central forces in fiction (as with the study of impressionism, which seeks to understand a similar relationship between points of view in writers like Crane), my hope is that my own study will

offer a new rubric through which to examine all of the various possible incarnations of this duality that have been or might be used.

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