THE THEME OF ALIENATION

IN LIGHT IN AUGUST AND AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

THE THEME OF ALIENATION IN THEODORE DREISER'S AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY AND WILLIAM FAULKNER'S LIGHT IN AUGUST

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the theme of alienation in Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy and William Faulkner's Light in August, a comparative approach that highlights both the naturalistic elements in both novels as well as those elements that go beyond the boundaries of naturalism. This paper traces the roots of Clyde Griffiths' and Joe Christmas' self-alienation to their childhood deprivations, distorted religious education and sexual repression. This paper also analyzes how American society turns these two fundamentally different characters into marginal figures who suffer in a very similar way from deeply internalised ambiguities. Deeply alienated from themselves and others these characters are driven to murder their sexual partners, both murders operating in a strikingly similar naturalistic discourse. Both characters are ultimately executed by their society as sacrificical scapegoats. Completely stripped of any sense of selfhood Clyde and Joe are denied any insight and awareness into their lives and deaths.

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INTRODUCTION

Comparing the novels of Theodore Dreiser and William Faulkner may seem a risky task at first sight because the contrasts between the two American writers are very striking. Nevertheless, both authors depict characters who commit their lives to the pursuit of a quest, a quest for a desired selfhood, which in both cases leads to failure and disaster in their lives. In Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy the young protagonist Clyde Griffith tries to define himself by committing himself passionately to the American dream, which turns, however, into a nightmare robbing him not only of a sense of identity but literally of his life. Although desperately seeking an identity throughout his life, Joe Christmas, the protagonist of Light in August, fails to establish who he is, which leads him to an equally violent death. Faulkner and Dreiser create prototypes not only of the modern outsider but of figures who, with a desperate sense of inevitability, destroy others and themselves as a result of their identity diffusion.

In critical articles Dreiser's and Faulkner's heroes have been compared independently from each other to Fyodor Dostoevsky's hero Raskolnikov, the Russian intellectual and prototype of the split character who turns into a cold blooded murderer.[1] Comparisons have also been

established to Albert Camus' L'Etranger, the modern existential outsider who kills without even knowing why and is executed for this murder without being able to make sense of his life or death.[2]

So far, nobody has undertaken a critical comparison between the two split characters and outsider figures in these two American novels despite the above mentioned very important thematic links. This missing element in Dreiser and Faulkner criticism is possibly a result of still existing misconceptions. Many critics, especially the earlier Dreiser critics, have labeled this author almost stereotypically as a naturalist, which for many in the critical world carried a negative and deprecatory connotation. Stuart Sherman even wrote an article on the 'Barbaric Naturalism of Theodore Dreiser' (in Alfred Kazin/Charles Shapiro. The Stature of Theodore Dreiser. 1955. p. 71). At the same time Faulkner has been almost unanimously praised by the critical world. Almost from the beginning he was elevated to the level of a 'mythmaker', which established a close link to Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Genteel school of writing, which always

1. see Frederick J. Hoffmann. "The Scene of Violence: Dostoevsky and Dreiser". in Modern Fiction Studies. Vol. 6. 1960/1; Jean Weisgerber. Faulkner and Dostoevsky: Influence and Confluence. 1974. p. 203-217; Frederick L. Gwynn: "Faulkner's Raskolnikov". in Modern Fiction Studies. Vol. 4. 1958/9. p. 169-172. Gwynn points out that Faulkner has often expressed his admiration for and acquaintance with Dostoevsky's work.

2. see Strother B. Purdy. "An American Tragedy and L'Etranger. in Comparative Literature. 1967. p. 252-268.

disassociated itself from Dreiser's writing. Faulkner generally disagreed with the lack of critical acknowledgement that characterized large parts of Dreiser's writing career[3] and from which Dreiser suffered immensely.[4]

Nevertheless, preconceived evaluative judgements may not be the only reason for the lack of comparisons between the two authors. Their differences are multifold, especially with respect to setting, personal philosophy, and writing style. While Faulkner's writing style is extremely innovative, idiosyncratic, and modern with reference to his narrative techniques, Dreiser's style has been negatively criticized as clumsy and heavy. Also, Faulkner, who has his roots in the old Southern aristocracy, explores in his writing the traditions and problems of the rural South by recreating the Southern world in the mythical Yoknapatawpha County. This mythical world is characterized by a history of dispossession, by the white man's sin of slavery against the black population, which ultimately brings about the downfall of the South in the form of the defeat of the South in the Civil War. Whereas Faulkner's writing is burdened with

3. But Faulkner also insisted that "An American Tragedy is not such a good book. ... Sister Carrie is a much better book" (Faulkner in the University. 1965. p.234).

4. Rolf Lunden points out that the idea of the Nobel Prize became "a fixation for Dreiser" ("Theodore Dreiser and the Nobel Prize". in American Literature. 1968/9. p.216).

the load of a century's long tradition, Theodore Dreiser's perspective is that of the son of impoverished German immigrants in the Northern part of the United States, which led him to shape the modern fictional outsider figure after his own experience.

Whereas Faulkner's writing reveals an obsession with the influence of the past on the present, Dreiser focuses on modern developments that characterize his time and his society. Most of his writing is set in the rapidly expanding Northern industrial cities such as Chicago, and his most famous novels critically explore the capitalization and industrialization of modern American life, a modernism that Dreiser sees with very ambiguous feelings. He was fascinated with the ever evolving and higher reaching human endeavours, but he had a deep sympathy for the victims of this rapid industrialization. Whereas Faulkner has become renowned as the creator of a myth in which Northern modernism inevitably leads to corruption and sterile immorality, Dreiser's thoughts have always turned around a scientific explanation of life, in which a seemingly evil phenomenon of life is always balanced by some positive outcome. Even in his later life, when he embraced a more transcendental and religious world view he still insisted that life was ruled by the 'inevitable equation' of good and evil and that science and religion are by no means exclusive terms. Whereas Faulkner

always insisted on being primarily a storyteller, Dreiser was always fascinated by philosophical and scientific theories which he did not hesitate to integrate into his fictional works, usually by putting these theories into the mouths of frequently commenting omniscient narrators.[5]

Despite these important differences the two authors have developed a similar approach to the theme of alienation in two of their works. Religion, sexuality and the question of identity are presented in recurring clusters which permeate both novels. The characters' alienation is linked to religious fanaticism and sexual repression. Both Faulkner and Dreiser have been accused of sensationalism and immorality, primarily because of their open and explicit treatment of sexuality and because of their critical attitudes toward religious doctrines and religious fanaticism, attitudes which have often been misinterpreted as a general rejection of religion. Both novels furthermore reveal a very similar concern by raising the question as to what degree the protagonists' murders can be seen as compulsive acts. The question of alienation is thus linked to the philosophic problem of free will and

5. After the completion of An American Tragedy Dreiser even gave up writing for a period of almost twenty years during which he devoted himself to philosophical and scientific research. His friend and critic Henry Louis Mencken urged him to go on writing novels. Yet Dreiser insisted on writing a work of philosophy which was never completed and which was published posthumously under the title Notes on Life. (in Louis Zanine. From Mechanism to Mysticism: Theodore Dreiser and the Religion of Science. 1983.)

determinism in human life. Both narratives establish a link between the protagonists' alienated status and the structure of their society. While both novels are set in very particular and different settings the questions raised by the theme of alienation go far beyond the mere regional aspect of the narrative, which in both novels seems to serve as a mere springboard for the more universal questions.

While differing in focus, An American Tragedy and Light in August are multilayered works with a naturalistic basis and superimposed levels of mythical and 'anti-naturalistic' elements. While Light in August has a very strong symbolical and mythical level with an undercurrent of naturalism, the naturalistic strain in An American Tragedy dominates over mythical and anti-naturalistic elements. Nevertheless, in both novels the protagonists appear as mythical alazon figures, as characters who deceive not only others but also themselves. Also, Dreiser and Faulkner use myths to a certain degree as structural devices. However, both authors do not merely recreate ancient and modern myths, but in their narratives they offer many ironic reversals of the myths they introduce. The narratives critically reveal how myths shape everyday reality, how myths may freeze spontaneous human responses and thus contribute to the alienation of the characters.

Dreiser and Faulkner powerfully dramatize the

roots of alienation and the effects of alienation on Clyde and Joe. Naturalistic and anti-naturalistic elements in An American Tragedy and Light in August serve to explore the plight of two characters who lose touch with themselves and their environment. They become murderers, only to be sacrificed, in turn, in the name of a very dubious justice. The ultimate pathos of both novels is that selfhood is a value never to be gained by either Joe or Clyde.

I. LIGHT IN AUGUST AND AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY IN THEIR CRITICAL CONTEXT

Alienation, according to Erich Fromm, is a new term for a very old phenomenon. Alienation goes back as far as the Old Testament idolatry of the golden calf. This building and worshipping of idols implies that the 'life forces flow into a thing', which is experienced as something apart from the individual (112). Alienation then describes 'every act of submissive worship'(113), the submission to 'irrational passions'(114), and all instances of neuroticism and insanity (114). The alienated person "does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own act" (The Sane Society, 1955, p.111). Fromm describes this person as being out of touch with himself and with all other people. This person therefore experiences himself as things are experienced, as a dead object outside himself. "He doesn't experience himself as an active bearer of his own powers and riches, but as an impoverished 'thing', dependent on the powers outside himself, into whom he has projected his living substance" (111).

A strong sense of anxiety is the consequence of this alienation, an anxiety which is created by the 'lack of self', 'by the abyss of nothingness' which is 'more terrifying than the tortures of hell' and which drives the

alienated person to 'the border of madness' (181). It is also interesting that the etymological root of alienation is the latin 'alienus', which means 'that belongs to another person', 'not one's own', 'to be a stranger to', even 'hostile and unfriendly to'. In the medical sense, i.e. referring to the body, alienus means dead, corrupted, paralysed. Referring to the mind it means insane or mad (A Latin Dictionary, 1966). In the last meaning it can still be found in modern French as 'l'aliéné' for a madman, or in modern English as 'alienist' for a psychiatrist.

Probably none of the Dreiser or Faulkner critics would hesitate to recognize the validity of this general definition of alienation, as none of them would hesitate to call Clyde and Joe alienated characters. Yet, the opinions in the critical world diverge and even differ fundamentally when it comes to uncovering the underlying philosophies that are at the bottom of this problem of alienation as described in both An American Tragedy and Light in August. The question arises as to whether naturalistic, existential or transcendental/humanistic cores are at the bottom of these works. It is therefore important to indicate the major critical strains or frameworks in Dreiser and Faulkner criticism with reference to the problems of selfhood and alienation.

Traditional naturalism originated as a theory in 19th century France and has at its base a materialistic

world view. It reduces all existence to matter and negates the existence of a creator as well as any metaphysical explanation of creation. Haskell Block links naturalism to "a materialistic, secular, or scientific attitude toward human experience" (Naturalistic Triptych. 1970. p. 5). One of the main pillars of naturalism is Postivism, which goes back as far as Auguste Comte's Cours de Philosophie Positive (1839-42). This positivistic philosophy led the 'pope of naturalism', Emile Zola, to claim that only observable facts should form the basis for the creation of a novel. The naturalistic author's desire for objectivity often leads him to base his novel on journalistic research in order to gain a thorough knowledge of visible reality. It is interesting that both Zola and Dreiser worked as journalists before they turned to fictional writing so that they were both familiar with the techniques of journalistic research. Before writing An American Tragedy Dreiser not only studied but collected journalistic accounts on various murder cases, which he used as a starting point for his fiction. Zola even went so far as to claim the end of all novels of imagination. He claimed that the new naturalistic novel should follow the laws of science as a contemporary scientist, Docteur Bernard, had laid them down in a medical essay.

Zola established a second pillar of naturalism when he claimed in his Roman Expérimental that the

characters of the naturalistic novel develop strictly according to the laws of determinism.[1] The human organism is conceived of as a machine, and all human action is determined by inner or outward factors, which predetermine all human action according to laws of causality. Human beings are seen as biological, psychological and social products, products of their genes and the environment. As a result, naturalistic writers often use figures with "small intellectual activity and strong animal drives" in order to illustrate the deterministic theories (Vernon. L. Parrington. "The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America". p. 323f). Zola explains his characters genetically by relating them to the temperaments or shortcomings of their parents. Dreiser uses the same procedure for explaining his character Clyde Griffiths, and Faulkner places a particular importance on the childhood of Joe Christmas in order to explain the adult man's character and actions, which points to a psychological determinism. Another feature Faulkner and Dreiser share with Zola is the tendency to provide an enormous number of characters in their novels in order to create a microcosm of society, which, in turn, allows them to demonstrate the deterministic interaction between individual and society.

1. Vernon Louis Parrington writes: "A philosophy of determinism[. This] is the vital principle of naturalism, setting it off from realism" ("The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America". in Main Currents in American Thought. 1930. p. 324)

In the traditional naturalistic novel the characters are often portrayed as completely lacking free will and therefore without any moral responsibility. "Le vice et la vertue sont des produits comme le sucre et le vitriol", writes Hippolyte Taine, and Zola not only quotes but applies this formula to the description of a murder in his novel Thérèse Raquin (see Edmond Lepellier. Emile Zola: Sa Vie - Son Oeuvre. MCMVIII. p. 230). In many naturalistic novels the heroes are compulsively driven to their acts, and the reader is left in the end with the notion that it is society that is responsible for the negative reality that surrounds the characters. The result of this technique is a very strong social criticism which characterizes almost all naturalistic writing from Zola on.

The third pillar of naturalism relies on the natural sciences. If human behaviour is determined, it is physiological and psycho-analytic laws which explain the functioning of human behaviour logically and causally. Both Zola and Dreiser were passionately interested in natural science. While Zola's knowledge of science was limited to some hereditary laws, Dreiser was influenced in his vision of the human being by modern physiology, ethnology, and Freudian psychoanalysis. Ethnology retraces human behaviour back to hierarchies of instinctual systems, in which the instinct of self preservation is at the top, followed by instincts of hunger, and then

reproduction. Many ethnologists even explain violence by an urge for aggression and thus make it part of the normal instinctual system[3], which is of paramount importance for a naturalistic approach to the phenomenon of murder. Physiologists establish a connection between chemicals and human behaviour.

Dreiser uses terms such as the libido or a psychic sex scar or repression, which are explicit references to Sigmund Freud's work, which Dreiser had read in the translation by Dr Abraham Brill. Faulkner denied any direct influence by Freud, yet much of his work can be seen in psycho-analytic terms. Sigmund Freud starts out his psychology with the assumption of an inborn structure--the Id (das Es)--which includes human instincts and urges, as well as all the repressed desires. In contrast to the ethnologists Freud sees human instinctual nature as fundamentally chaotic, completely dominated by the Lustprinzip, the desire for primarily sensual pleasure. Yet the Id is at the same time loaded with energy and therefore needs a controlling structure to be channelled into meaningful human action. Diametrically opposed to the 'Id' is the 'Uberich', the superego, a structure that is formed mainly during the period of adolescence through the identification of the individual with models of authority. While the Id is chaotic, the superego is made up of rules

3. see Konrad Lorenz. <u>On Aggression</u>. 1967.

and moral laws, which imply an order and in the extreme may imply a frozen rigidity. The most important structure, which creates human individuality, is the Ego (Ich), which establishes itself in the conflict between Id and superego. The stronger the conflict and the better this conflict is resolved the stronger will be the Ego that the individual builds up. However, if the individual does not resolve the inner conflict, a weak Ego and a neurotic personality will be the inevitable result. In An American Tragedy and Light in August Dreiser and Faulkner create very strong superego figures around their protagonists. Both characters are also dominated by strong instinctual urges. And they come across as characters with very weak egos.

Not only the 'naturalist' critics but also those who take an existentialist approach to An American Tragedy and Light in August are concerned with Clyde's and Joe's weakness, their difficulties in making choices in their lives. The existential tradition radically denies the existence of any pregiven essence in man. It follows logically that in the existential view identity can only be determined from within, from the individual himself. The self is capable of becoming, of creating itself. Elements such as choice and freedom and responsibility gain a paramount importance. In his analysis of An American Tragedy, Strother Purdy focuses on the passivity of the protagonist, who may easily become an existential victim in

an absurd universe that can only become meaningful through significant human acts. Purdy writes: "In Dreiser's world passivity means lack of will, and lack of will is fatal" ("'An American Tragedy' and 'L'Etranger'". in Comparative Literature. 1967. p. 252). Following Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism George Bedell discusses Joe Christmas as an existential victim (Kierkegaard and Faulkner: Modalities of Existence. 1972). Joe Christmas is a "model aesthete" (p.47), a person who lacks selfhood and who either reflects without being able to act or acts without the necessary reflection. As an aesthete Joe is opposed to the ethical person who is guided by conscience and duty, and the religious person who ultimately reaches the highest degree of selfhood through a conscious commitment to God. Dreiser's hero Clyde Griffiths may be easily labeled an aesthetic person because of his pleasure seeking sensuality. Like Joe Clyde is confronted with difficult choices, and his usual reaction is to escape making a decision. Both heroes' downfall is thus linked to the refusal to accept their existential freedom and responsibility.

It is also interesting to note the connection between naturalism and existentialism. Both are in direct opposition to any notion of a transcendental pregiven self. Daniel Brown sees naturalism even as 'the older brother' of existentialism and he points out that both strains are

indebted to a Darwinian concept of evolution, to Nietzschean statements about the death of God, to the Marxist idea about the class struggle and to Freudian psychology ("The War within Nathanial West: Naturalism and Existentialism". Modern Fiction Studies. 1974/75. p. 182). Existentialism, however, is a much more metaphysical strain than naturalism, whose criticism is mostly a criticism of society.

In recent criticism there have been numerous voices that argued that many of Dreiser's works are not limited to a pure naturalism, as the earlier criticism implied, but that Dreiser's work is open to humanistic and transcendental interpretations. Paul Orlov entitled an article "The Subversion of the Self; Antinaturalistic Crux in 'AAT'" (Modern Fiction Studies. 1977/8. p.457-472). Orlov as well as Robert Penn Warren and Charles L. Campell argue that Clyde Griffith's downfall goes back to his alienation from his own inner self in the framework of a hostile, fundamentally material society. According to Warren, Clyde's tragedy is that "his responsible self has been absorbed in the great machine of modern industrial secularized society", Clyde is "reduced to a cog, a cipher, an abstraction" (Homage to Theodore Dreiser. 1971. p. 131). This critical perspective is based on the assumption that each individual actually has an inborn, pregiven self. It is interesting that Faulkner himself invites such an

interpretation in the case of Joe Christmas. Joe "didn't know what he was and so he deliberately repudiated man". Faulkner describes this self-alienation as "the most tragic condition that any individual can have---not to know what he was" (Faulkner in the University. p. 97). This assumption of an inborn selfhood is a transcendental idea that can be traced back to Ralph W. Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and ultimately to Jean Jacques Rousseau. In his Emile où de L'Education Rousseau warns against the danger of losing one's self in the framework of society. According to Rousseau society creates artificial needs and passions that distance the individual from his or her inner core and create antinomies not only within the human being but also in his relationship with others. Similarly, Emerson warns against the danger of the submission of the individual to external reality: "Men do not imagine that they are anything more than fringes and tassels to the institutions into which they are born ... and bow the neck, and the knee and the soul to their own creation" (qtd. in William E. Bridges. Spokesmen for the Self, 1971, p.5). Emerson also sees alienation as a loss of the sense of wholeness, as the "inability to respond to experience as a natural and total organism" (5). In the transcendentalists' perspective, authenticity or the repossession of the self is not so much "the recovery of a thing --the self-- rather the reopening of the lines of inner communication so that

the person can once again respond authentically and openly to life around him" (ibid). Similarly, Thoreau's writing expresses the need to "abandon conceptualizing and see the surrounding as things-in-themselves" (11), an ideal state he achieved in the natural framework at Walden pond where he was filled with a "full state of presence" (11).

Also, from an anti-naturalistic perspective the question of good and evil gains a fundamental importance. For Faulkner this question is ultimately a question of the 'human heart', a phrasing that carries the connotation of an inborn pregiven instance of morality (ibid. p.26). In Faulkner's writing it is easy to trace the transcendental strain because he generally balances alienated characters with characters who display a strong sense of a positive selfhood. In The Sound and the Fury, which traces the painful disintegration of a family, Faulkner balances elements of sterility, rigidity, and death to the loving, trusting and loyal character Dilsey. In Light in August Faulkner creates a contrapuntal opposition between Joe Christmas and his description of Lena Grove, who like Dilsey, is not only filled with a sense of herself but also with a strong faith in God, a faith that is connected to nature and is devoid of all institutional rigidity.

Theodore Dreiser, who was a seeker all his life, found in his later life that the natural sciences only answered the question 'how' but not the question 'why'.

Dreiser reveals a clear religious perspective only in his last novel The Bulwark, which was published posthumously in 1946 and in which the ultimate answer of life is offered in the form of Quakerism.[4] Yet, already in 1925, the year of publication of An American Tragedy, Dreiser's view of selfhood goes beyond his own theories in which he talks about the 'myth of individuality' (qtd. in Paul Orlov. "The anti-naturalistic crux in Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy". p. 461). In An American Tragedy Dreiser implicitly hints at the "self's intrinsic importance" and Orlov concludes that the "subversion of the self is the core of the tragic experience" in An American Tragedy (ibid. p.463 and p.461).

4. Also in The Stoic, which was published posthumously as the last book of his Trilogy of Desire, Dreiser develops many important elements of mysticism.

II. THE ROOTS OF ALIENATION

Faulkner and Dreiser both take great pains to establish the childhood experiences of their characters that lead to their alienation and their subsequent behaviour. Joe Christmas appears as a very static character in Light in August whose fortune changes dramatically but who hardly develops in personality or conciousness or morality. Faulkner logically explains why Joe acts as he does by introducing a chapter on his early years in an orphanage and his childhood and adolescence with his step-parents. It is interesting to note that in an earlier novel, Sanctuary, Faulkner also presents us with a very static character, Popeye, a cold blooded, mechanical murderer who resembles Joe in many ways. It is only in the end of that novel that we get a glimpse of this character's difficult childhood in an orphanage, his inborn disease and the influence of a crazy grandmother. In Light in August, it is after we have met Joe Christmas as an adult that we are allowed a glimpse of Christmas as a child and adolescent. This naturalistic explanation in the middle or at the end of the novels may fill the reader retrospectively with a certain understanding if not sympathy for a character who generally strikes us as fundamentally distant and even unlikeable. The naturalistic explanation also gives the reader a sense of an initial development in otherwise very static characters.

Since An American Tragedy is structured chronologically, Dreiser devotes the first three parts of An American Tragedy to the exploration of Clyde's parents, brothers and sisters, and the development of Clyde's psyche and body. Haskell Block points out that in Dreiser's manuscript the description of Clyde's childhood was three times as long as in the published version, which underscores the importance Dreiser attached to the naturalistic exploration of Clyde's character (Naturalistic Triptych).

In both Clyde's and Joe's cases the disturbed character developments are linked to the psychological and physiological deprivation theory. Whereas Joe is denied a mother and love in his early years, Clyde is described as painfully suffering from a lack of material satisfaction. "The family was always 'hard up', never very well clothed, and deprived of many comforts and pleasures which seemed common enough for others" (An American Tragedy. p.9). As insignificant street preachers Clyde's parents have a hard time making ends meet. Completely absorbed in their pseudoreligious spirituality they are simply oblivious to the material wants of their children. Among other critics F.O. Matthiessen points out that Dreiser's own experience as a young boy was one of "oppressive physical dread of poverty and defeat which remained ingrained in him for life" (Theodore Dreiser: The American Men of Letters Series. 1951.

p. 11). In novels such as Jennie Gerhardt and the autobiographical A History of Myself: Dawn Dreiser dramatizes again and again the suffering of human beings through material deprivation, the feeling of hunger, physical and spiritual.

The chronic deprivation that characterizes Clyde's early life leads to an overwhelming feeling of 'hunger', a sense of material insatiability which dominates the life of the adolescent and the adult. The omniscient narrator comments: "For his ideas of luxury were in the main so extreme and mistaken and gauche-mere wanderings of a repressed and unsatisfied fancy, which as yet had had nothing but imaginings to feed it" (An American Tragedy. p.35). Throughout the novel Clyde's material cravings --- his love of luxury, of clothing, and money--- are connected to a physical urge ---his oral sense. At the sight of the primitive luxury at the Soda Fountain of a Kansas City drugstore, the young helper Clyde' fascination is compared to that of a "thirsting victim" (81). The 18-year old feels an "ambitious gnawing at his vitals" (29), is "starved for pleasure" (55, 66) and sex; he is "girl hungry" (72), yet, the thought of "an ugly girl nauseated him" (81). The early chronic feeling of hunger is an element that influences and forms Clyde's psyche and the direction of his life. The narrative suggests that Clyde cannot help but react to this inner urge, an urge he will never be able

to satisfy however hard he tries. This also partly explains why Clyde, the adult, never gets an enduring feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment. He may reach a momentary feeling of ecstasy in contact with material luxury and in sexual contact with a pretty girl. Yet, his satisfaction is extremely short lived and is followed either by a feeling of nausea or by new feelings of hunger.[1]

The narrative also establishes a close link between Clyde's material deprivations and his depressions. His melancholy, rebellious, brooding nature and lethargy are repeatedly linked to the negative material situation into which he has been born (19, 24). Dreiser seems to apply almost literally the scientific theory of the American psychologist Elmer Gates with whose research results Dreiser became familiar before he wrote An American Tragedy. Gates writes: "In the process of brainbuilding it is necessary to avoid all situations which caused irascible, malevolent, and depressive emotions" because "evil emotions produce cacostates" which are 'life destroying' while 'good emotions' are life augmenting" (qtd. in From Mechanism to Mysticism: Theodore Dreiser and the Religion of Science. 1983. p. 45). Thus, the material environment determines the

1. Richard Forrey argues that because of an unresolved oedipal complex Dreiser himself was essentially oral in his psychosexual orientation and, therefore, has fictionally created eating as a metaphor of life. Forrey also explains Dreiser's early fascination with Herbert Spencer's concept of social darwinism as an oral fascination for a 'dog eat dog philosophy'. ("Theodore Dreiser: Oedipus Redividius". Modern Fiction Studies. 1977/8. p. 341-354).

psychological nature of the individual. The poverty and dreariness of his parents' mission, which carries the ironic name the Door of Hope, causes a dangerous brooding lethargy in Clyde, a passivity that characterizes his whole life and that proves a serious handicap in moments of crisis. At the same time, Clyde develops an active enthusiasm when he is placed as a bell-hop in a luxurious environment, the Green Davidson Hotel. Even Clyde's mother notices how her son's mood and outlook on life change when he moves from one environment to another. Dreiser fictionally makes the point that the environment has an important determining influence on the individual's psychological structure.[2]

Even the element of escape that characterizes Clyde's early and later life is partly explained as an instinctual bodily reaction, and partly as an environmental influence. His situation at the Door of Hope is so dreary that he becomes obssessed with "a desire to be out and away from his home" (40). He thinks of escaping the mission service (21), of "getting out of this" (30) and he takes "imaginative flights" into a dream world (35). It is

2. It is also interesting that Herbert Spencer, who largely influenced the thinking of the young Dreiser develops a very similar idea in his Data of Ethics. Spencer holds that pleasure has a life enhancing effect, and that pain is life diminishing. Dreiser was possibly fascinated by this theory because it justified his personal hedonism. It is also interesting that Dreiser creates fundamentally hedonistic characters in his most famous novels. Not only Clyde Griffiths in An American Tragedy, but also Carrie Meeber in Sister Carrie, and Algernon Cowperwood in the Trilogy of Desire are dominated by a hedonistic sensuality.

interesting that the life of Clyde's parents is also characterized by a series of 'flights', by a constant movement from one city to the next. Each time the family faces problems, the usual reaction is to escape from the city. This pattern is simply transmitted to Clyde, who in almost all crisis situations instinctively reacts with a wish to escape. It is therefore not astonishing that in these situations he resembles a frightened animal.

Although Faulkner at no point establishes an explicit 'scientific' explanation for his characters and their actions, he does introduce the chapter on Joe Christmas' childhood by evoking a pre-verbal, pre-rational capacity of registering experience in the individual's mind: "Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders" (Light in August. p.111). Although the individual might not be able to grasp rationally the earliest and primal experiences of his or her life, it is the pre-rational 'believe' that ensures that our past experiences will never be lost but will always be part of our personality.[3] 'Believe' implies that the past experiences are present on the level of consciousness, without providing the individual with any factual evidence and proof that 'knowing' would offer. Whereas Dreiser's naturalistic causal chain focuses on the physiological--the lack of material comfort in Clyde's life--Faulkner establishes a chain of psychological causality between

Christmas' early childhood traumas on the one hand, and the development of his character and his later life, on the other.

Faulkner creates a character who is clearly inhibited in his normal emotional growth because he lacks a mother and because his surrogate mothers are nothing but "a mechanical adjunct to eating" (112). Instead of developing what Erik Erikson calls a "basic trust", Joe Christmas develops a "basic mistrust" (Identity and the Life Cycle. 1959. p.55). Even as a five-year old he has fallen victim to an emotional crustedness and rigidity, which is a result of his basic mistrust that characterizes all his life. The narrative further connects Joe's emotional rigidity to a traumatic experience of the five-year-old child, a trauma that exacerbates Joe's emotional insecurity and negatively determines later actions and emotional responses.

This traumatic childhood experience creates a subconscious cluster in Joe's psyche combining womanhood with sexuality, orality, secrecy, and the breaking of predictable and secure laws. Since the age of four Joe Christmas has indulged in a very peculiar form of oral satisfaction, secretly eating some of the toothpaste of one of the young dietitians in the orphanage. Joe is conscious

3. This idea probably goes back to the influence of Henri Bergson on Faulkner. In his Creative Evolution Bergson develops a time concept in which the present can never be separated from the past ---we are connected to the past by our memories---, nor can the present be separated from the future because we have a sense of anticipation.

of the fact that he is transgressing ---he is stealing the toothpaste--- which is all the more important as Joe's enjoyment of the toothpaste has a strong overtone of sensual desire and satisfaction. The toothpaste is sweet, and pink, and smooth, and he finds it in the dietitian's bedroom. He also knows instinctively ---relying on an "animal warning" (113) that more than a small dose will make him sick. One day Joe hides behind the curtains where he becomes a witness of the dietitian's clandestine sexual relations with one of the young interns at the orphanage. Enclosed behind the warm womanclothes, he nervously consumes all the toothpaste until he vomits violently and as a result is discovered by the horrified dietitian. Joe's original sensual oral pleasure has been turned around into its opposite---into nausea and the shameful uncovering of his act of transgression. But more importantly, this nauseating event links his own sensual transgression in the obscurity and warmth and smell of womanclothing to the clandestine sexuality of the dietitian. To be sure, this connection is by no means rationally established by Joe. His mind is much too immature to even perceive the nature of the contact between the dietitian and the doctor. Nevertheless, the link between secret, surreptitious, female sexuality and his own transgressive sensuality has been established on the subconscious level.

If Joe had been punished for his transgression,

this incident might possibly not have assumed any traumatic consequences for Joe. However, Joe is unable to trust any other human being, and his only sense of security depends on the rigid conviction that transgression has to be followed automatically by punishment. This explains why "[h]e was being tortured with punishment deferred and ... he was putting himself in her way in order to get it over with, get his whipping and strike the balance and write it off" (115). Yet, obsessed with the thought that Joe might reveal her sexual transgression, the dietitian not only does not punish him, but after several days of painful waiting she offers Joe a dollar as a bribe. Receiving a reward for an obvious transgression turns Joe's only system of security upside down. Looking at the dollar offered to him "[h]e was still with astonishment, outrage and shock" (117). He is unable to accept the dollar and unable to understand. The deep shock at the breaking of his secure system by a female creates a deep subconscious fear of the unpredictable female in Joe, a fear that accompanies his whole adult life and largely determines his relationships and subsequent problems with women. Also, given his own oral sensuality, which has been revealed, Joe must sense that this sensuality also exists in himself as a potential danger waiting to engulf him.

Both novels do more than stress the protagonists' deprivations and traumas to explain later actions. They

also emphasize the prison atmosphere in which the protagonists grow up. Both are placed in a environment that 'encloses', limits, restrains, and stifles the growth of a personality. On the first few pages of An American Tragedy, Dreiser repeatedly uses the image of walls of stone to describe the cold and anonymous city atmosphere in which Clyde grows up (7, 9, 10). Similarly, Joe Christmas is repeatedly associated with the image of the corridor. In the orphanage Christmas lives in a "cold echoing building of dark and red brick" that is enclosed by a ten foot steel fence and gives the impression of a penitentiary or a zoo. The reader is somewhat reminded of the claustrophobic coffin atmosphere that encloses Raskolnikov in the beginning of Crime and Punishment. In Joe's case the stone walls mirror the rigid inner walls that he erects in order to find a sense of security in life, because life seems to offer too many dangerous unpredictabilities. As a result he becomes hard and rigid like stone. The "towering walls" (9) that surround Clyde also become significant on a symbolic level in that they forshadow the insurmountable walls that Clyde encounters when he tries to break through the social barriers of his society. In both cases the environment is striking because this lack of nature symbolically reflects the lack of natural development in the characters. This lack of nature also establishes a link to the transcendentalist explanation of alienation. The

transcendentalists stress the importance of a frequent return to nature in order to re-establish an inner sense of wholeness.

Another determining factor in the lives of the two protagonists is the 'spiritual' and religious education that the parental authorities offer their children, and which for both Clyde and Joe takes the form of a dangerous indoctrination. In both novels the authors' point seems to be twofold. They establish a causal relationship between the influence of religious indoctrination and the protagonists' negative behavioural patterns, thus pointing out the effect of determining influences. At the same time both narratives effectively demonstrate that religious indoctrination leads to spiritual emptiness on the part of the protagonists.

In their criticism of religious fanaticism and doctrines Dreiser's and Faulkner's writings reveal many parallels, although Dreiser's religious criticism generally refers to the American institutionalized churches and especially the Catholic church, while Faulkner's criticism mainly refers to the protestant-calvinistic tradition. "The Calvinism of Faulkner is a religious and cultural residue filtering down through the Presbyterianism of the 19th and 20th centuries of the American secular South, in which form it is the doctrine, or set of doctrines, which he attacks in Light in August" writes Alwyn Berland ("Light in

August: The Calvinism of William Faulkner". p. 159). Although Faulkner critically exposes and rejects the more rigid and fanatical forms of Calvinism, he is subconsciously not totally free from the Calvinistic influences that dominate the Southern culture (ibid).[4] Faulkner also repeatedly and publicly stressed the importance of a religious perspective: "I think that no writing can be too successful without some conception of God, you can call him by whatever name you want" (Faulkner in the University. 1965. p.161).[5]

Dreiser himself had suffered in his youth from a rigid and orthodox Catholicism that his German father had tried to impose on him. Partly as a consequence of his

4. Cleanth Brooks follows the same line of interpretation: "On the conscious level, Faulkner is obviously a Protestant anticleric, fascinated, but also infuriated by some of the more repressive features of the religion that dominates the country." (The Hidden God. 1963. p.36). Also, Harold J. Douglas and Robert Daniel compare Faulkner's submerged Calvinism to Nathaniel Hawthorne's religious perspective: "Both [Hawthorne and Faulkner] must be considered Calvinistic novelists, but with the same important qualifications: that both hate the excesses of Calvinism. Hawthorne, while rejecting the gloominess of New England life and the cruelty that marred its early history, participated in the seriousness with which the Puritans regarded the fact of human depravity; and similarly, to say that Faulkner is Calvinistic is not to deny O'Connor's thesis that much of his work consists of savage satire upon the monsters sired by Protestantism." ("Faulkner's Southern Puritanism". 1957. reprinted in Religious Perspectives in Faulkner. 1972. p.45)

5. Faulkner even went as far as negatively criticizing the writing of the French atheist existentialists such as Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus because of the godlessness of their writing. He also criticized the same materialism in Ernest Hemingway's writing, excluding only The Old Man and the Sea. (in Joseph Blotner. Faulkner: A Biography. p. 563)

father's religious fanaticism he violently rejected any religious notion in his early adulthood and turned totally towards materialistic explanations of life.[6] Yet, like his characters Clyde Griffiths, Carrie Meeber, Jennie Gerhardt and Cowperwood, Dreiser could never reach the ultimate satisfaction through the material and, therefore, remained a spiritual seeker all his life. He turned from one philosophy to the next, from science to occult and supernatural writings and finally to a religious mysticism. Yet all his life Dreiser was consistent in his radical criticism of religious fanaticism and rigid, repressive doctrines. In A History of Myself: Dawn Dreiser talks about "[t]he inanity of teaching at this day and date, and as illustrated by the Holy Roman Catechism, the quite lunatic theories and pretensions of that entirely discredited organism" (30). In Jennie Gerhardt he creates in Jennie's father the prototype of the old Catholic bigot, who in his inflexibility and rigid stubborness contributes to the unhappiness of his familiy.

Dreiser ultimately seemed to find his religious ideal in a transcendental vision of the Universe. He

6. Louis Zanine points out that Dreiser was strongly influenced by Herbert Spencer's First Principles, in which Spencer advocates a philosophy of agnosticism. According to Spencer both religion and science contain the mutual conviction that there is an 'unknowable' force operating in the cosmos. "The power which the Universe manifests to us is incrutable" (qtd. in Zanine. From Mechanism to Mysticism: Theodore Dreiser and the Religion of Science. 1981. p.26)

adopted Emerson's notion of the 'Oversoul' as his vision of the ultimate Creator and he even managed to reconcile his transcendentalism with American Quakerism. In comparison Faulkner describes his vision of God in Bergsonian terms: "I'm not talking about a personified or mechanical God, but a God who is the most complete expression of mankind, a God who rests both in eternity and in the now ... a deity very close to Bergson's" (qtd. in Faulkner a Biography. p. 563). Both authors affirm the importance of a religion without the restraints of the institutions that characterize the offical American churches. In this rejection of institutions Dreiser's and Faulkner's works can be linked to a tradition of theism that goes back to American "Enlightenment" figures such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, a tradition of ideas that has its roots in French philosophers such as Voltaire. Both Faulkner and Dreiser develop in their works very similar critical approaches to the excesses of religious zeal ---a critical tradition that had given Voltaire an almost notorious reputation in 18th century France.[7]

In Joe's life the religious indoctrination takes on much more grotesque and extreme proportions than for Clyde.

7. It should also be noted that Voltaire and his religious criticism are at the bottom of the French Period of Enlightenment, a philosophical era dominated by the optimistic belief in scientific and rationalistic progress as it is mirrored in the collective masterpiece of French enlightenment, the Encyclopédie. It is precisely this rationalistic spirit of enlightenment that ultimately led to the naturalistic tradition.

The first religious zealot that enters Joe's life is his mad grandfather Doc Hines, an "incredibly dirty and incredibly old man" (361). Doc Hines, who never reveals his identity to his grandson, is fanatical to the point of entering peaceful Negro churches and preaching the superiority of white people from the pulpit, although it is the Negroes who provide him and his wife with food. Hines not only 'hollers out of the Bible' but also has conversations with the Lord. Calvinism presupposes that "God ordains whatever is to come to pass" (Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion), and Hines' perverted notions of Calvinism lead him to consider himself as nothing but the instrument of God's will: "The Lord of wrathful hosts, His will be done. Not yours [Joe's] and not mine, because you and me are both a part of His purpose and His vengeance" (362).

The importance given to predestination has led Puritan Protestantism to a tradition of submitting oneself to careful self-scrutiny in order to find out whether one belongs to God's chosen few or to those who are eternally damned. This tradition of watching is given a very positive turn in Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography. By submitting himself to a daily rigorous self scrutiny Franklin gains a higher sense of self awareness and self control, which fills him with a sense of personal freedom. In Light in August, however, this religiously motivated tradition of scrutinizing is given a clear negative turn. It is Doc

Hines who watches Joe Christmas in order to find proof for his already established conviction that Joe is damned. Born as the illegitimate child of his daughter Milly, Joe represents to Hines nothing but a product of female "bitchery and abomination". Joe is "the devil's walking seed" (362) and God's abomination that is "polluting the earth" (364). And, in Hines' view, God has created Joe with "nigger blood" to give him the ultimate expression of his damnation. The little children who start calling Joe "nigger" only confirm mad Doc Hines in his conviction.

At no point, however, does Faulkner establish that Christmas is or is not part nigger. The fact that the racial ambiguity is maintained up to the end of the novel is important for the thematic core of the novel.[8] The fact that Joe Christmas looks white but is dominated by the question of his racial identity allows Faulkner to point out that Joe's subjectivity is created through Hines' hateful gaze:

> If the child had been older he would perhaps have thought **He [Doc Hines] hates and fears me. So much so that he cannot let me out of sight** With more vocabulary but no more age he might have thought **That is why I am different from the others: because he is watching me all the time** He accepted it. (129)

Hines' fanatical gaze is like a mirror for Joe, a mirror in which he sees himself for the very first time. Joe is not aware of the fact that this mirror is not only not objective

but that it filters Joe's personality through a dangerous mixture of Calvinistic fanaticism and racial prejudice. Unaware of this distortion Joe is inevitably led to believe that his selfhood is the absolute negative identity. Although Joe does not have any indication about who his father or mother are, Joe recognizes in Hines' gaze that he is nothing but the 'nigger', the damned person, whose face has been marked by God (362).

Possibly as a result of his being objectified in the image of the nigger, Joe even starts acting like a person who is different from others.[9] He stops playing with the other children and becomes an outsider in the white orphanage. Joe's self-image has become chained to a dangerous mixture of Calvinistic fanaticism and racial prejudice, from which he will never be able to free himself, and one negro tells him prophetically: "You will never know who you are" (363).

After he has secretly placed Joe at the doorsteps of an orphanage Hines says to his wife: "He is dead to you

8. In Malcolm Cowley's (ed) The Portable Faulkner this racial ambiguity is, however, removed. Joe Christmas is introduced as a 'mulatto', which clearly indicates that he has negro blood. However, in The Portable Faulkner this change may be justified by the fact that the excerpt focuses on Percy Grimm, less on Joe Christmas and is furthermore supposed to be an 'independant' short story.

9. see Jean Paul Sartre's play La P... Respectueuse (1952). In this play white Southerners impose the image of the black rapist and murderer on an innocent Southern negro, and in the end of the play the black accepts this identity. He becomes incapable of saving his own life and agrees to be sacrificed as a black rapist and murderer.

and to me and to God and to God's world forever and ever more" (361). Symbolically, Hines has destroyed Joe's life by destroying his potentialities as a free individual. In John Conder's terms Joe has been cut off from any connection with his free self; he has been reduced to the level of the determined self (Naturalism in American Fiction. 1984). Joe is symbolically reborn when he is baptised in the orphanage and given the initials J.C., which evoke the Christian myth. This myth, however, is turned upside down in Light in August, is parodied in the novel because Joe Christmas cannot function as a redeemer figure.[10] Under Hines' gaze he has become the incarnation of the damned, black person who is predestined to evil.

In An American Tragedy it is not the grandfather but the father who has a determining influence on his son. As a result of his heredity Clyde has a predetermined weakness. He does not take after his strong and courageous mother but after his weak and ineffectual father, as Mrs Griffiths notices: "Clyde always struck her as one who was not any too powerful physically or rock-ribbed morally or mentally. So far as his nerves and emotions were concerned, at times he seemed to take after his father more than he did after her." (121) Like Joe Christmas Clyde is also easily led astray by

10. Faulkner has a fascination for the Christian myth and incorporates it in several novels. In The Sound and the Fury, he also associates Benjy Compson with Christ. Benjy, however, is an adult idiot and can hardly serve as a redeemer figure either.

a distorted religious education. Clyde is born into a family of ignorant and bigoted street preachers. The narrator introduces Clyde's father Asa as "the product of an environment and a religious theory, but with no guiding or mental insight of his own" (13). Clyde's mother Elvira is "inoculated with the virus of Evangelism and proselyting" (16). This choice of words carries a very naturalistic connotation. Religion is placed into a materialistic framework, into a chain of cause and effect, whereby the cause--the religious 'virus'--results in an effect which the narrative only implies--the disease of the mind. It is not astonishing that the parents are portrayed as fundamentally inadequate in the education of their children. Unable to relate themselves to the desires and needs of their youngsters, they are only keen on imposing their "self-abnegating, self-immolating theory" (20) on their children. "God's love in its human form of warmth, kindness, and understanding, is present as an abstraction in the Griffiths's sermons and as a superficial moralism in their mission activities but is absent from their family life", writes Donald Pizer (The Novels of Theodore Dreiser. 1976. p.236). In the best tradition of indoctrination the Griffiths parents reduce their religious theory to a fixed set of formulas ---a list of psalms which decorate the walls of the mission and which serve as a primitive system of explanation and an equally primitive and inadequate system

of guidelines for dealing with the complex problems of everyday life.

The narrative, however, repeatedly points out the ironic reversals of these religious mottoes in Asa's and Elvira's lives. While Elvira keeps repeating almost hypnotically formulas such as "God will provide" (10) and "God will show the way", the family not only has to live in abject misery, but encounters one blow after the other. Any religious doubt that may arise is immediately suppressed in the good fashion of the religious zealot. The narrator also points out ironically that Asa "insisted, as do all religionists, in disassociating God from harm and error and misery, while granting Him nevertheless supreme control" (23). These ironic contrasts unmask the Griffiths' religion as a hollow theory, which ultimately is shown to serve a function Karl Marx described as "Opium des Volkes".

Clyde recognizes instinctively the contrast between his parents' religious theory and the family's everyday misery. What is worse, he deeply resents his being forced to take part in the public preaching activities of his family, which exposes all their shabbiness to the outside world. Like Joe, Clyde is exposed to a negatively judging gaze. The boy, however, recognizes in the gaze of the street audience that he and his parents are shabby and less than normal. The omniscient narrator provides the reader with a summarized character profile. "Plainly pagan, rather

than religious, life interested him, although as yet he was not fully aware of this" (9). Clyde's love of "beauty and pleasure" and his interest in the material world seem to put Clyde in an extreme contrast to his parents, who are only concerned with the love of God. As an adolescent, Clyde become very quickly aware of what the narrator conveys to the reader even in the first few pages of the novel, namely that his parents' religion is nothing but a "cloudy romance" (9), which cannot have any real importance for his own life: "Mission work was nothing. All this religious emotion and talk was not so much either." (26) Clyde consciously rejects the religious theory in order to turn to the pleasures of the world.

Yet, despite these obvious contrasts between Clyde and his parents the narrative establishes that the parallels are numerous. Clyde and his father are characterized by the same sense of emotional sensitivity. The narrative also points out that Clyde rejects his parents' cloudy romance, only to adopt a worldly romance instead, which presents itself to Clyde in form of the American Dream of success.

According to Frederic Carpenter (American Literature and the Dream. 1955.) the American dream has been 'one of the motivating forces of American civilisation'. From the times of the Pilgrim Fathers on the American dream has developed into a modern American myth, which has not only been retold numerous times and transmitted to

subsequent generations but has also evolved in the process and has taken many different forms. Carpenter traces the myth of the American dream first to the dream of a 'new Haven and new Earth', then to the dream of a perfect democracy, followed by the transcendental dream of Emerson and Thoreau.

Yet, with the industrialization and capital intensive nature of the country following the Civil War, the originally spiritual quality of the dream was given a material twist. In this period of the Gilded Age, the dream became the American dream of success, at the bottom of which is the idea that every (virtuous) individual who possesses the will and the capacity can easily cross social barriers and rise 'from rags to riches'. The myth in its material version became quickly part of the American mind and became popularized in the 'Bound to Rise' stories by Horatio Alger. "It is clear, then, that Alger's books did embody the essence of the American dream in its purest form", writes John Tebbel (From Rags to Riches: Horatio Alger Jr and the American Dream. 1963. 14). It is also significant that as a journalist Dreiser was writing for a magazine entitled Success that published mostly stories in the Horatio Alger style, emphasizing the indicators of success, such as money and clothing.

In An American Tragedy this American dream of succes becomes a dangerous religion that takes the place of

the religious theory which provides Clyde's parents with a very precarious sense of security.[11] Clyde, however, believes that he creates a new life for himself. The narrative thus creates an effect of dramatic irony, with the reader realizing that Clyde's dream is as cloudy as that of his parents. Dreiser underlines this connection by placing Clyde's enthusiasm about material success and luxury in the framework of a religious vocabulary. The sight of the primitive luxury of the guests at a soda fountain arouses feelings of ecstasy in Clyde, which leads the narrator to the following comment: "This simple yet idyllic compound of the commonplace had all the luster and wonder of a spiritual transfiguration" (29). The gauche luxury of the Green Davidson Hotel seems to Clyde like "a marvelous realm" (20), "the realization of paradise" (39) and the first tip is a "sacred vision". Even the brothel becomes "an erotic temple" (71).

There are still other, perhaps more important parallels between Clyde's material dream and his father's religious dream. Asa comes across as a fundamentally weak character who takes refuge in the thought

11. Yet, in The Titan and The Financier ---the first two parts of the Trilogy of Desire--- Dreiser describes the steady rise of Cowperwood from a simple financier to an international magnate who accumulates money and power. Dreiser connects Cowperwood explicitly to the Horatio Alger myth by giving him the first name 'Algernon'. The rise from rags to riches is possible, yet according to Dreiser it takes an "Ubermensch" personality à la Cowperwood to succeed.

that there is a higher being ---a father--- who will take care of the needs and problems of his children on earth. This notion of a patriarchical protection by an omnipotent God who will provide is at the bottom of Asa's deep, religious conviction. And although his God fails him, he is incapable of admitting this truth to himself.

It is interesting that Clyde, although he deeply rejects his father, takes refuge in the same notion of a patriarchal protector. He never thinks in terms of realizing his dream by relying on his own forces, but he thinks in terms of being lifted up. Even in his early adolescence these thoughts of social success are connected to his rich uncle in Lycurgus. Later on he hopes to be lifted up by the rich girl, Sondra, who becomes the "goddess in her shrine" for Clyde, the matriarch who offers to share her realm. In the third book it is his lawyers who become the hoped for patriarchal protectors, and finally it is McMillan, the spiritual father on whom he relies completely, with a dangerous self-denying trust. Yet his father's life illustrates that trust in the great protector fails. Nevertheless, without being aware of imitating his father Clyde embraces the faith in the great protector with the fervor of a religious conviction. It is only the object of his adoration that distinguishes the son from the father.

Not only Clyde but also Joe takes over a secularized

religious pattern from his surrogate fathers, Doc Hines and Simon McEachern. Joe is not only influenced by his mad grandfather's Calvinism, but also by the rigid, authoritarian Calvinism of his stepfather McEachern, who adopts Joe as a five-year-old. Erich Fromm makes an interesting distinction between humanitarian and authoritarian religions. Humanitarian religion, such as the New Testament religion, encourages human love and the reasoning power and tends to make the individual strong and independent. Authoritarian beliefs, such as the Old Testament religion and Calvinism, claim that the ultimate virtue is obedience and the cardinal sin is disobedience. They also claim that God is omnipotent and omniscient and, as a logical consequence, the human being is considered unimportant, powerless, and impotent.[12] McEachern is presented as the incarnation of religious authoritarianism. With the tool of the whip he tries to teach Joe that "[t]he two abominations are sloth and idle thinking, the two virtues are work and the fear of God" (138). McEachern's God is a God of a mathematical justice, not of mercy, love or forgiveness.

McEachern is described in mechanical terms. He is "firm as a carved stone" (141), he looks at Christmas as if he would look at a horse or a second hand plow, convinced that he would see flaws" (133), an attitude that stresses

12. see Erich Fromm's Religion and Psychoanalysis. 1966.

the Calvinist belief in human depravity. McEachern's actions are "deliberate, without haste" (139) and he is always carrying a silver watch, which evokes not only an image of his mechanical time concept but of his mechanical, mathematical thinking and acting. McEachern's voice was not human, personal at all: "It was just cold, implacable, like written or printed words" (139), a description that evokes the Scripture, which alone in Calvinism is recognized as authority for belief. The description thus links McEachern's inhumanity to his religious convictions.

Like Clyde, Joe not only rejects his father's religions convictions, but he rejects any notion of God in his life. This refusal may be due to the fact that in Joe's view it must be God who has given him his black identity. At a later stage, the narrator even speaks of 'Joe's religious hatred'. The inability to believe in God is accompanied by the inability to trust and to love. Unlike Lena, who gains strength from her simple trust in God, Joe lacks strength and security. Whereas Lena is capable of constructive acts, Joe is mostly destructive. Fundamentally detached from any spiritual being, both Clyde and Joe exude a sense of spiritual emptiness.

McEachern literally tries to beat his religion into his rebelling stepson. As an eight-year-old Joe simply refuses one Sunday to learn his Catechism. Like An American Tragedy, Light in August dramatizes that this conscious

rejection of religion is, however, accompanied by a subconscious internalisation of a distorted religious residue; in Joe's case the Calvinistic authoritarianism as it is represented by McEachern. Joe is beaten by McEachern to the point of losing consciousness. Nevertheless, this punishment takes the form of a highly ordered ritual that both father and son approve of. McEachern "strikes methodically, with slow and deliberate force without heat or anger" (140) and he strikes exactly ten times before he asks Joe again to learn his catechism, thus symbolically re-enacting the Old Testament Ten Commandments. The punishment is characterized by a cluster of associations: maleness, the conscious rejection of any emotions, and a mechanical rigidity. McEachern uses a whip with the "odor of clean hard virile living leather" (139). Father and son are by themselves, the mother as the unpredictable female part is deliberately excluded from the male ritual. Joe stands erect and his face is rigid "with pride and despair", which the narrator attributes to the "stupid vanity of man" (141). "In their rigid abnegation of all compromise they were more alike than actual blood could have made them" (139). Like Dreiser, Faulkner uses a religious vocabulary to demonstrate ironically that it is only the object of religion that the son succeeds in rejecting while adopting the whole Calvinistic authoritarian pattern. While being punished Joe has an "attitude of exaltation", he has "a calm expression

like a monk in a picture" and he "might have been a Catholic choir boy carrying the empty tray as though it were a monstrance" (145).

Faulkner demonstrates the same ironic reversal of intention and effect when he describes Joe just after he has attacked and possibly killed his stepfather. Joe is exalting and is compared to the rebelling Faustus. He feels that he is free at last of the Thou Shalt Nots of his fatherly authority. But at the same time the narrative points to the fact that the son develops the same behaviour patterns that characterize his father: "He ran to the horse with something of his adopted father's complete faith in the infallibility in events" (193) and "The same urgency which carried her husband [McEachern] away had returned like a cloak on the shoulders of the boy" (195) and "with the exaltation of his adopted father he [Joe] sprang into the stranger's fist" (204/5). The fact that McEachern is 'his adopted father' underlines that Joe has subconsciously adopted his father's behaviour pattern.

McEachern provides Joe with a model of how to deal with women, which is all the more important for Joe as he is filled with a strong fear of women due to his childhood trauma. Mrs McEachern is a patient creature, timid, impotent and with a hunched beaten face, "as if she were the medium and the vigorous, ruthless husband the control" (138). In extreme contrast to her husband, she treats

Christmas with love and warmth and tries to be a real mother for him. But when she washes his cold feet in warm water to warm him up, he does not even "know what she was trying to do" (156). She also evokes a sense of secrecy, hiding a little money away from her husband, which she secretly offers to Joe so he should be able to enjoy secretly certain pleasures that his father forbids. But she does not realize that it is precisely this secrecy and her emotional warmth that Joe dreads. "'She is trying to make me cry,' he thought, lying cold and rigid in his bed" (158). Feeling in himself the potential for emotions, he immediately dreads being engulfed by these emotions and therefore rejects them. It was "[t]hat soft kindness which he believed himself to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men" (158). Joe's relationship with McEachern is completely regulated by McEachern's absolute doctrine of subjugation and subordination, which reduces Joe's life to two alternatives; to obedience or punishment. This principle of subordination is applied with the instrument of the whip, that is violence. Human relationships are thus reduced to a binary and highly predictable level, which, however, fills Joe with a feeling of security. He subconsciously internalises his father's principle of subordination to deal with his own life.

Joe deals with Mrs McEachern as McEachern does, by establishing a sense of male superiority and by completely

ignoring her and her tentative efforts to establish a loving, trusting communion behind McEachern's back. He rejects her presents but at the same time he steals her money. The food she prepares in secret and takes to his bed, he violently throws on the floor in front of her although he has not eaten all day and is hungry. Furthermore, Joe and McEachern reveal their spiritual kinship when during the ritual of punishment both ignore the necessity to eat. None of them has eaten for hours. Symbolically, the inner bodily urge is thus subjected and controlled by the male in a rigid ritual. It is the woman who ignores the ritual and tries to break through to Joe simply by appealing to this human need for food, which she secretly offers him during McEachern's absence. By rejecting this food violently Joe is applying McEachern's principles: he imposes his superiority over the female and suppresses his inner urge for food. However, an hour later, he gets up and "above the outraged food kneeling, with his hands ate, like a savage, like a dog" (146). His inner urge breaks through the wall of rigidity and is all the more violent, reducing him to the level of an animal.

Faulkner contrasts this rejection of food with Lena Grove's willing acceptance of food and help from other people. Mrs Armstid gives Lena her painfully saved up chicken money, and Lena buys some sardines and offers them in turn. Then "[s]he begins to eat. She eats slowly,

steadily, sucking the rich sardine oil from her fingers with slow and complete relish" (26) As she is able to accept food she is able to accept and give love and trust. Eating in Faulkner's work evokes the sacramental meaning of the last supper where the breaking and sharing of bread becomes the symbolic incarnation of spiritual and bodily communion. It is precisly this spirit of communion that Lena creates wherever she goes and that Joe fundamentally lacks. Joe even suffers from this lack of communion without knowing it. Joe is the anti-Christ, the perversion of the Christian myth.

As Joe suppresses his oral urges he also tries to suppress his sexuality. It is significant that not only Hines, but also McEachern links the concept of sexuality to sin and depravity, both of which they associate with the female and disassociate from the male. Both men use the same Old Testament vocabulary with reference to sexuality. Hines' repeated use of 'bitchery and abomination' creates a cluster of sexuality, animality, and the female, a cluster that provokes male, religious outrage. Both men link sexuality to 'lechery' and 'fornication' and see women as the 'Jezebel', the biblical harlot (191, 364). A similar cluster of associations affects the protagonist of An American Tragedy. Clyde's mother links sexuality to 'evil women'(69), to the 'temptress', which carries the connotation of a temptation by the devil that has to be

resisted if the individual does not want to go astray. Also, drinking is considered as evil because it reduces the individual's strength of resistance and makes the young male an easy prey for the evil woman. Clyde cannot help being influenced by his mother's moral laws, especially since he admires her for her moral strength. As a result of his mother's lecturing (63), Clyde associates sexuality with evil, lowness, and vice (63,69,54). Also, Dreiser puts the descriptions of sexuality in a framework of black and red (65, 66, 81, 125). Red as the colour of sexual passion is associated to the black, which evokes a sense of evil. Both Joe's and Clyde's sexual development is influenced by the repressions imposed by their superego figures.

Nevertheless, in both novels sexuality is portrayed as a strong instinctual urge that cannot be constantly repressed and that drives the individual to an active, if often subconscious, seeking for sexual satisfaction. Charles Glicksberg points out that for Dreiser sexuality is an extremely positive and creative force.[13] Faulkner poetically evokes a Freudian chaotic 'Id' when he talks about "the vague and formless magic of young desire" (166) Both authors have acquired notoriety for their open treatment of sexuality. Yet, while Dreiser's sexual scenes generally exude a sense of sensual pleasure and excitement, Faulkner's description of sexuality is loaded with elements of sexual deviance and perversion, which often have the

effect of reducing sexuality to a compulsive act.[14]

Both authors place sexuality in a naturalistic framework. "Faulkner is aware of the profoundly irrational character of much of human behavior and of the extent to which the biological will rather than abstract reason or ethical principles are in control" (Charles Glicksberg. The Sexual Revolution in Modern American Fiction. p. 99). The 18-year old Joe goes to a restaurant to meet the waitress-prostitute "without plan or design, almost without volition, as if his feet ordered his action and not his head" (166). The search for the object of sexual satisfaction comes clearly from within; it is instinctual and subconscious. Dreiser also sees sexuality as "an unregenerate and only partially controlled passion" (ibid. p. 35).

In An American Tragedy Dreiser repeatedly describes sexuality in terms of 'chemisms' or 'a compelling magnetism' (21).[15] Rita Dickerman, one of Clyde's friends, has "something heavy and languorous about her body, a kind of

13. Dreiser holds that the enjoyment of sexuality is "the primal source of beauty, the mother of the arts, the vital incentive to make progress" (35). Dreiser explicitly contradicts Sigmund Freud, according to whom the arts are the result of repressed and sublimated sexuality.

14. David Minter argues that Faulkner himself was dominated by feelings of sexual fear and guilt: "As a playful as well as ardent lover, Faulkner found both guilt and purity magical. There was in him a deep reticence, which derived from associating sex with the forbidden, and though this reticence made sex difficult, it also made sex exciting" (William Faulkner: His Life and his Work 1980. p. 162). Minter also discusses Faulkner's desire for a premenstrual 'girl-child', who reduced his "fear of being engulfed" (163).

ray or electron that intrigued and lured him in spite of himself" (205). These chemical and mechanical images clearly reduce sexuality to a material basis. The description of Hortense Briggs, who intrigues Clyde sensually and keeps him in a vulnerable dependency is crowded with animal images, which underline the biological determinism that the novel emphasizes. She has "the brain of a moth" (77), is compared to a cat (101,105) and to "a spider that spins a web for flies" (108). In Light in August the animal imagery is indirectly linked to sexuality. It is with a "shadowlike agility of a cat" (159) that Joe swings down his rope at night to go and meet Bobby. Also, the men watch the waitress Bobbie with "predatory eyes" (162) and the narrator describes her as "an animal impeded by that which distinguished her from animals: her heels, her clothes, her smallness" (178).

Both Clyde and Joe are subconsciously drawn to their sexual initiation, yet in both cases the sexual development is warped due to negative factors from their environment. Clyde is largely influenced by his experiences in the Green Davidson Hotel, in which sexuality is equated with sexual exploitation of the poor and the complete objectifying of the sexual partners. In the Green Davidson Hotel rich male homosexuals and elderly rich women lust for the bodies of

15. Dreiser's sexual chemistry probably goes back to his reading of Sigmund Freud in the translation of Dr Abraham Brill. Freud uses the expression "der Chemismus" in his The Theory of Sex.

the young bell hops (69). Clyde learns that betrayal and desertion of young women after a sexual encounter is not uncommon in the world of the hotel (58). Also Clyde's sister Esta runs away from home with an actor, "one of those vain, handsome, animal personalities" (21). Her naive hope to find love and be happily married is shattered when she becomes pregnant and finds herself deserted by her lover without any money or help. Dreiser links exploitative sexuality to the exploitative structure of contemporary American society. The sexual world of An American Tragedy is a world of "libertinism and vice" (54) [16], a world in which sex is disassociated from love, emotion, affection, and responsibility. It is a world in which sex becomes a simple commodity which is assigned a cash value. As the capitalist world is a world of exploitation of the poor by the rich, these exploitative structures are translated into the sexual realm.

Clyde's sexual initiation is associated with two main factors that will accompany his later sexual life; the notion of sexuality as a purchasable commodity and a deep-rooted sense of guilt as a result of sexual enjoyment. His sexual initiation takes place in the 'erotic temple' of the prostitutes to which his hotel friends introduce Clyde.

16. Libertinism is clearly used as a negative term in this context and carries the connotation of irresponsible sexuality rather than the positive connotation that Marquis de Sade and Rétif de la Bretonne associate with it. For Sade as well as Bretonne libertinism is the expression of the free and independent individual.

Underneath Clyde's excitement and nervousness at the sight of the naked flesh Dreiser underlines the financial thoughts that cross the mind of both 'seller' and 'buyer': "the money she [the prostitute] had seen him take out his pocket--plainly quite a sum" (69). Clyde reproaches himself for "buying drinks for such a woman at such a price" (67) and he is afraid that "she might charge him more than he could afford" (70). The narrative underlines that this first sexual experience determines his attitude towards women. He wants to find "a free pagan girl to spend his money on" (70), a "girl for himself" (84), a girl to "possess" (78). The female has thus been transformed in Clyde's mind into a sex object, a commodity for which he has to pay if he wants to enjoy it. In the relationship with Hortense Briggs Clyde meets the female counterpart of his notions of sexuality. Like Clyde Hortense belongs to a lower class and knows that she has to "capitalize her looks" (102) in order to move up the social ladder. Far from being captivated by Clyde she realizes that she can use him and make profit of his infatuation by making him buy presents for her, yet without ever fulfilling her part of the 'contract', that is the sexual gratification of Clyde. Dreiser seems to apply almost literally the capitalist market laws according to which the demand for a product necessarily regulates its price. With Clyde's sexual desires becoming more and more urgent he becomes willing to

pay the price of an expensive fur coat for Hortense ---a price that consumes the pay of several months' work--- in order to get the ultimate sexual reward he craves. The narrative also underlines the social darwinism that seems to dominate so many sexual relationships in An American Tragedy. Underneath a superficial cameraderie the relationships between females are dominated by rivalry in their 'struggle for men'. Hortense shows an initial interest in Clyde simply because she wants "to triumph over [her girlfriends]" (76, 86), who develop a clear interest in Clyde. She becomes clearly bored with him once her victory is established through her "mastery over Clyde" (135). Thus structures of society are reflected in personal relationships.

Yet, Clyde's sexual notions are warped not only by the fact that sex becomes a commodity for him. Due to his education Clyde cannot enjoy sexuality without a sense of conscious and subconscious guilt. Because of his "moral precepts" and his "nervous esthetic inhibitions" he can only look back on his sexual initiation with the prostitute as something "decidedly degrading and sinful", something "low and shameful" (70). This feeling of guilt ---at least partly caused by the strong motherly superego--- is probably at the bottom of the sado-masochistic elements that characterize his relationship with Hortense. "And she liked to think that he was suffering from repressed desire for her

all of the time that she tortured him, and that the power to allay his suffering lay wholly in her---a sadistic trait which had for its soil Clyde's own masochistic yearning for her." (107) Clyde is repeatedly described as feeling "weak and sick" (85, 133) and in Hortense's presence, he is also afraid of her "disturbing vitality which he might not be able to match". This feeling of weakness, his fear of impotence, and his willingness to submit are linked to the fact that he is a fundamentally neurotic personality, pulled by the demands of his desires to one side and by his mother's moral precepts to the other. Clyde is unable to openly and consciously live through this conflict. He gives in to his sexuality but with an obvious feeling of guilt which creates a subconscious wish for punishment, a masochistic attitude. Clyde refuses to give some money to his pregnant sister who is in desperate need of financial support. He is so dominated by his sexual desire that he keeps his money in order to be able to 'pay' Hortense for her favours. Yet, he cannot help thinking: "It was shameful. He was low, really mean. Might he not, later, be punished for a thing like this?" (120) This sense of deserving punishment for the gratification of his sexual needs might explain why Clyde falls in love with a woman like Hortense, whom he recognizes as being "coarse and vulgar" (72) and cold, yet whom he cannot resist. He craves sexual satisfaction, yet at the same time he makes himself

pay for it. Sexuality thus becomes a question of 'mastering' and 'yielding', with Hortense dominating not only over her female rivals but also over Clyde.

Not only Clyde's but also Joe's sexual development leads to a dangerous notion of superiority and subordination and a sado-masochistic trait in his sexual relationships. Like Clyde Joe has a strong inner urge for sexual satisfaction, yet at the same time he is dominated by a strong fear of sexuality and of women, a fear which inhibits his natural sexual development and even cripples his personality. In his flashback technique Faulkner retraces the different stages of Joe's sexual initiation, each of which is accompanied by a deep shock on the part of Joe. As an adolescent Joe is revolted by the idea of menstruation, the idea that "volition dwelled doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victim of periodical filth" (173) [17]. The extremity of this fear of menstruation evokes James G. Frazer's description of the "deeply engrained dread which the primitive man universally entertains of menstruous blood" (The Golden Bough. p. 603), which is thought of as "a most horrid and dangerous pollution" (605). As Frazer's primitive man copes with his fear of the 'deadly contagion' by an inhuman secluding of girls at puberty from the community, Joe uses a ritual to deal with his dread of menstrual blood: he kills a sheep and washes his hands in the warm blood thus purifying himself

from 'female periodical filth'. His ritual evokes the Old Testament Israelites' killing of lambs and smearing the blood on the doorposts in order to be saved from the Lord's destruction (Exodus 12). As the Lord said to the Isrealites "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12), Joe assumes that his ritual will disassociate him from the dangerous reality of menstruation. This obvious religious act again reaffirms his kinship to McEachern.

Joe thinks "I have bought immunity", and menstruation may exist for others but "not in my life and my love" (174). Yet, this rejection of menstruation is a clear rejection of the natural world itself. Joe uses the same wording as Hightower, another character in Light in August who rejects sexuality, thus driving his wife into the arms of lovers, to public shame and finally to suicide. By choosing to be a public outcast in Jefferson all his life Hightower thinks that he has "bought immunity" (176/7). Yet, the sterility of Hightower's life evokes T.S. Eliot's 'death in life' atmosphere.

Joe develops a dangerous ritual that helps him to deal with his fear of sexuality. This ritual is the subconscious re-enactment of McEachern's law of subordination with the instrument of violence. The first time Joe reacts with an almost reflex-like violence is at

17. The extremity of this negative judgement on female sexuality is echoed in the cynical statements of Mr Compson in The Sound and the Fury.

the age of 15. Under the peer pressure of four of his friends Joe finds himself forced to enter a shack where he finds a negro girl, for the boys nothing else but the object of their copulation. In the shed Joe feels immediately surrounded by a sense of sin (146), the darkness, his toothpaste episode, elements that grow together in a cluster of the 'womanshenegro', who encloses him. Joe is shocked, afraid and only thinking of 'trying to get out' and his reaction is immediate: "He was moving because his foot touched her" (147). This seemingly illogical causal relation expressed in this sentence reflects that Joe's subconscious dominates over his consciousness in this action. He only becomes aware of his violent act after his body has carried it out. It is also significant that his foot ---the agent of his violent action--- becomes detached from him, becomes a part that acts independently, seemingly following a will of its own. Faulkner thus effectively demonstrates the lack of wholeness in Joe, the split between body and will, between conscious and subconscious.[18]

As a young adult, Joe cannot help but react with violence at learning of Bobbie's menstruation. The shock, the outrage and revulsion make his arm jerk up in a reflex.

18. The whole scene is saturated with violence. The other four boys come to help the negro girl and fight with Joe, a fight that Faulkner links to a 'normal' instinctual pattern: "On the part of the other four it had been purely automatic and reflex: that spontaneous compulsion of the male to fight with or because of or over the partner with which he has recently or is about to copulate." (147/8)

Later on he runs to the woods and seems to see the urns in the moonlight each one of them cracked and "from each crack there issued something liquid, deathcolored, and foul" (179); he vomits. Again, sensuality for Joe is turned into nausea. Yet, more importantly, the trees of the woods are used throughout the novel as an image of life.[19] The sap-flowing trees are not only associated with menstruating women, but with the earthmother Lena, whose last name is Grove. K.J. Phillips links the hatred of trees of the male characters in Light in August to their shying away from women and from life. He points out that as a sterile character Hightower loses his sensitivity to trees and only experiences a renewed enjoyment of trees after helping to deliver Lena's baby. Lucas Burch, who deserts Lena when she becomes pregnant hates every tree, and Christmas' vision turns 'the sap of life' into a deathcoloured liquid ("Faulkner in the Garden of Eden". Southern Humanities Review. 1985. p. 11).

Joe's relationship with Bobbie and other prostitutes takes on sado-masochistic traits with Joe as the dominating and the female as the submissive part. At first Joe seems to grow in his relationship with Bobbie. For the very first time and the very last time in the novel Joe is willing to

19. Also in The Sound and the Fury the tree carries the same connotation of life. Caddy Compson, the deeply loving and sensual character is associated with trees. "Caddy smelled like trees" becomes a formula in the interior monologue of her brother Benjy.

give something; after having stolen some money from his stepmother he offers a box of candy to Bobbie. He also loses some of his fear of sexuality: "It was as if with speech he was learning about women's bodies" (184/4). Yet, his shock is all the more violent when he becomes conscious of the fact that Bobbie is a prostitute. "He struck her without warning, feeling her flesh" (186). And from that time on he calls her publicly 'his whore' when he is drunk. Bobbie as the masochistic counterpart of this relationship accepts this domination as a normal fact. Repeatedly she is described as abject and downlooking, and her attitude is as though she expected the blows. Also, the fact that Bobbie is small as a child gives Joe the courage to approach her. Erich Fromm writes: "The sadist needs the person over whom he rules , he needs him very badly, since his own feeling of strength is rooted in the fact that he is master over some one . This dependence may be entirely subconscious." (Escape from Freedom. p. 166/7) This need for mastery explains why Joe not only stays with Bobbie after he learns that she is a prostitute but even thinks of marrying her. The mastering of Bobbie, or any woman, helps Joe to master his own deep-rooted fears of sexuality and the female. He can only cope with it by violently and brutally subjecting it.

Faulkner and Dreiser make the point that childhood deprivation, religious fanaticism and sexual repression warp

the personalities of both Clyde and Joe. As a result both characters lack any sense of selfhood and are incapable of engaging in authentic love-relationships.

III. ALIENATION AND SOCIETY

In both An American Tragedy and Light in August society plays an important role and is part of the thematic core of the novels. The protagonists' downfall is at least partly due to their social alienation. Primarily Dreiser's but also Faulkner's works belong to the tradition of the 'littérature engagée', the literature that intends to increase the reader's awareness of social problems. Especially in their later lives Dreiser and Faulkner became quite vocal about inequalities in American society. In 1927 after his journey to Russia Dreiser wrote that "via Communism, or this collective or paternalistic core of everybody--it is possible to remove the dreadful sense of social misery" (qtd. in Matthiessen. Theodore Dreiser. p. 215). Shortly before his death Dreiser even joined the Communist party, although at no point of his life did he turn into a doctrinaire or ideologist: "his preoccupation remained with revolutionary ideas, not with revolutionary politics" (ibid. p. 218/9). Similarly, Faulkner became quite outspoken about racial inequalities in the South. In an interview he said: "No nation can endure with 17 million second class citizens" (162), and he also insisted that it is "the black ... who acts wiser, nobler, better, who does more with less" (Faulkner in the University. 1965. p.160). Donald Petesch points out that "Faulkner has portrayed the

moral blindness and insensitivity of racial prejudice and stereotypes" ("Faulkner on Negroes: The Conflict between the public man and the Private Art". in Southern Humanities Review. 1976. p. 56).[1]

Faulkner shows how quickly and willingly white Southern society turns blacks into scapegoats. In several works Faulkner dramatizes the lynching of blacks by whites and the dehumanization of blacks who are merely 'niggers', something less than human. Faulkner critically explores how society ---faced with black scapegoats--- melts together into a uniform mass in which the individual becomes devoid of all human decency and responsibility. White society thus becomes a dangerous, unthinking instrument when united and acting for some dubious racist purpose. Similarly, Dreiser has become renowned for his detailed description of groups, and his depiction of the lustre of crowded town landscapes. The first chapter of An American Tragedy introduces the reader to the 'commercial heart' of Kansas City, to a "nondescript and indifferent street audience" whose curiosity is attracted by the Griffiths' preaching and

1. Yet, Donald Petesch also points out the contradictions in Faulkner's attitude toward Negroes. R. W. Howe quotes Faulkner saying: "I'd fight for Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out into the streets and shooting Negroes" (qtd in Petesch. "Faulkner on Negroes". p. 57). In interviews Faulkner also repeatedly warned that "the situation cannot be changed overnight" because that would mean "turmoil, confusion" and would "upset the working economy" in the South. First the negroes "must be taught responsibility" ("Faulkner on Negroes". p. 59/60).

raising their voice against "this vast scepticism and apathy of life" (8). The indifference of this street audience sets the tone for the interaction between Clyde and society throughout the novel.

The identity diffusion of Clyde and Joe is partly due to their occupying very grey areas of social definition and placement. In their failure to integrate into any of the social groups they become the incarnation of the classic marginal man as defined by Everett Stonequist: "one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different, but antagonistic cultures" (qtd. in Peter Rose. Mainstream and Margins. 1983. p. 58). As a potential mulatto Joe faces enormous difficulties when he tries to find his place in a society that has clear cut racial barriers. Similarly, Clyde, who has internalised the American success ideology, dreams of establishing his identity by becoming part of the upper social class. Yet, Clyde's social ambitions place him in an ambiguous no-man's land. He becomes an outsider in a society that has clear socio-economic barriers. In his discussion of Clyde's alienation Paul Orlov recognizes that Clyde' and Joe's identity problems are similar with respect to their ambiguous status in society: "Just as Christmas' ambiguity in racial terms as perceived both by himself and by others leads those he meets to assign him various roles or pseudo-identities rather than to grant him an authentic identity,

so does Clyde's ambiguity in socio-economic status shape all his relations and experience in Lycurgus into a vise that crushes his true self." ("The Subversion of the self: antinaturalistic Crux in An American Tragedy". in Modern Fiction Studies. 1977. p.464)

Faulkner and Dreiser demask the myth of the total transparency of social barriers in America by linking the social alienation of both characters to the strictly hierarchical structure of American society and its clear lines of demarcation. Maxine Seller and Jerone Ozer point out that 19th century American historians believed that "the free American environment, with its republican institutions, changed whoever came here into a totally new person" (To Seek America: A History of Ethnic Life in the United States. 1977. p. 8). This concept of the melting pot ---the belief that every individual would be amalgamated with all their differences into 'the composite American race' (ibid.)--- is exposed as false by both Dreiser and Faulkner. Although the protagonists of An American Tragedy and Light in August have deeply internalised the order of their respective societies they are denied a sense of belonging that both characters ---Clyde consciously, Joe subconsciously--- desperately long for. Faulkner and Dreiser thus fictionally explore what Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan describe as a sociological phenomenon when they write: "the point about the melting pot is that it did not happen" (ibid.). Far from being

amalgamated Clyde and Joe are doomed to exist in the margins between the fixed social categories whose existence the offical political doctrine does not even admit.

Both authors take great pains to fictionally recreate microcosms of the Southern and the Northern society, thus following the tradition of Honoré de Balzac's 'sociological' fiction of his Comédie Humaine. As Balzac subdivided his 'études des moeurs' in 'scènes de la vie privée, de province, parisienne, politique, militaire et de campagne'[2], Faulkner and Dreiser describe the different spheres and social classes of American society by introducing an enormous number of characters, who come to represent a cross section of American society. Faulkner's sociological realm comprises the negroes at the bottom of the social hierarchy ---usually presented in an anonymous collective---, followed by the 'poor white trash' (Hines), the 'underworld' (Max and Mame), the sawmill workers (Byron Bunch), the small independent farmer (McEachern, Armstid). Faulkner also introduces the religious sphere (Hightower), the service sector (orphanage, Mrs Beard), and police/military sphere (Percy Grimm, Sheriff). The district attorney with slave owning ancestors (Gavin Stevens) is at the top of the Southern hierarchy. All of these are shown as representatives of society in direct or indirect interaction with the protagonist.

2. Honoré de Balzac attempted to recreate in his

Similarly, Clyde's social odyssey brings him into contact with the major social sectors and classes, all of which Dreiser explores in detail. Born into a lower class Clyde dreams of connecting himself with the business people at the top of the hierarchy --- the ultraconservative (Samuel Griffiths) and the newly rich (Finchleys). He is also introduced to the religiously minded, petit bourgeois middle class (Dillard and his world), and the working class at the bottom of the social level (shrinking room). Dreiser also critically explores the world of justice (Mason, Belnap, Jephson), of journalism, politics (governor of New York), and religion (McMillan). Although Dreiser's focus is clearly on urban society, he also provides a realistic insight into the rural world (Alden family). Dreiser gives a very detailed, sometimes impressionistic, at other times almost photographic reproduction of the different social classes, while Faulkner often limits the description of his racially divided universe to very few, almost expressionistic features, which focus on the characters'

Comédie Humaine not only the history of half a century --- from the French Empire to the Restoration and the July Monarchy--- but also the history of the different social classes. In 91 novels and novellas he created approximately 3000 characters. Following Balzac's tradition Emile Zola undertook to recreate the history of the Second Empire under Napoleon III. He established the genealogy of a family --- the Rougon Macquart. Each of his novels deals with a particular sector of society or profession: the working class in Germinal and L'Assommoir, the world of the bourgeousie in Pot Bouille, a cross section of society from highest aristocracy to the lowest prostitute circles in Nana.

inward attitude, the rhythm of their lives, their feelings toward each other.

Both Dreiser and Faulkner are particularly concerned with the barriers ---racial and socio-economic--- that society sets up between these different social groups, barriers that lead not only to antagonisms and hatred between the different groups, but also lead to a rigid sense of inclusion and exclusion of individuals. Faulkner gives his mythical county the symbolical name of 'Yoknapatawpha', which means divided land.[3] The most obvious division in Light in August is that between black and white which, symbolically, entails further social antinomies: between male and female, Southerners and Northerners, insiders and outsiders. The barriers between black and white are palpable throughout Light in August. The blacks live in Freedman town, go to their own negro churches, negro schools and colleges. Also, their particular idiom separates them from the whites: "You can whup the blood outen me" (277) reveals the black speaker.[4]

The racism on the part of the whites goes hand in

3. According to Faulkner the name comes from the Chickasaw language and means 'water runs slow through flat land" (Faulkner in the University. p.74)

4. Faulkner is highly conscious of these linguistic peculiarities that create a barrier between black and white. Faulkner distinguishes between four different types of Southern speeches: the dialect of the educated semi-metropolian white Southerner, the dialect of the hill backward Southerner, the dialect of the rural negro, and the dialect of the negro influenced by Northern cities. (Faulkner in the University. p. 125)

hand with this segregational policy. The narrative also points out that the blacks cannot help but see themselves in a lower position. One negro in Light in August whose wife is dying in childbirth is unable to ask a white person to use their telephone to call a doctor for help. "To be black, to be a member of the nonelect is to be despised by white America and perhaps by oneself as well", writes Judith Berzon (Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction. 1978. p. 4). The strongest antagonism exists between 'poor white trash' and the blacks. Hines, who is at the bottom of the social hierarchy, develops the strongest and most perverse hatred of negroes because the negroes are the only group the socially ostracised 'poor white trash' can step on.[5]

Faulkner's concern lies with Southern racism, which he describes as a dangerous abstraction in the 20th century

5. In his The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Mark Twain satirizes the same mechanism. Huck's father 'Pap' is outraged at negroes in good clothing who have been given the right to vote. In his drunkenness he decides to refuse voting in order to demonstrate his protest. In interviews, Faulkner explicitly links violent racism to the 'poor white trash': "He [the poor unsuccessful white man] is envious, he hates the Negro because the Negro is beating him at his own poor game, which is to make a living on forty acres of poor land." (Faulkner in the University. p. 20). Furthermore, Charles Peavy argues that "the demand for white supremacy had its true origin with the poor whites". He links this demand to the fact that the negroes (in league with the big plantation owners) were traditionally in competition with the small farmers. Since emancipation removed one very important point of distinction by giving the blacks freedom, "it became obsessively important for the poor white to maintain the other distinction", that is the colour (Go Slow Down: Faulkner and the Race Question. 1971. p. 20).

South. The ante-bellum South committed the sin of slavery for economic reasons, yet after the Civil War the South reacted to the emancipation of the negroes by retreating behind an inflexible wall of rigidity and racist stock responses. "What starts as a verbal pattern of classification thus becomes a social order not to be challenged or changed. And what starts as a category becomes a myth, for certainly the word 'Negro' is a compressed myth, just as the stock response to that word is a compressed ritual" (Olga Vickery. The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation. 1964. p. 69). In Go Down Moses two little boys who have grown up together realize their racial difference at the age of consciousness, and the white boy refuses to continue sleeping in the same bed with the black boy which carries the racial barrier over to the next generation. In the same novel the white Zack Edmonds keeps Mollie, a black man's wife, for six months in his house until the black dares to ask back his wife. In Absalom, Absalom Thomas Sutpen simply rejects his wife and his son when he discovers that his wife has some black ancestry. In Light in August Joe Christmas tells white people that he might have 'nigger' blood, and each time the white response is the same: Joe is brutally beaten down. This beating of the black by the white is a ritualised behaviour pattern and is illustrated in the novel by the completely unneccessary beating of a black by the sheriff of

Jefferson for the sake of a piece of information that every white person would have easily volunteered. Joe is beaten by Bobbie's friend as 'a nigger bastard': "These country bastards are liable to anything/ We'll find out. We'll see if his blood is black" (205). As if he temporarily accepted the negro identity Joe passively submits to this beating ritual: "Lying peaceful and still Joe watched the stranger lean down and lift his head from the floor and strike him again in the face" (205), an attitude that anticipates his later death scene.

Southern racism is linked to religion, in particular to the legend of Ham in Genesis.[6] In this legend Ham, one of the three sons of Noah, is cursed by his father: "Cursed be Canaan/A slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers" (Genesis 9). In Light in August Calvin Burden describes the blacks as "low built because of the weight of the wrath of God, black because of the sin of human bondage staining their blood" (233). The black is also described as the curse of the white race, a cross that the white is born with and can never get rid of. In his study on Southern religion and racism Jack Maddex points out that "In their controversy with Northern abolitionists, Southern Presbyterian theologians insisted that the Bible recognized slavery as a legitimate system without hinting that it was bad or transient" ("Postslavery Millennialism: Social Eschatology in Antebellum Southern Calvinism". American

Quarterly. 1979. p. 49).[7]

While Faulkner's narrative critically explores racial barriers in Southern society, Dreiser attacks the socioeconomic barriers in the North. The reality of social barriers of Northern society is contrasted to the deep-rooted myth of social mobility, a belief that every American can rise from rags to riches. This belief often leads to a sense of superiority in relation to European society which is conceived of as a rigid hierarchy. Although deeply convinced of the reality of this Alger myth, Clyde repeatedly clashes with the harsh boundaries of his society. Paul Orlov points out in a study on An American Tragedy and the Alger myth that many structural elements in the novel actually mirror the myth, that is, that Clyde's way in life to a certain extent coincides with the fortunes of a typical Alger hero. "[Alger] constantly preached that success was to be won through virtue and hard work, but his stories tell us just as constantly that success is actually the result of fortuitous circumstances", writes John W. Tebbel (From Rags to Riches: Horatio Alger Jr and the American Dream. 1963. p. 14) "The stories crucially hinge upon coincidence" writes Orlov ("Plot as Parody: Dreiser's

6. see Faulkner in Blotner. Selected Letters. 1977. p. 374

7. Also Erskine Caldwell links Southern racism to religion when he writes in his Deep South of the "infectious racial hatred - a hatred germinated and cultured by perverted principles of Christian religion" (qtd. in James Thompson Jr. "Erskine Caldwell and Southern Religion". Southern Humanities Review. 1971. p. 40)

Attack on the Alger Theme in An American Tragedy. American Literary Realism. 1981/2. p.239), and, as a matter of fact, Clyde's life is fundamentally directed by coincidence. Like the typical Alger hero Clyde is literally 'discovered' by the rich businessman, when as a poor bell hop he accidentally meets his uncle ---the Croesus from Lycurgus--- in the Union League Club in Chicago and receives the promise that his uncle will 'do something for him'. The fact that Clyde stongly resembles Griffiths' own son, Gilbert, makes Clyde miraculously a sort of 'long lost heir'. Clyde's father Asa had been unjustly treated by his father who had given the lion's share of his fortune to Samuel, thus providing him with the basis to accumulate a still bigger fortune. As in a typical Alger story this background lays the logical basis for Clyde to be restored "to a fortune of which he was unjustly deprived" (ibid. p. 241). And the fact that the rich Sondra Finchley becomes not only interested but falls in love with Clyde mirrors the Alger pattern according to which the lower class hero is lifted to a higher social level by way of marriage to a rich girl.

Yet, while An American Tragedy mirrors some elements from the Alger stories, the novel presents at the same time the ironic reversal of these Alger elements. Clyde' life describes several social upswings, which are always followed by a dramatic downfall. From the poverty of his street parents he works his way up to a fairly

independent status at the Green Davidson Hotel, a status that fills him with a sense of ecstasy. Yet, this 'high' is followed by the shock of his involvement in an accident in which a little girl is killed. The feelings of ecstasy are thus turned into their opposite--into the fear of jail and social ruin. Similarly, in Lycurgus Clyde's life describes an upward movement, from the inferno-like shrinking room, "that dim world below the stair" (217) to the 'heaven' and the 'paradise' of social recognition through Sondra's love and 'help'. Yet, this ultimate high is bound to be followed by the ultimate downfall.

Throughout the novel Dreiser establishes clues that point towards the Alger myth. Samuel Griffiths is portrayed in a largely positive light, yet he is not simply the benevolent uncle who receives the lost nephew with open arms. He is convinced of the necessity of social barriers and the Griffiths' collar factory in Lycurgus is described as a place in which human beings are subdivided as superiors and inferiors. Even though these barriers do not create the same tense feelings of hatred that Faulkner describes in Light in August, they do create strong feelings of distrust and antagonism between human beings. While the racism in Light in August is legitimized by distorted religious arguments, the socioeconomic antagonism in An American Tragedy is linked to a philosophy of social darwinism à la Herbert Spencer. The self-made man Samuel Griffiths who

worked his way up the social hierarchy has internalised this philosophy and believes in "the necessity of higher and higher orders to which the lower classes could aspire". He also believes in the validity of Spencer's principle of the 'battle for existence' because "hard work strengthened the minds of those who were destined to rise. And those who were not should be kept right where they were" (176).[8] Therefore, Clyde's connection with his high relatives leads him first down into the shrinking room, to the lowest level of society. The purpose is to let him 'drift for a while', so that he can prove himself by lifting himself up by his own force and energy. Behind this exercise is the philosophy that each person's social position is the result of one's natural abilities, and hence a logical consequence of the laws of nature. "All of existence is an equilibrium of rival forces", writes Spencer, who that the 'battle for existence' ensures that everybody gains the position that he or she is fit for (qtd in F.O. Matthiessen. Theodore Dreiser. 1951. p. 50). According to Spencer, the end result of this struggle is the preservation of society, the race, and the individual, an opinion that is echoed by Griffiths. He literally applies the principles of natural selection in his factory in order to ensure the survival of the fittest: his managers hire a surplus of workers to be able to select the good and discharge the less good. It is clear that Clyde will be accepted in the long run only if he is capable

of showing the energy, force and determination necessary in the competitive world of American business. But the fact is that Clyde is the opposite of Algernon Cowperwood. His genetic material and his upbringing predetermine him to sensitivity and weakness, which, in turn, predetermines his ultimate failure in a materialistic society.

Dreiser's narrative emphasizes that human relationships are limited to playing the roles of either 'master' or 'underling'. When Gilbert gives his orders to Whigam, one of the factory employees, the roles are clearly fixed. Gilbert assumes a tone of authoritative condescension and Whigam listens deferentially with his "head chronically bending forward" (183). Whigam's attitude immediately changes when he talks to one of the workers; he holds his head higher and talks more authoritatively: "he was master not underling now" (186). This binary behaviour pattern of domination and subordination goes hand in hand with the clear lines of social demarcation, which are "sharp as though cut by a knife or divided by a high wall" (249/50). These lines are re-enforced by taboos and restrictions which prevent the 'mixing' of the different classes and ultimately serve to maintain a clear-cut system with higher and lower levels.

Theodore Dreiser's narrative powerfully

8. The wording 'destined to rise' evokes the protestant notions of predestination, which are linked in the novel with Spencer's social darwinism.

demonstrates how status symbols, clothing, behaviour and speech patterns function as social indicators which are as effective and visible as the black/white contrast in Faulkner's South. On a walk through Wykeagy Avenue ---the rich area in Lycurgus--- Clyde is fascinated at the sight of the luxury of the houses, the tree lined avenue, the cast iron decorations, the cars in front of the houses, and the servants. Only some minutes later he is thrown into a depression crossing through the working class ghetto, which exudes poverty and social misery (187). Clyde's notices Gilbert's perfectly cut gray suit, a colour matching the season and his occupation (180). Roberta Alden is rather poorly and simply clothed in comparison to the rich Sondra Finchley, who wears 'the smartest clothing' (149) and takes pleasure in changing her outfit numerous times each day and adapting it to each social occasion.[9]

Even more strongly than Faulkner Dreiser dramatizes the importance of different sociolects as social indicators. Even in talking Gilbert consciously uses a highly formalised English standard, which Clyde hardly understands: "I might have placed you in the accounting end of the business when you first came if you had been technically equipped for it" (229). By contrast, the bell hops' lower class idiom is

9. In Sister Carrie Carrie's moving upward in society is externalised in her clothing; Hurstwood's moving downward is mirrored in the fact that he stops caring about his clothing. Also, clothing plays an important role in Balzac's novels.

crowded with non-standard grammatical and pronunciation forms: "I got my first job in Buffalo t'ree years ago and I never knowed a t'ing about it up to dat time. All you gotta do is to watch de udders an' see how dey do" (38). [10]

Clyde carries the name Griffiths, which in Lycurgus is synonymous with power and social success. At the same time Clyde lacks money, the all-important and absolute asset in the upper social crust. Again and again, Dreiser's narrative emphasizes this ambiguity of Clyde's status; people do not know how to treat Clyde because he is neither a clear 'master', nor a clear 'underling'. Clyde transgresses, and places himself in an ambiguous no-man's land when he falls in love with Roberta because a social taboo set up by the Griffiths management forbids Clyde to get involved in a relationship with one of the young women in his department.

In both narratives Clyde's and Joe's ambiguity in racial and socioeconomic terms violently clashes with the described clear-cut social categories. Joe, who is so dependent on a predictable system of order desperately tries to find out whether he belongs to the white or the negro. Although Joe perceives the black identity as a clear negative identity, he nevertheless would prefer to know for certain that he is a negro instead of living in uncertainty about his racial identity. For a while he even lives like

10. Also, Gilbert tells his sister: "'Don't say 'swell.' ... You talk like a factory girl." (151)

husband and wife with a black woman in a black ghetto, "trying to breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being", yet "his whole being writhe[s] and strain[s] with physical outrage and spiritual denial" (212).

Not knowing what his racial identity is and living in the South means not knowing what behaviour pattern to adopt and with whom to associate. As a consequence Joe sleeps with white prostitutes and when he does not have any money he simply tells them that he is a negro. He thus provokes the inevitable stock response on the part of the white society: he is beaten up and often thrown into jail. Also, he tricks white men into calling him black and then fights them. Again and again, he feels a need to ensure himself of the secure and stable Southern system. He is sick for two years when he finds out that a Northern white prostitute even accepts blacks as customers. Joe's tragedy is that he has internalised the black and white antagonism of his own society, and therefore becomes incapable of accepting himself as something in between. At no point does he become aware of a 'gray' shading; his environment only reflects a mirror image that is either black or white.

Yet, the narrative points out that the black and white have deeper meanings that go beyond the mere racial

aspects. One day Joe loses himself in Freedman town:

> before he knew it he was in Freedman town, surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible negroes. They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring, talking, laughing, in a language not his. As from the bottom of a thick black pit he saw himself enclosed by cabinshapes, vague, kerosenelit, ... It was as though he and all other manshaped life about him had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female.(106/7)

This passage presents the reader with a cluster of associations. The comparison of the negro section to the black pit evokes a downward movement into the darkness, similar to Joseph Conrad's journey into the Heart of Darkness. Symbolically it is a movement down to the subconscious level, to his anima ---the female part of himself. At the same time the blackness carries the connotation of evil, of mystery, of the ungraspable. Also, the fact that Joe is compared to "a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost" before he "found himself" in Freedman town evokes Dante having to go through the inferno because he has lost his way. The bodiless voices evoke a general lack of shape and form, a lack of clear-cut order. The murmuring, laughing and talking evoke a sense of communion and 'joie de vivre' that is foreign to Joe.

From the warmth of the black pit Joe goes back to

the coldness of the white sector. As Dante after his journey through the inferno climbs up into the light, Joe turns up "a sharp ascent" and the street 'mounted out of the black hollow'(107) and he recognizes the street lights in their mechanical regularity. Joe symbolically regains the level of consciousness, the level of rational, mechanical thinking. This level is also associated with a mechanical time concept. In the white sector of the town Joe is aware of the exact time: it is nine-thirty. The contrast between the two worlds evokes Henri Bergson's distinction between pure time, which is connected with human intuition and the flux of life, and mechanical time which is connected with analytical intellectualism, which in its extremity evokes a deathlike sterility.

Yet the split in Joe's psyche also appears as the extension of a split in Southern society. The novel repeatedly associates the negroes with summer, warmth, musical rhythmicality, and a communal 'joie de vivre'. In The Sound and the Fury they are linked to the mule, a picture which for Quentin Compson evokes a "timeless patience of static serenity". The mule is opposed to the white mechanical means of transportation, such as the streetcar, the car, or the horse, which can be trained to the white mechanical rhythm while the mule insists stubbornly on its own natural pace and rhythm.

In the same novel the negro servant Dilsey becomes

the incarnation of love and endurance which is opposed to disintegration and a sense of sterility among the white Compson family. So many of Faulkner's white characters seem to retreat behind sterile concepts of abstraction: Hightower in his dream of his grandfather's heroic past, Horace Benbow (Sanctuary) in the illusion of an ideal justice, Popeye into a cold mechanical killing machine, Quentin into a dream of purity and virginity. All of these characters become disassociated with nature and are linked to death. By contrast, the negroes are consistently linked to life and endurance.[11]

In interaction with society both Clyde and Joe create personae, social selves or masks they show to the outside world, masks which hide their real selves underneath. Clyde becomes alienated from himself because he takes on so many different social roles that his real self is sacrificed to his multiple personae. He adapts too much and too easily to a society with materialistic and anti-humanistic values. In extreme contrast to Clyde, Joe adopts only one persona, which, however, is a mask of rigidity that serves to hide the 'black' underneath. Joe's face is "completely cold, masklike almost" (105) and "the flesh itself, as though the skull had been molded in a still and deadly regularity and then baked in a fierce oven" (30).

11. In Go Down Moses the narrative explicitly associates the blacks with 'endurance, pity, tolerance, forbearance, fidelity, love of children'.

Joe's expression becomes literally a fixed mask, which in its rigidity and frozenness exudes a sense of deathlike stasis.

Furthermore, as a young adult Joe adopts some mannerisms in Max and Mame's brothel which he will never lose again. As if he wanted to slough off the old 'skin' of adolescence ---get rid of the outward forms that connect him to McEachern--- he imitates Max, the restaurant/bordello owner. Max' voice "held that ambiguous quality, quality hearty and completely empty and completely without pleasure or mirth, like something he carried before his face and watched Joe through it" (199), which is precisely the mask that Joe adopts in order to deal with his social environment. It is Max who uses the expression 'sweet Jesus', which becomes so characteristic for Joe (209/10). It is Max who smokes a cigarette without touching it (172), a mannerism that becomes inseparably connected with the description of Joe. The very first time Joe is introduced in the novel he has "a cigarette in one side of his mouth and his face darkly and contemptuously still, drawn down a little on one side because of the smoke. After a while he spat the cigarette without touching his hand to it" (28). In Max' restaurant Joe also learns how to cock his hat (187). The first impression the reader gets of Joe is "with his "hat cocked at an angle arrogant and baleful above his still face" (27). Also, Max introduces Joe to his first glass of

whiskey 'on the house', and Joe becomes an illegal whiskeydealer. Joe adopts the ruthless 'underworld' persona which he projects as a visible mask to the outside world. Underneath the visible surface he remains a prisoner of McEachern's rigid principles. As a result, Joe's persona alienates other people: "'We ought to run him through the planer," the foreman at the sawmill says. "Maybe that will take that look off his face." (28) Everywhere Joe comes he creates aggression and distrust, even before people learn that he might have negro blood. And the narrative establishes that this rejection is deliberately provoked by Christmas.

In Clyde's life the personae are the result of his identification with the different social spheres that he lives in. Dreiser takes pains to demonstrate the material nature that makes up Clyde's different selves, the importance of appearances, which always seem to evoke the lack of an essential self underneath. One striking element in Clyde's life is the importance of uniforms. When he puts on the handsome uniform of the Green Davidson Hotel he becomes a different person. He becomes more gentlemanly when he wears the black uniform of the famous Union League Club in Chicago . Working in a delivery uniform he feels insignificant, and with the working trousers and shirt in the Griffiths shrinking room he feels like 'nobody', whereas he becomes 'somebody' wearing the suit of a supervisor.[12]

The danger is not that Clyde takes on different personae, but that he completely identifies with each of these social selves. At each point of the novel Clyde is nothing more than what his clothes make him.

Clyde's behaviour is also shaped by imitation of 'mentors'. In the Green Davidson Hotel the bell hop Doyle is a 'youth to imitate', the "quintessence of Chesterfieldian grace and airs and looks" (49). In the Union League Club Clyde internalises the conservative ideals of the successful businessmen and as a consequence "in the precincts of the Club he felt different from what he really was---more subdued, less romantic, more practical, certain that if he tried now, if he imitated the soberer people of the world he might succeed" (169). Again, in Lycurgus Clyde shapes his behaviour to the expectations of the rich Griffiths family. He denies his shabby past and recreates a socially acceptable past; he takes on hobbies, not because he likes them but because they are expected in the upper class.

As a result of these total identifications with the outside world, Clyde becomes an "other-directed person" who "seeks to be not himself but what others are like or will like" (Paul Orlov. "The Subversion of the Self: Anti-Naturalistic Crux in An American Tragedy". 1977/8. p. 466/7). Clyde "attempts to be through belonging. To his

12. There are similarities between Clyde and Stendhal's hero Julien Sorel, an 'arriviste' in French society, who changes his social identity each time he changes into different coloured coats (Le Rouge et le Noir.)

mind, the person is synonymous with the persona." It is the pretension of "the counterfeiter to have created the 'Ding an Sich'" (ibid.). Yet, taking the different personae for the real thing, Clyde's feeling of self becomes totally dependent on the reactions of the outside world. Like Estelle in Sartre's Huis Clos he desperately needs the others as a mirror, to reflect his desired image of himself. It is interesting to note how often Clyde sees himself in a mirror, or perceives others through a mirror. Just as Estelle discovers at the end of the play, "L'enfer, c'est les autres", Clyde feels tortured when the others refuse to reflect the longed for self-image; instead, their signals tell him that he is a mere nobody because he does not have any money. Clyde literally has to build up a fictional image of himself to Sondra and her friends in the desperate hope that they will reflect this positive image back to him, thus establishing his desired identity. As a result, Clyde becomes dependent on reactions from the outside world and he is unable ever to experience a sense of inner selfhood. Clyde becomes a victim of feelings of identity diffusion. "Oh the devil. Who was he anyway, and what did he really amount to?"[13]

Clyde develops the passion and conviction of the mythical alazon figure in his quest for the higher social spheres. Like the archetypal alazon, Clyde is a figure who

13. It is significant that C.G. Jung relates such a lack of selfhood to a lack of personal morality: "Je starker die kollektive Normierung des Menschen, desto starker ist seine individuelle Immoralitat" (Typologie. p. 139).

deceives himself about his true nature. The alazon is accompanied by an eiron figure, a character whose function it is to bring the alazon 'down to earth', that is to confront him with reality. In An American Tragedy the eiron appears as Clyde's Doppelganger ---his cousin Gilbert. Both characters not only carry the same name, but are almost the same age and, most significantly, they strongly resemble each other. Gilbert becomes a desired for mirror image for Clyde; he is the "youth that Clyde would have liked to imagine himself to be" (180). It is precisely this resemblance that lifts Clyde up in the eyes of the Lycurgus society; they meet Clyde with respect and even deference, simply because of his name and resemblance to the young heir of the Lycurgus collar factory. The receptionist in the factory and the salesman Dillard are visibly impressed by Clyde's looks and name. Clyde, in turn, is impressed with the 'mistering' even though it comes from sycophants. Clyde "congratulated himself on being connected with this great company" (187) and thinks defiantly "was he not a Griffiths, a full cousin, as well as a full nephew to the important men who lived here?" (189). From his seemingly superior position he even looks down on other social groups: "What! Mix with people so far below him--a Griffiths" (213), and he cuts off Dillard and Rita Dickerman because they belong to the middle class crowd.

The narrative insists on the striking differences

between Gilbert and Clyde. Gilbert treats Clyde with the utmost condescension. Gilbert is authoritative and efficient, cold and strong and determined. He is correct when he points out that Clyde wants to be more than he really is, that he lacks not only the 'technical equipment' for an important position in the factory, but also lacks the contemptuous aggression and the vigour that is necessary in the competitive business world. Gilbert even sees Clyde as a beggar (352/3) and deep down this is what Clyde really is. At no point is he willing to give anything, but is always asking to receive: "Were the Griffiths never going to do any more for him than this?" (256) It is Gilbert who brings Clyde from his feeling of ecstasy down to the level of reality; as a result, Clyde feels depressed in the presence of Gilbert (228). Yet, at no point is he willing to see himself honestly for what he is. While he feels resentment toward Gilbert he nevertheless forces himself to produce "a half ingratiating and half-apologetic smile" (228).

Even Joe may be partly seen as an alazon figure because he believes that he can suppress one part of himself, the black as the incarnation of his anima, the female part of himself. Like so many other Faulknerian characters he attempts to live in a realm of pure abstraction, the realm of 'male' rationality and order. Unable to fit himself into Southern racist society he not only rejects this society but he rejects humanity

altogether. Although "there was something definitely rootless about him, as though not town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home" (27), he carries this knowledge "as if it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud" (27). When Byron Bunch offers Joe something to eat, Joe brutally rejects this symbolic offer of human communion by saying: "Keep your muck! I ain't hungry." Repeatedly it is the women who establish not only a relationship with him but challenge his predictable order. And even more importantly, the women instinctively understand their environment and themselves, while Joe ---cut off from his intuitive source of knowledge--- is always a victim of 'not knowing'.

Both characters experience strong feelings of loneliness as the result of their alienation. "You have to 'belong' or you can't go anywhere" (198), says Clyde's friend Dillard, a truth that proves only too valid in the lives of both Clyde and Joe. Clyde feels that "he is permitted to look into a world into which he did not belong" (223), and this feeling makes his eyes darken. Not belonging to any social group he is haunted by feelings of loneliness (199, 200), painfully aware that he is cut off from "love and youth and romance" (236). Similarly, Joe is associated with feelings of loss and loneliness. He looks "like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world and lost"; "And though he was not large, not tall, he contrived

somehow to look more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert" (106). His split from himself is accompanied by a split from society and from the whole universe: "Overhead the slow constellation wheeled, the stars of which he had been aware for thirty years and not one of which had any name to him or meant anything at all by shape or brightness or position" (98). As Raskolnikov carries his split as part of his name, Joe's whole personality exudes the tortuous ambiguity of his being: "He looked like a tramp, yet not like a tramp either" (27). The positive affirmation of what Joe is has to be questioned in the second part of the sentence. Like Raskolnikov he becomes the incarnation of the split character.

IV. THE MURDERS OF ROBERTA AND JOANNA

In both Light in August and An American Tragedy the plots reach the first climax with the protagonists' murdering their female partners. Both Clyde and Joe are seen as not completely responsible for these deeds. It is not only their self-alienation that makes such crimes possible but also the structure of a society which is dominated by subjugation and subordination mechanisms, with whites dominating over blacks, rich over poor, and male over female. The murders are the ultimate expression of these structures of domination. In his study on murder trials John R. Brazil points out that the America of the twenties witnessed a tremendous increase in the murder rate ("Murder Trials, Murder, and Twenties America". in American Quarterly. 1981. p. 180). Sociologists even speak of a 'crime wave', which is attributed to social and cultural phenomena such as "America's frontier heritage, its revolutionary origins, Puritan or Victorian repression, the influence of the Civil War or World War I, the tradition of gun ownership, the rural and religious conservatism". The increase in murders is reflected in the preoccupation of newspapers with murder trials: "virtually every sizable paper had its largest average circualtion during intensive murder trial coverage; its single best days were when verdicts were announced or when executions were carried out"

(ibid., p. 164).

Not only Dreiser but also F. Scott Fitzgerald fictionalised murder as a social and symbolic phenomenon in 1925, the year of publication of both An American Tragedy and The Great Gatsby. As Brazil points out, Fitzgerald's whole novel is saturated with allusions to murder and gangsterism. Like Clyde in An American Tragedy the protagonist Jay Gatsby dreams of self-creation and falls prey to the materialism of American society. His dream turns into a wasteland, a garden of ashes (ibid. p. 175). Unlike Faulkner and Fitzgerald, Dreiser took pains to recreate his fiction after actual murder cases. Haskell Block points out that Dreiser literally 'collected' murder cases from newspapers and compiled them in a notebook which he entitled "American Tragedies". Dreiser discovered a common pattern, even a 'type of crime' in many of the murder cases he studied. Most of them were motivated by social ambitions, the American Dream. And significantly the intended title for An American Tragedy was "Mirage". For An American Tragedy he drew heavily on the Chester Gillette case of 1906, the case of a young ambitious man who was executed in New York for drowning his preganant girl friend in Big Moose Lake in the Adirondack Mountains.[1]

Before discussing the murderous acts in An American

1. see Haskell M. Block. Naturalistic Triptych (The Fictive and the Real in Zola, Mann, and Dreiser). 1970. p. 58-65.

Tragedy and Light in August, it is necessary to trace the development of the relationships of both Clyde and Joe with their victims. It is interesting to note that both protagonists become locked in relationships with women who are similar to the protagonists with respect to background, ideas, behaviour patterns and goals. This spiritual kinship between the protagonists and their female partners intensifies the problems and fears on the part of the male protagonists and partly explains why these relationships end in murder. Both women are very strong, which increases the potential for conflicts, as these women are not necessarily willing to submit so completely as the protagonists might expect. Roberta, like Clyde, not only comes from a very poor background, but has also experienced the great disappointments of life (243). Like Clyde she is repeatedly associated with dreams of a better life. "She was always thinking of something better" (245) and was "seized with the very virus of ambition and unrest that afflicted him" (250). Like Clyde she falls prey to the Cinderella myth, "the old world dream of all of Eve's daughters ... that her beauty or charm might some day and ere long smite bewitchingly and so irresistibly the soul of a given man or men" (244/5). Like Clyde she is not only emotional, but refined and different from other factory workers and "in a delicate poetic way, sensual" (251).

Similarly, Joanna mirrors the same split that

characterizes Joe. She is a "dual personality" (221); by the lightness of the day she is cold, uncommunicative, a stranger to Joe, and in the blackness of the night she becomes a sexual creature. She is linked to the same cluster of associations that accompany Joe's life. She mirrors Joe's preference for masculinity: she wears manshaped clothes, has mantrained muscles, and sexually yields to Joe in an almost 'manlike surrender' (221). Like her male counterpart she needs clear rules and order and is linked to the mechanical time concept. Harold Hungerford, who re-established the exact chronology of the events in Light in August found that Joanna "organised time into an ordered progression of dates and events, schedules and appointments" ("Past and Present in Light in August". 1983. p. 190). She is also the incarnation of the spinster, who has repressed her sexuality over long years, which echoes Joe's lifelong fear of sexuality. She also shares Joe's preoccupation with blackness and negroes. Growing up as the daughter of a fanatic hater of slavery, she has devoted her life to philantropic works for the negroes, yet she is unable to see the negroes as human beings but sees them as objects that need help. Like Joe she is a fundamentally isolated human being; she is an outsider, ostracised as a 'nigger lover'.

Another point that explains why the protagonists become capable of killing the women they have a close

relationship with is that none of the relationships are authentic love relationships but are simply based on the symbiotic satisfaction of needs. Joe takes Joanna as an object that provides him with food and sex. After her menopause he brutally says: "You're just worn out. You're not any good anymore" (262). Joe uses her, but he also "recognizes that she uses him as an object, a Negro, who needs help" (John Pilkington. The Heart of Yoknapatawpha. p. 149). In their desperate love-making she breathes "Negro! Negro! Negro!", (245), and when she believes herself to be pregnant it is important for her to know that the child should be a 'bastard negro child' (251).[2] Joe reacts against this objectifying by violently throwing Joanna's food on the floor, the food "Set out for the nigger." (224)

Similarly, the relationship between Roberta and Clyde is dangerously symbiotic. Roberta is "carried away by a bravado which was three-fourths her conception of him as a member of the Lycurgus upper crust and possessor of means and position" (280). There is no doubt that Roberta is infatuated with Clyde's looks and sensitivity, yet her willingness to consider a relationship is also influenced by the fact that Clyde might be the realization of her social dream ---that is if he is willing to marry her and thus lift

2. Olga Vickery comments: "Joanna's concern with racial, geographical and religious myths serves as a complement and antithesis to his own. Not even their frenzied and insatiable love-making can destroy their ingrained awareness of what each other believes the other to represent" (The Novels of William Faulkner. 1964. p. 71).

her to a higher level. Yet, from the beginning of their relationship, Clyde can conceive of Roberta only in terms of a sex object that will help him through his moments of loneliness. He is sex hungry because of the "repressed and protesting libido of his nature" and he "could not go alone forever" (256). A relationship with Roberta would make him happy provided that he "does not have to marry her" (258). Both characters lack authenticity, they become guilty of what Sartre calls "la mauvaise foi"; they lack the honesty to face their own desires and both build up expectations that the other cannot or will not fulfill.

As an ironic consequence of Roberta's 'giving away' her virginity ---the most valuable asset of the female in a society in which everything is assigned a cash value--- Clyde seems to gain and Roberta seems to lose in value. Clyde is no longer the 'simpleton' he used to be with women. He gains in self confidence, taking on the airs of a seductive Don Juan at the same time that he starts looking down on her: "Who was she? She was not of his station" (301). Trained by the same society as Clyde, Roberta accepts this concept of being less than she was before her initiation. She has given him 'everything' and as a desperate consequence further belittles herself and flatters him since her future depends on Clyde's 'rehabilitating' her via marriage (344)[3]. The narrative thus exposes society's double standard for male and female.

In both Light in August and An American Tragedy the relationships evolve in three stages of psychological and physical violence escalating up to the murder. Both relationships start out with a rapelike intitiation of the females, an act through which the males literally and symbolically intend to establish their superiority. Roberta is inhibited in giving way to her sexual feelings because an illicit sexual relationship will reduce her to a state of nothingness in her society. The double standard of her society also reduces Roberta to a state of dreadful ambiguity. She is torn between her own sensual desires and her mental and moral scruples (271): "For with what qualms--what protests on the part of Roberta; what determination, yet not without a sense of evil--seduction--betrayal, on the part of Clyde" (299). Once overcome, the relationship is clearly established in terms of superiority and inferiority. In Light in August Joe literally rapes Joanna, thus imposing his will on the female by violently taking her body. This act is anticipated by his first 'penetration' into the house:

3. In his McTeague Frank Norris describes a very similar evolution in the relationship between Trina and McTeague, a relationship which also leads to the murder of the woman. By engaging in a sexual relationship with McTeague Trina feels that she completely gives herself away to McTeague and therefore loves him in a masochistic way. At the same time McTeague loses his fascination for Trina because she has sexually submitted to him: "The moment that Trina gave up, the instant she allowed him to kiss her, he thought less of her. She was not so desirable after all. But this reaction was so faint, so subtle, so intangible, that in another moment he had doubted its occurrence. Yet afterward it returned. Was there not something gone from Trina now?" (69/70).

he climbs through the window and steals Joanna's food. Yet, the rape fails to establish Joe's longed-for feeling of superiority, which alone gives him a feeling of security with women. Unlike the women he has known before, Joanna is cold and rigid and inflexible (as Joe himself), and therefore he symbolically has to 'despoil her virginity each time anew' (221). It is because he fails to establish his superiority over the female that he gives up the sexual contact with Joanna, which ends the first phase of their relationship with a precarious status quo.

In An American Tragedy the first stage of his relationship with Roberta finds its end with Clyde's infatuation with Sondra Finchley, which creates a new--triangular--relationship. Similarly to Sister Carrie in which Carrie's movement upward is contrasted to Hurstwood's movement downward, Dreiser powerfully contrasts Roberta's low and Sondra's high status with each other. Both women are important to Clyde less as people than as the incarnation of the opposite worlds they stand for. The rich Sondra--rather superficial and immature--is the 'angel' (307) in Clyde's eyes, 'the perfect girl' (308), 'the goddess in her shrine' (314), the 'paragon of luxury' (364). She offers social security for Clyde and is "inclined to make more of him" (324), possibly by marrying him. In contrast, Roberta--much more mature, responsible and warmhearted--has "nothing to offer" (336) in Clyde's

perspective and therefore loses all attraction that she had for Clyde before. Once more Clyde becomes guilty of 'mauvaise foi'--a lack of personal honesty, an incapability to admit to himself that he has simply used Roberta and would now like to throw her away--when he continues the sexual relationship with her although he is in love with Sondra. He still pretends to be in love with Roberta although he knows better.

In Sondra's company Clyde becomes the "epitome of a self-ingratiating and affectionate and wistful dog of high breeding" (305), who feels not a little reduced in her presence (321), and shows the submissiveness of 'a slave for his master' (367). Erich Fromm comments: "By becoming a part of a power which is felt as unshakably strong, eternal, and glamorous, one participates in its strength and glory. One surrenders one's self ... but one gains a new security and a new pride in the participation in the power in which one submerges" (Escape from Freedom. 1965. p. 177). Not only does Clyde put Sondra on a pedestal, but he also seems to disassociate all elements of sexuality from her: The thought of a kiss was "without lust, just the desire to constrain and fondle a perfect object" (365). He looks at her "like a devotee looking in the eyes of a saint" (366). Clyde thus literally splits the female into two different beings: the sexually active woman whom he subconsciously links to the prostitute and whom he is allowed to subjugate,

to despise, and to objectify[4], and the idolized woman whom he cuts off from any notion of sexuality and to whom he submits like he submitted to his mother.

While Clyde's and Roberta's relationship turns into a triangular relationship, Joe's relationship with Joanna changes because Joanna herself changes. From sexual repression she turn to 'wild throes of nymphomania' (245), thus initiating a new stage in their relationship and sucking Joe "down in a bottomless morass" (246). As she completely rejected sexuality before, she now becomes insatiable, avid and slightly perverse, not only desperately trying to make up for all the 'wasted' years, but also masochistically punishing herself for what she considers a religious transgression, "damning herself forever to the hell of her forefathers by living not only in sin but in filth" (244).

Joanna is undergoing a perfectly normal development toward her menopause, and Faulkner underlines the natural nature of this process by placing it in the framework of archetypes. Faulkner repeatedly links Joanna to the images of the moon, the seasons and the tides, images which underline the female, cyclical nature of Joanna. In Joanna's life, however, these fundamentally positive archetypes take on very negative aspects. Her body becomes

4. Clyde clearly feels that Roberta is simply a girl on whom 'to spend his money' and who gives sexuality in return.

like "two moongleamed shapes sruggling drowning in alternate throes upon the surface of a black thick pool beneath the last moon" (246).[5] She symbolically drowns in the archetypal water of life because she refuses to accept her female nature. Thus she turns life into death. She is diametrically opposed to Lena Grove who accepts the natural process. Whereas Lena travels trough the country and gives birth to a baby, Joanna stays in the isolation of her home, and her pregnancy turns out illusory--symbolically mirroring her lack of change and her emotional sterility.[6]

In this second phase of their relationship Joe is shocked at Joanna's development; but it is in the third phase that he actually becomes afraid of her. Her menopause completed, Joanna categorically and rigorously rejects all sexuality and becomes "cold, remote, and fanatic" (253). She turns back to religion with a desperate longing to repent her sin. Even more importantly, she tries to change Joe as well, tries to integrate him in her religious, a-sexual world and wants him to attend a negro college and become a negro lawyer. "Joanna, her physical need for him exhausted, demands of him that choice which he has spent his whole life evading", namely the choice between black and

5. D.H. Lawrence uses the same archetype in his Women in Love: The protagonist Rupert Birkin throws stones in the water and destroys the reflection of the moon in the water; symbolically rejecting the female.

6. In his chronology of the events in Light in August Harold Hungerford notes that the time periods when Joanna thinks of herself as pregnant and Lucas Burch impregnates Lena coincide.

white (Vickery. The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation. p. 72). More and more Joe feels threatened because of a developing imbalance in their power struggle: Joanna becomes stronger because she regains a 'male' uncompromising coldness which contrasts with Joe's 'weakness', his still active desire for sexuality, which he links to his negative identity--his blackness. He subconsciously prepares himself like a bridegroom before he goes to Joanna and is even singing something 'minor, plaintive and negroid'. Yet, Joanna, instead of engaging in a sexual contact and expressing her need for him, demands "Kneel with me" (265), thus asking for an attitude of humiliation and subjugation. In this power struggle "neither surrendered; worse, they would not let one another alone" (264). Joanna becomes the ultimate threat to his weak ego: she is a female of whom Joe has always been afraid, she is a (superior) white who tries to make him an (inferior) negro, and she ultimately assumes a McEachern-like attitude when she asks him to pray, which again evokes the problem of domination and subordination. Joe, whose only security lies in his role of subjugator is turned into the subjugated part. His murderous thoughts arise almost as a logical consequence.

In An American Tragedy murderous thoughts arise in Clyde when Roberta categorically refuses to 'sacrifice' herself completely for Clyde's happiness and demands instead

that Clyde 'sacrifice' himself for her (411)[7]. With a determination born out of the desperation of becoming an unmarried mother in a society which considers her pregnancy as nothing but "the stigma of unsanctioned concupiscence" (369), Roberta demands to be married 'in time' so that she will be able to face her family again. Both characters are locked in a situation in which only the other's sacrifice can prevent social ruin. Roberta, who like Joanna is ultimately internally stronger than her male partner, is willing to 'compel' Clyde to act in her favour. She even threatens to expose him in public if he does not give in to her demands, thereby destroying his relationship with Sondra and his relatives--and ultimately his desperately longed for identity.

Like Joe in the last stage with Joanna, Clyde reacts to Roberta's demands with mingled fear, even nausea and panic. Both men simply become helpless in the face of active and demanding women. Like Joe, Clyde categorically and violently rejects the negative identity the woman tries to impose on him: "Never! Never! Never!" would he marry her (413). Clyde feels that Roberta's offer pulls him down into a life characterized by the "somberness of defeat and uncertainty---the black barrier" (445), whereas Sondra offers the elevation, the true paradise, the 'fulfillment of a

7. Choosing the expression of the 'sacrifice' both Roberta and Clyde use a religious vocabulary and the idea that religion legitimizes the ultimate sacrifice.

large desire' (445). On the one hand he sees Roberta "with nothing, asking all" and on the other hand Sondra "with everything offering all---asking nothing of him" (472). And Clyde who is internally starved for the material wealth Sondra offers feels as if he has to defend what is rightfully his--even if he has to kill.

But it is also interesting to note that Clyde is dominated by the feeling that he is hunted and haunted by his problem with Roberta, as if he were being attacked, and that his life is endangered: "Force him to do something which would be little less than social, artistic, passional or emotional assassination?", "His life would be ruined" (425). He feels like a "harried animal pursued by hunter and hound" (416). In yet another instance of 'mauvaise foi' he comes to think of Roberta as the aggressor, thus rationalizing his own plans to murder Roberta into a necessary self-defence mechanism. Clyde only betrays himself by projecting his aggression on Roberta and portraying himself as the pure victim.

Dreiser's description of the murderous act itself seems to be based on Max G. Schlapp's scientific findings with which Dreiser was familiar. According to Schlapp a 'feeble minded individual' might be driven to 'criminal behaviour including murder' as a result of a state of chemical imbalance:

He conceives a hatred for some person who

> stands in his way or who has done him a real or fancied injury. The concept of killing comes to his mind ... The normal man rejects the idea... But the man capable of murder is disturbed in his glands, cells and nerve centers. The concept of killing is rapidly followed by another concept of the manner of carrying out his deed. ... The concept of a plan comes to him and the concept of concealment, a flight and an escape. No doubt he struggles back and forth, drawn to his victim and away from the deed of blood by the contentions of emotions and of his inhibitory brain parts. This very struggle works him up the more. The time comes when he can no longer resist." (qtd in Zanine. From Mechanism to Mysticism. p.85)

The narrative follows this scientific description of a murder to a considerable extent, yet also establishes important differences. Clyde gets his idea of drowning Roberta by reading an article on a drowning accident at a nearby lake. And from that moment on 'his none too forceful mind could not dismiss the idea' of killing (442). Yet, while he silently plans and prepares for the murder he keeps arguing with himself: "Never once did he honestly face the thought of committing so grim a crime" (467). Under the pressure of his murderous thoughts his mind becomes 'befuddled', he is at a "borderline between reason and unreason (450). He "looked sick, broken" (450), which again evokes the atmosphere of sickness that surrounded Raskolnikov's murder.

Dreiser, like Dostoevsky, dramatizes Clyde's plotting by filtering the action through Clyde's consciousness in the form of an interior monologue. This

technique of temporarily eliminating the narrator not only puts the focus on Clyde's thoughts in order to dramatize his inner struggle, but the absence of a narrator allows the reader to have a direct contact with a protagonist who finds himself in an extraordinary situation, at the threshold of transgressing one of the fundamental human laws. This decreasing of the distance between the reader and the protagonist increases the reader's willingness to understand an action, which he or she would instinctively condemn. Yet, Dreiser never goes as far as Faulkner in disrupting the syntax of sentences and jumping from one level of association to another. Dreiser's interior monologue is very close to a dramatic free indirect style, characterized by many rhetorical questions and exclamatory sentences, with a heavy use of punctuation: "Murder?!!!" (440). Dreiser also uses repetitions in order to create an echoing effect: "It was wrong--wrong--terribly wrong" (440).

Dreiser also deals with the problem of evil by introducing a gothic-like magic spirit who whispers the murderous thoughts in Clyde's ear: "there had now suddenly appeared, as the genie at the accidental rubbing of Aladdin's lamp---as the efrit emerging as smoke from the mystic jar in the net of the fisherman---the very substance of some leering and diabolic wish or wisdom concealed in his own nature" (463/4). It is interesting that the narrator uses an 'anti-naturalistic' vocabulary to deal with the

problem of human evil. Thomas P. Riggio points out that in his description of Clyde's murder plans Dreiser is indebted to Edgar Allen Poe who "employed oriental fables and gothic symbolism to analyze the mind of a murderer" ("American Gothic: Poe and An American Tragedy. in American Literature. 1977/8. p. 515). Like Poe's and Dostoevsky's murderers, Clyde also experiences the bizarre nightmare in which Clyde sees a black dog--evocative of his own evil desires. The dog tries to bite Clyde, as if the evil was pursuing Clyde as an instance outside himself. Clyde thus conceives of his 'dark side' as 'the other', with which he establishes a dialogical relationship in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense: "one point of view opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to another, one accent opposed to another" (The Dialogic Imagination. 1981. p.314). As Raskolnikov reflects on his murder, taking first one position and then arguing from the exact opposite position, Clyde's genie talks to him in a seductive language urging him to commit the murder, while Clyde contradicts with cautious, reluctant, and moralizing arguments.[8] The nearer Clyde gets to the murder the stronger the efrit becomes. It turns into a Giant Efrit with "Clyde being talked through, not actually talking himself" (471). Donald Pizer notes that this projection of his aggressive wishes on an instance outside himself explains how a character as weak as Clyde can actually conceive of and carefully plan such a brutal act as a

deliberate murder. Dreiser makes it clear that the evil whispers are part of "the darkest depths of his heart". Dreiser thus denies the transcendental notion that the human being can be conceived of as innately good and merely corrupted by negative influences. Dreiser shares Nathaniel Hawthorne and Hermann Melville's more pessimistic vision of the human being as a fundamentally dualistic creature ---at times capable of moral victories but also capable of falling into the deepest abyss of evil.[9]

Dreiser places the situation of the murder itself in clearly naturalistic terms. Sitting in the boat with Roberta he becomes incapable of acting because of "a balanced combat between fear (a chemic revulsion against death or murderous brutality that would bring death) and a

8. Lauriat Lane Jr explains the efrit in terms of the double. Dreiser uses the "archetype of the double to dramatize or symbolize an inner split" (213). Lane sees the Geni as a 'blend of Freud, Jung, and Calvin' (216), a blend of medieval morality and naturalistic psychology. ("The double in An American Tragedy". 1966/7).

9. Charles L. Campbell notes that Dreiser's description of the natural framework in which the murder takes place owes to the nature description of Henry David Thoreau, with the important difference that Dreiser turns Thoreau's forest idyll into a nightmare in which Clyde does not find his identity but becomes a hunted animal. Whereas for Thoreau the lake reflects the depths of the individual nature, Clyde finds the water bottomless and treacherous as he gazed into it. Whereas the loon becomes a symbol for Thoreau's quest for self-knowledge and rebirth, Clyde's weir-weir bird is related to killing and death. "Both authors operate imaginatively in the American Eden; while Thoreau sees the Golden Age constantly being renewed, Dreiser presents what is perhaps the most explict depiction of the corrupted Garden" ("An American Tragedy; or Death in the Woods". 1969/70. p.259)

harried and restless and yet self-repressed desire to do--to do--to do---yet temporarily unbreakable here and now---a static between a powerful compulsion to do and yet not to do" (491/2). Dreiser creates a clear moment of free choice for Clyde which underlines the potential freedom that the world offers to the protagonist. Yet, the fact is that Clyde is incapable of choosing; he is incapable of a free act because he has become a prisoner of inner instinctual forces, from which he cannot free himself because he is not strong enough.[10] When Roberta ultimately falls into the water as a consequence of an unintended chain reaction, Clyde seems inhibited in his capability to act by the same instinctual blockage. He simply lets her drown although he might easily have rescued her.

Unlike Clyde Joe Christmas does not have a clear plan on how to kill Joanna. But he knows that he will kill her a long time before he acts. Repeatedly he tells himself: "I have got to do something" (256) and "I'm going to do something" (261); yet the question as to whether the protagonist ultimately acts on his own free will ---as he

10. The deterministic elements described in this 'murder' situation are not so much based on Freud's notion of a chaotic Id structure. They are based on biological/ ethnological theories which assume a clearly ordered, hierarchically structured instinctual system in both humans and animals. Modern ethnology has provided evidence for the theory that human action can be blocked if two strong instinctual levels which are in opposition to each other are stimulated equally at the same time (see Guenter Vogel/Hartmut Angermann. dtv-Atlas zur Biologie. Band II. 1977. p. 389).

believes himself he does--- or whether his murderous act is completely determined by other forces unknown to himself remains as ambiguous as in An American Tragedy. This ambiguity in Light in August is partly due to the use of a narrative technique which Dieter Meindl characterizes as "die Gegenlaufigkeit von assertorischer Allwissenheit and auktorialer Hypothese" (Der Amerikanische Roman zwischen Naturalismus und Postmoderne. p. 74).[11]. Frequently the narrator uses hypothetical forms such as "as if he knew where he would be", "as if manipulated by an agent" (216), which leave the reader in doubt as to the actual state of affairs. Furthermore, an insight into Joe's thinking proves extremely ambiguous, because Joe's perspective is not merely limited but is fundamentally flawed ---in W.C. Booth's terms 'unreliable'--because Joe deliberately rejects one form of knowing--intuition--and, therefore his most important problem in life is that of not knowing.

Like Clyde Joe is caught up in the paradoxical net of wanting to do one thing and then doing another. Several times he consciously decides to leave Joanna: "'Then I'll blow,' he thought" (223), "yet when he moved it was toward the house" (224). He broods that "This is not my life" (244), yet "something held him, as the fatalist can always be held by curiosity, pessimism, by sheer inertia" (246). Faulkner himself underlines the importance of

11. transl.: "the antagonism of assertive omnipotence and authorial hypothesis";

individual freedom: "Man is free and he is responsible, terribly responsible" (qtd in Joseph Blotner. Faulkner: A Biography. 1984. p. 563), yet in another interview he also holds that "man's free will functions against a background of fate" (Faulkner in the University. p. 38). All along Joe is convinced that he has created and chosen his own life: thinking about marrying Joanna Joe refuses, "thinking, 'No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be" (250/1). John Lewis Longley argues that "Joe is free to choose what he will be, and his freedom is infinite" ("Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World". 1963. p.196). Longley argues that Joe ultimately chooses to be neither white nor negro--- "he will simply be himself" (197), and his murder of Joanna is the logical consequence of this choice because Joanna insists that he become a nigger. Throughout his life people attempt to force him to be what they insist he must be, and Joe reacts with violence. Yet, Longley simply takes Joe's statements for literal truths and misses or ignores the ironic reversals that follow Joe's statements. In complete contrast to Longley, George Bedell argues that Joe refuses to make a choice, at all. And the strength with which Joanna pushes him toward a decision he is incapable of making drives him to the violent act, again with the same sense of paradox that characterizes his whole life: "He believed with the calm paradox that he was the volitionless

servant of a fatality in which he believed that he did not believe" (264).

Whereas Clyde at no point is capable of actively killing Roberta, Joe kills Joanna with his razor, which throughout the novel accompanies Joe with strong symbolic connotations. Yet the reader only becomes an indirect witness of this deed. It is not the characters that seem to act and threaten each other with murderous weapons but only their shadows: "He was watching the shadowed pistol on the wall; he was watching when the cocked shadow of the hammer flicked away" (267). Joe does not see Joanna as a person, which decreases the natural inhibition in each human being to kill another human. Also, the shadow may be considered as something between life and death. In ancient mythologies it is the shadow that enters the underworld.[12] Furthermore, as in so many earlier instances Joe seems to become a passive oberver of the violent act he commits against Joanna. He feels that "his body seemed to walk away from him" (266), as if he could only consciously register after his body has (subconciously) acted, which demonstrates Joe's lack of freedom in this violent act. It is also interesting that "there was no heat in them, no fury" (267), which gives the murder an almost ritualistic aspect. Both characters are calm and fulfill what seems an inevitable chain of action. It is significant that Joe is not the only aggressive partner but that Joanna contributes her part to the

murderous game, holding up a pistol to kill Joe. Also, it is Joanna who says: "Maybe it would be better if we both were dead" (263). This strong urge to kill on the part of both former lovers evokes Fromm's ideas on human destructiveness. According to Fromm humans usually transcend themselves by creating life, art, ideas, love. But if humans cannot create life, they will inevitably turn to destruction as a means of transcendence. "If I cannot create life, I can destroy it" (The Sane Society. p. 42).

For both Clyde and Joe the murders seems to become inevitable consequences of their respective problems with their female partners by whom they feel threatened. While Clyde is too weak to execute the murder and lets circumstances act for him, Joe not only actively kills Joanna but after the murder also intrudes into a negro church, curses God from the pulpit, attacks a negro priest and kills another young negro. Again, these acts seem like an inevitable consequence of the cluster evoked by Joanna, the cluster of religion, racism, and violence.

12. C.G. Jung considers the shadow as an archetype for "the inferior being in ourselves', 'the primitive, uncontrolled, and animal part of ourselves' (Frieda Fordham. An Introduction to Jung's Psychology. 1981. p.49).

V. CLYDE'S AND JOE'S DEATHS

Both Light in August and An American Tragedy are in extreme contrast to Crime and Punishment with respect to the ultimate resolution of the novels and the alientated status of the respective heroes. A great deal of the latter part of Crime and Punishment deals with Raskolnikov's confession of his murder and his education and final transformation through the acceptance of his guilt and his punishment. As Louise Dauner puts it, Raskolnikov is ultimately "coming to him-self" through the integration of the feeling self with the thinking self ("Raskolnikov in Search of a Soul". Modern Fiction Studies. 1958/9. p.209). In Joe's and Clyde's cases, however, the alienated status is maintained up to the end of the novels, up to their deaths. As alleged murderers Clyde and Joe are handed over to the justice of their society, yet in both novels society is depicted as ultimately re-enforcing the characters' alienation by using them as sacrificial scapegoats. Dreiser devotes the biggest of the three parts of An American Tragedy to a meticulous description of the persecution, trial and execution of Clyde. According to Matthiessen "the novel becomes documentary in the literal sense" (Theodore Dreiser. p.198), because Dreiser draws heavily on original trial documents to reconstruct his fictional trial. He even uses original love letters from an actual murder trial and makes them play a crucial role in Clyde's trial. Light in August

is much less documentary, but the emotionally powerful execution scene is based on an actual lynching in Oxford where Faulkner was born. Both authors thus hold up a mirror to American society.

Dreiser's narrative powerfully dramatizes that Clyde is not only used but exploited by different social institutions whose alleged function it is to serve the truth in the name of the American people. Dreiser makes the point that Clyde is denied any justice because the judicial institutions are corrupted by political interests. The district attorney Orville Mason in many ways evokes his counterpart Eustace Graham in Faulkner's Sanctuary. Both characters have physical handicaps, which create in both extremely strong social ambitions. Mason has a broken nose, 'a psychic sex scar' (503), and Graham has a "club foot, which had elected him into the office he now held" (Sanctuary. p. 208). Both Graham and Mason are not so much interested in values such as the truth, but in how they can use a murder trial and public emotions to further their own careers. The case against Clyde is "a golden opportunity" (503) for Mason, a case "which might perhaps solve the problem of his future" (504/5). While Clyde is wrongly convicted for deliberately and actively killing Roberta, Mason wins the necessary public support in his election for the county judgeship. Robert Penn Warren argues that the attorney Mason functions as a mirror to Clyde's story, because Mason is dominated by the same burning ambitions

that characterize Clyde. Dreiser thus unmasks ambition as the secret springs of human action (Homage to Theodore Dreiser. 1971. p. 122). While Mason as the stronger individual realizes his ambitions in his life, Clyde is weak and loses and is literally doomed to die.

"Raskolnikov participates both in crime and punishment actively. ... Clyde is at every turn a passive observer of the scenes in which the terms of his crime and punishment are being agreed upon" (Frederick J. Hoffmann. "The Scene of violence: Dostoevsky and Dreiser". Modern Fiction Studies. 1960/1. p. 104). It is this passivity that turns Clyde into an object; as an object he is used by the social machinery with different forces struggling to use him to their advantage. The Lycurgus Griffiths refuse to allow Clyde's lawyers to use the plea of emotional insanity in Clyde's trial, which would be the most logical and most effective defence strategy, with a very high probability that it might at least save Clyde's life. The Griffiths are afraid that such a plea might reflect negatively on their name, and, the lawyers ---financially dependent on the Griffiths--- comply with their requests.

The newspapers spread the melodramatic black and white picture of the murderer and his victim in order to push their sales. John Brazil points out that in newspaper reporting on murder trials in the twenties "there appears to have been an effort to make the trials the same, to invest them with a stereotypical plot constructed of stock

situations, stock characters, and formulaic descriptions. Each was a 'crime of the century,' 'the modern era,' or 'the decade'; the crime was always 'bestial,' 'shocking,' or 'horrible'. Police or detectives always 'combed the city.' There was a 'positive identification,' a 'mastermind,' a 'little woman,' and an 'aged mother.'" ("Murder Trials, Murder, and Twenties America". p. 166). All these elements recur in the coverage of Clyde's trial. For the public Clyde becomes "an unmitigated villain---a reptilian villain" (502), he is a "city seducer and betrayer" (513), he is seen as a rich scoundrel, a raper, and a murderer (502, 513). The melodramatic contrast is emphasised by Roberta being pitied as a "poor lonely country girl" (577), a 'mere child' (506) who has been brutally victimized by 'a bearded man', although Clyde is actually younger than Roberta.[1]

A similar stereortyping occurs in Light in August where Joe is used as a sacrificial goat. Faced with the murder of Joanna Burden Southern society immediately falls back on the deep-rooted black/white antinomy and imposes the picture of the black raper and murderer on Joe. In both Light in August and An American Tragedy the image of the murderer is sensationalised by its connection to sexuality.

1. Brazil also points out that contrary to the public image of the murderer most of the 'big' trials and virtually all of the lesser trials involved people who were merely average. "The murderers were, as Alexander Woolcott said of Ruth Snyder, extraordinary because they were not exceptional. They were hard to distinguish from the man or woman across the street" ("Murder Trials, Murder, and Twenties America". p. 167).

In Light in August the image of the male rapist and murderer is furthermore connected to blackness, and in this cluster gains an emotional explosiveness in the white population. Faulkner thus dramatizes that the same cluster of sexuality and blackness that haunted Joe during his lifetime is deeply rooted in his society, a society that seems to have a need, almost an avidity to project this cluster on Joe: "it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and who knew, believed and hoped that she had been ravished too" (272). Joe's persecutors are not primarily interested in whether or not Joe is guilty of murder, but they first of all want to know whether he is a negro or not. Being a negro equals being guilty: "'You better be careful what you are saying, if it is a white man you are talking about', the marshal says. 'I dont care if he is a murderer or not'" (91). The avidity with which the white population is willing to hunt, catch, and execute Joe points to the fact that through Joe they are exorcising an evil they all feel deep down in themselves. Hyatt Waggoner writes: "A scapegoat is needed not by the innocent but by the guilty" (in Barth. p. 193).

It is significant that the hunt takes on the form of a ritual whose inevitable end must be the death of the black man. Right after Joanna's murder "some of them with pistols already in their pockets began to canvass about for someone to crucify" (272). Joanna's dead body is carried to town in "a procession behind a catafalque" (278). And Joe is hunted

as a 'nigger' with bloodhounds hungrily following his traces (279).[2] The only people who take a critical attitude toward the impending crucifixion of Joe are Byron Bunch and Hightower: "Is it certain, proved, that he has negro blood? Think, Byron; what it will mean when people--if they catch ... Poor man. Poor mankind" (93). Only Hightower, who talks from the perspective of a complete outsider, recognizes the tragic fallacy of the white hunters. He recognizes that by killing Joe the white hunters not only re-affirm their own need to be absolved from the evil they project on their victim but that they burden themselves with new guilt and create a still more urgent need for purification and scapegoats.[3]

In both novels the execution of Joe and Clyde is described in terms of killing machineries. Again, Dreiser underlines his positivistic perspective by recreating the atmosphere of a murderers' row after visiting Sing Sing in New York. Dreiser powerfully describes the suffering of the prisoners in the death house in Auburn ---in which Clyde spends more than a year before being electrocuted. The

2. Both Light in August and An American Tragedy stress the spectacular effects that the murder cases create. In Light in August the spectacle of Joanna's death becomes "an emotional barbecue, a Roman holiday almost" (273), and in An American Tragedy "a sense of holiday or festival" (629) prevails among the audience at Clyde's trial. The farmers and their wives even come with infants in their arms (629) in the hope of obtaining a glimpse of Clyde (635).

3. The narrator distances himself from the mob action: "as if the initial outrage of the murder carried in its wake and made all subsequent actions something monstrous and paradoxical and wrong, and in themselves against reason and nature" (280).

murderers row is 'an inferno of mental ills' (767), in which the prisoners are dominated by feelings of 'fear', 'horror', and 'terror' (771). Clyde is overwhelmed by a kind of "psychic terror evoked by the uncertainty as to the meaning of the hereafter" (807). Dreiser thus evokes a sense of existential despair with people becoming mad because they experience for the first time a sense of universal nothingness---a lack of hope for their present lives and a sense of doubt as to the probability of an afterlife. Haskell Block comments: "Dreiser's pity for human suffering enlarges his novel to cosmic dimensions" (The Naturalistic Triptych. p. 74).

In strong contrast to this suffering Dreiser presents the working of the cold, inhuman, never-halting, never-failing killing machinery: "the deadly process was in no way halted, for all their terror" (771). "There was a system---a horrible routine system---as long since he had come to feel it to be so. It was iron. It moved automatically like a machine without the aid or the hearts of men." (807) On the literal level this machine refers to the meticulous regulations and routines in the death house, which like an assembly line moves them all to their ultimate destination --the electric chair. On a figurative level it refers to the inhumanity of the American system ---its judicial system with its laws and regulations, its economic and social system with its clear cut barriers, its political system that needed Clyde as a scapegoat.

It is also highly symbolic that the actual death of each prisoner is accompanied by "a sudden dimming of the lights in this room---as well as over the prison---an idiotic or thoughtless result of having one electric system to supply the death voltage and the incandescence of this and all other rooms" (773). Integrated into an electrical circuit, death is completely materialised, thus reflecting the materialising of prisoners who have lost their status as human beings. This materialising of death seems almost like an ironic anticlimax after the prisoners' long mental suffering, almost as anticlimactic as Emma Bovary's ugly death scene after dreaming of a heroic, romantic suicide (Gustave Flaubert. Emma Bovary). In both Flaubert's and Dreiser's novels these anticlimaxes serve to criticise the underlying notions of such deaths. The deaths in Auburn are systematised, highly ordered, seemingly clean from the perspective of the outside world, and yet, underneath the surface the inhumanity of such a deadly system becomes only too palpable for the reader who is forced to witness Clyde's suffering. Repeatedly Dreiser dramatizes the high walls that surround Auburn. It is society that erected these walls in order not to see the inhumanity that is committed in its name.

Although Joe is ultimately killed after a chase scene by a fanatical fascist, the narrative evokes the sense that there is a similarly inevitable and inhuman killing machine at work as in An American Tragedy. Faulkner

introduces Percy Grimm, Joe's murderer, only toward the end of the novel and creates him partly as a double of Joe Christmas. Becoming part of the civilian military Grimm could "see now his life opening before him, uncomplex and inescapable as a barren corridor" (426), an image that is also repeatedly associated with Joe. As Joe subconsciously follows McEchern's law of subjugation and subordination, Grimm has "a sublime and implicit faith in blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races" (426). Like Joe, Grimm is associated with a highly mechanical order. His character is accompanied by a card playing metaphor, and he wants to preserve order in town during Joe's trial (427, 427). Also, like Joe he acts violently, yet always 'without anger' (428), 'coldly' (429,431), and detached (430). Like Joe and McEachern, Grimm also seems to act not upon his own free will, but is driven by a force outside himself, showing obedience to "whatever Player moved him on the board" (437).[4] Like McEachern and Christmas, Grimm is cut off from the immediacy of a spontaneous response. All his actions are filtered through a primitive code of right wing nationalism and racism. Reduced to a logical, mathematical and mostly binary response mechanism, Grimm's actions become highly predictable.

4. Alwyn Berland comments: "we are taken back to the Calvinist's Old Testament note of righteousness, of violence, of judgment and doom. The seed of Calvinism has

It is also significant that Grimm succeeds so easily in manipulating the town into participating in his violent course of action: "the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs" (432). The town becomes an unthinking instrument in Grimm's hands. Without interfering the town witnesses how Grimm not only kills but also castrates the dying Joe while he rationalizes his deed with the words: "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell" (439). According to Blotner this execution and castration scene goes back to the lynching of a black man named Nelse Patton in Oxford in September 1908. Patton, who was alleged to have killed a white women by cutting her throat, was killed by a white mob 'in a volley of pistol shots' and afterwards his body 'was quickly castrated and the head mutilated' (Faulkner: A Biography. 1974. Vol.I. p. 113/4).[5]

The fact that Joe is lynched and castrated as a black reflects the reality of the post Reconstruction era

flowered into the public life; Percy Grimm is not a departure from, but an extension of the Calvinistic pattern of Light in August" ("Light in August: The Calvinism of William Faulkner". p.166). As a matter of fact, Grimm's violent actions are described in religious terms: He moves "with the implacable undeviation of Juggernaut or Fate" (435), "as though under the protection of Providence" (437). Also, Panthea Broughton writes: Faulkner "presents it as a dominating compulsion in Light in August, where character after character construes his own action to be guided and controlled by some supernatural power. These characters commit deeds with incredible certitude, ..., because they act not as individual men" (The Abstract and the Actual. 1974. p. 152).

in America. Herbert Shapiro notes that the large majority of lynchings were committed by whites against black victims (The Encyclopedia of Southern History. 1979. p. 762).[6] Faulkner's narrative dramatizes that the white project the image of the black raper on negroes in order to justify their own violence. Shapiro points out that "the major pretext for lynchings from the post-Reconstruction era onward was that mob action was necessary to control black sexual assaults upon white women" (The Encyclopedia of Southern History. 1979. p. 762). The actual falseness of these claims, however, underscore the reality of subconscious phobias on the part of the white.

Both Clyde and Joe are brutally victimized by American society. They are not only denied the legal justice they are entitled to according to the Constitution, but they are also denied any mercy or sympathy which they deserve as human beings. American society dehumanizes Clyde and Joe so completely that it becomes impossible for them to overcome their alienation even in the face of death.

5. It is also significant that the lynching mob in Oxford was led by a Percy Grimm-like character, the senator Sullivan, who even issued a press statement justifying his actions: "I led the mob which lynched Nelse Patton and I am proud of it ... I wouldn't mind standing the consequences any time for lynching a man who cut a white woman's throat. I will lead a mob in such a case any time" (qtd in Blotner. Faulkner: A Biography. Vol. I. p. 114).

6. According to the statistics quoted by Shapiro there were 275 lynchings from 1921-1930 in the United States, with 248 black and 27 white victims. In 1932--the year of publication of Light in August--6 blacks and 2 whites were lynched (Herbert Shapiro. The Encyclopedia of Southern History. p. 763).

Although both of them try to reach a deeper understanding of their lives and deaths, they die without any insight. Clyde desperately struggles to find to what extent he has become guilty of Roberta's death, which is a key to his understanding of himself. Yet, again and again, his outside world imposes roles on him that further weaken his sense of self.

Clyde's lawyers Alvin Belknap and Reuben Jephson drill and coach Clyde for months, hammering their version of the truth into him, namely that he has experienced a change of heart towards Roberta and never ever even thought of committing a deliberate murder. The narrative, however, clearly exposes that it is exactly the consciousness of this lie that weakens Clyde in his trial to such a point that he is incapable of convincing the jury of his innocence. The narrative furthermore demonstrates the fallacy of Clyde's complete psychic dependency on his lawyers. Donald Pizer very correctly describes Jephson as a 'Hawthornelike villain' (The Novels of Theodore Dreiser. p. 270). Jephson is cold and shrewd, an "uncontrollable machine of a kind which generates power" (606), and uses this power to manipulate Clyde. Just as Arthur Dimmesdale in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter trusts and depends on Roger Chillingworth who slowly erodes Dimmesdale's life forces, Jephson has a "determined cunning and courage with which he was seeking to inoculate Clyde, and which somehow did inoculate him" (626), yet ultimately to Clyde's

disadvantage. Clyde is left with a dangerous weakness when Jephson is not at his side. Instead of gaining some insight into himself Clyde is given some formulas which, in fact, distance him from himself.

Similarly, in the death house in Auburn Clyde invests all his trust in the young minister Duncan McMillan, who appeals to him because he is 'highly poetic and emotional', a 'confused, merciful, beautiful soul' (777). McMillan's goal is the "spiritual salvation of Clyde's soul" (778). His function is similar to that of Porfiry in Crime and Punishment, who tries to induce the murderer to confess his transgression in order to regain his inner peace. According to Robert Penn Warren "McMillan strips Clyde of all his lies and prepares him for repentance and salvation" (Homage to Theodore Dreiser. p. 124). Also, Lauriat Lane argues that "trying to understand himself, Clyde has become, at last fully himself" ("The Double in An American Tragedy". p. 220). This very positive reading of McMillan's influence in Clyde's life, however, ignores that Clyde at no point reaches a moment of peace or inner awareness. Even at the end of the novel he feels completely misunderstood, and still does not know how to judge himself and his past actions: "How hopeless. Would no one ever understand---or give him credit for his human---if all too human and perhaps wrong hungers" (805). McMillan simply imposes a last foreign role on Clyde, which distances him as much from himself as all the other roles he has played

throughout his life. McMillan merely repeats the indoctrination that characterizes Clyde's youth; he 'spoonfeeds' Clyde with endless quotations of psalms and surrounds him with a superficial cloak of religion, which Clyde never really internalises, let alone understands. Clyde reads and rereads the Psalms most familiar to him, "seeking from their inspiration to catch the necessary contrition---which once caught would give him that peace and strength which in those long and dreary hours he so much desired. Yet never quite catching it" (799). Also, Clyde's public statement of his religious conversion and McMillan's feeling of spiritual triumph are ironically contrasted to his inner doubts: "Was he truly saved?" (809). McMillan ultimately turns out to be the last surrogate father who betrays Clyde's trust. Once Clyde has confessed his deed to McMillan, the priest--"yearning towards an impossible justice" (777)--refuses to help convert the death penalty into a prison sentence. He decides that "In your heart was murder then" (795), completely ignoring all the elements that have led up to Clyde's act; the negative influence of his parents, society, his emotional instability.

Clyde's death scene is significant on different levels. All in all his death follows the same routine that characterized all the earlier executions in the death house with the green curtains drawn in front of the cells of the prisoners, with Clyde bidding his comrades good-bye, and the same 'shuffle shuffle' noise of feet moving closer to the

fatal chair, and finally the sudden dimming of the light that announces his death. The routine ironically echoes the banality of Clyde's life and death in the framework of his world. Yet, Clyde's death is also embedded in--almost crowded with--religious imagery. The final walk to the electric chair is repeatedly referred to as a procession, and Clyde's mother appears twice as a Pieta-figure: "she was too moved for words---her condemned boy in her arms---merely drawing his head to her shoulder and then looking up" (748). This scene evokes the archetypal crucifixion and implies that Clyde has been betrayed and sacrificed by his world like Christ, which in turn fills the reader with a strong sense of pity for him. Clyde's death also stimulates a process of self-awareness in McMillan, who recognises that he has not only failed, but that he has betrayed Clyde, which re-affirms the religious parallel[7]: "Was he ever to have mental peace again, perhaps?" (811).

While Clyde gives himself to mental tortures behind the walls of Auburn, Joe's search for insight is placed in a natural framework. During his flight from the white persecutors, he becomes incapable of maintaining the clear-cut, mechanical order that characterizes his whole life. He desperately longs to know which day of the week it is in order to regain a sense of security. Yet it is through

7. Robert Penn Warren points out that in the first typed version of An American Tragedy McMillan commits suicide, which drastically re-enforces the parallels to Judas Iscariot. Dreiser removed this scene from the final version of the novel.

this breakdown in his mechanical order that Joe gains a moment of peace in the natural framework: "feeling with each breath diffuse in neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. 'That was all I wanted,' he thinks" (313). For the first time Joe is associated with grayness, a union of black and white. Also the verbs 'diffuse' and 'becoming one' stress a sense of wholeness that Joe has never experienced before. The fact that this experience is placed in a natural framework evokes a rebirth in the transcendental sense. John L. Longley interprets this scene as Joe having a major insight: Joe becomes (tragically) aware of the fact that his newly gained freedom is accompanied by a need for reconciliation with humanity. He sacrifices himself for the murder he has committed ("Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World". in The Tragic Mask. p. 197). The fact is that as a result of his persecution Joe accepts the black identity. He eats the food of negroes and he thinks of himself as their 'brother' (317). The narrative also reveals that it is precisely this recognition of his black side that leads to Joe's wish for suicide. It is not a sense of wholeness that leads to a positive self-sacrifice for some higher purpose but rather the feeling that blackness can only be dealt with by destroying it. Joe wears the black shoes of negroes to hide his traces and he feels "the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves". After being hunted for a week

as a black he thinks: "**Here I am I am tired I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs**". He decides to go back to Mottstown where he knows he will be recognized and caught and executed. Joe finds the spiritual counterpart of his white side in Percy Grimm, who sees in Joe nothing but the black raper and murderer and who is willing to exorcise Joe from his evil blackness. Only in the act of getting brutally murdered and castrated does Joe ultimately find peace:

> He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever" (439/40).

Joe feels released because the act of castration forever frees him of the black blood--the sexual, the feminine, his subconscious side, (the side he sees as the incarnation of evil). He is left with nothing but (some moments of) consciousness, which throughout the novel is associated with whiteness and maleness. The blood as a released breath is a symbol of life, an image of the fountain of life. By longing for the destruction of this black side of himself, Joe accepts the destruction of himself as a living being. In his death Joe only repeats his life-long longing for

white male rigid order. At no point does Joe reach a deeper understanding of himself.

Both Clyde and Joe die as they lived, without any insight into the fallacies of their goals and actions. Yet in both cases the death scenes also re-affirm the human potential for transcendance. While McMillan recognizes his own failure in Clyde's eyes, the spectators of Joe's death scene become aware of their own inhumanity. Only through the brutality of Joe's death do the Southerners become able to recognize Joe for the first time as the man where they saw nothing but the negro before. With the vehicle of their memory his 'crucifixion' becomes part of their everyday life.

Both Clyde and Joe seem to come full circle at the end of the novels. Joe has travelled all his life, yet shortly before his death he realizes that "I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo" (321). As a matter of fact, Joe's life is characterized by a repetition of the same fatal actions; he kills several times, he rejects food repeatedly, his life seems like a series of flights. Yet, Joe is contrasted to Lena Grove's journey, a journey that seems very slow and quiet but that actually involves change and progress.[8] Similar to Joe, Clyde's life is characterized by repeated flights, deaths of which he becomes passively responsible, a journey that leads him back to were he started, behind tall walls which he longingly looks up to but is never able to

overcome. Dreiser re-enforces a pessimistic reading of his novel by constructing the last chapter almost as a repetition of the first, which evokes an eternal circular movement and a denial of all progress. The Griffiths' have become older but they are still preaching the same religion to an audience that is as indifferent as in the beginning of the novel.

Both characters' deaths are accompanied by the rebirth of children that function as doubles to the protagonists. Clyde is replaced in the framework of his family by his little nephew Russel who not only resembles Clyde but has the same temperament. And An American Tragedy ends with one significant difference to the first chapter, namely that Mrs Griffiths--Russel's grandmother--has become aware of the little boy's sensual needs. She gives him money for icecream, thinking: "She must be kind to him, more liberal with him, not restrain him too much, as maybe, maybe, she had---" (814). This act--as little and insignificant it may seem--reveals Mrs Griffiths' insight in her past mistakes and a longing to do better. In Light in August Lena Grove gives birth to a boy in Joe's old shack, in the presence of Joe's grandmother who recognizes the baby as her 'little Joey'. Although the little baby is also an illegitimate child (as Joe Christmas was), the little boy is surrounded by love and protection (that Joe never knew). Whereas An American Tragedy ends on an

8. Joe is also contrasted to Gail Hightower who is capable of understanding that he has become guilty in his life.

ambiguous note, the dark story of Joe Christmas in Light in August is surrounded by the comic mode of the story of Lena Grove. Joe remains "a foreigner to the very immutable laws which earth must obey" (320), but Lena Grove not only endures but prevails as the archetypal earthmother and female principle.

CONCLUSION

Dreiser and Faulkner were neither the first nor the last American authors to treat the problem of alienation --- among others Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Saul Bellow have also written about this problem. Nevertheless, both Dreiser and Faulkner have illustrated the drastic consequences of alienation in terms of violence. Both authors draw attention to the problems of marginality, the problem of the outsider in a rigid social framework.

Although Dreiser and Faulkner attack specific American social problems, the universal nature of their works should not be underestimated. Clyde and Joe are victims of society as much as they are victims of a distorted religious education and the deprivations they suffered during their childhood. The dangerous psychological imbalance which characterizes both characters is a result of their negative childhood experience. In Clyde's case this imbalance results in a fatal passivity, and in Joe's case in a hard uncompromising violence. At the same time the protagonists are caught up in a chain of necessity. Repeatedly, Clyde and Joe are given moments of choice, but each time they prove incapable of choosing. Both characters have moments of reflection, but they are ultimately incapable of awareness or understanding. Caught up in very similar ambiguities of free will versus

determinism both of them become guilty of the deaths of their female partners. Rather than acting on their free will, they are driven by their compulsion, which is a traditional feature of the naturalistic discourse. At the same time Faulkner's and Dreiser's narratives do not completely deny the potential for free-willed action, a feature which clearly transcends the boundaries of traditional naturalism.

By comparing the two works we come to a closer appreciation of the problematic nature of the term 'naturalism'. Light in August and An American Tragedy highlight both the naturalistic and those elements that go beyond the naturalistic framework. There is no doubt that the naturalistic elements are much stronger in An American Tragedy than in Light in August. Dreiser emphasizes elements of heredity in the formation of Clyde's character, whereas heredity is unimportant in Light in August. Dreiser connects the violent death of Roberta to natural sciences, which Faulkner never does. Only in the death house of Auburn does the naturalism in An American Tragedy merge with an overtly existential perspective.

Although the naturalistic perspective dominates in An American Tragedy and Dreiser at no point develops a positive sense of selfhood for Clyde, his narrative dramatizes the alienation of Clyde so powerfully that the reader can assume the underlying notion of selfhood. Clyde

is not what his different roles make him, and he ultimately loses himself through the many roles he adopts. Underneath the overt layer of naturalism An American Tragedy definitely has an 'anti-naturalistic crux'. In contrast to Zola's or Norris' naturalism, Dreiser's characters are never brutes but seekers for an ultimate fulfillment they never reach. An American Tragedy dramatizes the ultimate impossibility of satisfying Clyde's hunger for material objects. The novel clearly denies that an ultimate satisfaction can ever be reached via material objects. Dreiser's narrative seems to imply that the seeking individual needs a spiritual and metaphysical orientation, as Dreiser himself discovered in his life.

Light in August has an important underlayer of naturalism, yet more important than the naturalistic level is the archetypal level of interpretation. A purely realistic or naturalistic interpretation of either Lena or Joe does not lead very far. Taken on a realistic level, Joe is nothing but an aggressive villain, Lena nothing but stupid and cowlike in her passive acceptance. Yet, as archetypes they gain a deeper meaning, representing female and male, life and death, intuition and rational thinking, acceptance and rejection. They represent thesis and anti-thesis and imply an evolution to a higher synthesis when both come together. Although Joe dies a split character, a union is reached at the end of the novel with Lena and Byron

Bunch. Before he knows Lena, Bunch lives a mechanical life, symbolically regulated by his watch. With Lena he renews his contact with life, his courage, his acceptance of change.

Both Faulkner and Dreiser describe in their works the downfalls of Clyde and Joe, which fill the reader with a sense of loss and pity for the victims. Both Dreiser and Faulkner imply a tragic interpretation of their works, Dreiser by changing the intended title 'Mirage' into An American Tragedy, Faulkner by explicitly labelling Joe's downfall a 'tragedy' (Faulkner in the University. p.97). Yet, with my analysis I come to the conclusion that an ironic reading of the characters and their actions is ultimately more rewarding than a tragic interpretation of these works. One pleasure of reading these novels is the dramatic irony both authors create by giving the reader a feeling of superior knowledge over the characters. The reader recognizes the falseness of both Clyde's and Joe's assumption that they act as free individuals and create their own destinies. The reader witnesses their struggling for awareness and their ultimate failure to find themselves.

However partial and limited such a comparison may be, one might argue that Clyde and Joe become tragic victims like Oedipus Rex, who does not recognize the truth when he is openly confronted with it. Nevertheless, considering such an analogy would be overlooking one main difference

between this play and Dreiser's and Faulkner's novels: In Oedipus Rex, the gods who are responsible for man's fate are recognized and ultimately re-affirmed in their omnipotence throughout the play. The spectators are left not only with pity but also with fear at the end of the play, bowing their heads to the acknowledged superiority of the Gods. Faulkner's and Dreiser's novels, however, provide the reader with some critical insight into the underlying structures that are responsible for Clyde's and Joe's failures in life. Dreiser and Faulkner clearly unmask the falsity of the secret 'Gods' that victimize the protagonists of their novels. Faulkner demasks the false arrogance of the assumed omnipotence of the white race, as well as the false claim of the omnipotence of the male and the rational, clearly ordered, systematized and rigid world the male represents. Dreiser unmasks the falsity of the American myths that Clyde so religiously believes in. Whereas the classical tragedy fills the reader with a sense of humility, the novels discussed in this paper leave the reader with a sense of outrage at the falsity of those forces that create Joe's and Clyde's destinies.

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