

THE JOURNEY OF THE YOUNG AMERICAN:

PATHWAYS TO VIETNAM

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By

BARRY R. RITSON, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts

McMaster University

(December) 1983



MASTER OF ARTS (1983)  
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Journey of the Young American: Pathways  
to Vietnam

AUTHOR: Barry R. Ritson, B.A. (University of Lethbridge)

SUPERVISOR: Professor J. D. Brasch

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 152

## ABSTRACT

This investigation of four novels, spanning two centuries of American literature, traces recurrent motifs in the American novel of initiation. Repeatedly, a sojourning American child-Adam follows a circular path, moving from his childhood innocence into an underworld where confrontation with the machine leads to introspection and altered perceptions. The American novelist's fascination with the adolescent initiate shifts focus in the twentieth century, reflecting the increasing dominance of technology.

A brief introduction is followed by three chapters examining the four novels. To define the predominant concerns of nineteenth-century America with the maturational excursion, Melville's novel, Redburn, is the subject of the second chapter. Redburn is a fine example of the more traditional fall into the knowledge of good and evil, and the young Wellingborough proves more a witness than an active participant on his voyage to Liverpool. Lucius Priest, in Faulkner's The Reivers, the subject of the third chapter, is a "doer" on his trip to Memphis. Lucius is a twentieth-century Huck Finn who initiates his own fall from innocence by reiving an automobile, the symbol of modern American technological prowess. The more serious journey into maturity during the Vietnam War is the subject of the fourth chapter. Herein, the first section, examining Michael Herr's Dispatches, evidences the experience of the arch-seer, the reporter in Vietnam whose self-knowledge is painfully laid bare by the

violence through which he travels. This section is augmented by the study of A Rumor of War by Philip Caputo, who recounts his year-long journey as an officer, a "doer," through Vietnam.

In all four novels, the sojourner is a child-Adam, initially innocent, naive, idealistic, and in all four the machine enters the garden, thrusting the child into a world of harsh experience. The journeys share a familiar pattern, but the physical process and the concomitant introspection are strikingly more intense and penetrating in the more contemporary novels of initiation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I extend my sincerest appreciation to Ed and Vera, parents whose support and encouragement are the foundation for this project. I also wish to recognize Professor Jim Brasch and Professor Cheryl Calver for their combined academic and editorial guidance in the composition of the thesis. Without their confidence and painstaking concern, the quality of the work would surely have suffered.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

American novels in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries repeatedly depict young boys on journeys. One need only think of such familiar characters as Huck Finn, Henry Fleming, Nick Adams, Redburn, and Lucius Priest, to realize the popularity of this theme of the adolescent on a journey. My suspicions of the potential fruitfulness of close examination of the intricacies of this theme in novels from both centuries have been confirmed as I examined the four novels under consideration here. The similarity of their designs has been borne out.

My analysis has been inspired by two seminal critical studies of nineteenth-century American literature: R. W. B. Lewis' The American Adam and Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden. Each work reveals more than adequately that the examination of this century's literature is an extraordinarily fruitful process when done with a particular theme in mind. Both works effectively draw thematic threads through the fabric of American culture, and both find that motifs, in one case the American as Adam, and, in the second, the industrial machine's invasion into Edenic nature, encapsulate American thought in the nineteenth century.

These two works not only take a similar critical tack, but fundamentally, they complement one another thematically. The American

Adam and the confrontation with the machine in the New World's garden are mythologically united by the consideration of the Biblical myth in Genesis. Adam falls, and he is thrust out of Eden. Here, on the outside, there is a new life, one with the hardships not experienced in the Edenic garden. In the American myth of the new life, as outlined by Marx, Adam idealizes the product of his labours: he expects to shape this New World to approximate the past Eden, using the machine as the tool. Yet it is the machine that both inspires the vision and disrupts the realization of the dream.

Tactically similar and thematically united, the two studies form a critical dichotomy that is integral to the study of not only nineteenth-century American literature, but that of the twentieth century as well, and, in particular, to any examination of the boy-on-a-journey motif in the American novel. There is a tendency to present the American Adam as a young boy who falls to experience and is therefore thrust into adulthood. There is also a tendency for that same boy to come to maturity on a journey, one that metaphorically takes him from childhood innocence to worldly experience. However, it is the degree to which these three--Adam, the machine, and the youth on a journey--are related that concerns this study. The following examines four novels that depict the sojourning adolescent.

I commence with an analysis of a representative nineteenth-century novel of initiation, Melville's Redburn, hitherto unexamined in the light of Lewis and Marx. While demonstrating the viability of their approaches, the analysis reveals a traditional fall into experience. The remainder of my investigation examines three twentieth-century novels:

first, a representative novel of initiation, The Reivers, by one of the foremost modern American novelists, William Faulkner, and finally two contemporary examples of the motif, Michael Herr's Dispatches and Philip Caputo's A Rumor of War. The ensuing analysis demonstrates the general applicability of Lewis' and Marx's approaches in the twentieth-century journey novel as well as notable changes in intensity and emphasis. Before turning to the detailed analyses of these four works, however, I should first explore those integers upon which this study pivots: the form the journey typically takes and the demands it places on the initiates at the various stages of its progression.

By no means the creation of American authors, the journey motif is prevalent throughout literature, but this motif is particularly important within the study of American novels because, in general, "American fiction assumes typically the pattern of a journey."<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, "the novel records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience, from that ignorance which is bliss to a mature recognition of the actual way of the world."<sup>2</sup> Essentially, each adolescent hero must undertake this journey, literally or metaphorically. When the journey is undertaken by a boy, it is the American Adam who passes "from a state of innocence to a state of experience," who falls from child-like ignorance to worldly knowledge.

Typically, the journey is marked by the young hero's isolation and introspection. Having fallen, the young man is privileged in his new position:

The new member inherited the corruption, but he likewise shared in the wisdom. If he could never regain Adam's radical innocence, he need never regress to Adam's ignorance.<sup>3</sup>



But it is by no means easy to incorporate the experience. Literally, the experience takes the form of the journey, but figuratively, this is a journey to discover the self, requiring the initiate to go beyond the "circle of selfhood" to gain or rediscover the self.<sup>4</sup> The circuit demands severe introspection, and this introspection is often unsettling, as, for example, Holden Caulfield discovers. Moreover, this introspection accentuates the individuality of the youthful American hero who invariably suffers from loneliness. The finest expression of the isolated, lonesome figure on a journey is, of course, Huck Finn:

In him, the obsessive American theme of loneliness reaches an ultimate level of expression, being accepted at last not as a blessing to be sought or a curse to be flaunted or fled, but quite simply as man's fate.<sup>5</sup>

Herein, Fiedler recognizes the universal fact that man may well perceive himself as part of a greater whole, but ultimately, he is an entity unto himself, depending on himself for existence.

Over and above the loneliness, the introspection, and the learning, the American boy's journey is characterized by its circular path. Like Odysseus, the hero returns homeward, but the return invariably places in chiaroscuro the changes that have occurred in the interim. Having left his family, his possessions, and his home, he proceeds in isolation, an Ishmael, a pariah, on a journey until "...in the end the American hero is either dead or totally alienated from society, alone and powerless, like the evicted shepherd of Virgil's *eclogue*."<sup>6</sup> (This is not to say that Odysseus is, "in the end," "powerless.") However, for the most part, the journey proves a "denitiation," an "initiation

away"<sup>7</sup> from society. So when the miraculous events in Twain's fable come to an end, Huck decides to "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest."<sup>8</sup> Huck has come full circle, back into the realm of society dominated by people like Miss Watson, the widow, and Aunt Sally. His experience has stripped away the mere vestige of social acceptance that he had in the beginning of the novel, and, even though he has not changed much, as an "abolitionist" who had exercised his moral prerogative in favor of his friend, Huck has no place in Hannibal, Missouri. In a sense, Huck, like Nick Adams and Ike McCaslin, comes to recognize his "apartness from others"<sup>9</sup>: "...so there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't agoing to no more."<sup>10</sup> Huck could not have written the book without having first made the journey, and he is not about to acquiesce to the moral domination he has come so far to escape. By no means all of the initiates decide to leave again the world from which they initially departed, but all do return to see that once-familiar place through altered, experienced eyes.

Another aspect common to these journeys is the hero's confrontation with the underworld. This occurs in either of two ways: a metaphorical or mythological crossing into the underworld, or the confrontation with a manifestation of hell on earth. Odysseus literally meets his mother in the underworld and returns again on the voyage, whereas Lucius Priest, in Faulkner's The Reivers, metaphorically crosses into the underworld with the help of Charon, whose ferry facilitates the confrontation with the hellish world of Memphis. The manifestation

of hell on earth often takes the form of a Faustian character or, again, the Hadean city. For example, Melville's Redburn stands in awe of the malignant Jackson, and he also witnesses the corruption in the streets of Liverpool. In either experience, the hero makes the choice to commence the journey, herein choosing to confront the Hadean vision. Occasionally there is a conscious decision to face the underworld, evidenced most dramatically within Huck's words: "'All right, then, I'll go to hell.'"<sup>11</sup>

To understand the implications of such a confrontation with the underworld, we must realize that the adolescent is initially innocent. The young boy is unencumbered by worldly concerns, adult responsibilities, or human mortality. In most of these novels of adolescence, there is an invigorating youthful energy, a robustness and strength that is paralleled by a young America's vision of itself. An adolescent among world nations, the newly-independent states perceived themselves in idealistic terms, a land where the fetid influences of the Old World could be eradicated while constructing a new Eden or Arcadia:

Soon the dream of a retreat to an oasis of harmony and joy was removed from its traditional [Virgilian] literary context. It was embodied in various utopian schemes for making America the site of a new beginning for Western society.<sup>12</sup>

This national idealism, this rather naive vision of the self, is reminiscent of the adolescent's idea of self. Just as youth is hardly aware of worldly concerns, human mortality, or other distinctly adult burdens, America is fascinated with youth, and possibly always has been, because "the great works of American fiction are notoriously at home

in the children's section of the library, their level of sentimentality precisely that of a pre-adolescent."<sup>13</sup> Yet, each individual must pass through adolescence, and there is no more consistent and adroit presentation of this transformation than in the novel as the adolescent's "passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience." The parallel between individual and nation ends here. The nation has not abandoned its fascination with youth.

The simple fact that the innocent ideals of the individual must be altered, if only by the passage of time and the subjection to experience, lends credence to Fiedler's assertion that

In general, our writers have no history, no development; their themes belong to a pre-adult world, and the experience of growing old tends to remain for them intractable. It is merely one aspect of that compulsive veneration of youth, that fear of all which is not simply strong and beautiful, so important in our total culture.<sup>14</sup>

The commercial object for the typical television-fed American is the maintenance of youth, the ideal conclusion that women are youthful because of their face cream and the buoyancy of a young man is determined by the beer he drinks. However, the perpetration of this "veneration of youth" would be impossible if it were not for the abandonment of "history" by each successive generation of Americans. The idea of starting fresh, on the part of both the individual and the society, focuses on the conception of innocence while at the same time abandoning the past:

The dismissal of the past has been only too effective: America, since the age of Emerson, has been persistently a one-generation culture. Successive generations have given rise to a

series of staccato intellectual and literary movements with ever slighter trajectories.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, the innocence is repeatedly renewed with a slightly different effect, and it is this generational rebirth that maintains the youth of the fictional hero. The beginning of his life is pristine, or at least uncluttered by experience, a tabula rasa coincident with the author's pen touching the blank page recreating an idyllic state of immense contradiction:

There is something both ambiguous and unprecedented about the Cult of the Child; indeed, the notion that a mere falling short of adulthood is a guarantee of insight and even innocence is a sophisticated view, a latter-day Pastoralism, which finds a Golden Age not in history but at the beginning of each lifetime.<sup>16</sup>

But the "falling short" can be a revelation, most often perspectively recognized in retrospect, and the revelation is inevitable because the youthful hero cannot remain innocent. Again and again, American novels demonstrate that the fall to experience must occur. Moreover, the effects of the fall are not always predictable nor is the Adamic figure's well-being protected by his initial innocence.

The idea of a fall from innocence persists on each side of the century's turn, and adolescence plays a key role. The novels repeatedly establish an analogy between Adam and the child. Both begin life innocent and fall from the innocence because of a tragic confrontation with the outside world:

...so the narrative figure of Adam--introduced as the hero of a new semidivine comedy--was converted into the hero of a new kind of tragedy, and grew thereby to a larger stature. It was the tragedy inherent in his innocence

and newness, and it established the pattern for American fiction.<sup>17</sup>

The alteration of the hero away from the obvious Adamic prototype to the more subtle child-Adam, or at least youthful hero, is far more convincing for the modern reader who is not necessarily willing to accept primordial innocence as a part of modern intellectual life. Hence, it is a far more palatable and more fruitful theme for both artist and reader when the novel deals with a universal and individual fall from childhood innocence, a state of worldly incognizance and moral naiveté.

It is for this reason that the innocent idealism, epitomized in the twentieth century by, for example, Jay Gatz's adoration of the idea of Daisy rather than Daisy, the fickle gadabout woman, must be shattered. Nick Carraway retells Gatz's tale, and on his very last night, lying on the sand in front of his dead friend's house, Nick unifies the moment Gatsby "first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock" and the moment the "fresh, green breast of the new world" lay before those "Dutch sailors' eyes," the moment the explorer came "face to face" "with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."<sup>18</sup> For the reader, as for Nick, the mythological, green vision of the New World is inextricably linked with the naive idealism that is bound to fall prey to time and circumstance. This inevitability is an essential part of the design of the boy-on-a-journey novels: the myth of innocence far outweighs and outlasts the individual's "wonder." There is bound to be a fall to experience even though not every person is obligated to reenact, literally or metaphorically, the "Dutch sailors' voyage."

However, the choice to commence the journey places the young hero on a path to experience. All sojourners are observers, inevitably seeing places and people along the way. Fiedler asserts:

...the child is not a participant in the fall, but a witness, only vicariously inducted into the knowledge of sin. In the modern version of the Fall of Man, there are four participants, not three: the man, the woman, the serpent and the child (presumably watching everything from behind the tree).<sup>19</sup>

Herein lies an apparent contradiction. The child is both observer and participant, though he is typically more one than the other. The child-initiate is bound to represent events as they strike him, and the kind of events may well determine the tone of the narrative. For example, the experience of a Redburn is quite different from that of Henry Fleming; sailing a merchant ship across the Atlantic is, prima facie, unlike taking part in a war. And the two narratives are as different in style and tone as are the two experiences. Redburn describes his voyage to Liverpool, his meanderings in the city, his trip to London, and the return voyage. Henry Fleming's voyage is into and then away from an American Civil War battle. The staggering confrontation with the underworld occurs only after weeks of sailing in Redburn. On the other hand, Henry Fleming must deal with the Hadean horror of battle revealed to the initiate in a matter of hours. For Henry, the aging process is short and anything but sweet. The latter experience is considerably more dramatic than the first, and the explanation for the difference lies in the word "experience." Experience, according to The Oxford English Dictionary, indicates "7. Knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone." There are two

elements, then, that compound an experience: seeing, that is, the "observation," and the doing, that is, "what one has undergone"(O.E.D.). That the doing is integral to the experience is attested to by the initial, now obscure meaning of the word: "1. The action of putting to the test; trial"(O.E.D.). The distinction arises from the initiate's participation. All are observers, but some become embroiled in the events on the journey. These are the "doers." These doers do not predominantly observe people and events as seers do. They take an active role in their own fall. Hence, the rendering of events on the part of a doer is typically more dramatic because of this personal involvement.

The confrontation with the ways of the world is harsh, but it operates maturationally as a rite of passage. Traditionally--that is, in the nineteenth century--the fall is manifest in mythopoeic allegory and takes the form of an Adamic confrontation with evil:

An initiation is a fall through knowledge to maturity: behind it there persists the myth of the Garden of Eden, the assumption that to know good and evil is to be done with the joy of innocence and to take on the burdens of work and childbearing and death.<sup>20</sup>

Fiedler is quick to point out the alteration of focus from sin and its burdensome fruits to the twentieth-century concern, not so much with "the more traditional fable of a fall to evil" but with "an initiation into good-and-evil...a transition from the worship of innocence to that of experience, from a concern with the latency period of the child to a concentration of the moment of adolescence."<sup>21</sup>

This adolescence is linked to the fall by way of the doctrine



of the Fortunate Fall. Again, R. W. B. Lewis must be considered the authority of precedence because he traces the idea to fourth-century Christian theology, revealed in a hymn: "O certe necessarium Adae peccatum"--certainly Adam's sin was necessary.<sup>22</sup> The child-Adam-individual must, if he is to enjoy maturity, deny his innocence. Or, in Jamesian terms, "...in order to enter the ranks of manhood, the individual (however fair) had to fall, had to pass beyond childhood in a encounter with 'Evil,' had to mature by virtue of the destruction of his own egotism."<sup>23</sup> Possibly the only quality peculiarly American in the fall as a universality is the kind of experience that precipitates the fall. In the mythopoeic sense, the Adamic figure confronts human sexuality, but "In the United States it is through murder rather than sex, death rather than love that the child enters the fallen world."<sup>24</sup> For example, Hemingway's Nick Adams confronts death as he enters the "fallen world" in The Nick Adams Stories. On the opening page Nick reveals his Adamic character. When he undresses by firelight, he, like the naked postlapsarian Adam, "felt very uncomfortable and ashamed."<sup>25</sup> Within scant narrative minutes, Nick becomes even more uncomfortable in the forest's solitary darkness, a darkness whose Melvillean silence triggers the recognition of his own mortality: "Then suddenly he was afraid of dying."<sup>26</sup> Previous to this fishing trip, Nick has the same thought, and on this occasion his solitary fear is assuaged by reading Robinson Crusoe the night through. However, in the forest, he symbolically fires the rifle that summons his father and uncle. The resultant wound from this martial confrontation with death and darkness brings Nick to the conclusion that "I myself did not want to sleep

because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body."<sup>27</sup> Perceptively, his life dangles from his waking consciousness. The "knowledge" is perceptively real, as real to Nick as the silkworms in the mulberry bushes. The "knowledge" is spun from thought and experience, his baptism of fire, and the "knowledge" attests to the darkness of the human soul, as opposed to the light of the campfire or the light of apprehension (indicated by his resumption of sleeping at night). Having been disabled by the fall, Nick returns to the "Big Two-Hearted River" to come to grips with his past experience. He reveals the potential danger concealed within the choice that leads to harsh experience.

In light of this claim that it is through murder and death, not sex or love, that the child enters the fallen world, it might be expected that sexual imagery is denied a place in the American version of the fall. However, there remains the possibility for imagery that unites the sexual and the deadly. This proves to be the case in all four novels under investigation here, especially in the novels of Vietnam, where explicitly sexual imagery is employed to describe the confrontation with death.

The choice to commence the journey, to enter the world of experience, is taken by numerous characters, such as Henry Fleming, Ishmael, Wellingborough Redburn, Huckleberry Finn, and Tommo (of Typee). They commence the journey and confront the world's contraries, and the authors are most likely to reveal or at least express these contraries in a series of dialectically opposing pairs: Europe and

America, city and country, industry and nature, society and the individual, to mention but a few. By tracing the journey of a Huckleberry Finn or an Ishmael, the author facilitates the isolation of an individual who is forced to deal literally or figuratively with such contraries and establish values of his own. It is a journey that demands self-reliance, confidence on the part of the sojourner to evaluate what lies before him. In addition, the journey has specific narrative purpose and direction:

...in Cooper, Melville, and Twain as much as in Hawthorne, the essential search is not for a means of escape but for values./...Whether the journey is only inward or whether it is accompanied by outward physical movement, the important fact is that, unlike other literary journeys...,it is not a mere functional device. It does not merely provide a means for the serious or satirical portraiture of contemporary society, nor is its purpose entirely that of holding together an episodic narrative of adventure, anecdote, or escape. The journey is more nearly the essential form of these novels because it represents in physical terms an approximation to their theme: the individual's 28  
alienation from the established social order....

This formative journey is a journey into maturity. The past security is abandoned because it is out of place in the adult world that demands independence. It is this sense of individuality, the sense of America alone on her own frontiers, that lends vigor to mid-nineteenth-century America, a land of exuberant, intense human movement.

The critic need go no further in the search for this adolescent vitality than Melville's fictional presentation of the Mississippi's temporary population:

As among Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, or those oriental ones/crossing the Red Sea towards Mecca in the festival month, there was no lack of variety. Natives of all sorts, and foreigners; men of business and men of pleasure; parlor men and backwoodsmen; farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heiress-hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo-hunters, bee-hunters, happiness-hunters, truth-hunters, and still keener hunters after all these hunters. Fine ladies in slippers, and moccasined squaws; Northern speculators and Eastern philosophers; English, Irish, German, Scotch, Danes; Santa Fé traders in striped blankets, and Broadway bucks in cravats of cloth of gold; fine-looking Mississippi cotton-planters; Quakers in full drab, and United States soldiers in full regimentals; slaves, black, mulatto, quadroon; modish young Spanish Creoles, and old-fashioned French Jews; Mormons and Papists; Dives and Lazarus; jesters and mourners, teetotalers and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs; hard-shell Baptists and clay-eaters; grinning negroes, and Sioux chiefs solemn as high-priests. In short, a piebald parliament, an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man.

As pine, beech, birch, ash, hackmatack, hemlock, spruce, basswood, maple, interweave their foliage in the natural wood, so these varieties of mortals blended their varieties of visage and garb. A Tartar-like picturesqueness; a sort of pagan abandonment and assurance. Here reigned the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West, whose type is the Mississippi itself, which, uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide.<sup>29</sup>

Melville presents the astounding variety of humanity, a collection of "pilgrims" whose journey will take them through a landscape as varied as "these varieties of mortals." The list itself is a series of opposing pairs whose opposition sometimes is defined by the juxtaposition rather than a contrast taken for granted previous to the list's construction. This sense of opposition, inherent in the American

novel, apparently has its origins in New England Puritanism, the source of a Manichaeian perspective:

...the Manichaeian quality of New England Puritanism...had so strong an effect on writers like Hawthorne and Melville and entered deeply into the national consciousness. From the historical point of view, this Puritanism was a backsliding in religion as momentous in shaping the imagination as the cultural reversion Cooper studied on the frontier. For, at least as apprehended by the literary imagination, New England Puritanism --with its grand metaphors of election and damnation, its opposition of the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, its eternal and autonomous contraries of good and evil--seems to have recaptured the Manichaeian sensibility. The American imagination, like the New England Puritan mind itself, seems less interested in redemption than in the melodrama of the eternal struggle of good and evil, less interested in incarnation and reconciliation than in alienation and disorder.<sup>30</sup>

In the four novels under consideration here, the initiates are all thrown into a world of alienation and disorder.

The potential for such harsh experience is hidden within Melville's description cited above. In his "piebald parliament" are the black predators of humanity, the "still keener hunters after all these hunters," whose threat is accentuated by the tree list, a Spenserian allusion indicating the danger to be confronted by the Red Cross Knight in the forest of Error. The pilgrims, like Spenser's knight, are on a voyage of discovery, a search for values, a wise, secure identity, and possibly a "new beginning."<sup>31</sup>

The search reveals the tendency for the American imagination to view itself in terms of contradictory, opposing values and ideas. This

tendency is evident not only in American fiction but also in autobiographical accounts, which invariably present the dialectical view of the "actual way of the world."<sup>32</sup> This inclination on the part of American authors is in keeping with Trilling's conception of culture: "The 'very essence' of a culture...resides in its central conflicts, or contradictions, and its great artists are likely to be those who contain a large part of the dialectic within themselves, 'their meaning and power lying in their contradictions.'"<sup>33</sup> As is seen in the passage from Melville, an obvious "source of contradiction lies in the dual allegiance of the American, who in his intellectual culture belongs both to the Old World and the New."<sup>34</sup>

It is to be expected, then, that a journey undertaken a century ago will differ considerably from one undertaken by a contemporary hero. Though the temporally disparate journeys share many similarities, the distinctions are determined by the extraordinary changes that everyday living has since undergone, particularly in the realm of technology. If the Industrial Revolution captivates the society of a century ago, it certainly dominates contemporary society. And if the machine enters the garden in nineteenth-century novels, it prevails in the gardens of the twentieth-century novels. The youth on his journey into experience must confront this burgeoning technology. The contemporary adolescent hero faces much the same threat as did, say, his predecessor Huck Finn, and the confrontation is certainly as dangerous. In fact, if he is so unlucky as to go to war, where technology rules supreme, he confronts a pervasively more deadly technology. Such is the case in Vietnam. That war's character was determined by military technology, so, not

unexpectedly, America's most recent initiation novels--those martial novels of Vietnam--give a central dominance to the machine.

Vietnam is the terminus ad quem on the journey of a generation of Americans. More than a decade has passed since the last American military fighting unit left Vietnam, and the veterans are only now beginning to reveal their experiences in literary form to their country. An adolescent among nations, America, like the generation of youths who went to that war, has recoiled from her first defeat. She has come to discount her own invincibility. And yet the country's journey is paralleled in American literature, paralleled by the traditional solitary journey of the young boy from innocence to maturity.

To define the predominant concerns of nineteenth-century America with the maturational excursion, Melville's novel, Redburn, is the subject of the second chapter. Redburn is a fine example of the more traditional fall into the knowledge of good and evil, and the young Wellingborough proves more a witness than an active participant on his voyage to Liverpool. On the other hand, Lucius Priest in Faulkner's The Reivers, the subject of the third chapter, is a "doer" on his trip to Memphis, Tennessee. Lucius is a twentieth-century Huck Finn who initiates his own fall from innocence by reiving an automobile, the symbol of modern American technological prowess. The more serious journey into maturity during the Vietnam War is the subject of the fourth chapter. In the first section, an examination of Dispatches by Michael Herr evidences the experience of the arch-seer, the reporter of the Vietnam War whose self-knowledge is painfully laid bare by the violence through which he travels. This section is augmented by the study of A

Rumor of War, the memoirs of Philip Caputo, who recounts his year-long journey as an officer, a "doer," through Vietnam.

The first two chapters establish the characteristic concern in American fiction with the young man's physical journey and the concomitant introspection that results in self-knowledge. While the young seer, Redburn, achieves a limited degree of self-knowledge through confrontation with evil external to himself, the doer, Lucius Priest, confronts evil by participating in it. The process is more internalized, and he comes to a more intense awareness of his responsibility for his own actions. While, in the nineteenth-century novel, the machine is evident as a manifestation of the fallen world, it remains comparatively submerged. In The Reivers, however, the machine plays a more central role as the apple in the garden, as the vehicle of initiation. The final chapter demonstrates a continuing concern with the young man's physical journey and resulting self-awareness. In these novels of Vietnam, however, the child-Adam's fall to experience is more dramatic than in the earlier works--for the seer (Herr) as well as for the doer (Caputo). The reason lies, apparently, in the increased tension created by the dominance of technology. Undeniably, the machine has become the controlling factor in the journey and the determinant of the initiate's fall into experience.

In all four novels, the sojourner is a child-Adam, initially innocent, naive, idealistic, and in all four the machine enters the garden, thrusting the child into a world of harsh experience. The journeys share a familiar pattern, but the physical process and the concomitant introspection are strikingly more intense and penetrating in the more contemporary novels of initiation.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A. N. Kaul, The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>Maurice Z. Shroder, "The Novel as a Genre", in Philip Stevick, ed., The Theory of the Novel (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955; Phoenix Edition, 1965), p. 73.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957; Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980), p. 209.

<sup>5</sup>Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 286.

<sup>6</sup>Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: The Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 364.

<sup>7</sup>Lewis, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961), p. 226.

<sup>9</sup>James William Johnson, "The Adolescent Hero: A Trend in Modern Fiction", Twentieth Century Literature, V (April 1959), 7.

<sup>10</sup>Clemens, p. 226.

<sup>11</sup>Clemens, p. 168.

<sup>12</sup>Marx, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Fiedler, Love and Death, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup>Leslie A. Fiedler, An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1948; 4th printing, 1962), p. 193.

<sup>15</sup>Lewis, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>Leslie A. Fiedler, "The Eye of Innocence", in his No! in Thunder: Essays on Myth and Literature (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1960), p. 251.

<sup>17</sup>Lewis, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 182.

<sup>19</sup>Fiedler, No! in Thunder, p. 280.

<sup>20</sup>Fiedler, No! in Thunder, p. 279.

<sup>21</sup>Fiedler, No! in Thunder, p. 279.

<sup>22</sup>Lewis, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup>Lewis, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup>Fiedler, No! in Thunder, p. 281.

<sup>25</sup>Ernest Hemingway, The Nick Adams Stories, preface by Philip Young (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 13.

<sup>26</sup>Hemingway, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup>Hemingway, p. 144.

<sup>28</sup>Kaul, pp. 71-72.

<sup>29</sup>Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, ed. and intro. Hennig Cohen (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964), pp. 6-7.

<sup>30</sup>Chase, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup>Marx, p. 228. Here Leo Marx draws a parallel between the "American myth of a new beginning" and the "primal myth described by Joseph Campbell."

<sup>32</sup>Shroder, p. 14. Classes within genres are an unnecessary restraint. Specifically, autobiography can be employed with equal emphasis within an examination of this sort, particularly when that analysis is concerned with a unifying theme. Moreover, these two classifications are meant to assist the reader and critic, an attitude supported by the simple fact that the two have more similarities than differences. Such works are the result of rendering life into words, the only difference being that the autobiographer tells his own life. But again, even this difference is reduced because the narrator in the autobiography, like the author of fiction, must use words to translate events, and those events are necessarily filtered through a highly selective memory and a never perfectly objective mind.

<sup>33</sup>Marx cites Lionel Trilling, p. 342.

<sup>34</sup>Chase, p. 11.

## CHAPTER II

### MELVILLE'S ADAM:

#### THE VISION OF THE FALLEN WORLD

Reading Redburn is a delight. Reading the critics who since 1849 struggle to express their reading of this, Melville's "cakes & ale"<sup>1</sup> narrative, is tedious. The vast majority of these critics focus their attentions on the autobiography of the youthful Herman as it pertains to Redburn or struggle with numerous narrators seen toppling each other to gain dominance in the narrative. The light of critical sanity is sparked in 1951 by William H. Gilman who adroitly exhausts the biographical connection between Melville's youth and Wellingborough Redburn's first voyage, only to conclude that the literary rendering far exceeds the author's original experience.<sup>2</sup> However, though Gilman compliments the artistic prowess of the author, he has considerable difficulty with the narrative stance within the novel, and it is not until 1954 that Merlin Bowen offers a satisfactory account of the presence of an older man and an adolescent youth that collectively comprise the narrator, Redburn.<sup>3</sup> Despite the accuracy of these two studies, critics continue to flounder about upon these two respective topics, generally redefining the critical approach to the novel in the shadow of the most recent fad in criticism. In my estimation, these two works remain quite unscathed by subsequent aberrators.

However, apart from their ardent concerns for autobiography and

Melville's own statements about this "amusing narrative of personal experience"(Intro., 8) with its reminiscing narrator, critics collectively agree on the central motifs and concerns developed in the novel. Essentially, the narrative portrays the typical, literary "circular journey"<sup>4</sup> of a naive American adolescent from the New York of the New World to the iniquitous urbanity of the Old World (Liverpool and London) and back to America. The journey leads not only geographically across an ocean, but also experientially across the intellectual expanse between innocence and maturity, between adolescence and adulthood. The journey is from innocence to experience. Therefore, to traverse the expanse, the innocent must master the business of independent living, a theme dominant in the reading of the narrative "as the sort of initiation novel in which the hero gains maturity and self-mastery by learning a particular craft or trade..."--that is, mastering the vocation of sailor.<sup>5</sup> Wellingborough applies himself vigorously to learning his vocation, admitting at first that "I myself was called a boy, and a boy I was"(111). It is not long before "'He Begins to Hop About in the Rigging Like a Saint Jago's Monkey'"(173), and, confident in his mastery of sailing, Redburn, "nimble as a monkey"(174), is "among the first ground-and-lofty tumblers, that sprang aloft at the word"(174). Yet learning the art of sailing is a far cry from learning self-knowledge.

Seemingly, success for Redburn might be measured by his prowess as a sailor:

Going to sea, both in deed and in symbol, was always Melville's way of fronting what Thoreau called "the essential facts of life"; and what must be stressed is that the venture was so much the more harrowing for Melville because

malice and evil were central among the facts to be fronted.<sup>6</sup>

Though Lewis' statement implies that the initiate take an active role to confront those "facts," the student Redburn remains predominantly a seer, "more the passive spectator,"<sup>7</sup> because the emphasis in the novel is "less upon what happens to the boy himself than upon the wretchedness and depravity that are uncovered as existing independently of him in the world...."<sup>8</sup> His is an account of external events, incidents that rarely demand his active involvement. Indeed, once he is afloat and past the upsetting sickness of the sea, Redburn's first impulse is to comment upon the need to "make observations"(115): "...though we were at sea, there was much to behold and wonder at; to me, who was on my first voyage. What most amazed me was the sight of the great ocean itself, for we were out of sight of land"(115). The flurry of visual referents betrays Redburn's role as a seer rather than a doer.

Only "a boy"(43), Melville's child-Adam is committed to "leaving the bright land"(81) of familiarity behind and confronting "the dark night"(81) of the unknown--that Manichaeian vision "outside time"<sup>9</sup> where "nothing was to/be seen but water--water--water..."(115-116), "the area of total possibility."<sup>10</sup> He needs to define himself and his new environment. He is the archetypal nineteenth-century child-Adam that R. W. B. Lewis discusses. Beyond temporal considerations, as if "in a dream all the time"(116), Adam "alone"(79) attests to his own newness: "...[I] did not exactly know where, or what I was; every thing was so strange and new"(117). He logically but naively proceeds to fulfill the Genesiac role, making the Adam-like attempt to "master" "an infinite

number of totally new names of new things"(118), yet interpolating the sagacious, retrospective remark that the naming proceeds ad infinitum because of the ironic possibility that "there were a great many more names, than things in the world"(118). In other words, the naming becomes a preoccupation of only limited worth to the observer, "for to know a great many names, seems to look like knowing a good many things..."(118).

The actual ways of the world, as "seems" implies, are not easily uncovered by a retentive watcher; there is more to "knowing" than remembering "a great many names." Hence, the metaphor of sailing as living is limited by the pervasive influence of man within the world, and he does not so easily fall into convenient categories. Moreover, as young, sojourning Adam, "a sort of Ishmael"(114) in isolation who is without a palmer on his first voyage, Redburn suffers from extreme "lonesomeness"(120), exemplified initially on the packet to New York where he sits "apart, though among them [the other passengers]"(54). Although he leaves his home with an acute hunger to satisfy his romantic, "vague dreamings and longings"(48) for sustaining experience, "he is to learn in the course of his initial voyage...that meals, literal and figurative, do not always satisfy."<sup>11</sup>

There is no one to assist the boy in his discomfiture when his expectations are denied by experience, as they would have been had he taken a bite from his father's oil painting "bought in Paris"(46), or had he pried open the hull of the glass ship, La Reine, or especially had he taken of the fruit from that "vision of the date tree"(46) from stony Arabia. Yet metaphorically, Redburn does come to knowledge because

the commitment to sail is a commitment to confront evil, to walk the streets of iniquitous Liverpool and to descend to the hellish "pit"(313) of London. For the most part, the narrative concentrates upon the external world. Rarely does Redburn grapple with the effect of his actions or the responsibility he bears for those actions. Yet he does achieve a limited degree of self-knowledge, for his observations in Liverpool and London force him to look to himself, to become self-reliant.

It is no wonder, then, that his adolescent emotions range from occasional ecstasy to a dominant melancholy. The Highlander is not long out of sight of land before a dark gloom descends on his spirit:

With such thoughts as these I endeavored to shake off my heavy-heartedness; but it would not do at all; for this was only the first day of the voyage, and many weeks, nay, /several whole months must elapse before the voyage was ended; and who could tell what might happen to me; for when I looked up at the high, giddy masts, and thought how often I must be going up and down them, I thought sure enough that some luckless day or other, I would certainly fall overboard and be drowned. And then, I thought of lying down at the bottom of the sea, stark alone, with the great waves rolling over me, and no one in the wide world knowing that I was there. And I thought how much better and sweeter it must be, to be buried under the pleasant hedge that bounded the sunny south side of our village grave-yard, where every Sunday I had used to walk after church in the afternoon; and I almost wished I was there now; yes, dead and buried in that church-yard.(78-79)

These are the broodings of a mythopoeic universal Adam, "any boy in the world"(79). Markedly similar to Huck's nocturnal vision of the dead, Redburn's melancholy wish for an aquatic dissolution prefigures the metaphorical descent into the underworld. In addition, envisioned against the backdrop of light and darkness, the death-wish marks the



abandonment of the "sunny" green land of innocence for the dark unknown where experience will destroy that innocence. Redburn is literally "thrust out of the world"(83) he knows. He is a child-Adam, isolated and bound to fall to evil as he metaphorically passes through the underworld.

Tugged away from his childhood by the power of the steamer "Hercules"(78), Redburn clings to his Edenic past to counter the singularly isolating voyage ahead of him. His innocence and his past are united in his green memory. His last sights of land are "the green shore of Staten Island"(79), with its "beautiful cottages all overrun with vines, and planted on the beautiful fresh mossy hill-sides"(79), and the florae on the banks of the Narrows, "the entrance to New York Harbor from sea"(80). On describing the latter, Redburn presents a verdant vision of a time when his father was alive:

On the side away from the water was a green grove of trees, very thick and shady; and through this grove, in a sort of twilight you came to an arch in the wall of the fort, dark as night; and going in, you groped about in long vaults, twisting and turning on every side, till at last you caught a peep of green grass and sunlight, and all at once came out in an open space in the middle of the castle. And there you would see cows quietly grazing, or ruminating under the shade of young trees....It was noonday when I was there, in the month of June, and there was little wind to stir the trees, and every thing looked as if it was waiting for something, and the sky overhead was blue as my mother's eye, and I was so glad and happy then.(82)

This is the comforting idyll of his past, a time of innocence epitomized in the sunny nook within the bastion of childhood, protected from the outside world. It is a vision that he is literally leaving behind him as

the Highlander sails into the imminent darkness, yet the vision is intellectually maintained as future possibility, the possibility "that there could really be cities and towns and villages/and green fields and hedges and farm-yards and orchards, away over that wide blank of sea..."(80-81). He has not yet abandoned innocence, his green past, and his idealistic view of himself.

It is his insistence on his own importance, the maintenance of his innocence, that limits his advancement into self-knowledge. Redburn is nearly bludgeoned by experience before he gives ground to his egocentricity. Because, "from the time Redburn leaves home to go to sea he is struck with how out of kilter the world seems,"<sup>12</sup> he endeavors to maintain the vision, seeking that "gentle security"<sup>13</sup> of the past through the mastery of the fundamentals of navigation.

The study commences with the compass, an instrument "forever pointing its fixed fore-finger toward the Pole"(178), remaining uninfluenced by man's activities that "since the beginning of the world almost" have "been setting west"(178). In other words, the compass gives the sojourner a true bearing for his journey. It is not surprising, therefore, that the description of the binnacle housing the compass be concomitant with the memory of his green past:

It was a little house, about the bigness of a common bird-cage, with sliding panel doors, and two drawing-rooms within, and constantly perched upon a stand, right in front of the helm....It was painted green, and on two sides had Venetian blinds; and on one side two glazed sashes; so that it looked like a cool little summer retreat, a snug bit of an arbor at the end of a shady garden lane. Had I been the captain, I would have planted vines in boxes, and placed them so as to overrun this binnacle....(178)

However, like becoming a sailor, the business of navigation is of limited use, the calculations being written on a "blank leaf"(178) of that most useless work, the Wealth of Nations. The navigational idyll is undercut immediately by the textual juxtaposition of the "cool little summer retreat...at the end of a shady garden lane" with a threateningly mechanical helm:

It was a complex system of cogs and wheels and spindles, all of polished brass, and looked something like a printing-press, or power-loom. The sailors, however, did not like it much, owing to the casualties that happened to their imprudent fingers, by catching in among the cogs and other intricate contrivances. Then, sometimes in a calm, when the sudden swells would lift the ship, the helm would fetch a lurch, and send the helmsman revolving round like Ixion, often seriously hurting him; a sort of breaking on the wheel.(179)

Redburn is never physically threatened by the mechanical helm. Its threat is more imagined than real for him. Essentially the juxtaposition betrays a "contrast between two worlds, one identified with rural peace and simplicity, the other with urban power and sophistication,"<sup>14</sup> and, consequently, it betrays "the superiority of the present to the past."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the juxtaposition prefigures the entrance into the murderous underworld and the ultimate demise of Redburn's maintenance of idealistic expectation.

Redburn's confrontation with the Old World brings disillusionment, especially when he seeks to realize his vision of the green landscape. Redburn is bent upon resolving the irresolvable, finding Eden in a fallen world. He is bound to fall into experience, "pitching head-foremost down into the trough of a calamitous/sea"(50-51) like the "gallant

warrior" "figure-head"(50) with which he has "a secret sympathy"(51). The fall is bound to negate "the essence of the glamour of the sea"<sup>16</sup> that this glass ship, La Reine, represents as she sails, the "undisputed mistress of a green glassy sea"(50).

Inasmuch as Liverpool presents Redburn with the sophisticated world of mercantile urbanity that fails to reveal the security of those days when his father lived, the young traveller naively seeks those "green fields and hedges and farm-yards and orchards"(81) he expected in the "land beyond"(80). Outside the city, Redburn immediately regresses into a romantic reverie in "the bright fields and green hedges"(286) where "the air was sweet with the breath of buds and flowers, and [where] there was a green splendor in the landscape that ravished..."(286). It seems that this "old England"(286) holds the promise of an ideal past:

Hovering over the scene was a soft, dewy air,  
that seemed faintly tinged with the green of  
the grass; and I thought, as I breathed my  
breath, that perhaps I might be inhaling the  
very particles once respired by Rosamond the  
Fair.(286)

Yet there is a threat within this knightly vision. He no sooner embraces the "soft, dewy air" than he comes to a "shady place, in some shady field"(286). For the Spenserian, the landscape containing both dew and shade presents the wanderer with both promise and threat.<sup>17</sup> The dew is comforting in its softness, yet portends liquid, sexual dissolution. The shade promises relief from the sun, yet also, shutting it out, secrets potential evil and death. Having merely seen the "charming little dale, undulating down to a hollow, arched over with foliage"(286), Redburn confronts the danger within the seductive landscape--"MAN-TRAPS

AND SPRING-GUNS!"(287). Leo Marx might note here the extraordinarily quiet entrance of the machine. These green fields contain a "species of mechanism"(287) that promises the errant Adam death within this "forbidden Eden"(287), but again, though the machine appears threatening, it remains just an invisible threat for Redburn, who sees only the sign. Because of that warning sign, Redburn discovers the mechanical threat in this garden, and not unexpectedly, the body-threatening device is uncovered side-by-side with sexual defloration.

Textually the sexual threat to innocence is not far off. Deterred from immediately entering the verdant fields, Redburn settles in an equally sinister place "along the London road"(286):

...at last I came to a green bank, deliciously shaded by a fine old tree with broad branching arms, that stretched themselves over the road  
....Down on the green grass I threw myself and there lay my head, like a last year's nut.(289)

Again the shaded threat enters, but this time the danger is a "sturdy farmer, with an alarming cudgel in his hand"(290), who promises to move the young "Tramp" on his way with a "cut-throat looking dog"(290). It seems there is nothing left but to turn back to industrialized, "Smoky old Liverpool"(289), yet he is once more enchanted by the sight of a "cottage" "along the skirts of forbidden green fields"(290):

So sweet a place I had never seen: no palace in Persia could be pleasanter; there were flowers in the garden; and six red cheeks, like six moss-roses, hanging from the casement  
...three charmers, three Peris, three Houris!(290)

There is little doubt that these virginal "charmers" living by the skirts captivate his attention. He is guilty of visual concupiscence as

he can hardly keep his eyes off one of the "Peris," "gazing at the dew on her lips"(291). In fact, Wellingborough is figuratively seduced by the "Houris" as tea: "And there they sat--the charmers, I mean--eating these buttered muffins in plain sight. I wished I was a buttered muffin myself"(292). Even though "desperate" and unable to skirt his marine obligations, Redburn returns reluctantly to his "only resource," his "bunk," where that night he dreams of "red cheeks and roses"(293)--specifically which "cheeks" and whose "roses" we are never told.

Upon awakening from this erotic dream, the isolated youth meets his seducer, Harry Bolton. Young Harry is a rakish "Orpheus"(364) who, like Wellingborough, is "of a roving mind"(295), and his role of seducer is keyed by a distinctly feminine description:

He was one of those small, but perfectly formed beings, with curly hair, and silken muscles, who seem to have been born in cocoons. His complexion was a mantling brunette, feminine as a girl's; his feet were small; his hands were white; and his eyes were large, black, and womanly; and, poetry aside, his voice was as the sound of a harp.(294)

"Charmed with his appearance"(294), Redburn trembles "with amazement and delight"(303) at the prospect of accompanying the "Bury blade"(301) to London and his ancestral home, Bury St Edmunds. The latter presents Redburn with the prospect of a centuries-old green security:

By all my rare old historic associations, breathed Bury; by my Abbey-gate, that bears to this day the arms of Edward the Confessor; by my carved roof of the old church of St Mary's, which escaped the low rage of the bigoted Puritans...by my Norman ruins, and by all the old abbots of Bury, do not, oh Harry! abandon me. Where will you find shadier walks than under my lime-trees? where lovelier gardens than those within the old walls of my monastery....(295)

By association, Harry is included in this vision because, in the young Redburn's initially naive view, "Harry is the embodiment of everything Redburn believed England at its best would be."<sup>18</sup> Yet Redburn is not wholly deceived by the metamorphic Harry whom he perceives to be wanting "as a teller of the truth"(302): "I [Redburn] was very sorry for this; as at times it made me feel ill at ease in his company; and made me hold back my whole soul from him; when, in its loneliness, it was yearning to throw itself into the unbounded bosom of some immaculate friend"(302). However, he does yield to Bolton's blandishments.

In yielding, Redburn is transported, not to the source of Harry's secure past, but to the source of Harry's undoing: the underworld, London. Nothing of the pastoral Bury St Edmunds is realized. Redburn enters "Aladdin's Palace"(311), a den of iniquity, "whose foundations take hold on the pit"(313). In this casino, he is witness--"looking boldly out of my eyes"(309)--to Harry's metamorphosis into "another person from what he had seemed before"(314), one perverse in "his behavior"(296) and one whose "bane" is "gold guineas"(296). The young Adam has "misgivings"(306) at the sound of his own footsteps, a "hollow, boding sound, which seemed sighing with a subterraneous despair"(307), and he also senses that, as he moves through this "infected"(313) "bower in Babylon"(309), he is "slowly sinking in some reluctant, sedgy sea"(309): "...I was mysteriously alive to a dreadful feeling, which I had never before felt, except when penetrating into the lowest and most squalid haunts of/sailor iniquity in Liverpool"(314-315). Redburn's descent into this opulent version of Liverpool's "squalid" "iniquity," "this superb apartment [that] was the moon-lit garden of Portia at

Belmont"(307), only denies the initial, green expectation he held before leaving the Highlander, and denies his initial perception of Harry, who has fallen victim to vice. There is no difference between the vice of Liverpool and the vice of London, he discovers: "though gilded and golden, the serpent of vice is a serpent still"(315). Disillusioned by the trip, Redburn admits that Harry has "made me the most miserable dog alive"(316).

Harry, like Wellingborough, has fallen upon harsh times and has suffered accordingly. However, unlike Wellingborough's, Harry's "spirit, for the time, had been broken"(342), and because the blade does not treat the young American forthrightly, the spiritual bond between the two remains incomplete. Harry is, from the start, more a doer than a seer like Redburn.

In contrast, "the Italian boy Carlo...claims his place in the story as a foil highlighting the English boy's tragic lack of inner resource and resiliency to life."<sup>19</sup> Carlo also functions as a seducer, and again, this role is keyed by a distinctly feminine description:

From the knee downward, the naked leg was beautiful to behold as any lady's arm; so soft and rounded, with infantile ease and grace. His whole figure was free, fine, and indolent....(329)

Yet in spite of his fragile feminine appearance, it is obvious to Redburn that Carlo's "days must have seemed to him years"(329) and that Carlo's eye "shone with a soft and spiritual radiance...and spoke of humility, deep-seated thoughtfulness, yet a careless endurance of all the ills of life"(329). With hair like "thick clusters of tendril curls, half overhanging the brows and delicate ears"(329), the Italian youth



is perceived as an idyllic figure belonging on a "classic vase, piled up with Falernian foliage"(329). He is a child of nature "as might have ripened into life in a Neapolitan vineyard"(329), a musical, Pan-like figure attesting that "the human soul...[is] essentially a harmony"(331), a harmony within and without.

Redburn, at once and without reservation, abandons himself to that harmony coming from Carlo's "wondrous box of sights and sounds" (334). He is captivated by Carlo's honey-tongued voice "that seemed like mixing the potent wine of Oporto with some delicious syrup"(330), and Carlo's hand organ, a hollow and expandable organ whose architecture and sound are, for Redburn, a feast for "the eye as well as ear"(333). The young Adam takes of this "Neapolitan" delicacy, immersing himself in the "divine ravishments"(332):

Ay, it [the organ] does; for as Carlo now  
turns his hand, I hear the gush of the  
Fountain of Lions, as he plays some thronged  
Italian air--a mixed and liquid sea of sound,  
that dashes its spray in my face.(332)

The seduction is climactically complete: "All this could Carlo do--make, unmake me; build me up; to pieces take me; and join me limb to limb. He is the architect of domes of sound, and bowers of song"(333). Redburn is satisfied by indulging in the harmony without and within, and though his relationship with the young Pan is transitory, this is the only really satisfying experience with the manifestation of the green, idyllic past. When Carlo stops playing, Redburn admits: "I droop"(333). The child-Adam is surely now the postlapsarian Adam.

Yet he is not wholly dominated by the interlude with Carlo. His Old World experience, concomitant to the suffering on the return passage,

has tempered his spirit and generated a somewhat more sagacious perception. The return journey to New York is a harsh passage, marked by foul weather, plague, and famine. The overcrowded steerage passengers suffer abominable conditions and, en masse, below decks, they produce "the steady hum of a subterranean wailing and weeping"(323) reminiscent of the "subterraneous despair" within Aladdin's "pit." For Redburn, the sea loses its green promising appearance:

It was like a landscape in Switzerland; for  
down into those dark, purple glens, often  
tumbled the white foam of the wave-crests,  
like avalanches; while the seething and  
boiling that ensued, seemed the swallowing  
up of human beings.(378)

The sea is now a threatening purple, the purple of the light marking the entrance to Aladdin's. These emigrants go to the New World with great expectations (reminiscent of Wellingborough's anticipation concerning the Old World), yet they are as unprepared for what awaits them as Redburn was unprepared. Upon reaching "the green heights of New Jersey" (388), they find no vision of the promising, idealized green landscape, even though the green land is mentioned on several occasions. Rather, the land proves a release from the maritime confinement, and Redburn's last reference to the emigrants' reaction to the land takes on ironic undertones: "The steerage passengers almost neighed with delight, like horses brought back to spring pastures..."(390). Their naiveté, despite the passage, remains intact.

However, the implication here is that Redburn's naiveté, that innocent idealism he took with him to Europe, has been eroded. His vision of the green promise is denied time and again, and the most

dominant threat to his innocent vision is death. (Sexuality plays a minor, incidental role by comparison.) Sailing into the world, he expects to realize his romantic imaginings, to live his youthful dreams. Yet the Highlander is barely out of sight of New York, sailing into Redburn's unknown future in the "dead of night"(99), than "a horrid groaning noise down in the fore-castle"(99) is punctuated by the sight of a delirious "shrieking man"(99) throwing himself overboard to be seen "no more"(99). Similarly, upon leaving Liverpool, Redburn is awed by the spontaneous "animal combustion"(327) that consumes the corrupt body of a Portuguese sailor that had been delivered dead on board by a crimp. The two deaths prefigure future deaths on the respective passages, and they attest to the dangers of life at sea. Moreover, the prefigured deaths arise from want. Shortly before sighting Ireland, the Highlander sights (but does not stop for) "three dark, green, grassy objects"(161), bodies lashed to the taffrail of a capsized schooner, where they "must have famished"(161). All but Redburn seem to be indifferent to the demise of the three men. Concomitantly, it is not long into the rough return passage before the emigrants begin to succumb to the fever that is rampant in the overcrowded, filthy hold. Little is undertaken to alleviate their needs, and many are ignominiously shrouded to be buried at sea. The emigrant survivors suffer these human losses, "a gnawing reality, that eats into their vital beings"(379). Redburn is more than shaken by the numerous deaths, those of depravity and those of deprivation, and by the indifference of his shipmates.

However, this experience is essential for the traveller, for without it, there is a danger that the innocent might fall prey to

depravity and deprivation. The voyage to the Old World is a kind of death in itself:

The voyage itself, here as elsewhere, is a metaphor of death and rebirth, of the passage from childhood and innocence to experience and adulthood; the crossing, to and fro, of a sea in the waters of which one dies to the old self and puts on a new. As if to enforce this intention irresistibly, the Highlander's voyage outward and the voyage home are both initiated by a scene of violent death.<sup>20</sup>

The young Adam leaves the paradise of innocence, "the old self," to confront life outside the garden, and in doing so, he falls into evil, embodied in the archetypical pariah, Cain-like Jackson. On this allegorical voyage, the biblical role is filled by the sailor, Jackson, "a Cain afloat"(163), who daily "seemed to grow worse and worse, both in body and mind"(162). "Branded on his yellow brow with some inscrutable curse"(163), Jackson suffers, and his suffering epitomizes man's deprivation and depravity. He is doomed, his consumptive body deteriorating under the effects of a "malady which had long fastened its fangs in his flesh, [and which] was now gnawing into his vitals"(361). The physical, animal disease presents Jackson with imminent death, a presentiment that embitters him, plunging him into misanthropic spiritual evil: "The prospect of the speedy and unshunnable death now before him, seemed to exasperate his misanthropic soul into madness; and as if he had indeed sold it to Satan, he seemed determined to die with a curse between his teeth"(362). For the fated, Faustian Jackson, "there was nothing to be believed; nothing to be loved, and nothing worth living for; but every thing to be hated, in the wide world"(163). His shipmates are witness to his spiritual and physical decline, the

spiritual evil becoming manifest in his countenance: "His aspect was damp and death-like; the blue hollows of his eyes were like vaults full of snakes..."(385). Yet for all his weakness, Jackson maintains his Satanic "unbounded dominion over the men"(385) until the very last, plunging, "with a blasphemous cry"(385), from his "post of honor"(385) upon the mainmast, "like a diver into the sea"(386).

Jackson's is a dramatic, though ignominious end, deserving of anyone so corrupt; rich or poor, "there is no dignity in wickedness, whether in purple or rags..."(362). This last comment, originating from the elder narrator, is overshadowed by the youth's attitude towards this figure of death and evil:

But there seemed even more woe than wickedness about the man [Jackson]; and his wickedness seemed to spring from his woe; and for all his hideousness, there was that in his eye at times, that was ineffably pitiable and touching; and though there were moments when I almost hated this Jackson, yet I have pitied no man as I have pitied him.(163)

The compassion expressed here is not the unsophisticated sentiment of a child. The young Wellingborough is learning. Redburn has all the cause in the world to despise Jackson, and yet to do so, the elder knows, is to fall victim to Jackson's malady.

On two other occasions, Redburn becomes privy to the instruction of death, and both incidents occur in Liverpool, an urban underworld of death and iniquity, a hellish "Sodom-like" haven for companies of "miscreant misanthropes, bent upon doing all the malice to mankind in their power"(265). The portrayal of these incidents evidences a growing maturity on Redburn's part, both in the way he perceives himself and in

how he perceives his world. This city, where "the doom of Gomorrah seemed reversed"(226), "most abounds in all the variety of land-sharks, land-rats, and other vermin, which make the hapless mariner their prey"(202). The deadly character of the city is announced to Redburn by the harbour's "Bell-Buoy"(189) that produces "the doleful, dismal sound"(189), a "great bell"(189) that peels "dirges"(189) of warning. It is a city of death where Redburn witnesses the arrest of "a drunken Spanish...murderer"(265) and learns that there is "no calamity overtaking man, that can not be rendered merchantable"(251). Bodies having fallen into the docks command "standing rewards"(251).

It is in an ironically named street of "dingy, prison-like cotton warehouses"(252), called Launcelott's Hey, that Redburn hears the echo of the "Bell-Buoy's" dirge, "that dismal sound"(252): "...the low, hopeless, endless wail of some one forever lost"(252). It announces his three-day vigil over the imminent death-by-starvation of a woman, her baby, and two older daughters. Wellingborough seeks assistance for the starving from near-by residents and the police only to be met with "uniform indifference."<sup>21</sup> His proffered water and scraps of food "only tend to prolong their misery"(256) and, on the third day, they die. In his helpless grief, Redburn is struck by the responsibility of us all for "the poor and forlorn"(257):

Surrounded as we are by the wants and woes of  
our fellow-men, and yet given to follow our  
own pleasures, regardless of their pains, are  
we not like people sitting up with a corpse,  
and making merry in the house of the dead?(257)

The deaths reveal the indifference and depravity of society.

This concern for others--that is, "the wants and woes of our

fellow-men"--has, until Redburn's explorations in Liverpool, been overshadowed by his concern for himself. Specifically, the alteration of focus occurs when Wellingborough employs the "green morocco guide-book"(217) to chart his way through the city of Liverpool. He associates the "guide-book" with his father and his childhood:

As I now linger over the volume, to and fro  
turning the pages so dear to my boyhood,--  
the very pages which, years and years ago,  
my father turned over amid the very scenes  
that are here described; what a soft,  
pleasing sadness steals over me, and how I  
melt into the past and forgotten!(208)

Mildly self-indulgent, this retrospective statement attests to the solidity of those associations. It also accentuates the intensity of the young traveller's sentiments because the book's practical worth is yet untested as Redburn walks "down Old Hall-street toward Lord-street"(220) in what he believes to be his father's footsteps: "...a thousand fond, affectionate emotions rushed around my heart"(220).

The younger Redburn, "a poor friendless sailor-boy"(221), is self-indulgent to the point of self-pity:

Poor, poor Wellingborough! thought I,  
miserable boy! you are indeed friendless  
and forlorn. Here you wander a stranger in  
a strange town, and the very thought of your  
father's having been here before you, but  
carries with it the reflection that, he then  
knew you not, nor cared for you one whit.(221)

In his abandonment to these sentimental emotions, Redburn momentarily loses his grip on reality: "So vivid was now the impression of his [Redburn's father's] having been here, and so narrow the passage from which he had emerged, that I felt like running on, and overtaking him round the Town Hall adjoining..."(221). Having just "checked"(221)

himself in this reverie, Redburn confronts a harsh, artistic vision of death, a sculpture unnoted in the guidebook:

The ornament in question is a group of statuary in bronze, elevated upon a marble pedestal and basement, representing Lord Nelson expiring in the arms of Victory. One foot rests on a rolling foe, and the other on a cannon. Victory is dropping a wreath on the dying admiral's brow; while Death, under the similitude of a hideous skeleton, is insinuating his bony hand under the hero's robe, and groping after his heart. A very striking design, and true to the imagination; I never could look at Death without a shudder. (222)

This vision of "Death" follows directly after Redburn's attempt at "overtaking" his father, and the force of the image arises not only from the starkness of the "statuary," but also from the suddenness of its appearance, unheralded by the guidebook.

The finality and power of the scene prove an epiphany for Wellingborough. "Death" is an irresistible force that holds universal dominion, even over those human heroes, paternal or military, that tend to be "elevated" by those who follow. Moreover, even though he cannot look at "Death"--that is, the handiwork or representation of death--"without a shudder," the boy accepts its presence, and, possibly, accepts the death of his father:

From this point [this specific incident] on, the note of self-pity is rarely if ever heard. Redburn's father is never mentioned again, although references to him and to the family have been employed almost thematically throughout the first half of the novel.<sup>22</sup>

The guidebook incident is a turning point for Redburn: his focus turns from himself to those around him, and he assumes a more mature



perspective on existence in a world that is "indeed growing old"(215). Implicitly, the young sailor confronts his own potential demise, his own mortality, realizing that "die by death we all must at last"(377), and that, in the interim, "every one in this world has his own fate entrusted to himself"(299). In essence, then, he becomes self-reliant.

The voyage has taken Redburn far away from the innocent that travelled to New York so many months before. Upon his return passage, he admits that he has "been well rubbed, curried, and ground down to fine powder in the hopper of an evil fortune"(365). His "fortune" leads to the confrontation with "evil," and, though "it is a hard and cruel thing thus in early youth to taste beforehand the pangs which should be reserved for the stout time of manhood"(53), the confrontation is fortunate and inevitable--childhood innocence cannot be maintained. Experience expunges his self-centredness, his idealistic, romantic imaginings, and his "exaggerated self-image"<sup>23</sup> that so offends his mates whom he once "was particular to address...in a civil and condescending way"(98). The maturation of the youth is continuous and ever-present in the narrative because of the novel's older narrative voice. With each new experience, the young sailor-boy moves toward the perspective of the older narrator:

...the process of his disillusionment having been largely completed [by the guidebook episode], he himself is now less introspective, and...the steady convergence of his outlook with that of the narrator has reached a point where his judgments and evaluations no longer stand out sharply against those of the older man.<sup>24</sup>

The initial distance between the younger and the elder, having been

diminished in the reminiscing and confessing of those events "after the lapse of so many years"(200), is the measure of the youth's success on the voyage:

The act of reminiscing implies a continuity of self. The "I" which is remembering is ineluctably linked to the "I" which is the object of the memory. Confession, on the other hand, has traditionally required a point outside of the stream of time from which the self can be contemplated and analyzed. To confess and accept a past guilt is to imply the assumption of a new level of awareness, if not a new self.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, the gap between the two has decreased, but, more importantly, the gap is not closed completely. Nowhere is there an explicit statement that the experience has brought Redburn to manhood. Though he does not regret having made the voyage upon which there was little profit (neither maturational nor financial), he does regret his initial naive foolery that allowed him to think himself so much above his shipmates. There is a vestige of this left in the young Redburn, if only, it may be argued, because he abandons his mate Harry in the city that was so inhospitable to him in the first place. Redburn has come full circle, back to New York after viewing the European underworld. He has seen his childish idealism eroded by experience in a harsh world dominated by death, and he has suffered in isolation, falling into the Manichaeian world of good and evil, light and dark, known and unknown. Yet, as Harold Beaver notes, "Wellingborough good-naturedly dumps his 'fraternal likeness' [Harry] on Goodwell, another 'good natured fellow', who promptly forwards him to oblivion"(n. 442). This young Adam, this boy, has finished only the first voyage, a cruise overshadowed by future

experiences, "far more perilous scenes than any narrated in this"(406). He has just begun the business of sailing, has achieved some self-awareness, but he recognizes that there are many voyages to follow and much to learn: "...for you know nothing till you know all; which is the reason we never know any thing"(182). Adam must go on.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Herman Melville, Redburn: His First Voyage, ed. and intro. by Harold Beaver (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1849; Penguin Books Ltd., 1976), intro. p. 8. Further references to this edition will be noted in the chapter by page number.

<sup>2</sup>William H. Gilman, Melville's Early Life and "Redburn" (New York: New York University Press, 1951), p. 204.

<sup>3</sup>Merlin Bowen, "Redburn and the Angle of Vision", Modern Philology, LII-LIII (November 1954), 102. Mr. Bowen makes this point emphatically, early in his article: "That older Redburn, one must insist, is as truly independent a fictional character as Conrad's Marlow./The disturbing 'adult comment' is very clearly and properly his and is not to be attributed either to the boy or to the author"(101-102). This statement more than adequately redresses Gilman's contention that there is a "shift in the angle of vision"(cited by Bowen, 102). As always, there is a great difficulty with the lack of textual evidence when pinpointing the author in this work of fiction.

<sup>4</sup>Charles J. Haberstroth, Jr., Melville and Male Identity (Toronto: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1980), p. 83.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Davitt Bell, "Melville's Redburn: Initiation and Authority", The New England Quarterly, XLVI (1973), 566.

<sup>6</sup>R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955; Phoenix Edition, 1965), p. 142.

<sup>7</sup>Lewis, p. 137.

<sup>8</sup>Lewis, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup>Lewis, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup>Lewis, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup>William B. Dillingham, An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Work of Herman Melville (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 37. Dillingham's chapter on Redburn contains a well-conceived and exhaustive examination of the hunger metaphor and its importance to the novel.

<sup>12</sup>Dillingham, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup>Haberstroth, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup>Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: The Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 19.

<sup>15</sup>Marx, p. 192.

<sup>16</sup>Ronald Mason, The Spirit Above the Dust (2nd ed.; Mamaroneck, N. Y.: Paul P. Appel, 1972), p. 75.

<sup>17</sup>Further examination of the Spenserian dualism should look at passages in The Faerie Queene, specifically, I,1 and II, 12. These two cantos are representative of a large number of instances where dew and shade play key roles in the poem.

<sup>18</sup>Haberstroth, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup>Bowen, p. 108.

<sup>20</sup>Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1950), p. 106.

<sup>21</sup>John J. Gross, "The Rehearsal of Ishmael: Melville's Redburn", The Virginia Quarterly Review, XXVII (1951), 594.

<sup>22</sup>Bowen, p. 106.

<sup>23</sup>John Bernstein, Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964; reprint ed., Princeton: The Folcroft Press Inc., 1970), p. 59.

<sup>24</sup>Bowen, p. 106.

<sup>25</sup>Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 60.

### CHAPTER III

#### ADAM TAKES THE WINTON FRUIT:

#### A THIEF ENTERS THE UNDERWORLD

A younger, but no less innocent boy commences his life-journey in William Faulkner's The Reivers. Like Wellingborough Redburn, Lucius Priest, Faulkner's child-Adam, is caught up in the business of moving, getting on with life and learning of the world through the motion of the journey. Unlike Redburn, Priest is predominantly a doer. While the former is primarily a seer of the evil in a fallen world, the latter is an active participant in that evil. Lucius participates in and struggles against evil--he is no bystander.

Lucius' journey runs from the insular world of Yoknapatawpha county, whose motive existence revolves around the horse and mule, to Memphis, the metropolis with its Beale Street bordello delights and where equine power relinquishes dominance to the symbol of America's industrial future, the automobile. Hence, the journey of The Reivers charts the initiation of a boy into manhood and a generation's passage into a new industrial age. The journey also charts the passage of a child-Adam into the world of harsh experience epitomized by the underworld of Memphis.

The novel encompasses the life span of Lucius Priest within the concentric circles of the narrative's perspective. The narrator is

Lucius' grandchild, who renders what "GRANDFATHER SAID."<sup>1</sup> However, because the grandchild-narrator does not enter the narrative except in the first line, in effect, the reader listens to the elder Lucius Priest's account of his own experiences as a boy. Lucius' original account may be different than the account of the grandchild. Lucius observes that, "except in a few scattered cases of what might be called malevolent hyper-prematurity, children, like poets, lie rather for pleasure than profit"(53). It is evident, then, as in all fiction or even autobiography, that there is a narrative discrepancy between events and their fictive rendering. If the grandchild as narrator inherits, as by right he should, a propensity for embellishing stories or yarns as inevitably Lucius does (since this yarn is fondly recollected over fifty-six years), then the grandchild's account must surely alter the original. The reader, however, must accept the account prima facie. From this stance, Faulkner is able to give a composite narrative vision: the "reporting of the boy's experience, and of the boy's reactions to it, seems so precise and sensitive that Faulkner manages to achieve both nostalgic retrospect and narrative immediacy, and achieve them simultaneously."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it is because of a "narrative immediacy" and a "nostalgic retrospect" that critics seem to have such difficulties with Redburn. An obvious difference is that Redburn sharply criticizes his younger self, whereas the elder Lucius does not. Lucius as narrator reveals what he understood as a child and what he has come to understand since 1905: "...Lucius is guided through his adventures by his older self, just as, as storyteller, he now guides his grandson [or granddaughter]."<sup>3</sup>

On specific occasions, a narrative digression, facilitated by the reminiscent stance, reveals a dichotomous temporal vision spanning fifty-six years. Many comments in the narrative originate with the elder narrator, comments concerning matters beyond the ken of a boy. Some comments criticize a modern world in comparison with the world of 1905. For example, Lucius reveals how fifty years of history have taken a toll on the present society's understanding of age and death:

Besides that, people took funerals seriously in those days. Not death: death was our constant familiar: no family but whose annals were dotted with headstones whose memorialees had been too brief in tenure to bear a name even...and the grandparents and childless great-uncles and -aunts/who died at home then, in the same rooms and beds they were born in, instead of in cubicled euphemisms with names pertaining to sunset. But the funerals, the ritual ceremonial of interment, with tenuous yet steel-strong threads capable of extending even further and bearing even more weight than the distance between Jefferson and the Gulf of Mexico.(44-45)

The past generation's aging occurs in familiar surroundings that lend, or, at least, facilitate the possibility of a graceful acceptance of death, whereas, in the present, familial ties are weak and death occurs not in the home where family bears witness, but in closeted homes for the aged. The ties weakened, the "ceremonial of interment" is no longer a capstan within the familial circle. In this instance, Lucius binds the past and the present in harsh opposition and does not hesitate to draw a prophetic extension from the present generation's trifling attitude towards themselves and human dignity:

...the moment already here when, if all the human race ever stops moving at the same instant, the surface of the earth will seize, solidify: there are too many of us; humanity



will destroy itself not by fission but by another beginning with f which is a verb-active also as well as a conditional state....(193)

These are not the sentiments of a boy, too young to go to Lessep's funeral.

Lucius' comparison of how men and women cope with death also evidences the dual temporal vision:

It's not men/who cope with death; they resist, try to fight back and get their brains trampled out in consequence; where women just flank it, envelop it in one soft and instantaneous confederation of unresistance like cotton batting or cobwebs.(46-47)

These are the sentiments of an experienced man, wise enough or at least brash enough to compare men and women in such a fashion. They also evidence a maturity capable of imagining death in sexual terms. Once more, the duality of the vision is spanned by the journey.

The journey within the novel takes a circular path, from Jefferson to Memphis and back again. The story centres on Lucius Priest, a youth of eleven years and a cadet amongst the Priests who are themselves a "cadet branch"(18) of the McCaslins and Edmondses. The youth, in league with the burly, inept Boon Hogganbeck, travels to Memphis in the "borrowed" Winton Flyer belonging to Grandfather (Boss) Priest. "'Ned William McCaslin Jefferson Mississippi'"(239), the Priest's hostler, surreptitiously joins the excursion as a piece of baggage, and because of a broken set of "manners"(72), Boon discovers the stowaway and forces Ned to assist in the task at hand: overcoming the road's inhospitable disposition towards automobile traffic.

Once in Memphis, the threesome part company for the evening, Boon

and Lucius taking shelter at Miss Reba's whorehouse, and Ned disappearing into the mysterious black world of the city. Their plan to return to Jefferson the following morning shatters upon Ned's arrival later that evening when he unveils a stolen flat-track racing horse he has just swapped for Boss's Flyer. Moreover, he has arranged to win the automobile back in a race at "Possum"(118) against another horse that has already outrun their new acquisition. The illegality of the situation, unavoidable because the swap itself is irreversible, requires that the horse be moved to "Possum"--that is, Parsham--and raced with the utmost caution. Ned supplies the guiding hand in these intricate manoeuvrings and, without alternatives, Lucius and Boon must play along. However, the manoeuvrings are driven to astounding complexity by an insidious Arkansian malcontent by the name of Otis and a physically repulsive, rapacious lawman named Butch Lovemaiden. It is only by way of their determination, adaptability to circumstance, and luck that the trio race the horse to victory. Somewhat wiser and certainly worse for wear, the three return to Jefferson to face the music they knew would be waiting for them before they left. The return is a more solemn affair than their initial exit.

Lucius' journey, like Redburn's, is a circular one, but while young Wellingborough travels from America to the Old World and back, Lucius makes a narrower circuit, from the small fictive town of Jefferson, Mississippi, to the city of Memphis in Tennessee. The loci determine the extremes of the journey by their geographical characters, which are themselves analogous to the initiate and manhood termini of Lucius' experience. Jefferson in 1905 is little more than an isolated

agricultural settlement, connected to the outside world by an infrequent train. Memphis, on the other hand, is a bustling metropolis, an industrialized centre of a fallen world hitherto unknown to Lucius.

Because of its isolation, Jefferson is a close-knit community where people are bound, at least obligated, by familial and economic circumstances. This is not to say that inhabitants of urban environs are free from these constraints. Rather, Jeffersonians, particularly the threesome, are constrained by the number of people with whom they must abide. Specifically, Boon is obligated economically and socially (not legally) by a bond to his employer and Jefferson's legal arm. Boon is also bound by his past upbringing to three familial pillars of Jefferson's society:

Boon was a corporation, a holding company in which/the three of us--McCaslins, De Spain and General Compson--had mutually equal but completely undefined shares of responsibility, the one and only corporation rule being that whoever was nearest at the crises would leap immediately into whatever breach Boon had this time created or committed or simply fallen heir to....(18-19)

In like manner, Lucius is a dependent within the McCaslin-Edmonds clan. He is literally a dependent of his father's, and he is subject to his grandfather's idea "that even at eleven a man should already have behind him one year of paying for, assuming responsibility for, the space he occupied, the room he took up, in the world's (Jefferson, Mississippi's, anyway) economy"(4). As a Priest and a "cadet McCaslin," Lucius will always be in one way or another, "secure behind that inviolable and inescapable rectitude concomitant with the name I bore,/patterned on the knightly shapes of my male ancestors"(50-51). His heritage determines

social position and familial obligation, just as Ned's heritage ("his mother had been the natural daughter of old Lucius Quintus Carothers himself," 31) lends him a kind of superiority of birth since he "was an actual grandson to old time-honored Lancaster where...[the] moiling Edmondses and Priests...were mere diminishing connections and hangers-on"(31). Even though he is economically dependent through years of service as hostler for the Priest household, he is above deeming it a necessity to refer to Boon, a white, as Mr. Hogganbeck. For the three-some, and most especially Lucius, these familial and social obligations are rooted in Jefferson. No more than a child, Lucius is essentially isolated from the adult world of Jefferson, which in turn is isolated from the outside world. He lives in a limited world of close-knit family ties that function within a fundamentally rural community.

On the other hand, Memphis and its surrounding countryside have a profoundly different character, one that is dominated by technology. There are prima facie differences between Memphis and Jefferson. As confronted by Lucius, Memphis life is fraught with gambling, drinking, whoring, lechery, and bribery, on a grand, encompassing scale, whereas Jefferson seems part of a pastoral vision by comparison.

Even before Memphis' city limits, Lucius observes the metropolis' sway over the countryside: "The very land itself seemed to have changed. The farms were bigger, more prosperous, with tighter fences and painted houses and even barns; the very air was urban"(94). The pervading urbanism of the countryside enthralls the youth--enthralls him to a point where he is oblivious to the possible surprise of witnessing a cloud of dust give birth to another automobile:

...much closer than that was a rapid and mounting cloud of dust like a portent, a promise. It was indubitable, travelling that fast and that much of it; we were not even surprised when it contained an automobile....(94)

The cloud foreshadows the appearance of the machine, an entrance that is strikingly similar to the entrance of the train into Walden. In both texts, the description of the rural, semi-pastoral setting is interrupted mid-stride by the portentous arrival of a machine, and, as Leo Marx comments on this moment in Walden, "it would have been difficult to contrive a quieter entrance."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the soundless approach of the other automobile, which critically is Marx's machine (automobile as train), comes again to the fore when Lucius takes the wheel and is ironically warned by Boon: "'Just dont get the idea you're a forty-mile-a-hour railroad engine'"(94).

As in Redburn, the machine's entrance is quiet and threatening. But in this instance the ramifications are far more encompassing. The automobile is the portentous machine of a new age, a machine that is the harbinger of technological expansion and an evolving symbol of the future. Or again, as Leo Marx comments on Thoreau's understanding: "...this machine is the type and agent of an irreversible process: not mere scientific or technological development in the narrow sense, but the implacable advance of history."<sup>5</sup> The automobile literally and figuratively connects the isolation of Jefferson and the urbanism of Memphis.

It is this "implacable" historic advance of technology that will inculcate rural Jefferson as an extension of the automobile that has

already invaded from the urban, outside world. The idea of technology as it inherently relates to industrialization and the process of history is in evidence at Wyott's Crossing where an enterprising man "came along and the Indians showed him the crossing and he built his store and ferryboat and named it after himself..."(73). But now--that is, in 1905--the area around the crossing contains only "vestigial wilderness" since "most of the deer and all the bears and panthers.../were gone"(72-73). Civilization encroaches upon the wilderness, and an "Iron Bridge" attests to the encroachment. However, this bridge is not just any iron structure. It is "THE Iron Bridge since it was the first iron bridge and for several years yet the only one we in Yoknapatawpha County had or knew of"(73). Because of the upper-case emphasis on the article, there seems to be an allusion to Ironbridge, Shropshire, the site of one of the first iron bridges in England, built during the dawn of the English Industrial Revolution.<sup>6</sup> The English Ironbridge marks a juncture before the accelerating expansion of the "architecture of iron" (as Bronowski calls it), whose construction seems, in retrospect, an inevitability, and whose existence (once it is built) has an irreversible impact.

It is with this understanding that Lucius makes the analogy between crossing "Iron Bridge" and crossing "Rubicon"(93). Hence, it is of great import that Lucius takes control of the Winton Flyer when he does. His first impression upon driving is that "civilisation was now constant," appropriately concluded with "then the country itself was gone"(95). In essence then, that machine, the automobile, transports Lucius from the isolated, leisurely innocence of small-town Mississippi to the technologically fast-paced urban iniquity of Memphis.<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, Boon Hogganbeck is the impulsive catalyst behind Lucius' departure from childhood toward the mature storyteller of the narrative. For all his size and years, Boon is still very much a child in 1905. He has an innocent, child-like fascination for the automobile, and it is by no means an accident that he plays a role in the introduction of the automobile into Jefferson. At first sight, Boon and the mechanical wizard, Mr. Buffaloe, were "not merely in complete, but instantaneous, accord and understanding in the whole process of getting the automobile into Mr. Buffaloe's hands and the owner of it out of town"(27). It is almost as though the car figuratively seduces the two of them. Boon and Buffaloe stand before their newly-won prize, "the one motionless, staring at the car with a kind of incredulous yearning, like a fixed bull; the other dreaming at it, gentle, tender, his grimed hand gentle as a woman's as he touched it, stroked it, caressed it"(26). Their plan works but not to Boon's satisfaction, because Buffaloe tears the car to pieces and reassembles it so as later to build his own machine. Boon must wait for the prototype to be constructed before he can play with the new toy.

This incident, and Boon's subsequent driving lessons, are the kernel of later events. The construction of Buffaloe's car precipitates an "ordinance against the operation of any mechanically propelled vehicle inside the corporate limits"(28). The ordinance is the conception of Colonel Sartoris whose "matched carriage horses"(27) bolt at the appearance of Buffaloe's "rubber-tired buggy"(27). On the other hand, Boss Priest opposes the ordinance, buying and operating the Winton Flyer. Boss's pride demands that he take exception to the dictates of Jefferson's

junior bank president. Of course, this is not Boss's only motive, even though "he/was forced to buy one"(24-25); "a far-sighted man, a man capable of vision"(38), Boss sees that "People will pay any price for motion. They will even work for it"(41). He envisions the transformation of the livery stable into "Priest's Garage maybe, or the Priest Motor Company"(41). It is Boss's foresight that brings the automobile to Jefferson to stay:

A banker, president of the older Bank of Jefferson, the first bank in Yoknapatawpha County, he believed then and right on to his death many years afterward, by which time everybody else even in Yoknapatawpha County had realised that the automobile had come to stay, that the motor vehicle was an insolvent phenomenon like last night's toadstool and, like the fungus, would vanish with tomorrow's sun.(25)

Lucius appreciates Boss's depth of vision, yet does not deny the occasional influence of prideful spite that initially drives Boss to purchase the Flyer. Moreover, like Boss, Lucius appreciates the import of the Winton "toadstool," the "fungus" that does not disappear--at least not permanently. The machine is a "phenomenon." An unexplained influence is cast over Boon's and the county's future. It will change the lives of those uninitiated to the technological wonder, just as America herself is changed by the dominance of the automobile.

The entrance and disappearance of the Flyer is analogous to the discovery of the forbidden fruit and the consequential seduction in Eden. Intrinsic to the Edenic analogy is the character of Boon Hogganbeck. He is at once a version of the child-Adam and the seducer. In the vehicular fruit--for the machine is no longer simply a machine--the child-like



Boon "found his soul's lily maid, the virgin's love of his rough and innocent heart"(28). The attraction of his "soul's lily maid" demands Boon's proximity to the Flyer, and in pursuit of this proximity, Boon is driven to what in renaissance terms might be called immoderate passion and what modern scholars call "radical emotional commitment."<sup>8</sup> In addition, the description of Boon's countenance also attests to his innocent state. Boon has a "big ugly florid walnut-tough walnut-hard face"(16) that at times becomes "twisted like a child's"(16). Boon's innocence is not limited only to his features. Boon has "the mentality of a child"(19), and Maury Priest predicted "that at any moment now I [Lucius] would outgrow him"(19). Implicitly, then, Lucius too is in a state of innocence. Time and again, the narrator explicitly reveals that he considers himself a possessor of innocence: for examples, "my innocence"(52), "my tenderness and youth's concomitant innocence"(133), or again, "in my innocence, trusting too much in the armor and shield of innocence"(51). So Lucius and Boon are allied in innocence, living in Jefferson that is itself "in those innocent days"(66).

However, proximity to the machine precipitates the seduction of Lucius Priest. Boon attends to the Flyer with a concupiscent passion that dissolves any precedent Ned considers as his right to take charge of the vehicle's maintenance. Boon even changes Boss's inclination that, for the most part, the machine ought to remain under lock and key. He takes one opportunity to give Grandmother a short ride across the yard. Her conclusion is that the automobile poses no threat to its passengers and that riding in it is actually a pleasant experience. In his pursuit to become master hostler of the mechanical carriage, Boon betrays his

own innate tactical brilliance. Boon, "a pretty damned good guerrilla fighter"(34) has "discovered the weak point in the enemy's [Grandfather's] front"(36)--Grandmother. This one seemingly insignificant manoeuver yields Boon a position of responsibility and trust. It also yields the opportunity to betray that trust and his own innocence.

Inevitably, "those innocent days"(66) must end. Boon and Lucius are Edenic figures about to be thrown headlong into a fall from innocence, prefigured by Ludus's "'borrying' of the wagon and team"(12). These falls are "not only instantaneous but simultaneous too: back at the identical instant when Mother got the message that Grandfather Lessep was dead"(50). So death is the catalyst that begins journey and fall. The adults of the Priest household attend the funeral, leaving Boon with a few brief hours with the car before it is to be locked away for the duration of their absence. Having a taste for adventure and fresh fruit, Boon inevitably abuses his responsibility. The trip to Memphis is this abuse, and he thinks it a good idea to "seduce"(44) Lucius into going along, "even knowing that someday he must bring it back or come back himself in order to face lesser music..."(45). Out of "some embryo gleam of simple yet-virgin discretion and common sense"(46), Boon believes the seduction necessary to draw Lucius into the scheme "as a kind of hostage"(46). It is ironic, therefore, that Lucius submits to Boon's overture, "simply testing Boon's capacity to undermine"(51) his virtue. Boon need not have bothered:

When grown people speak of the innocence of children, they dont really know what they mean. Pressed, they will go a step further and say, Well, ignorance then. The child is neither. There is no crime which a boy of

eleven had not envisaged long ago. His only innocence is, he may not yet be old enough to desire the fruits of it, which is not innocence but appetite; his ignorance is, he does not know how to commit it, which is not ignorance but size.(46)

Their innocence then is not pristine; it is the postlapsarian innocence associated with childhood and inexperience. In other words, the two are innocents only inasmuch as they lack experience. They have the inclination toward the consumption of the forbidden Winton fruit. And because Lucius agrees to the scheme, in much the same fashion as Boon and Buffaloe instantaneously agree, he is a thief, or more accurately, a reiver; together, they are "worse than amateurs: innocents, complete innocents at stealing...since we [Boon and Lucius] intended to return it unharmed..."(62).

Furthermore, within the metaphor of the fall, the automobile "like the apple in Eden, represents the temptation to greater knowledge"<sup>9</sup> --knowledge that stems from experience of the journey which, to be fulfilled, or at least enjoyed, demands a lie to bring the apple into the reivers' sole possession. Inasmuch as Boon and Lucius are confederates and the plan for the journey originates with Boon, the obligation to lie falls on Lucius. His lie facilitates the actual theft of the automobile. Furthermore, with this act, the lie upon which all else depends, Lucius assumes the role of an active participant. Henceforth, he is a partner in all events. He is a doer--one who has a personal stake in and a responsibility for the journey. Even though Boon deems it necessary to seduce Lucius by placing him in the driver's seat (an action similar to Grandmother's ride), it is eventually obvious to both that the successful lie betrays who is really in the driver's seat on the journey:

I was as bent as Boon, and--during the next step anyway--even more culpable. Because (I realised; no: knew; it was obvious; Boon himself admitted it in so many words) I was smarter than Boon. I realised, felt suddenly that same exultant fever-flash which Faustus himself must have experienced: that of we two doomed and irrevocable, I was the leader, I was the boss, the master.(53)

Lucius not only participates in events, he also decides them. So with the "very cards of virtue and rectitude"(47) stacked against him, Lucius chooses perjury, betraying his family and himself. Like Faustus, he chooses of his own free will to barter himself for a brief interim of unconstrained adventure, knowing full well that, ultimately, retribution must be forthcoming--they must return to Jefferson.

Lucius discovers that the lie is an exponential sin: "...there would be no end to it, not only no end to the lies I would continue to have to tell merely to protect the ones I had already told, but that I would never be free of the old worn-out ones..."(64). Like Redburn who stands to a lie told his captain, Lucius discovers that the lie has tremendous ramifications. The lie whereby Lucius "bartered--nay, damned --my soul"(58), brings Faustian regret: "I'm sick and tired of lying, of having to lie"(64). In telling the lie and regretting it, the boy takes the first step in denying his own innocence. The die cast, the journey under way, Lucius can only acquiesce to his commitment: "Let's go now. If I've got to tell more lies, at least let it be to strangers"(64). Years afterwards--that is, in retrospect--Lucius comes to an understanding of lying:

...I have said it a thousand times since and I still believe it and I hope to say it a thousand times more in my life...I will never

lie again. It's too much trouble. It's too much like trying to prop a feather upright in a saucer of sand. There's never any end to it. You never get any rest. You're never finished. You never even use up the sand so that you can quit trying.(58)

But for the time being, Lucius suffers from frequent bouts of regret and yet never withdraws from his initial commitment:

I wanted my mother; I wanted no more of this, no more of free will; I wanted to return, relinquish, be secure, safe from the sort of decisions and deciding whose foster twin was this having to steal an automobile. But it was too late now; I had already chosen, elected; if I had sold my soul to Satan for a mess of pottage, at least I would damn well collect the pottage and eat it too....(66)

In this, Lucius acknowledges his place in the adult world, the world in which the exercise of choice is a necessary part of living. No one should choose for the individual.

Having "decided quick and hard not to think about Monday"(54), Lucius abandons his past (Jefferson), his present (by way of the lie and its ramifications), and the future (Monday), choosing "unvirtue" over "virtue" and leaving a serpentine dust cloud "spurting and coiling" "across the bright May land"(59). Together in the postlapsarian state, the reivers adopt or are adopted by non-virtue: "Or maybe it was just Virtue who had given up, relinquished us to Non-virtue to cherish and nurture and coddle in the style/whose right we had won with the now irrevocable barter of our souls"(93-94). Non-virtue, personified by the use of the feminine pronoun(62), is a popular universal cause; it is akin to "debauchery and degeneracy and actual criminality"<sup>10</sup> rather than malevolent evil:

...all the world...who serves Virtue works alone, unaided, in a chilly vacuum of reserved judgment; where, pledge yourself to Non-virtue and the whole countryside boils with volunteers to help you.(143)

It is the experience--the exposure to non-virtue--that brings understanding. For example, the narrator describes Miss Reba and Miss Corrie as "already toughened, even if not wisened, by constant daily experience to any wile or assault Non-virtue (or Virtue) might invent against them..."(133).

The struggle between virtue and non-virtue catches Lucius between the encompassing contraries and forces him to come to grips with each. It has been this way since the original fall, and therefore it must remain as such here in the narrative. Non-virtue is an essential component of existence:

You have heard--or anyway you will--people talk about evil times or an evil generation. There are no such things. No epoch of history nor generation of human beings either ever was or is or will be big enough to hold the un-virtue of any given moment, any more than they could contain all the air of any given moment; all they can do is hope to be as little soiled as possible during their passage through it. Because what pity that Virtue does not--possibly cannot--take care of its own as Non-virtue does. Probably it cannot: who to the dedicated to Virtue, offer in reward only cold and/odorless and tasteless virtue: as compared not only to the bright rewards of sin and pleasure but to the ever watchful unflagging omniprescient skill --that incredible matchless capacity for invention and imagination--with which even the tottering footsteps of infancy are steadily and firmly guided into the primrose path.(52-53)

The author, the inventor of the narrator, and possibly the narrator

himself, are craftsmen, working in language of "sin and pleasure," who are in league with non-virtue by way of their "capacity for invention and imagination." As narrator, Lucius travels a "passage through" non-virtue, and, from his first step into motion, he commits himself to "the primrose path," life where innocence succumbs to experience. Furthermore, motion is a metaphor for living:

There are things, circumstances, conditions  
in the world which should not be there but are,  
and you cant escape them and indeed, you would  
not escape them even if you had the choice,  
since they too are a part of Motion, of  
participating in life, being alive.(155)

Motion, then, is much like the act of sailing is for Redburn. In this case, however, the automotive, mechanical apple precipitates motion, and this is one movement through life dominated by non-virtue.

The first step that places Lucius in motion is the seduction (at least from Boon's perspective) of Lucius. It is the moment when Boon places Lucius behind the wheel of the Winton Flyer. Lucius then controls the vehicle and the motion:

...we moved back and forth across that  
vacant sun-glared waste, forward a while,  
backward a while, intent, timeless, Boon  
as much as I, immersed, rapt, steadying me  
(he was playing for such stakes, you see),  
out of time, beyond it, invulnerable to  
time until the courthouse clock striking  
noon a half-mile away restored us, hurled  
us back into the impending hard world of  
finagle and deception.(52)

The moment unites Boon and Lucius in a timeless void where both are beyond reality until the clock brings them back. And once returned, they are bound together, "talking man-to-man now, mutual in crime, confederate of course..."(52) in motion on that "primrose path" within the "world of

finagle and deception."

The motion itself seems to distort time, and on several occasions Lucius notices a temporal aberration in his perceptions. For instance, having told the lie and damned his soul, Lucius regrets his action: "Nothing remained, nothing. I didn't want to go anywhere, be anywhere. I mean, I didn't want to be is anywhere. If I had to be something, I wanted it to be was"(58). Or a more exacting instance is when Ned reveals the swap: "It was like a dream, a nightmare; you know it is, and if you can only touch something hard, real, actual, unaltered, you can wake yourself..."(117). Or again, in the respite following the second race, Lucius' weariness aberrates his perception: "...it seemed hours, forever, then in the next thinking it seemed no time..."(269). Ultimately, the most "precise aberration" comes from Boss's reappearance: "...me looking past Lightning's ears at Grandfather leaning a little on his cane (the gold-headed one) and two other people whom I had known somewhere a long time ago..."(274). The precision of the vision lies in the disturbing fact that a few days' motion have transported Lucius a long way from childhood, and from a narrative perspective, the distance between this event, preceding ones, and the telling is even greater. Once in motion, once moving away from Jefferson in the Flyer, once Lucius chooses the path of non-virtue and damns his Faustian soul, it is inevitable that the traveller will visit the underworld upon his journey.

It is not simply a matter of going to iniquitous Memphis, a haven of non-virtue and a kind of Christian hell on earth. There are obstacles between Jefferson and Memphis that precede and possibly prefigure an entrance into the underworld. They must pilot the Flyer through a



wilderness landscape that stands across the path to the underworld encompassingly indifferent--much like an ocean before a sailing ship. As innocents, Boon and Lucius are unaware of this possibility: "Where else did we have to go? [other than Memphis]....Some aged and finished creature on his or her deathbed might contemplate or fear a more distant destination, but they were not Boon and me"(57). However, having made the trip on previous occasions, Boon is cognizant of the physical impedimenta that lay before them, and with this knowledge, Boon necessarily takes the position at the head of the expedition, even though he has already admitted Lucius' superior intelligence.

His previous experience teaches him that a block and tackle, a rope, a stretch of "bob wire," an axe, and a shovel are necessary equipment for overcoming the mire obstacles before them. The first obstacle, "'Harrykin Creek'"(68), proves little challenge for Boon: "With one Herculean effort, he lifts the automobile bodily and shoots it forward onto dry ground...."<sup>11</sup> Herculean or not, Boon doubts that even with the mud-fighting equipment they will pass successfully through Hell Creek bottom. He also knows that they have no choice but to make the attempt "'Because Hell Creek bottom aint got no around....Go one way and you'd wind up in Alabama; go the other way and you'll fall off in the Mississippi River'"(80). At Ballenbaugh's, Boon takes a near-malicious delight in the presence of the flatulent stowaway:

"That's who I'm laughing at: Ned. By the time we are through Hell Creek tomorrow, he's going to wish he hadn't busted what he calls his manners nor et nor done nothing else under that tarpollyon until he felt Memphis itself under them wheels."(79)

The implacable, threatening character of the Hadean obstacle is reinforced by Lucius' observation. His vision of the dead during the night at Ballenbaugh's prefigures the entrance into the underworld:

Then there was all the spring darkness: the big bass-talking frogs from the sloughs, the sound that the woods makes, the big woods, the wilderness with the wild things: coons and rabbits and mink and mushrats and the big owls and the big snakes--moccasins and rattlers--and maybe even the trees breathing and the river itself breathing, not to mention the ghosts--the old Chickasaws who named the land before the white men ever saw it, and the white men afterward--Wyott and old Sutpen and Major de Spain's hunters and the flatboats full of cotton and then the wagon trains and the brawling teamsters and the line of brigands and murderers which produced Miss Ballenbaugh....(78)

From the contemplation of nature outside his window, Lucius' mind moves to animals of traditional ill fortune: the owl and the snake.<sup>12</sup> His mind jumps to the dead that have preceded him towards Hell Creek bottom. They too had to pass the same obstacle because, again, "'Hell Creek bottom aint got no around.'" According to Lucius, Boon corroborates the portentous implication behind the vision: "...he himself had populated the/stagnant cypress--and willow-arched mosquito-whined gloom with the wraiths of stuck automobiles and sweating and cursing people"(81-82). There is a lonesome, threatening trail ahead.

Boon's oracle and Lucius' vision bear out in the midst of the "big receptacle of milk-infused coffee"(84), the bottom's road that had "transmogrified, exchanged mediums, elements"(84). Boon's Herculean efforts prove to no avail; they must employ Charon to cross.<sup>13</sup> They are stuck fast in the purgatorial mud:

There was something dreamlike about it. Not nightmarish: just dreamlike--the peaceful, quiet, remote, sylvan, almost primeval setting of ooze and slime and jungle growth and heat in which the very mules themselves, peacefully swishing and stamping at the teaming infinitesimal invisible myriad life which was the actual air we moved and breathed in, were not only unalien but in fact curiously appropriate, being themselves biological dead ends and hence already obsolete before they were born; the automobile: the expensive useless mechanical toy rated in power and strength by the dozens of horses, yet held helpless and impotent in the almost infantile clutch of a few inches of the temporary confederation of two mild and pacific elements--earth and water--which the frailest integers and units of motion as produced by the ancient unmechanical methods, had coped with for countless generations without really having noticed it; the three of us, three forked identical and now unrecognisable mud-colored creatures engaged in a life-and-death struggle with it, the progress--if any--of which had to be computed in dreadful and glacier-like inches. (87)

The reivers are in a "life-and-death struggle" that almost encompasses them as their progress slows to such a pace that eons might pass before the other side is gained. It is a struggle that illuminates their own mortality, and it is a struggle in which man's progress, as gauged by his mechanical inventions, is dwarfed by the "temporary confederation of two mild and pacific elements" produced by "ancient unmechanical methods."

It is therefore appropriate that Faulkner parallels the crossing to ancient classical motifs. The crossing is analogous to crossing the Styx into death. The crossing has "no around." It is a mistake to interpret this crossing as Brylowski does, understanding that Hell Creek is only analogous to the Lethe. The reivers employ the ferryman to cross into the underworld whose "boundary is usually Styx, not infrequently

Archeron."<sup>14</sup> The ferryman proves himself a usurous, but democratic Charon. The obol has been doubled since Boon's last crossing, and the same price is paid per person regardless of age or color--the latter justified wittily by the Charon: "'both these mules is color-blind'"(91). Death plays no favorites--all must pass that way. And once past the Charon, during their adventures in the underworld, the reivers must surpass or get by Archeron to commence the journey home. Only, having done this, the return is immediate, and there is no mention of recrossing a river of forgetfulness. In fact, it becomes a major issue that what takes place on the journey and in Memphis will always be remembered. So, Hell Creek functions as both Styx and Lethe on the way to Memphis. It functions as Lethe because "Lethe is closely connected with the idea that those about to be reincarnated are given a magical drink which makes them forget their former existence...."<sup>15</sup> Lucius passes into the underworld where non-virtue is dominant and where his past--that is, his childhood--is all but forgotten, sprung again to memory by the reappearance of Boss Priest.

Hell Creek is the barrier across the path to the underworld and civilization: "...maybe it was necessary first to put Hell Creek as far behind us as limbo, or forgetfulness, or at least out of sight; maybe we would not be worthy of civilisation until we had got the Hell Creek mud off"(92). The crossing forces the reivers to continue the journey:

...if we crossed Rubicon when we crossed the  
Iron Bridge into another county, when we  
conquered Hell Creek we locked the portcullis  
and set the bridge on fire.(93)

The choice made to commence, there is no turning back. The process is irreversible.

Once in Memphis, where "Virtue" relinquishes the reivers to "Non-virtue"(93), Lucius and Boon confront evil embodied in Otis and Butch. Like "knights errant" of a classical romance, Lucius and Boon rely upon Miss Reba, with her "connections" within the white underworld, and Ned, with his connections in the black underworld, in a pitched battle against Otis, Butch, and Bobo's anonymous creditor, the three latter "all referred to as demons."<sup>16</sup> The narrative focus is on the jousts between Lucius and Otis, on the one hand, and Boon and Butch on the other.

From his first meeting with Otis, Lucius observes that "He was not even as big as me but there was something wrong about him"(106). Time and again, Lucius repeats the last portion of this statement, and in doing so, he accentuates Otis' forbidding character. What becomes painfully obvious in a comparison of the two young men is that their respective upbringings have already determined how each will react to the civilization of Memphis. Otis is simply a debased, rapacious little thief, who, "'like a rat or a snake'"(202), has the audacity to steal Minnie's gold tooth, whereas Lucius is a person of ideals who knows that you do not "...promise your mother you wouldn't never take things....You dont have to promise anybody that....You dont take things"(218). Moreover, Otis is disrespectful when he curses Ned, "calling him nigger"(143), and this too Lucius is incapable of, since "...Father and Grandfather must have been teaching me before I could remember because I dont know when it began, I just knew it was so: that no gentleman ever referred to anyone by his race or religion"(143).

It is evident, then, that Otis plays the part of a foil for Lucius, a foil that is eventually overcome. To Lucius, Otis is an

immature dissembler: "...Otis looked like two or three years ago he had already...been going backward"(141). The conflict between Lucius and Otis is a moral conflict, since Otis reveals his complete disrespect for human dignity and his rapacious egocentric concern for money, and since Lucius proves himself the gentlemanly product of his "male ancestors"(51), incapable of passively suffering the presence of such malignity. Otis proposes a peephole like the one he made back in Arkansaw in the wall of Corrie's room, to allow paying voyeurs to witness Corrie about her business. Uninformed, Lucius asks Otis to explain what "'pugnuckling'" (156) is and why anyone would pay to watch it. The answer proves another harsh step into experience, a step that destroys his faithful image of Corrie and drives him to the attack--a hopeless attack aimed to obliterate the perceived source of Corrie's moral and physical defilement:

But I knew exactly what I wanted to do: not just hurt him but destroy him....I was hitting, clawing, kicking not at one wisened ten-year-old boy, but at Otis and the procuress both: the demon child who debased her privacy and the witch who debauched her innocence--one flesh to bruise and burst, one set of nerves to wrench and anguish; more: not just those two, but all who had participated in her debasement: not only the two panders, but the insensitive blackguard children and the brutal and shameless men who had paid their pennies to watch her defenseless and undefended and unavenged degradation.(157)

It is of course impossible to reverse the events of the past, and it is impossible to punish all who took part in Corrie's "debasement" by attacking Otis. Otis is for the moment the figurative embodiment of human malignancy.<sup>17</sup>

This confrontation with Otis has an immense impact on Lucius. It

appears as though the journey from Jefferson leads Lucius directly to this room in a brothel. Boon, his seducer, companion, and guide, has previously attempted to prepare Lucius for what he might come to know on this journey:

"Dont it beat all how much a fellow can learn and in what a short time, about something he not only never knowed before, he never even had no idea he would ever want to know it, let alone would find it useful to him for the rest of his life...."(103)

Boon attests to the value of experience, especially experience that is fresh and unexpected. Boon has even come close to defining for Lucius what it is to come to manhood by way of understanding:

"Everything a m- fel- boy sees and learns and hears about, even if he dont understand it at the time and cant even imagine he will ever have any use to know it, some day he will have a use for it and will need it...."(105)

It is not as though Lucius is unaware of the worth of knowledge or even incapable of recognizing an occasion when such knowledge is present. A case of this occurs when Lucius enters Miss Reba's:

I had never smelled it before. I didn't dislike it; I was just surprised. I mean, as soon as I smelled it, it was like a smell I had been waiting all my life to smell. I think you should be tumbled pell-mell, without warning, only into experience which you might well have spent the rest of your life not having to meet.(99)

For Lucius the smell is a déjà vu. It is also an experience which should occur unannounced--that is, be unintentionally encountered--so that the recognition and understanding result from the situation rather than any preconception. Thus the experience functions as a rite of passage.

The confrontation with Otis also functions as an unexpected but

inevitable step into sexual awareness. Lucius is thrown into bed with demonic rapacity, and he attempts to flail, to "destroy"(157) Otis, as if by annihilating Otis, he expects to eradicate human rapacity, specifically, "all who had participated in her [Corrie's] debasement." It is an experience that could have gone unchallenged if not for the journey, and Boon, though much older than Lucius, attests to the extreme nature and worth of such an experience:

"Eleven years old...and already knife-cut in a whorehouse brawl....I wish I had knowned you thirty years ago. With you to learn me when I was eleven years old, maybe by this time I'd a had some sense too."(159)

Understanding, that is, "sense," arises from experience. But the fact remains that Lucius is not at all prepared for the experience:

I wanted my mother. Because you should be prepared for experience, knowledge, knowing: not bludgeoned unaware in the dark as by a highwayman or footpad....I was having to learn too much too fast, unassisted; I had nowhere to put it, no receptacle, pigeonhole prepared yet to accept it without pain and lacerations.(155)

Isolated, Lucius is literally and figuratively "lacerated" by the experience.

However, Lucius' vision of Corrie as being "exactly right for serenity"(131) remains, for the most part, intact after the fight. She comes to know that Lucius fights Otis for her dignity, and the revelation is of sufficient magnitude to precipitate her reformation from whoredom--much to the disgruntlement of Boon. Having her honor fought for gives Everbe Corinthia's name the stature of pure, chaste maidenhood,<sup>18</sup> but since Lucius becomes privy to her past via the "demon child"(157), she



will be "that helpless lodestar for human debasement"(174). Moreover, because Boss reveals that "'Nothing is ever forgotten'"(302), she will ever be part of her past and a luxurious Corinthian to those who know that past. In the struggle for Corrie, her eventual husband, Boon, opposes Butch, another child-demon with a "little boy mind"(186). Ironically, Boon, the child in a man's body, learns from Lucius' example that Corrie's honor is worth fighting for: "'God damn it...if you can go bare-handed against a knife defending her, why the hell cant I marry her? Aint I as good as you are, even if I aint eleven years old?'"(299).

Boon's statement is a recognition that, by implication, Lucius is no longer innocent or a child. Boon is not alone in coming to this conclusion. In a more direct manner that is in keeping with her forth-right demeanor, Miss Reba agrees with Boon: "'Jesus, you men. And here's another one that aint but eleven years old'"(280). Uncle Parsham concurs with Miss Reba's observation when he urges Ned to tell Lucius how Corrie acquiesced to Butch's wish so the horse race might continue: "'Tell him ....He's stood everything else you folks got him into since you brought him here; what makes you think he cant stand the rest of it too...'"(255).

Parsham's confidence in Lucius arises from the hours the two spend together, and the sageness of his appeal (and thus his estimation of Lucius) stems from his likeness to the wise Boss Priest who "'snores too'"(250). In other words, Parsham replaces Boss during his stay, and he comforts, assists, and generally looks out for Lucius amidst the turmoil of events that bring the young man considerable torment. The torment is akin to if not the exact same hesitation Lucius exhibits upon initially leaving Jefferson. For example, in weighing his share of the racing scam,

Lucius ponders that

...maybe I just wasn't able to tote whatever my/share was, and if they had had somebody else bigger or older or maybe just smarter, we wouldn't have been licked. You see? like that: all specious and rational; unimpugnable even, when the simple truth was, I wanted to go home and just wasn't brave enough to say so, let alone do it.(251-252)

However, it is in Memphis as it was in Jefferson. The lie told, the journey in motion, the Faustian hero is unable to renege his commitment; he cannot "get Grandfather's automobile and take it back to Jefferson, in reverse if necessary, travelling backward to unwind, ravel back into No-being, Never-being..."(175). Experience is irreversible and, once in motion, the initiate's only course is to continue: "...I had gone too far by now in sophistication and the facts of life to stop now, just as I had gone too far in stealing automobiles and race horses to quit now"(196). Through experience, and partially through retrospect, Lucius undergoes a change. He is privy to knowledge that will not allow his being to remain unchanged:

Maybe yesterday, while I was still a child, but not now. I knew too much, had seen too much. I was a child no longer now; innocence and childhood were forever lost, forever gone from me.(175)

He is not so much conscious of the evil he has encountered, as he is conscious that his "moment of adolescence" (Fiedler's phrase) is quickly passing. As a result of being run through, pushed, dragged, and carried into events beyond his control, Lucius is a man. More properly, in Boss's words, he is a gentleman, one who "...accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences"(302).

The distance Lucius travels is immeasurable temporally: "I had gone too far to stop now, like in Jefferson yesterday--or was it yesterday? last year: another time: another life: another Lucius Priest" (156). And in going "too far," Lucius declares that money plays no part in the decision to see things through:

...I wasn't doing it for money: that money would have been the last thing of all; that once we were in it, I had to go on, finish it, Ned and me both even if everybody else had quit; it was as though only by making Lightning run and run first could we justify (not escape consequences: simply justify) any of it. Not to hope to make the beginning of it any less wrong--I mean, what Boon and I had deliberately, of our own free will, to do back there in Jefferson four days ago; but at least not to shirk, dodge--at least finish--what we ourselves had started.(279)

The business finished, Lucius does not "want to have to make any more choices, decisions..."(283). The initiate has had enough of free will for the time being. He is satisfied that he has seen the venture through to its culmination--the return to Jefferson where he recognizes a change in himself:

It [Jefferson] hasn't even changed. Because it should have....I dont mean it should have changed of itself, but that I, bringing back to it what the last four days must have changed in me, should have altered it.(299)

Inasmuch as there is no perceptual change in Jefferson's countenance, then the belief that there should be some alteration evidences the altered perception of Lucius. He is no longer the child he was four days ago. The motion, the living experienced in those four days, has taken Lucius dramatically from an age of innocence to the age of mechanical motion and the underworld of human delight. In urban, civilized Memphis,

Lucius has had to grapple with human rapacity, a struggle that has literally and figuratively scarred the young Priest. Moreover, the lacerations become an impediment as Lucius proves his worth as a reiver and as a man. The experience and the worldly knowledge gained on the journey are precipitates of the single moment, the act of choosing to throw himself consciously or unconsciously into the stream of events for which he "accepts the responsibility" "and bears the burden of their consequences."

Lucius recognizes that in some way he must atone for his actions, and the atonement must be made to his father. Yet, atonement for his journey cannot come in the form of physical punishment: "And if all that I had done was balanced by no more than that shaving strop, then both [father and son] of us were debased"(301). Lucius relies on his father to assist him in dealing with what he had done and what he had experienced, because Lucius has "nowhere to store them nor even anywhere to lay them down..."(300). His conscience will not be assuaged. The punishment comes from Boss who reveals the simple fact that as a man Lucius must "'Live with it'"(302). Knowledge, however undesirable retrospectively, cannot be simply laid aside, because "'Nothing is ever forgotten. Nothing is ever lost. It's too valuable.'"(302). In other words, with the coming of adulthood, a man becomes responsible for his actions, accountable for whatever he does.

It is clear that, in comparison, Lucius has come considerably further than Redburn, even though he has covered less distance on his circular journey. Redburn's voyage took months, and it is never explicit that the initiate has gained manhood, whereas on this four-day jaunt

from pastoral Jefferson to Memphis' underworld and back again, Lucius leaves his innocent, child's world behind, and enters the domain of adult responsibility. Through his exploits, Lucius, a doer, proves himself to be just that, a man, capable of holding up his end of the reciprocal relationship amongst reivers. Boon initiates Lucius to motion, and they fall together, reiving that Winton fruit, embracing Un-virtue in its realm: Memphis.

The Flyer, the automobile, is the apple in the garden of experience. Lucius lies. He thus facilitates the theft and his own fall. Using the retrospective reminiscent narrative stance, Faulkner juxtaposes Lucius' mild lament for his own passing innocence with the steady disappearance of rural pastoralism in the face of growing technology, marked in his lifetime and this century by the increasing dominance of the automobile in America.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, The Reivers: A Reminiscence (New York: Random House, 1962; Vintage Books), p. 3. Further references to this edition will be noted in the chapter by page number.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 256.

<sup>3</sup>Edwin Moses, "Faulkner's The Reivers: The Art of Acceptance", Mississippi Quarterly, XXVII (Summer 1974), 309.

<sup>4</sup>Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: The Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 250.

<sup>5</sup>Marx, p. 252.

<sup>6</sup>J. Bronowski, The Ascent of Man (Boston/Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 272. The construction of this bridge is in fact a milestone of English industrialism. Built in 1779, under the supervision of ironmaster, John Wilkinson, the bridge marks one of the first examples of the "architecture of iron" that was to change not only the appearance of the countryside, but also the way of life in the western world. It is also worth noting that the first model seen in London of an iron bridge was (ironically enough) proposed by Tom Paine.

<sup>7</sup>It is a wonder, in light of this, that Melville did not make more of a point when the Highlander, a sailing ship, is escorted to and from port by steamships, the first portent of wind power's demise. Sails were being rapidly replaced by the time of Redburn's conception.

<sup>8</sup>Albert J. Devlin, "The Reivers: Readings in Social Psychology", Mississippi Quarterly, XXV (Summer 1972), 328.

<sup>9</sup>Joseph Gold, William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 181.

<sup>10</sup>Joseph Blotner, Faulkner: A Biography, Vol. II (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 1795.

<sup>11</sup>Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (Louisiana State University, 1964), p. 230.

<sup>12</sup>It is apparent that Lucius and Huckleberry Finn have similar imaginations. Lucius' imagination is spurred by the sounds of creatures outside his window, just as Huck's imagination runs rampant at the sounds of creatures outside his window at Miss Watson's house (Ch. 1). The sounds of the evening are transformed from the natural into the supernatural. Both boys imagine the sounds of the creatures intermingled with the sound of ghosts. The contemplation brings Lucius to think of his forthcoming descent into Hell Creek bottom. Ironically, Huck considers himself so lonely that he almost wishes himself dead--a wish that is soon to be figuratively fulfilled. Both boys make that descent into the nether world.

<sup>13</sup>Walter Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh: Myth in the Novels (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), p. 217.

<sup>14</sup>H. J. Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1928; University Paperbacks, 1965), p. 89.

<sup>15</sup>Rose, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup>Vickery, p. 232.

<sup>17</sup>Otis is like the men who peer through the fence at Ike Snopes and the cow in The Hamlet. The act itself is not the focus of the outrage. Rather, those who take pleasure in watching the act and those who exploit the participants for their own gain garner the reader's and, in this case, Lucius' outrage.

<sup>18</sup>Lynn Gartrell Levins, Faulkner's Heroic Design (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 179.

CHAPTER IV  
THE JOURNEY THROUGH NAM:  
DEADLY TECHNOLOGY IN THE GARDEN

While technology plays a central role in the fall of Lucius Priest, it literally dominates the martial world of Vietnam, and it does so in a strikingly deadly fashion. Not unexpectedly, the fictional presentation parallels the historical events. America's entrance into the conflict was a quiet one, during the colonial struggle between the French and Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh. The French, whose involvement prefigures America's a decade later, fought a conventional war against the unconventional Vietminh, whose tactics evolved in their struggle against the Japanese. The Americans were concerned with the geopolitical threat of communism, and hence, they supported France's presence in Indochina, lending economic aid to the colonials in their unsuccessful efforts to defeat Ho's nationalist forces. American involvement steadily increased during the fifties until the tide of their military commitment swept them onto the beaches near Danang in 1965. From this time, until the last American soldier left Vietnam from a rooftop in crumbling Saigon in 1975, a generation of Americans followed the tragic journey through the first war the United States ever lost. That generation, like their nation, is still remembering and reliving the experience of those years.

Lucius Priest's epiphany that the mature individual must be



responsible for his own actions and live with the memory of those actions for the rest of his life parallels America's discovery that she too must be responsible for her own actions and live with the memory of those actions, in this case her part in the Vietnam War. This discovery is manifest in microcosm within accounts of individual journeys into the maelstrom of Vietnam. Of these accounts, two novels predominate. The first, Dispatches by Michael Herr, has been referred to as metafictional because of the work's concern with the literary recollection of experience into fiction.<sup>1</sup> It is the account of a correspondent, one who reports what he sees. The second, A Rumor of War by Philip Caputo, is an autobiographical rendering of the author's military stint in Nam. Caputo is a doer rather than a seer, yet both he and Herr concern themselves with the revelation of young America's initiation into the Hell that was the Vietnam War, a revelation of self through the experience of the journey.

It is not as though the threat of involvement in Vietnam went unnoticed in the formative years following World War II. In The Quiet American, Graham Greene reveals a prophetic vision of what subsequently is to befall America. In this novel, the protagonist, Thomas Fowler, a seasoned and skeptical English correspondent, confronts the naive Alden Pyle who is working to create a third force in the conflict within Vietnam. Metaphorically, America's third force is symbolized by Pyle's attempt to insinuate himself into the good graces of Thomas Fowler's mistress, a desirable yet indifferent Vietnamese woman. This metaphorical connection is cemented by a comment made by a French captain in the airforce, as he addresses personal involvement in the

conflict: "'It's not a matter of reason or justice. We all get involved in a moment of emotion and then we cannot get out. War and Love--they have always been compared.'" <sup>2</sup> The term denoting this involvement is "engagé," and Pyle becomes engaged to Phuong, the young Vietnamese. He is perfunctory in his dealings with Fowler, honest though boyish in the courting of Phuong, figuratively proving a pain to Fowler. In his wooing and political intrigue, Pyle acts with the self-assumed invincibility of a medieval knight, proceeding "with the caution of a hero in a boy's adventure-story, proud of his caution like a Scout's badge and quite unaware of the absurdity and the improbability of his adventure." <sup>3</sup> He is youthful, idealistic, and innocent. Pyle reveals himself a modern American innocent, convinced that his intentions are justified--politically, by the academic treatises of York Harding, and romantically, by his middle-class morality. Yet in his attempt to create a political vacuum large enough to make way for his "Third Force," Pyle is responsible for the bombing of a crowded market place, killing many Vietnamese civilians. His naiveté and innocence are deadly--to himself and those around him:

"He was young and ignorant and silly and he got involved. He had no more of a notion than any of you what the whole affair's about, and you gave him money and York/Harding's books on the East and said, 'Go ahead. Win the East for Democracy.' He never saw anything he hadn't heard in a lecture-hall, and his writers and his lecturers made a fool of him. When he saw a dead body he couldn't even see the wounds. A Red menace, a soldier of democracy." <sup>4</sup>

The vanguard of Kennedy's Camelot, Pyle has the idealistic, adolescent conviction that his view is wholly correct, that life contains only

right and wrong, that those deaths he is responsible for are justified by his cause and his ends. And, like many Americans who followed the fictional Pyle into Vietnam, he died "because he was too innocent to live."<sup>5</sup> He experienced nothing to shake these convictions, and intellectually, there is little to counteract the innocence: "'...he'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity.'"<sup>6</sup> There is only one thing that ends innocence--experience, the experience Pyle, with all his intellectual convictions, is able to avoid. Hence, he cannot survive.

However, some Americans who followed Pyle's fictional journey survived the experience and subsequently chose to write of that experience. Permeated by the American lense on life, these literary endeavors are invariably an attempt to come to grips with the journey into Vietnam and to uncover the essence of what that war and all wars present to the combatant-initiate. The finest of these works are conscious of the distance between experience and its literary rendering and of the conscious effort needed to characterize experience within the art form. Veteran predecessors like Edmund Blunden make a similar effort:

So that in this vicinity a peculiar difficulty would exist for the artist to select the sights, faces, words, incidents, which characterized the time. The art is rather to collect them, in their original form of incoherence....Let the smoke of the German breakfast fires, yes, and the savour of their coffee, rise in these pages, and be kindly mused upon in our neighbouring saps of retrogression. Let my own curiosity have its little day, among the men of action and war-imagination.<sup>7</sup>

To recompose the event is to relive it, to relive the curiositas and

fall once more into experience. Even though Blunden falls short of the quoted objective, he reveals, nonetheless, the necessity for the art to reflect its source, the necessity that there be a symmetrical relationship between form and substance. This, of course, is true of all art, but in Vietnam, the task is that much more difficult because of the "original form of incoherence" intrinsic within the experience, the recollection, the sifting, via memory, through time past, and the revelation of meaning through a creative or a recreative process. Michael Herr and Philip Caputo succeed in this task. It is not unexpected, therefore, that a recent study of American war literature gauges these two works as "The two books most likely to become classics that have emerged from the Vietnam War...."<sup>8</sup> They are both works in which the American Adam confronts the machine as it overruns the vision of the green past. In both works, innocence falls victim to experience and the initiate undergoes severe isolation and introspection. Typically, the American Adam is innocent in his lack of experience, especially of worldly knowledge and self-knowledge. He is thrust into the presence of a martial technology that strips away adolescent naiveté, scarring the initiate.

#### Innocence and La Vida Loca

As its title indicates, Dispatches is a series of journalistic briefs. They represent the experiences, what Michael Herr witnessed during his year-long tour as a correspondent in Vietnam. The work is a staccato series of vignettes presented in a language that sensually,

structurally, and syntactically encapsulates the American experience in Vietnam. The author is the thread that ties the series of events together. The war is why Herr is in Vietnam, and the war is the reason the book is written. It is the war that takes Herr from a state of green innocence, where "I was new, brand new, three days in-country, embarrassed about my boots because they were so new,"<sup>9</sup> to an undeniable maturity after "We got out and became like everyone else who has been through a war: changed, enlarged and (some things are expensive to say) incomplete"(260). Like the reivers, Herr is not pristinely innocent, but he is Adamically new.

Herr's innocence stems (as does the reivers') from a lack of experience. The book is the record of an Adamic journey through a war, a circular journey from the States to Nam and back again. But, whether it be its temporal immediacy or its immediacy by way of the effect it still has on America, the Vietnam war had an illusive, often bewildering character. It is through the description of the war's character that Herr orders and possibly gives meaning to the maelstrom of activity that is the experience in Vietnam.

Herr's account shows that the war in Vietnam has a particular, ambiguous character that sets it apart from preceding wars. But it is not fundamentally different--it is, after all, a member of the genus bellum. Herr notes how the ideological justification for American presence in Vietnam is reassuringly reminiscent of the American Civil War: "...we were there to bring them the choice, bringing it to them like Sherman bringing the Jubilee through Georgia"(45). Once there, a man, especially a correspondent, easily succumbs to "fantasizing

privately about other, older wars, Wars I and II, air wars and desert wars and island wars, obscure colonial actions against countries whose names have since changed many times, punitive wars and holy wars and wars in places where the climate was so cool that you could wear a trench coat and look good"(200). But these youthful, idealistic fantasies must give way to harsh reality, as they have given way in each war in the past. That is part of what the journey in Nam teaches the initiate.

By drawing numerous parallels, Herr defines the uncertainty and confusion of the initiate in Vietnam--whether he is in the press or the military. Of all the wars mentioned, the one that receives most attention by way of discreet allusion is the First World War. For instance, Herr describes an attempt to "crank up the Home For Christmas rumor"(49). His use of the definite article indicates that the rumor is a convention, and it is a rumor heard repeatedly in the former European conflict. Or, in other instances, he creates parallels by way of circumstance. To help them on their patrol, the night-fighters receive amphetamines(2), instead of the more palatable noggin of rum. In a more general sense, the combat situations are, on occasion, very similar. At Khe Sanh, the Americans are entrenched behind barbed wire. They are subjected to horrific barrages, and, like the earlier trench fighters, they experience a feeling of helplessness: "...there was nothing you could do but curl up in the trench and try to make yourself small"(94). Events like this isolate the individual, throwing the focus on the self, and, instead of concentrating on the events, Herr shifts his concern to the language that informs experience. So his examination is a kind of introspection, an examination of past acts and events through the

language that informs the past.

Herr discovers language reminiscent of an earlier conflict. Herr spends considerable time in Khe Sanh with the "grunts" who live in bunkers that are sometimes lighted by candles and always smell foul. However, though these are the bunkers a Great War veteran remembers, there have been changes since that war. As in the First War, shell shock is a recognized affliction not to be confused with neurasthenia, but it is referred to by American command as "'acute environmental reaction'": "Most Americans would rather be told that their son is undergoing acute environmental reaction than to hear that he is suffering from shell shock..."(97). It seems that this command, like its earlier counterpart, sees fit to disguise the reality of the war behind misleading public announcements couched in jargon:

...all that the Mission talked about was control: arms control, information control, resources control, psycho-political control, population control, control of the almost supernatural inflation, control of terrain through the Strategy of the Periphery. But when the talk had passed, the only thing left standing up that looked true was your sense of how out of control things really were.(50)

He reveals a paradoxical relation between the official description and the event described. Or again, concerning a specific combat situation, the Mission says that the Marines are "'containing'" at Con Thien, when, in reality, they are "sitting there while the NVA killed them with artillery"(49). The illusiveness of the official stance irritates the press, who are not as acquiescent as their forerunners: "That office [JUSPAO] had been created to handle press relations and psychological



warfare, and I never met anyone there who seemed to realize that there was a difference"(231). It is evident that the source of official information does not, or chooses not to understand their own linguistic positions.

But the alienation is not confined to the press. A more immediate, and more important, alienation is sensed by the ordinary soldiers:

...they would ask you with an emotion whose intensity would shock you to please tell it, because they really did have the feeling that it wasn't being told for them, that they were going through all of this and that somehow no one back in the World knew about it.(220)

There is a strain of disillusionment that is akin to the helplessness perceived by the combatants in the First World War, but the disillusionment is only a small part of what the war held for the Americans in Vietnam. This--that is, the individual character of the war--is the thing, above all, which is captured in Dispatches. The war is fundamentally the same as its predecessors--man killing man--but there seems to be no ulterior motive or purpose in the Vietnam War. There is no specific goal. There is no holy cause. There is only chaos.

It is the rendering of this chaos onto the printed page that gives the work its power. What is immediately evident is that the language is the vehicle of barbarous confusion. The jargon of the war is misleading:

...things like "discreet burst" (one of those tore an old grandfather and two children to bits as they ran along a paddy wall one day, at least according to the report made later by the gunship pilot), "friendly casualties" (not warm, not fun), "meeting engagement" (ambush), concluding usually with 17 or 117 or 317 enemy dead and American losses



"described as light."(237)

In this passage Herr assumes the role of a linguistic palmer. His sage understanding, found in the bracketed portions of the quotation, guides the reader through the language which functions as a barrier to comprehension of the war. The "'discreet burst'" that shreds these three people is anything but circumspect. Apparently, the purveyors of the language expect a sympathetic interpretation. They imply that there is such a thing as "'friendly casualties'" (an oxymoron) or that the repetitively similar casualty reports are forthright or even accurate. This assumption on their part is an insult to the observer's intelligence.

However, the jargon of the war is found not only in the reports of the upper military echelons, but in the combat units as well: "We even had a small language for our fire: 'discreet burst,' 'probe,' 'prime selection,' 'constructive load'..."(65). These terms, the "small language" describing the deployment of firepower in specific engagements, do not reveal what an engagement is; Herr "never saw it as various, just compulsive eruption, the Mad Minute for an hour"(65). The jargon is the "small language" of training manuals or of after-the-fact reports made by company commanders. It comprises a description of battle that masks the experience, the adrenaline-charged "eruption" of human action that supercedes reason and abandons the perception of time. The jargon serves only to soften the reality of the combatant abandoning himself to the activity of killing. Those who have gone too far too many times end up in the LURPS, a Special Forces contingent tantamount to a suicide squad. Even here, the nature of the unit masquerades behind an official

anagram.

The book overflows with a flurry of anagrams that represent various groups ranging from the enemy to a specialized organization within the American command. The list seems endless: NVA, AFUN, TAOR, COORDS, TOC, ARVN, MACV, or JUSPAO. Even the machines of war have abbreviated names: M-16, AK-47, LCU, M-79, M-60, C-130, or loaches. The destructive capability of these machines is not apparent from the name, just as the function of the organizations remains, for the most part, textually undetermined. Yet their dominance in the narrative attests to the overwhelming influence of technology in the war. This technology is man's deadly creation, the machine of destruction designed and controlled by man for the destruction of man. The author spends little time explaining these metaphors of men or the machines they control. Rather, he alerts the reader to the dissembling character of the terminology and proceeds to employ these very terms in his description of events. The author also reports the language of the participants in these events. The crude sentiments and the cursing of the soldiers remain unaltered; no attempt is made to soften the language. The use of both the technical jargon and the field language brings the reader as close as possible to events, since they are presented in the contemporary, accurate language. Thus, the chaotic nature of the events is voraciously rendered in the language of conflict.

These events are, of course, rendered through memory, the memory of a young impressionable man of the sixties' generation. As to his memory, Herr testifies to the intensity with which events became a part of both the vicarious experience and the witness: "Memory print,

voices and faces, stories like filament through a piece of time, so attached to the experience that nothing move[d] and nothing went away"(29). The emotions within experience are retained, as are the events themselves: "This is already a long time ago, I can remember the feelings but I can't still have them. A common prayer for the over-attached..."(29). Here, Herr all but admits that he, like Greene's Alden Pyle, has become "engage," "over-attached" to the experience caught in memory so that he must recount in search of meaning and peace of mind, figuratively journeying back to Vietnam: "Only when with the distancing of time he can probe and order experience through memory and art is he able to complete the act of going to Vietnam...."<sup>10</sup> Again, there is a distance--that is, time--between the events and the author's recollection.

However, to portray the experience in its most vivid terms and to reveal the emotional substance of the recollection, the author often uses the language of the sixties. For example, he uses jargon in discussing mobility: "Airmobility, dig it, you weren't going anywhere. It made you feel safe, it made you feel Omni, but it was only a stunt, technology"(12). "Omni" and "dig it" lend an authorial intimacy through which the reader is expected to comprehend the sense of safety and the sense of power. But, underlying these is uncertainty: moving without going anywhere, safety in the threat of destruction. It is this kind of uncertainty that accentuates physical perceptions: "The thought of that one [the uncertainty] could turn any sudden silence into a space that you'd fill with everything you thought was quiet in you, it/could even put you on the approach to clairauidience"(54-55). The threat of how a nighttime silence will end throws awareness inward, on the self, but the

uncertainty lies without, so the unusual is exacerbated. Hence, as is seen above with "airmobility," the unusual nature of the situation requires the emphatic and unusual word, "clairaudience."

Uncertainty is also manifest in Herr's use of the list. He employs a list to indicate the unreliability of official press releases:

Maps, charts, figures, projections, fly  
fantasies, names of places, of operations,  
of commanders, of weapons; memories, guesses,  
second guesses, experiences (new, old, real,  
imagined, stolen); histories, attitudes--you  
could let it go, let it all go.(44)

This disclaimer undoes the need for the inventory. The list has no function other than to show how useless its composition is. In a similar manner, another list undercuts the use of the word "arms" to designate structure within the American force in Vietnam: "Gun arms, knife arms, pencil arms, head-and-stomach arms, hearts-and-minds arms, flying arms, creeping-peeping arms, information arms as tricky as the arms of Plastic Man"(45). Each part in this catalogue has at least two meanings: the figurative and the literal. The inclusion of the comic book hero at the end points to the elastic, inexact, and fantastic nature of the list. Its meaning arises not from the literal, but from the components' collective implication.

In another similar instance, Herr employs the list to encapsulate the plethora of "American types" in Vietnam:

It was bottomless and alive with Lurps, seals,  
recondos, Green-Beret bushmasters, redundant  
mutilators, heavy rapers, eye-shooters, widow-  
makers, nametakers, classic essential American  
types; point men, isolatos and outriders like  
they were programmed in their genes to do  
it....(35)

This gathering seems a natural extension of Melville's catalogue of

hunters gathered on a Mississippi steamer, though here, in the bars of Saigon and Danang, only the "keener hunters after all these hunters" are to be found. It collectively describes the all-too-frequent desperation that results from the exposure to the possibility of their own deaths, as though "the first taste made them crazy for it, just like they knew it would"(35). One and all, they are pariahs. Vietnam contains the prospect for "bottomless" deprivation, a dread-fascination with the war and the self, that finds expression in "'Born to Kill' placed in all innocence next to the peace symbol..."(242). The combatants themselves assimilate the dichotomous character of the conflict, their personalities displaying the contradictions of the war they fight:

You honestly didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Few people ever cried more than once there, and if you'd used that up, you laughed; the young ones were so innocent and violent, so sweet and so brutal, beautiful killers.(251)

One does not remain "young" in Vietnam for long, because the initiate must deal with the paradox of existence.

Even the prayers function paradoxically:

Prayers in the Delta, prayers in the Highlands, prayers in the Marine bunkers of the "frontier" facing the DMZ, and for every prayer there was a counter-prayer....MACV padres would fire one up to sweet muscular Jesus, blessing ammo dumps and 105's and officers' clubs. The best-armed patrols in history went out after services to feed smoke to people whose priests could let themselves burn down to consecrated ash on street corners.(46)

The Christian prayers are in apposition to the pacifist immolation. The prayers to Jesus, the King of Peace, are ideologically debased, and, in a sense, they deny western Christianity. But the prayers arise from "the

common failure of feeling and imagination compounded by punishing boredom, an alienation beyond tolerance and a terrible, ongoing anxiety..."(46). It is no wonder, then, that the Americans in the field suffer psychological breakdowns which Herr calls "crazy":

They'd talk about physical wounds in one way and psychic wounds in another, each man in a squad would tell you how crazy everyone else in the squad was, everyone knew grunts who'd gone crazy in the middle of a firefight, gone crazy on patrol, gone crazy back at camp, gone crazy on R&R, gone crazy during their first month home. Going crazy was built into the tour, the best you could hope for was that it didn't happen around you....(61)

Psychic wounds are in evidence everywhere, and the fact that a witness to a breakdown could become a victim shows that life anywhere in the war is tenuous. The enemy is not the only threat.

The initiate must deal with time. It punctuates the uncertainty of the future. The sensual perceptions during varying circumstances often determine the intellectual perception of time. Night or day, the sudden eruption of a fire fight denies the consideration of time, the "Mad Minute for an hour"(65). This temporal distortion is strikingly similar to Lucius Priest's Adamic lapse behind the wheel of the Winton Flyer, when he is "out of time, beyond it...."<sup>11</sup> Metaphorically, combat affects the soldier-initiate as it does the Adamic youth; the sensual faculties of each are focused on the immediate circumstance, momentarily obliterating time from consciousness. Moreover, in Vietnam, as Herr presents it, the perceptive faculties are often mixed with imaginings, especially when the most important sense, sight, is severely limited. Specifically, at night, which is "the war's truest medium"(42), the

imagination runs rampant in the consideration of the potential unseen death. The threat is only lessened by the dawn, and ultimately the only relief is escape from the threatening circumstances. The tension of the experience is a harsh constant, broken only by the sudden, dramatic violence, the instantaneous fall into experience. Day or night, time is a focal point for the American soldier:

Like every American in Vietnam, he had his obsession with Time. (No one ever talked about When-this-lousy-war-is-over. Only "How much time you got?").(126)

The "obsession" is invariably a personal one rather than the collective concern for the war's end, as was the case in World War I (indicated by the quotation from the song of the Great War).

In particular, a soldier called Day Tripper (his name stems from his insistence on avoiding night patrol for reasons stated above) is an exemplar of the time-conscious American:

No metaphysician ever studied Time the way he did, its components and implications, its per-second per seconds, its shadings and movement. The Space-Time continuum, Time-as-Matter, Augustinian Time: all of that would have been a piece of cake to Day Tripper, whose brain cells were arranged like jewels in the finest chronometer.(126)

The integrant concepts make a compendium of universal time. But it is recognized as such only in the narrative. In this, the intellectual perception of an individual is crucial to how time is rendered in the narrative. It can seem like a nighttime eternity, or, perhaps, a daytime eternity. The latter is in evidence when a young soldier is asked how long he has been in-country. He replies, "'All fuckin' day'"(189). And if the perceptions are flooded by outside stimuli, the concept of time

disappears altogether: "Sometimes I didn't know if an action took a second or an hour or if I dreamed it...still, what happened happened"(20). The stimuli are ever-present: "...the trees would kill you, the elephant grass grew up homicidal, the ground you were walking over possessed malignant intelligence, your whole environment was a bath"(69). The point here is supported by pathetic fallacy, but it aptly reveals that chaos, indicated by the encompassing, watery "bath," is ever-present. It is, of course, the fear aroused that distorts time. Past, present, and future lose independent status in the stream of events: "'Four months? Baby, four seconds in this whorehouse'll get you greased.'"(139).

The individual's perceptions are the only counterbalance to the illusive, chaotic nature of the war's character. The war is a stream of evolving events that is presented like a photographic record, a series of vignettes rendered through the perceptions of the author: "My movie, my friends, my colleagues. But meet them in context:"(201). It is only through Herr's linguistic techniques, like the use of jargon, "hip" dialect, lists, and time distortion, that the essence of the conflict can be approached. More conventional approaches fail. For example, physically, the war itself is too large: "Some of us moved around the war like crazy people until we couldn't see which way the run was even taking us anymore, only the war all over its surface with occasional, unexpected penetration"(7). Conventional descriptions cannot suffice: "...for years now there had been no country here but the war"(1). The war has outgrown the country, and the geographical bounds are no longer sufficient to contain it. The map on which Herr marks his movements falls apart(272), and the one on the wall in his room is outdated. Even



official maps are useless because the military arbitrarily ignores geographical boundaries. In fact, no map can illustrate the war: "... even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much anymore; reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind"(1). Moreover, the historical approach fails because "you couldn't find two people who agreed about when it began/...if you saw as far back as War II and the Japanese occupation you were practically a historical visionary"(50-51). Failing these, Herr must, through language, render what he perceives--especially through his eyes. He is in Vietnam "to watch"(20)--to watch, remember, and record. And because he saw only small pieces within the immense martial mosaic, and because these pieces are filtered through memory, the novel reveals a staccato, impressionistic vision that, inspite of its professed limitations, encapsulates the war.

The narrative is rich with sensory impressions. Herr talks of the chill of a jungle dawn, "Or dozing and waking under mosquito netting in a mess of slick sweat, gagging for air that wasn't 99 percent moisture"(56). He talks of night sounds: "...the babbling and chittering and shrieking of the jungle..."(55). Or he talks of the welcome taste of hot rations in the field. However, of the senses, sight is most important. Herr is predominantly a seer rather than a doer. Pictures of the war are not accurate; to comprehend the war, Herr must see the war:

Even when the picture was sharp and clearly defined, something wasn't clear at all, something repressed that monitored the images and withheld their essential information. It may have legitimized my fascination, letting me look for as long as I wanted....(18)

What he sees is the cycle of life and death that is the heart of the war. Yet Herr denies that either courage or cowardice drives him to assume the role of witness: "...like the mistake of thinking that all you needed to perform a witness act were your eyes"(69). It is his "fascination," rather than bravery or cowardice, that drives him to "perform a witness act," moving across Vietnam like a hummingbird in a garden, in the attempt to complete the martial vision. The mammoth size of the conflict and the apparent physical limitations are dwarfed by the fascination, the enchantment that metaphorically conceives life within the war itself: "...the war made a place for you that was all yours"(67).

In the feverish attempt to see it all, he operates out of Saigon, "the center, where every action in the bushes hundreds of miles away fed back into town on a karmic wire strung so tight that if you touched it in the early morning it would sing all day and all night"(43). From the centre he moves by air, and infrequently by land, to the firebases and LZ's all over Vietnam. In this way, one might say, he gets into bed with the war, sometimes spending a few days in an embattled Khe Sanh, or covering hundreds of miles and several bases before returning to his hotel room that night. In other words, he lives like a soldier, he moves like a soldier, and he sees what a soldier sees.

Concomitantly, Herr runs the risks of a soldier:

You were there in a place where you didn't  
belong, where things were glimpsed for which  
you would have to pay and where things went  
unglimpsed for which you would also have to  
pay, a place where they didn't play with the  
mystery but killed you straight off for  
trespassing.(101)

The horror of the events disturbs the witness, and, during the course of

the act, an extreme payment is demanded of the inattentive. He cannot remain detached from the conflict; he cannot maintain the completely objective stance of the reporter--it is "Impossible"(31). His experiences remain with him, and "It doesn't matter that memory distorts; every image, every sound comes back out of smoke and the smell of things burning"(115). It is, of course, these visions of death and carnage that Herr lives with after the witnessing. This is the payment, the payment that haunts his dreams long after the fact.

The fascination with the morbid, his ability to look "as long as [he] wanted," disappears when he is confronted repeatedly with the sight of death:

You couldn't remain effective as a soldier or a reporter if you got all hung up on the dead, fell into patterns of morbid sensitivity, entered perpetual mourning. "You'll get used to it." people would say, but I never did, actually it got personal and went the other way.(270)

He cannot simply dismiss the fascination and disgust he has for the war. He cannot remain passive intellectually. His dependence on the grunts who "were my guns" does not impede his descriptions of them: "I stood as close to them as I could without actually being one of them, and then I stood as far back as I could without leaving the planet. Disgust doesn't begin to describe what they made me feel..."(70). The description makes no attempt to soften the reality of what the American soldier is capable of doing. Herr must rely on them for his life, and what he sees in their company strips away what naive idealism he might have brought with him in-country.

An overwhelming, fluid ecstasy exists in the threat of death,

and the language for the paroxysm loses its syntactical order just as the events themselves evolve in a bewildering series, unexpected and unforeseen. He describes the grunts as he describes the fighting:

Under Fire would take you out of your head and your body too, the space you'd seen a second ago between subject and object wasn't there anymore, it banged shut in a fast wash of adrenaline...the sudden drop and rocket rush of the hit, the reserves of adrenaline you could make available to yourself, pumping it up and putting it out until you were lost floating in it, not afraid, almost open to clear orgasmic death-by-drowning in it, actually relaxed.(66)

Inspite of the threat there is an inner calm within the storm. But there is also another possible reaction under fire: "Unless of course you'd shit your pants or were screaming or praying or giving anything at all to the hundred-channel panic that blew word salad all around you and sometimes clean through you"(66). To be in battle seems akin to a horrific drug-induced hallucination. The unreality of the actual fighting either breaks (as in going "crazy") or enraptures the combatant. The novel's language is incantatory and matches the bizarre, ecstatic rapture of battle. These descriptions display on-the-brink-of-destruction knowledge that must stem from personal experience and impressions. But he is disposed to battle as he is disposed to the grunts whom he both admires and detests:

Maybe you couldn't love the war and hate it inside the same instant, but sometimes those feelings alternated so rapidly that they spun together in a strobic wheel rolling all the way up until you were literally High On War....(66)

The war's events either enrapture or horrify.

The war is an apocalyptic vision which consumes Herr, and it is a vision whose reality is indeterminate--actions do not function perceptively within conventional chronological schema. Because Herr recognizes the bewildering illusiveness, he rhetorically recreates events with the metaphor of "war-as-movie." Given that events are recalled through the vision and memory of the author, the narrative assumes a distinctly personal aspect:

Between what contact [with the enemy] did to you and how tired you got, between the farout things you saw or heard and what you personally lost out of all that got blown away, the war made a place for you that was all yours. Finding it was like listening to esoteric music, you didn't hear it in any essential way through all the repetitions until your own breath had entered it and become another instrument, and by then it wasn't just music anymore, it was experience. Life-as-movie, war-as-(war) movie, war-/as-life....(67-68)

His comprehension of experience as a personal photographic apocalypse gives rise to an internal harmony that is, metaphorically, the encompassing "esoteric music." There is a profound intimacy on the part of the author with his work, and it is as though the reader shares his choice of "breathing in and breathing out, some kind of choice all by itself"(15).

But that it is a personal vision is not wholly correct. The narrative renders his experiences in the war, but he is rarely unaccompanied. The distinctive nature of "experience" is a result of individual perceptions that naturally vary according to the person. But what Herr sees, what he witnesses, is never for his eyes alone. His experience is tantamount to a microcosm of the war:

It came back the same way every time, dreaded and welcome, balls and bowels turning over together, your senses working like strobes, free-falling all the way down to the essences and then flying out again in a rush to focus, like the first strong twinge of tripping after an infusion of psilocybin, reaching in at the point of calm and springing all the joy and all the dread ever known, ever known by everyone who ever lived, unutterable in its speeding brilliance, touching all the edges and then passing, as though it had all been controlled from outside, by a god or by the moon.(144)

The experience is revealed through a series of whirling, hallucinatory images. The experience is both dreaded and welcome, and, most importantly, it is a vision shared by "everyone who ever lived." It is a universal vision.

The dread and the fascination, the dichotomy within the vision, are found in almost every descriptive passage. For example, Herr describes his conception of the helicopter of Vietnam:

In the months after I got back the hundreds of helicopters I'd flown in began to draw together until they'd formed a collective meta-chopper, and in my mind it was the sexiest thing going; saver-destroyed, provider-waster, right hand--left hand, nimble, fluent, canny and human; hot steel, grease, jungle-saturated canvas webbing, sweat cooling and warming up again, cassette rock and roll in one ear and door-gun fire in the other, fuel, heat, vitality and death, death itself, hardly an intruder.(7)

The description contains antithetical elements, paired universal concepts interspersed with specific machine parts. It contains the material and the impressionistic, the physical and the intellectual. The machine--a symbol of the "technology that characterized Vietnam"(228) and the primary vehicle of movement--and its dichotomous description convey the

metaphorical movement of the author through the war. The fascination lies in the violent harmony of rock music and the illusion of safety within a hostile world. The dread lies in the assured knowledge that the illusion can be broken by the "intruder."

But there is a flaw in his vision. In retrospect, it is as though the witness, rather than what is witnessed, is in stasis: "Time and information, rock and roll, life itself, the information isn't frozen, you are"(20). He sees the war from an eye within the storm of activity. He becomes privy to men's Dionysian revelry in the conflict. Their appetite for violence, the most insatiate being called a "John Wayne wetdream"(19), is the basis for the metaphor of fighting as a sexual activity. For example, on one occasion Herr sees an attack on enemy bunkers by "two tiny helicopters, Loaches...hovering a few feet above the slits, pouring in fire"(170). To the observer, the loaches look like "wasps outside a nest," but a captain looking on remarks: "'That's sex,'...'That's pure sex.'"(170). The captain, however, is not alone in his enchantment with violence. Herr's initial innocence is deflowered by "La Vida Loca"(7), and the confrontation brings Adamic shame: "...I remember now the shame I felt, like looking at first porn, all the porn in the world"(18). It is an initiation into a deadly sexuality, the "old knowledge"(92) of the postlapsarian state. Moreover, the threat of death in combat brings "ecstasy"(69), a sudden immersion in fluid chaos:

Contact. Then it was you and the ground: kiss it, eat it, fuck it, plow it with your whole body, get as close to it as you can without being in it yet or of it....(66)

The sexual and the deadly are united in an ecstatic moment. Within the martial intercourse is the potential for corporal dissolution, an "orgasmic death-by-drowning"(66). And the "infatuation" for the "Quakin' and Shakin'"(65) could dominate the witness: "...your choice of story told it all and in Vietnam an infatuation like that with violence wouldn't go unrequited for very long, it would come and put its wild mouth all over you"(65). The war bears the promise of the ultimate fellation, the extraction of precious bodily fluids--the crowning consummation.

Like Herr, the soldiers in Vietnam are confronted by the equivocacy of experience. And though Herr shares the fascination with American soldiers or even officers who could not "reconcile their love of service with their contempt for the war..."(196), he differs from them because he has a choice in the matter. This alienates him from the soldiers with whom he must live:

As far as any of them knew, we were crazy, maybe even dangerous. It made sense: They had to be here, they knew that. We did not have to be here, and they were sure enough of that too.(202)

Herr voluntarily places himself before the horror. He chooses to experience and to explore the perverse enchantment for the inextricably repulsive. The one thing he cannot look at is the man who confronts him with this fact:

But there was often that bad, bad moment to recall, the look that made you look away, and in its hateful way it was the purest single thing I'd/ever known.(221-222)

Herr is "some kind of parasite"(243), hated by the grunts:



They only hated me, hated me the way you'd  
 hate any hopeless fool who would put himself  
 through this thing when he had choices, any  
 fool who had no more need of his life than to  
 play with it in this way.(222)

Herr's initiation is away from those on whom his life depends, and again, there is a price to pay for being there: "'Okay, man, you go on, you go on out of here you cocksucker, but I mean it, you tell it! You tell it, man. If you don't tell it...'"(221). It is his obligation to reveal the war for those who "have the feeling that it wasn't being told for them..."(220). The American soldier is alienated from the "World," and Herr is alienated from both. The circular path leads to alienation.

Herr comes to Vietnam in a state of innocence, curiositas, and from "Day one, if anything could have penetrated that first innocence I might have taken the next plane out"(22). Once in the war, Herr becomes a part of the war; he becomes addicted to the "essentially adolescent"(45) energy that drives the war, that violent, incantatory, hypnotic, hallucinatory motion. The experience takes its toll on youth, the youth of Herr and of the soldiers with whom he travels. It is evident in their faces: "...nothing like youth ever lasted in their faces for very long"(92). The ever-present "Inscrutable Immutable"(58) death erodes youthful, romantic ideas of the war. At no time is this erosion more sudden and more thorough than during the Tet Offensive, when "...actual youth had been pressed out of me in just three days..."(75). In retrospect, his vision of the dead in Tet is "the old dance"(72) of death. He pursues "a fantasy until it becomes experience, and then afterward you can't handle the experience"(72). Herr is driven on by the war, "enchanted by it"(240). The more he sees, the more he dreads seeing and

becoming privy to the "war's dark revelations"(222). The experience reveals his alienation away from his martial comrades and away from his past: "Your scene before Vietnam was unimportant..."(240).

Upon returning to the States, he recognizes that, because of his experience, he is unlike uninitiated Americans:

Of course coming back was a down. After something like that, what could you find to thrill you, what compared, what did you do for a finish? Everything seemed a little dull, heaviness threat/ened everywhere.... You wondered whether, in time, it would all slip away and become like everything else distant, but you doubted it, and for good reason.(261-262)

The experience, the journey, has no "finish" because it has bequeathed an unsettling memory, a memory that will not be assuaged "in time," but by the conscious effort to understand the experience's import. Herr is not the same individual who commenced the journey: he is "changed, enlarged and (some things are expensive to say) incomplete"(260).

Moreover, the search for understanding began before his return to America. He has repeatedly broken out of the sensual perception of self: "Under Fire would take you out of your head and your body too..." (66). The threat of battle produces an extemporaneous extrusion of consciousness--a sort of intense introspection from without. Herr experiences this phenomenon frequently at Khe Sanh, often without adrenaline catalysis:

I would see the thing I knew I actually saw: the base from the ground where I stood....But at the same time I would see the other, too; the ground, the troops and even myself, all from the vantage of the hills. It was a double vision that came to me more than once there.(114)

The "double vision" is representative of his encompassing vision of the war: his concern for perception as it alters recollection, his concern for language as it conveys perception, and his concern for the effect the experience has had on the self--his fascination as it overcomes his dread of the war.

Herr's journey through the war is a composite of all journeys through Vietnam:

...a distinct path to travel, but dark and hard, not any easier if you knew that you'd put your own foot on it yourself, deliberately and--most roughly speaking--consciously. Some people took a few steps along it and turned back, wised up, with and without regrets. Many walked on and just got blown off it. A lot went farther than they probably should have and then lay down, falling into a bad sleep of pain and rage, waiting for release, for peace, any kind of peace that wasn't just the absence of war. And some kept going until they reached the place where an inversion of the expected order happened, a fabulous warp where you took the journey first and then you made your departure.(68)

He has "consciously" gone as far down that "path" as is possible without being "blown off it." Moreover, he has gone "farther" than he "probably should have," confronted the darker side of his self that is fascinated by the horror, and paid for the vision over many sleepless years in the search for peace of mind.

His experience is the American experience in Vietnam, and his return from the Hadean world does not leave the war behind: "There'd been nothing happening there that hadn't already existed here, coiled up and waiting, back in the World"(268). Herr discovers the serpentine, "old knowledge" after his return. He takes the "journey first" and, then,

in the recreation, discovers his "departure." His purpose in going is, in a sense, a search for self-knowledge, but it had been waiting for him in the States if he had only taken the time to look:

The Sixties had made so many casualties, its war and its music had run power off the same circuit for so long they didn't even have to fuse. The war primed you for lame years while rock and roll turned more lured and dangerous than bullfighting, rock stars started falling like second lieutenants; ecstasy and death and (of course and for sure) life, but it didn't seem so then.(276)

The book is a portrait of the war as part of the American experience in Vietnam. It is an attempt to explain the fascination with the horror and death in life. The pursuit involves the watching, the experiencing ("Breathing In" and "Breathing Out"), and the recollection of information. Once the pursuit physically terminates, the matter and the pursuit become intellectual: "And no moves left for me at all but to write down some few last words and make the dispersion, Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there"(278).

#### Experience and the Landscape of War

The reader shares Herr's journey through the war. Captured in the staccato dispatches of the narrative, the original perceptions are reexperienced in the act of reading. The accuracy of the often poetic language reveals the intense energy of the conflict and the concomitant intensity of this journey through Nam for the initiate. The reading figuratively retraces the author's journey across and through the landscape of the war. Moreover, inasmuch as the novel is a recollection

of events through memory, the dispatches are the "route markings along an interior trail,"<sup>12</sup> and the reading parallels the writing, "retracing the inward route."<sup>13</sup> So the outward journey through the war parallels the inward journey of experience and recollection. Both the external and internal lead from innocence to experience, and the perception of one reveals much about its component because of the interdependence between these two landscapes.

In keeping with this parallel, the first sights of Vietnam are of the green garden of that first innocence. The apprehension of the two landscapes--external and internal--is expressed in the duplicitous description, the portrayal of the environment as both idyllic and fallen, or the portrayal of the interior terrain as both fascinating and appalling. The apprehension itself depends upon the position of the individual within the landscape. That is, a reporter, a seer, will portray a different perspective than a soldier, a doer. The former is at liberty to come and go, but the soldier is bound to his assigned position by military law. It is to be expected, then, that the landscape will be a predominant concern for the combatant, though the reporter will necessarily deal with the topic as an integer of less immediate concern within the Vietnam experience. This is revealed in the presentation of the green landscape in Dispatches and A Rumor of War.

In Dispatches, the Annamese hills of Vietnam's cordillera reveal a landscape of promise to Michael Herr. Spring has come to Khe Sanh, and the retreating winter mists uncover a terrain "full and voluptuous in the new spring light"(161). This verdant landscape precipitates a vision of ancient, idyllic innocence:

Once they had been the royal hunting grounds of the Annamese emperors. Tigers, deer and flying squirrels had lived in them. I used to imagine what a royal hunt must have been like, but I could only see it as an Oriental children's story: a conjuring of the emperor and empress, princes and princelings, court favorites and emissaries, all caparisoned for the hunt; slender figures across a tapestry, a promise of bloodless kills, a serene frolic complete with horseback flirtations and death-smiling game.(161)

Herr's idealistic, youthful vision of "serene" perfection deserves preservation upon a "tapestry," frozen in time and motion, its innocence intact. However, the words "used to" indicate that, although the vision remains in his consciousness, the land has been altered since the frieze was initially conceived. The face of the land has literally been altered. The greenness has been erased by "Ranch Hands" whose defoliating motto is "'Only we can prevent forests'"(163). The face of the land has been scarred: "The smaller foothills were often quite literally turned inside out, the steeper of them were made faceless and drawless..."(162). Technology is the agent that transforms the green and "voluptuous" into the barren and "faceless." It is the agent whose consequence betrays the implacable advance of the war and the demise of the initiate's idealistic vision.

The martial technology is not only the minister of territorial destruction, it is also the executor of death, the threat that most quickly demolishes innocence. For the uninitiated, those capable of forthrightly taking part in Herr's idyllic vision, there is no obstacle to "comparing these hills with the hills around their homes..."(161). Yet the promise of "bloodless kills" within the pastoral landscape of "serene

frolic" becomes part of the past, a memory of what once was. The confrontation with death eradicates the temporally distant ideal:

They had humped those hills until their legs  
were in an agony, they'd been ambushed in them  
and blown apart on their trails, trapped on  
their barren ridges, lain under fire clutching  
the foliage that grew on them, wept alone in  
fear and exhaustion and shame just knowing the  
kind of terror that night always brought to  
them....(162)

The pain of experience demands an altered perception. Those hills are no longer "full and voluptuous." They are "'angry'"(162). The experience with death alters the internal perception of self and of what lies without, the fallen landscape, the victim of death's harbinger, technology.

The apprehension of the external terrain is expressed in concomitant terms with the perception of the ground over which experience leads, and this is by no means unique to the literary expression of the Vietnam experience. For example, Lucius Priest recognizes a change in the landscape immediately following the entrance of the automotive machine: "The very land itself seemed to have changed."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the land at this point of the reivers' journey to Memphis has become more urban than bucolic, but, more importantly, Lucius' perceptions have also changed, indicated by the impressionistic verb, "seemed." These are the perceptions of an accomplished reiver rather than an innocent eleven-year-old boy. In Herr's account of Vietnam, the land is definitely changed and so are the initiates travelling through the war. The land is altered by technology, and the youths are changed by experience with death. The entrance of war's technology into the landscape is sudden, and, as at Walden Pond, the stage set for the machine's entrance is a quiet

one. Here the similarity ends. The entrance of the martial technology is quiet only in that there is no portent, and the change it precipitates is extreme and violent, scarring without and within.

The war, any war, belittles and isolates the individual, civilian or martial:

There is nothing in war which is not in human nature; but the violence/and passions of men become, in the aggregate, an impersonal and incalculable force, a blind and irrational movement of the collective will, which one cannot control, which one cannot understand, which one can only endure as these peasants, in their bitterness and resignation, endured it. C'est la guerre.<sup>15</sup>

It matters not whether the conflict be the Great War or Vietnam, the individual is of little consequence in the face of the war's advance. However, in both of these conflicts, the English and the American societies, respectively, could by no means share the experience with the people directly involved in the conflicts. The combatants are alienated from their prewar, civilian existences because they are isolated and forever altered by experience:

...each was what every private soldier is, a man in arms against a world, a man fighting desperately for himself, and conscious that, in the last resort, he stood alone; for such self-reliance lies at the very heart of comradeship.<sup>16</sup>

Just as Redburn discovers that mastering the art of sailing is necessary before becoming part of the crew, so Herr finds that "self-reliance" is, ironically, the integer upon which "comradeship" rests. Further, it is also ironic that the individual is alienated from the society for which he fights.



Michael Herr recognizes both ironies. He can only observe a conflict he cannot alter, and he is alone among those upon whom he must depend for his life. It is, therefore, to be expected that his disillusionment be reflected in his perception of the ravaged landscape because "...in the end the American hero is either dead or totally alienated from society, alone and powerless, like the evicted shepherd of Virgil's eclogue. And if, at the same time, he pays a tribute to the image of a green landscape, it is likely to be ironic and bitter."<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the ravaged landscape, Herr surmises that

...an observer from some remote culture might see in them [the landscape's craters] the obsessiveness and ritual regularity of religious symbols, the blackness at the deep center/pouring out rays of bright, overturned earth all the way to the circumference; forms like Aztec sun figures, suggesting that their makers had been men who held Nature in an awesome reverence.(162-163)

Yet the landscape is torn by a race that defiled "Nature," not one that holds her in "awesome reverence."

For Americans in Vietnam, the landscape presents an impassable barrier, a barrier to victory and continued life. It is a vast, encompassing threat, especially for the combatant-initiate who cannot, like a reporter, step outside the conflict at will for a few days in Hong Kong or Tokyo. Because of this, the American soldier is necessarily dominated by the landscape, and accounts of military service in Vietnam display a preponderant concern for how terrain is perceived and how these perceptions alter circumstantially. A Rumor of War, Philip Caputo's literary recollection of his sixteen-month tour through Vietnam--his circular journey through the war--is dramatically conscious of these

perceptions. The descriptions of the landscape are commensurate with Caputo's journey from youthful innocence to mature experience.

Caputo's journey begins in Westchester, Illinois, where an adolescent boy wanders the bucolic landscape with his youthful, idealistic reveries. "A restless boy" in his "late teens," Caputo walks the farm lands:

...the corn stubble brown against the snow,  
dead husks rasping dryly in the wind;  
abandoned farm houses waiting for the  
bulldozers that would tear them down to clear  
space for a new subdivision; and off on the  
horizon, a few stripped sycamores silhouetted  
against a bleak November sky. I can still see  
myself roaming around out there, scaring  
rabbits from the brambles, the tract houses a  
few miles behind me, the vast, vacant prairies  
in front....<sup>18</sup>

The bucolic terrain spurs his boyish imagination to contemplate "...the wild past, when moccasined feet trod the forest paths and fur trappers cruised the rivers in bark canoes"(5). It is a romantic vision of the Deerslayer ilk, one paralleled by twentieth-century "Hollywood fantasies" (15), "...the sort of thing I had seen in Guadalcanal Diary and Retreat, Hell!"(14):

The romantic in me responded to the pageantry  
of a parade, to the tribal ritualism of  
ceremonies that marked anniversaries or  
comradeships formed long ago on distant  
battlefields.(21)

Like the young Redburn and Lucius Priest, the young Caputo is initially an Adamic figure whose innocence is revealed in his idealistic romanticisms within the Edenic landscape. Yet there is a machine within the garden of Caputo's youth. It is symbolized by the "bulldozers that would tear them [farm houses] down to clear space for a new subdivision."

The idyll cannot be maintained; the terrain "would" be altered, and, by implication, so will his youthful ideals.

It is not as though Caputo cannot suffer the machine to bulldoze, to reform the rural landscape, because neither the bucolic nor the urbanite life is desirable. He is a "restless boy caught between suburban boredom and rural desolation"(5). However, it is difficult to walk with Deerslayer to "summer barbecues eaten to the lulling drone of power mowers"(5). To extricate himself from this contradictory situation, he joins the armed forces, "to find in a commonplace world a chance to live heroically"(5). In essence, Caputo's move, like Lucius' from Jefferson to Memphis, is one from a semi-rural existence to a more urban, mechanized existence. He subjects himself bodily and intellectually (in his "adolescent mind") to the discipline of the United States Marines: "THE MARINE CORPS BUILDS MEN"(7). In doing so, he seeks the promise of "manhood"(6), a maturity gained by the "ordeal of initiation"(8). He consciously moves to deny his own innocence, to commit himself to experience. Moreover, in the Corps, Caputo becomes "one of its construction projects"(7), and, because of the subversion of the individual, he becomes part of a machine: "...a machine of which we were merely parts"(10). Through this martial initiation, he becomes akin to Thoreau's laboring man who "becomes a machine in the sense that his life becomes more closely geared to an impersonal and seemingly autonomous system."<sup>19</sup>

It is not surprising that his outlook on the world is altered by this mechanically disciplined life. Caputo's apprehension of the landscape is dualistic:

In my own case, it was the way I looked at the world around me. A year earlier, I would have seen the rolling Virginia countryside through the eyes of an English-major who enjoyed reading the Romantic poets....Landscape was no longer scenery to me, it was terrain, and I judged it for tactical rather than aesthetic value. Having been drilled constantly to look for cover and concealment, I could see dips and folds in a stretch of ground that would have appeared utterly flat to a civilian. If I saw a hill--"high ground"--I automatically began planning how to attack or defend it, my eyes searching for avenues of approach and fields of fire. A woodland meadow held no picturesque beauty for me. Instead, it presented a potential menace.(21)

Like Twain's river pilot who "must keep his mind upon the menacing 'reality' masked by the beautiful river,"<sup>20</sup> Caputo, as a professional soldier, must keep his mind on the "menace" within the "terrain." Survival for pilot and soldier depends upon the skill with which they perceive that threat, and yet the "aesthetic" grandeur, colors, and beauty within the landscape remain evident to that part of consciousness that remains an "onlooker."<sup>21</sup> A doer rather than a seer, Caputo must act on his apprehension of the landscape. Mere observation is not sufficient to ensure survival, especially when the vision is of Vietnam's terrain.

However, regardless of his obligation to react to his perception, he maintains the ability to recognize both the idyllic and the threatening in the landscape. The idyllic is poignantly apparent in his description of the summer countryside that surrounds Danang:

The rice paddies lay quietly in the sun. They were beautiful at that time of year, a bright green dappled with the darker green of the palm groves shading the villages. The peasants in the villages in the secure areas went on living lives whose ancient rhythms had hardly been disturbed by the war. In the early

mornings, small boys led the water buffalo from their pens to the river wallows and farmers came out to till the fields. They plodded for hours behind wooden, ox-drawn plows, tilling the sunbaked hardness out of the earth. In the afternoons, when it became too hot to work, they quit the fields and returned to the cool dimness of their thatched huts. It was like a ritual: when the heat got too intense, they unhitched their plows and filed down the dikes toward the villages, their conical hats yellow against the green of the paddies. A wind usually sprang up in the afternoon, and in it the long shoots of maturing rice made a luxuriant rippling. It was a pleasant sight, that expanse of jade-colored rice stretching out as far as the foothills and the mountains blue in the distance.(181)

It is a vision of bucolic innocence of the garden before the fall. The daily rural routines, the unaltered "ancient rhythms," bear the "luxuriant" promise of fruitful harvest, and the verdant vision bears the promise of a peaceful existence. Similarly, there is beauty in the sight of the Vietnamese Cordillera at sunrise:

It was golden-green high up, where the new sun touched it, greenish-black lower down, and the line between light and shadow was as sharp as if it had been painted on.(75)

Again there is placid tranquility in the green landscape, a tranquility that appears incongruous in a countryside embroiled in war.

However, this scenic tranquility within the greenness is a "scenic defect American firepower would eventually correct"(51). This vision betrays a false sense of security because there is nowhere in Vietnam that the war does not touch, and the war is never far away. Its proximity is as sharp as the ominous "line between light and shadow," and as close as the next line in the text:

Looking in the opposite direction [opposite the Cordillera], we could see the helicopters taking off from the airfield....Now the sound of the bombardment reached us. The explosions of the first shells echoed and reechoed through the mountains; just as their reverberating roar began to fade, there was another burst and another series of echoes, and still another, until all we heard was a rumbling, solemn and unbroken.(75)

The prospect is broken by the sharp juxtaposition of landscape with bombardment, and the barrage not only encompasses the witness visually and audibly, it also encompasses the verdant landscape: "Mists had begun to curl up through the jungle that covered the mountain's slopes, and they mingled with the smoke to form a cloud that was shaken and thickened by each new bursting shell"(75). For Caputo, there is a sense of security arising from his allegiance with the purveyors of the barrage, the security that allows him to be "charmed" by the "scene" before him. Nevertheless, the original vision has been radically and technologically altered.

The sense of security disappears when the attempt is made to penetrate the landscape. To leave a secure area and enter "the enemy-controlled country beyond, [is] like sliding over an edge"(239). This "edge" divides "the known and the unknown"(79), divides the perception of the landscape as idyllic and fallen. For here in the green world, technology bearing death enters rapidly and with ferocity:

Most of the time, nothing happened; but when something did, it happened instantaneously and without warning. Rifle or machinegun fire would erupt with heart-stopping suddenness, as when quail or pheasant explode from cover with a loud beating of wings. Or mortar shells would come in from nowhere, their only preamble the cough of the tubes.(89)

The deadly entrance of technology is with little "preamble." On foot in the green immensity, the American soldier no longer recognizes the landscape's idyllic beauty: "Being Americans, we were comfortable with machines, but with the aircraft gone we were struck by the utter strangeness of this rank and rotted wilderness"(79). The landscape is now threatening and fallen, no longer green and promising, but alien and "rotted." The threat is embedded within the consciousness, and, for the soldiers, surrounded by an alien, isolating wilderness, moving into the landscape is like being "swallowed whole"(79) by the "undergrowth"(79), "haunted by a presence intangible yet real, a sense of being surrounded by something we could not see"(80). The threat comes seemingly from nature. Death comes unseen with the "heart-stopping suddenness" like frightening "quail." Nature becomes a personified, awesome entity with its "power to cause fear: it blinds"(80). As such, the jungle itself becomes a focus for hate:

It smelled of decaying wood and leaves, and the low trees encircled the outpost like the disorderly ranks of a besieging army. Staring at the jungle and at the ruined temple, hatred welled up in me; a hatred for this green, moldy, alien world in which we fought and died.(298)

The jungle becomes an immense, encompassing enemy: "It is as if the sun and the land itself were in league with the Viet Cong, wearing us down, driving us mad, killing us"(100).

To enter this environment is to walk "that frontier between life and death"(77) and to confront the possibility of one's own death. The deadly potential is real, tangible, but it is by no means obvious; the direct and immediate threat to life is concealed within the potential,

concealed within what is imagined. There is then a threat from the imagination itself:

In Vietnam, the best soldiers were usually unimaginative men who did not feel afraid until there was obvious reason. But the rest of us suffered from a constant expectancy, feeling that something was about to happen, waiting for it to happen, wishing it would happen just so the tension would be relieved.(80)

The author is part of "the rest of us" who suffer from the anguish of expectation imparted by the imagination: "that cursed imagination of mine--conjured a vision of the VC lying in wait just around the bend"(115). In the jungle, "a war of plant life"(78), "the bend" could be any bend, because vision is limited by the density of growth and, under the forest's canopy, light itself is at a premium, like in a "darkened room"(78). Here Caputo, like Herr, stresses that, with vision limited, the imagination is free to run its course. The situation is exacerbated because the war continues at night as well as in the day.

In fact, the war intensifies at night--the enemy utilizes the cover of night as it does the cover of the jungle. There is a concomitant change in the perception of the landscape, "so bucolic in daylight, [it] gradually assumed a sinister aspect"(54). Any threat perceived in daylight grows in the darkness, compounded by nightly mists: "Sentries saw all sorts of imaginary terrors in the swirling whiteness"(124). The jungle again assumes the role of adversary when even the "bushes began to look like men"(54). The threat to life perceptually grows to the size of the unknown, which, in this darkened world, is as large as the imagination. The stress on the individual in this situation is tremendous. Caputo succinctly describes what effect this stress has:



so lush and enchanting in the daytime that it reminded me of Shangri-La, that fictional land of eternal youth. But night always brought the sound of artillery, a practical reminder that this was Vietnam, where youth was merely expendable.(65)

The experience can expend a life at most, but at least, this "land of eternal youth" will expend that promise of "youth." Youth cannot be maintained. The initiate must fall.

The demise of youth becomes an intrinsically personal matter from the narrative prospect that the novel describes an internal landscape, a landscape recreated from the author's Nam tour. The narrative describes that internal landscape which is paralleled by the external. To trace the path into "the Indochina bush, an ethical as well as a geographical wilderness"(xx), is to trace the "descent" into an underworld populated by "phantoms"(59), the descent from an Adamic innocence associated with the "dawn of creation"(xx) to a postlapsarian maturity forced upon the combatant-initiate--if he remains alive. Even after the elapse of a decade, Caputo, as a reporter covering the fall of Saigon, reconstructs part of that interior terrain:

Reading the story resurrected long-buried memories of men and battalions, fire-fights and assaults, of nameless, numbered hills and joyless, rainy dawns on the line. Even after a decade's absence, I could clearly picture the part of Vietnam I knew best: the expanse of rice paddy and jungle west of Danang. It was as if a mental curtain had been raised, revealing a detailed battle map, with the dangerous places marked in grease pencil and the names of certain places underlined, names that meant something to me because men had died there.(323)

The memory describes personal experience and the cartographical terrain over which he moved and where he witnessed friends' deaths. It is

obviously the landscape of a man who has experienced much.

Caputo, needless to say, has not always been so worldly. In "that innocent time before Vietnam"(23), he chooses to commit himself to this "road to manhood"(23), chooses to join the Corps, and yet suffers later from the realization that "No one had forced me to join the Marines..." (232). In "that innocent time," he romantically idealizes himself as one of those "medieval knights"(49) believing "in all the myths created by that most articulate and elegant mythmaker, John Kennedy...the King of Camelot"(66). Again Caputo's account agrees with Herr's. Naively self-assured, these "knights," these "happy warriors"(46), place stock in Vietnam's version of World War I's 'Home by Christmas' rumour: "...we had acquired the conviction that we could win this brushfire war, and win it quickly....By 'we,' I do not mean the United States, but our brigade alone; and by 'quickly,' I mean very quickly...'a few months'" (66). "Garlanded like ancient heroes"(50) by "schoolgirls" upon making an assault landing on Danang's beaches, they could not believe this adventure to be anything more serious than "The splendid little war"(202).<sup>22</sup>

Caputo and the men who came to Vietnam are innocent, but that innocence is not initially evident to the men themselves. After months in-country, Caputo is struck by the difference between the recruits new to the war and the veterans. Caputo, reassigned as "The Officer in Charge of the Dead," is confronted by a battalion just in from the States: "It was a big, fine-looking battalion, and when I saw them I felt as an old man does when he sees someone who reminds him of his youth"(206). Like the men of this force, he too once revelled with "innocent enthusiasm"(206)

at the prospect of entering this war. This confrontation is repeated a second time when he is about to leave Vietnam as a combatant:

They [the replacement draft] fell into formation and tried to ignore the dusty, tanned, ragged-looking men who jeered them. The replacements looked strangely young, far younger than we...I felt sorry for those children, knowing that they would all grow old in this land of endless dying.(319)

The members of this draft, these "children," will undergo the same "rite of passage"(13) as did the child, Caputo. These initiates bring the same immature approach to a deadly conflict as does the youthful Caputo: "...I tended to look upon war as an outdoor sport, and the shelling seemed, well, unfair"(110). But this cavalier, cowboy-and-Indian attitude soon disappears:

They [his platoon] had taken part in their first action, though a minor one that had lasted only ninety minutes. But their company had killed during those ninety minutes; they had seen violent death for the first time and something of the cruelty combat arouses in men. Before the fire-fight, those Marines fit both definitions of the word infantry, which means either a "body of soldiers equipped for service on foot" or "infants, boys, youths collectively." The difference was that the second definition could no longer be applied to them. Having received that primary sacrament of war, baptism of fire, their boyhoods were behind them.(119-120)

Henceforth, Caputo is unable to perceive his men, and more importantly, himself as youthful and innocent. These "infants," these Adamic martial initiates, are beyond that innocent inexperience of their youths. They have been subjected to the "primary sacrament," "the baptism of fire." They have experienced the two things that deny innocence: the confrontation with "violent death" and the fury of "their first action."

As a soldier in Vietnam, Caputo confronts death as a combatant in the field, and, during an interregnum, as "Regimental Casualty Reporting Officer"(156). In the latter capacity, he is no longer "an agent of death as a platoon leader"(160), but "death's bookkeeper"(160), and as such, he must record death in "that clinical, euphemistic language the military prefers"(157). Like Herr, Caputo discovers that this language, though clinically accurate, does not reveal the harsh realities it represents, except that it demands translation. He must first comprehend a battle wound in "simple English"(158) before rendering the euphemistic, official description of the wound:

If, say, a marine had been shot through the guts, I could not write "shot through the guts" or "shot through the stomach"; no, I had to say "GSW" (gunshot wound) "through and through, abdomen." Shrapnel wounds were called "multiple fragment lacerations," and the phrase for dismemberment, one of my favorite phrases, was "traumatic amputation."...After I saw some of the victims, I began to question the accuracy of the phrase. Traumatic was precise, for losing a limb is definitely traumatic, but amputation, it seemed to me, suggested a surgical operation. I observed, however, that the human body does not break apart cleanly in an explosion. It tends to shatter into irregular and often unrecognizable pieces....(158)

Needless to say, the two descriptions, on one hand euphemistic and on the other accurate and realistic, are at odds. The first bears little resemblance to what it describes, and the second portrays the reality of the wound, revealing the necessity to contemplate the physical damage and, more importantly, the circumstances giving rise to the horror. Having to observe what he describes, Caputo, like Herr, is faced by the harsh visage of violent death, and to recall his observation he must have

recourse to the more accurate, sensual description. The obligation to perform these duties daily takes a toll on Caputo: "It was also a job that gave me a lot of bad dreams, though it had the beneficial effect of cauterizing whatever silly, abstract, romantic ideas I still had about war"(157).

It is through the deaths of two comrades, Sullivan and Levy, that Caputo comprehends death and mortality; he overgoes the impersonal descriptions of his regimental duties to deny the belief that "I would live forever"(41). Death becomes a distinctly intimate matter when it is a personal friend rather than a name on a military form that expires: "Dead. Death. Death. I had heard that word so many times, but I had never known its meaning"(151). Concluded upon learning of Sergeant Sullivan's death, this statement reveals in its accentuated initial triad that his friend's death upon the crosshairs of a sniper's rifle raises Caputo's own demise as a "proximate," "real possibility"(154). The sergeant's demise also discloses the finality of extinction: "...all that Sullivan had ever been or would ever be, all of his thoughts, memories, and dreams were annihilated in an instant"(154). The essence and potential of a lifetime are irrevocably snuffed out in the blinking of an eye, and if there remains a hope that the sacrifice is somehow justified by their cause, it is eradicated by the death of Caputo's schoolmate, Levy: "...a part of us died with you, the small part that was still young, that had not yet grown cynical, grown bitter and old with death"(213). In this passage, addressed posthumously to Levy, death erodes what little "youth," what little confidence in the war Caputo has left. Figuratively, a part of Caputo dies with his friend. Now there can be no such thing as "pro

patria"(213), only survival.

The recognition of the "Reality"(154) of violent death brings Caputo to reevaluate his own existence and the possibility that his existence might be "wasted" (the "soldier's slang for death," 210). He concludes that to die in the war is to negate the past, "all the years" parents "spent raising and educating their son"(209). And to die in war is to die without apparent justification--the waste of a human life. Moreover, in death, the individual loses the semblance of humanity that is afforded the living. That semblance is most startlingly eradicated by violent death. Regardless of race, dead men are equal in death: "Black men, white men, yellow men, they all looked remarkably the same"(161). The dead also have the same odour: "The stench of death is unique, probably the most offensive on earth, and once you have smelled it, you can never again believe with conviction that man is the highest being in earthly creation"(161). The stature of man's existence comes into question, and the observation of a mutilated source of that odour takes the question a step further:

The horror lay in the recognition that the body, which is supposed to be the earthly home of an immortal soul, which people spend so much time feeding, conditioning, and beautifying, is in fact only a fragile case stuffed full of disgusting matter....The sight of mutilation...burst the religious myths of my Catholic childhood. I could not look at those men and still believe their souls had "passed on" to another existence, or that they had had souls in the first place.(121)

What is left in death is waste. This conclusion undermines the religious beliefs that have, until now, informed his existence. He loses another ideal. War has again come down to a matter of survival:

We had survived, but in war, a man does not have to be killed or wounded to become a casualty. His life, his sight, or limbs are not the only things he stands to lose.(196)

Indeed, the loss of these ideals is a "wound," a "wound" that changes the man. He is no longer what he once was, and the most dominant, immediate concern is to survive.

Yet, for all the disgust that Caputo has for this war, he discovers in battle a "fascination"(4) within the immediate prospect of death. He discovers through active participation what Herr discovered by witnessing the fire fights: the war's central contrary--the fascination and the dread. Caputo and his fellow soldiers find an intense excitement in the abandonment to a situation beyond the individual's control:

Carried willy-nilly down toward the landing zone  
...we felt a visceral thrill...the feeling, half  
fear and half excitement, that comes when you  
are in the grip of uncontrollable forces.(106)

He senses an adolescent "thrill" during the landing, but the "excitement" is opposed by "fear." Moreover, the combatants in battle feel an extraordinary intensity:

You seemed to live more intensely under fire.  
Every sense was sharper, the mind worked  
clearer and faster. Perhaps it was the tension  
of opposites that made it so, an attraction  
balanced by revulsion, hope that warred with  
dread. You found yourself on a precarious  
emotional edge, experiencing a headiness that  
no drink or drug could match.(218)

Caputo experiences "an unusual clarity"(103) of mind that negates, or at least limits, the effect of the chaos without--a state similar to Herr's "clairaudience."

The "tension of opposites" is maintained by an adrenalin-induced

"high"(254), a "headiness" unmatched by that induced by artificial compounds. There seems only one human activity that parallels the experience of battle when the individual must face the fear of annihilation:

But this resolve, which is sometimes called courage, cannot be separated from the fear that has aroused it. Its very measure is the measure of that fear. It is, in fact, a powerful urge not to be afraid anymore, to rid himself of fear by eliminating the source of it. This inner, emotional war produces a tension almost sexual in its intensity.(278)

The internal "tension of opposites" produces an experience similar to sex, and it is to be expected, then, that the external conflict be described in like manner. For instance, initially, Caputo "lusted"(68) for battle, and later, when he finds himself pinned down at a hot landing zone, he, like Herr, makes "love to the earth"(251). Once the "source" of "fear" that informs the "sexual" "tension" is eliminated, Caputo experiences "an ache as profound as the ache of orgasm"(254). To extend this metaphor is to conclude that battle, with all its inherent horror and "dread"(276), is not a wholly abhorrent activity. It promises a satisfaction to those who live through it.

The satisfaction derived from taking a hand in the death and destruction of battle proves disturbing for the combatant-initiate. He is changed. He is no longer the boy he once was:

We were boys and thought everything was possible. The memory sent a momentary pang through me: not so much a feeling of homesickness as one of separation--a distancing from the hopeful boy I had been, a longing to be like that again.(263)

The experience denies the former youthful world of "promise"(263). He



can never regain that innocence, that ideal, because here in Vietnam he is "chained to an existence of ruthless practicalities"(223). The mere exigency of staying alive demands the abandonment of the naive ideals, just as expectation gives way to event. Life in this war reveals a most disquieting fact "'that one of the most brutal things in the world is your average nineteen-year-old American boy'"(129). There can be no quarter given to principles when survival is at stake. So there is a serious payment to be made for the crossing into this martial hell:

I came home from the war with the curious feeling that I had grown older than my father, who was then fifty-one. It was as if a lifetime of experience had been compressed into a year and a half.(4)

The payment is his youth. Chronologically he is still a young man, but, experientially, he is an anomaly: an old man. When he leaves Vietnam, a soldier on the homeward leg, Caputo makes a parting reference to the terrain where he lost that youth: "Below lay the rice paddies and the green, folded hills where we had lost our friends and our youth"(320). It is a final "ironic and bitter" tribute to the "green" landscape that once held the promise of youth and hope, yet ultimately denied both--  
Et in Arcadia Ergo.

Caputo realizes the necessity to remain critical of not only the landscape, but his own perceptions as well. Within the landscape are the vehicles of demise, and each, when confronted, must be evaluated and those evaluations acted upon. The margin for error is slim. It is critical, therefore, that the evaluation be correct. It is also important not to overreact, not to slip off that "precarious emotional edge"(218) into either fascination or dread. The combatant-initiates must deal with

frequent oscillation between monotony and excitement, comfort and hardship, safety and peril. But most of all they must deal with the ugliness of this war:

But we saw enough to learn those lessons that could not be taught in training camps: what fear feels like and what death looks like, and the smell of death, the experience of killing, of enduring pain and inflicting it, the loss of friends and the sight of wounds. We learned what war was about, "the cares of it, and the forms of it." We began to change, to lose the boyish awkwardness we had brought to Vietnam. We became more professional, leaner and tougher, and a callus began to grow around our hearts, a kind of emotional flak jacket that blunted the blows and stings of pity.(90)

Just as they develop physically to deal with the environment, they develop a mental distance, "a kind of emotional flak jacket," to remain acclimatized to the emotional environment. The "flak jacket" does not exclude the abhorrent, but it does protect against emotional wounds.

It is ironic, therefore, that Caputo---a man who learns early that preconceptions rarely prove out in this war where an "old woman...a sack of bones covered by a thin layer of shriveled flesh"(85) proves to be "The Enemy"(85)--should fall prey to the combatant's most frequent employment: inactivity. Fresh in-country, he and his men are assigned the defense of the air-base near Danang, a duty that proves difficult: "Instead of the adventure we had hoped it would be, defending the air-field turned out to be a deadening routine"(57). It is a "deadenning routine" that convinces him that this "was not war; it was forced labor"(57), and there is no respite from the torpor because the "days were all alike"(56). Later in his tour, as a regimental officer, Caputo listens to the late night situation reports of "disembodied voices"(156), calling in

from "outposts and patrols"(182), that collectively describe the monotony of the war in the "Captain Midnight code-word gibberish that passes for language in the military"(157)--"All secure. Situation remains the same."(182). The stasis seems impervious even to fighting:

When contacts did occur, they were violent, but nothing ever really changed. The regiment sat in the same positions it had occupied since April, and the details of the surrounding landscape became so familiar that it seemed we had been there all our lives. Men were killed and wounded, and our patrols kept going out to fight in the same places they had fought the week before and the week before that. The situation remained the same.(182)

The perception of the unchanging situation is linked to the "landscape" with which he is so familiar. As in previous instances, the landscape accrues the desultory qualities of the monotonous human condition:

It is interesting how the color green, which poets and songwriters always associate with youth and hope, can be so depressing when there is no other color to contrast with it. Green. It is embedded in my consciousness. My vision is filled with green rice paddies, green hills, green mountains, green uniforms; light green, medium green, dark green, olive green. It is ...monotonous....(92)

"Monotonous" "green" dominates the landscape as the "green" depression dominates his consciousness. Even in the field with a platoon command, Caputo is lulled by the heaviness of routine despite the danger surrounding their foxholes:

Almost every hour of every night, the radio operators chanted, "All secure. Situation remains the same."...no contact except for the usual snipers. All secure. Situation remains the same...lost two machine-gunners to a mine. All secure. Situation remains the same....It rained all the time. We slept, when we slept, in the mud. We shivered through our

nervous night watches, calling in reports every hour: All secure. Situation remains the same....The Viet Cong lobbed a few shells at us....No casualties. All secure. Situation remains the same.(228)

The dirge-like chant mollifies the effect of the series of deadly incidents that, under normal conditions, would demand action. The dull chorus replaces that action.

It is as though the recollection originates in a trance. And this trance-like state has a name and a history that begins when the "novelty"(65) of the landscape wears off:

...the battalion began to suffer from a spiritual disease called la cafard by the French soldiers when they were in Indochina. Its symptoms were occasional fits of depression combined with an unconquerable fatigue that made the simplest tasks, like shaving or cleaning a rifle, seem enormous. Its causes were obscure, but they had something to do with the unrelenting heat, the lack of action, and the long days of staring at that alien landscape; a lovely landscape, yes, but after a while all that jungle green became as monotonous as the beige of the desert or the white of the Arctic.(65)

The green, once perceived as so idyllic and soothing, now becomes oppressive, promoting the "spiritual disease" that threatens peace of mind.

The "fits of depression" and the "fatigue" constitute but the first stage of a disease whose second phase is when "you feel a hatred for everything and everyone around you"(93). Caputo reaches the third and most deadly stage of the disease at regimental headquarters. He develops a suicidal hatred for himself, "plunging into morbid depressions"(191) and feeling "urges to kill someone else"(191) at the "slightest irritation"(191). He has "reached the stage of moral and emotional

numbness"(117) where it is as easy to cross over the edge of emotional balance as it is to cross the "Line of departure"(277), "that line between a world of relative stability and one that was wholly unstable" (277). The incredible distance Caputo senses between himself and the external world is in evidence when he watches "people running out of their burning homes..."(270): "I did not feel anything at all"(270).

That distance describes a split within Philip Caputo, as though there are two beings within one body. One part of him participates in the war and the other is at a distance--watching. The nightmarish division begins in a dream the night Bryce and Devlin die in a bunker: "...I was given command of a new platoon....Devlin, Lockhart, and Bryce were in the first rank/...Sullivan was there too"(188-189). While shaving the next morning, Caputo is disturbed to see the faces of the dead "in the mirror that reflected my own face"(189). At breakfast that morning, Caputo watches two regimental officers discuss an operation: "Half of me was in the mess...and the other half was on the dream drill field where legless, armless, eyeless men marched to my commands"(190). When the "mental bisection" dissolves, he sees "Mora and Harrison prefigured in death.... their living faces across from me and, superimposed on those, a vision of their faces as they would look in death"(190). Caputo is experiencing the psychological price of la cafard and the war: "Asleep and dreaming, I saw dead men living; awake, I saw living men dead"(190).

The split widens, as if by logical extension, until his vision reveals his "own death"(219). He is fascinated by death. Caught in the maelstrom of a horrendous artillery barrage, he finds part of his consciousness removes itself from his body:

The ground slammed against my chest, bouncing me up an inch or so, and a part of me kept going up. I felt myself floating up out of myself.... Hovering there, I felt an ineffable calm....I saw myself lying face down in the foxhole....I felt no fear, just a great calm and a genial contempt for the puny creature....(258)

It is an extraordinary self-examination. The part of Philip Caputo that is repulsed by the horror removes itself to examine, from a distance, that opposing component that remains caught up in the conflict. His observing "spirit"(258) concludes with indifference that Caputo must be dying:

It is painless. Death is an end to pain. Rich the treasure, sweet the pleasure, sweet is pleasure after pain. Death is a pleasure. The Big D is the world's most powerful narcotic, the ultimate anesthetic.(258)

The placid, "calm" acquiescence is tantamount to a death-wish. However, the other side of him, though also addicted to "the world's most powerful narcotic," takes a course other than acquiescence. It is driven by "hatred, a hatred buried so deep that I could not then admit its existence"(219), "an emotion that dwells in most of us"(219). Put simply, this hatred is a "desire for retribution"(219). So rather than accept the "Big D," this part of the "bisection" seeks to destroy, to revel in the catharsis yielded by destroying the source of the external threat. He wants "a chance to kill somebody"(219).

This "icy, abiding fury"(268) encompasses "everything in existence...except those men of mine"(268), who suffer from the excruciating emotional pressures as does Caputo. Once in the field, operating as a collective unit, they are liable to become "men in extremis"(289). Such is the case at the village of Ha Na: "Then it

happened. The platoon exploded. It was a collective emotional detonation of men who had been pushed to the extremity of endurance. I lost control of them and even of myself"(287). The "emotional balance"(285) overturned, the men abandon themselves to a frenzy of destruction and burn the village. After the action is complete, the men experience "catharsis, a purging of months of fear, frustration, and tension"(288). They have relieved their "own pain by inflicting it on others"(288). However, the "inner quietude"(288) is shaken, opposed by "guilt and shame"(289). So different are they now that some have "a difficult time believing that we were the ones who had caused all that destruction"(289). Caputo and his men sense that within that recollected "dreamlike" "battle"(289), they have witnessed "the dark, destructive emotions"(289) that heretofore have remained submerged. Moreover, the recollection of the experience accentuates the emotional schism between "madness"(288) and sobriety:

Strangest of all had been that sensation of watching myself in a movie. One part of me was doing something while the other part watched from a distance, shocked by the things it saw, yet powerless to stop them from happening.(289)

Once more, the "part" of him that cannot abide the destruction extricates itself to a "distance" and watches hopelessly as the darker self runs amuck.

Not long after the village's immolation, Caputo once again chooses to "Retaliate"(299), except this time he seizes the "chance to kill somebody." Crowe, one of his men, has been told by a boy from Giao-Tri that two men from the same village are Viet Cong. Caputo still cannot "shake that weird sensation of being split in two"(297). In his "addled state of mind"(300), "full of turbulent emotions and disordered thoughts"

(297), he briefs the men who are to be sent into the village after the VC suspects. He informs them that they are to "'Snatch 'em up and bring 'em back here, but if they give you any problems, kill 'em'"(300). Yet within the conversation there is "an unspoken understanding: blood was to be shed"(300). All the while Caputo senses that he is "watching" himself "in a film": "I could hear myself laughing, but it did not sound like my laugh"(300).<sup>23</sup> The passive "half" of his "double self" warns him that "something awful was going to happen"(301), yet this "half" is helpless. The patrol goes to the village, snatches two suspects and kills them on the return path to the outpost. One of the dead is the boy, the informant. Caputo and his men are brought up on charges, and he is eventually sent back with a letter of reprimand to the States where he completed his stint.

Caputo has come full circle back to America and the landscape of his youth, which, because of his experience, will never again look as it did to the kid from Illinois. He had "broken" that night the informant was killed. On this occasion, as on many previous, he had suffered from an internal, emotional struggle of opposites that revealed him capable of astounding cruelty. The experience had "awakened something evil in us, some dark, malicious power that allowed us to kill without feeling"(309). "Badly shaken"(308), fearing that he would "break in two"(308), he considers himself "a casualty of the war"(314): "As his [referring to himself] physical energies are bodily injuries, so were all of my emotional energies/spent on maintaining my mental balance"(314-315). It is a tortured state of being where "enduring"(315) seemed "an act of penance"(315). It is also a state from which "Recovery"(4) is "less than



total"(4). He is permanently changed, scarred by an experience that fogs the past--"anything that had happened before Vietnam"(210)--and that reveals an America of 1967 that is nearly as alien to him as the Indochinese bush had once been:

When my three-year enlistment expired in 1967,  
I was almost completely ignorant about the stuff  
of ordinary life, about marriage, mortgages, and  
building a career.(3)

Like Herr, he is effectively initiated away from the United States and its "normality"(234), initiated away from those who are implicated by his last, most startling observation:

If such cruelty existed in ordinary men like us,  
then it logically existed in the others, and  
they would have to face the truth that they, too,  
harbored a capacity for evil. But no one wanted  
to make that recognition. No one wanted to  
confront his devil.(313)

He recognizes a universal inherent evil in man.

More than a decade after returning from Nam, Herr and Caputo published their respective novels. From this temporal distance, the authors take that inward journey across the martial landscape of recollection and experience. Herr and Caputo are both sojourning child-Adams as they commence their journeys. Like Redburn and Priest, they are initially innocent, and the confrontation with experience and technology brings them to maturity. Harsh experience and technology are constants in the two earlier novels, but here they hold sway over the texts. The maturation process for both seer and doer in Vietnam is sudden and extreme, paralleled by the entrance of the deadly machine into the green landscape. And just as the machine alters the landscape, the confrontation with technology dramatically alters the initiate. Martial

technology dominates the war, destroying both Herr's and Caputo's initial vision of innocence. They are unnaturally aged by the tremendous tension and introspection thrust upon them by the war. Unlike Redburn and Priest, they are irrevocably thrown beyond the moment of adolescence into old age.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Hellmann, "The New Journalism and Vietnam: Memory as Structure in Michael Herr's Dispatches", The South Atlantic Quarterly, LXXIX (1980), 142. This article, though conversant in the language of the metafictional critic, sacrifices the search for meaning in the novel to the establishment of the novel as a "self-reflexive fable." The critical process subverts the importance of experience of the journey through Vietnam, and thus, the article's focus is off-base in its search for meaning in the narrative.

<sup>2</sup>Graham Greene, The Quiet American (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1955; Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 152.

<sup>3</sup>Greene, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup>Greene, pp. 31-32.

<sup>5</sup>Greene, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup>Greene, p. 163.

<sup>7</sup>Edmund Blunden, Undertones of War (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1928; New York: Harvest Books, 1965), p. 156.

<sup>8</sup>Jeffrey Walsh, American War Literature 1914 to Vietnam (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), p. 199. This examination makes for interesting reading, but, in spite of the noted statement, the author's discussion of these two works is both brief and shallow.

<sup>9</sup>Michael Herr, Dispatches (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977; Avon Books, 1980), p. 177. Subsequent quotations from this edition will be noted by page number in the text of the chapter.

<sup>10</sup>Hellmann, p. 145.

<sup>11</sup>William Faulkner, The Reivers: A Reminiscence (New York: Random House, 1962; Vintage Books), p. 52.

<sup>12</sup>Gordon O. Taylor, "American Personal Narrative of the War in Vietnam", American Literature, LII (1980), 297.

<sup>13</sup>Taylor, p. 301.

<sup>14</sup>Faulkner, p. 94.

<sup>15</sup>Frederic Manning, The Middle Parts of Fortune (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1929; Mayflower Books, 1977), pp. 108-109.

<sup>16</sup>Manning, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup>Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 364.

<sup>18</sup>Philip Caputo, A Rumor of War (New York: Random House, Inc., 1977; Ballantine Books, 1978), p. 5. Subsequent quotations from this edition will be noted by page number in the text of the chapter.

<sup>19</sup>Marx, p. 248.

<sup>20</sup>Marx, p. 324.

<sup>21</sup>Marx, p. 324.

<sup>22</sup>This phrase alludes to an earlier conflict, the Spanish-American War, fought in 1898 for only ten weeks. Credit for coining the phrase belongs to "John Hay, soon to become Secretary of State [who] commented....'It has been a splendid little war...begun with the highest motives, carried on with magnificent intelligence and spirit, favored by that Fortune which loves the brave.'" Ironically, this idealistic, confident attitude is carried to Vietnam by Americans, doomed to experience only defeat and disillusionment. For a brief commentary on the turn-of-the-century conflict, see Alexander De Conde's chapter fourteen, "That Splendid Little War," from which the above quotation is taken: Alexander De Conde, A History of American Foreign Policy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 350.

<sup>23</sup>It should be noted that this image of Caputo watching himself "in a film" is strikingly similar to Herr's "war-as-movie"(68). The parallel is solidified by the fact that both employ this common metaphor when discussing the fascination and dread they have for the war. Each uncovers a part of himself that is horrified by the apocalyptic vision and an opposing part that enjoys the participation in a potentially deadly situation.

## EPILOGUE

This investigation of four novels, spanning two centuries of American literature, traces recurrent motifs in the American novel of initiation. Repeatedly, a sojourning child-Adam follows a circular path, moving from his childhood innocence into an underworld where confrontation with the machine leads to introspection and altered perceptions. The similarities, however, are less intriguing than the variations, for, as this study shows, the American novelist's fascination with the adolescent initiate shifts focus in the twentieth-century, reflecting the increasing dominance of technology.

Wellingborough Redburn travels into the Old World dominated by evil, and his naiveté is stripped away by the traditional confrontation with evil. Lucius Priest, on the other hand, denies his own innocence by lying, by participating in his own fall, stealing the machine and travelling in it to the urban underworld of Memphis. Like Lucius, the seer, Michael Herr, and the doer, Philip Caputo, move through a modern hell, in their case the man-made underworld of the Vietnam War, and in that hell, they are dominated by a deadly technology that defines that war's character. The last three accounts are markedly different than Melville's, where the machine, though perceived in the landscape, remains submerged as an unseen threat to the initiate's vision of green innocence. The green vision of the last three initiates hinges upon that machine and the experience thrust upon them by the machine. These last three are by

no means the traditional fall to evil.

The Adamic journey leads from innocence to experience. In the earliest novel, Redburn, the adolescent hero suffers the traditional fall to evil, and yet it is apparent that he has far to go before he is mature, self-knowledgeable. Most of his experience is external to himself, even though, like later sojourners, he is isolated upon the journey. In The Reivers, Lucius reveals a more internalized experience, and, though his fall is a temporally short affair in comparison to Redburn's, it is a more wrenching one. His is a more dramatic discovery (the responsibility for one's actions), because he is a doer rather than a seer like Redburn, and because the machine, the Winton fruit, is far more central to the experience. It is to be expected, then, as the fourth chapter shows, that this shift in intensity and emphasis is exacerbated when the landscape of experience is dominated by deadly technology as it is in Nam. Even the seer's fall to experience is more dramatic under such circumstances, though his role is passive compared to the soldier-doer's obligation to move through the fallen landscape. The introspection of both Herr and Caputo is far more intense than that of either Redburn or Priest. Death, in the earlier novels an oblique threat and a catalyst for the excursion, is the omnipresent concern in Vietnam. The sexual imagery common to the previous novels becomes more explicit and deadly, since it is linked not to the chance seducer, but to death and technology. Needless to say, the maturation process, accelerated for the young doer, active in denying innocence, is exponentially accelerated in this, the harshest underworld.

This study is only of four American novels of initiation. There is call, therefore, for further research. While other nineteenth-century

novels could be explored with both Lewis' and Marx's studies in mind, my investigations to date lead me to believe that the twentieth century might provide the most fruitful ground for further examination. This approach could open the way for an extended study of the modern novel of initiation and potentially could provide an approach to the novels that are just now being published on the Vietnam War.

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