A STUDY OF FIVE FILMS OF FRANK CAPRA AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE SHORT STORIES OF MARK TWAIN

by

JILL BRINDLE

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the
degree of Master of Arts, McMaster University
September 1975

MASTER OF ARTS (1975) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: A Study of Five Films of Frank Capra and Their Relationship to the Short Stories of Mark Twain

AUTHOR: Jill Brindle, B.A. (Brock University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Petrie

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 124

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

In their studies of the films of Frank Capra, several critics comment in passing upon the parallel between that popular filmmaker of the 1930's and that other popular American artist, Mark Twain:

> As strange as the hybrid may seem, Capra in his better films fashioned his heroes by crossing Jefferson's independent yeoman with a grown-up version of Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer....Capra's heroes in short, are ideal types, created in the image of powerful national myths.[1]

> Like Mark Twain, an artist whom he often resembles, Capra portrays American culture at its breaking point, but always within the context of a comic vision.[2]

> As artists, Twain and Capra are vastly dissimilar; yet they seem to me comparable in their situation with respect to art and consciousness. And, like Twain also, Capra is a "natural"; a folk artist in the sense of drawing imaginatively for his substance on some of the most characteristic matter of our national folklore.[3]

There remains, however, scant criticism which explores in any real depth the nature of the similarity between these two artists.

In this thesis I shall attempt to show through an examination of the short stories of Mark Twain and

---

[1] John Raeburn, introduction to Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975) pp.xii-xiii.

[2] John Raeburn, "American Madness and American Values", in Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, pp.63-64.

[3] William S. Pechter, "American Madness", in Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, p.182.

five films of Frank Capra made in the 1930's how Capra and Twain embody in their works an American philosophy of "individualism"; how both artists in the development of their art have been forced to reconcile a vision of the simple, independent and spirited pioneer with an American environment that has become rapidly industrialized, increasingly controlled by vast corporations and strong, centralized government.

Throughout this thesis I have interpreted the films in question as expressions of Capra's own personal, artistic development. Admittedly film is always, to some extent, a collaborative creation, dependent upon the influence of producer, and the creative efforts of story writer, script writer, camera man, editor, actors and actresses, as well as director. In Capra's case, however, the director has established such control of his medium that one finds it impossible not to regard Capra as the creative genius behind his films. Lewis Jacobs in his article, "Capra at Work" comments vividly upon the pervasive presence which Capra maintained on set:

> The most striking thing about him while he is directing is his complete immersion in the film problem. He is seldom found in the chair marked "Director"....Every set-up absorbs his attention.
> ...While the crew sets up, Capra is busy placing the actors....
> He goes to the camera, and...watches through the lens...with viewfinder in hand, [he] roams the

set for a better angle....[4]

Likewise, in a discussion entitled, Frank Capra: "One Man - One Film", published by the American Film Institute, Capra describes the intense, personal control which he exerted over his films from editing, to choosing the pictures, to budgeting:

> Bruce Henstell: How closely did you work with your film editor? Was he given an editing script to work from or would you actually be in the cutting room with him?
>
> Capra: I'd be in the cutting room. They couldn't get rid of me no matter what....
>
> [later in the discussion]
> George Stevens: ...You were able to decide what pictures you were going to make.
>
> Capra: I took that responsibility....if you're willing to take full responsibility...a director can go as far as he wants to....
>
> [later in the discussion]
> Stevens: Were you involved in the budgeting of your films?
>
> Capra: Yes, Ma'am....
>
> [later in the discussion] Capra: ...if you're going to be filmmakers, you must pay attention to the money side...If you do, you get the picture made on time and don't lose any of the ingredients of the picture, any of the artistry....[5]

In his review of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington Graham Greene notes how surprisingly little Capra's

---

[4] In Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, p.41.

[5] In Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, pp.17, 20, 21-22.

artistry seems to owe to that "faithful scenario writer", Robert Riskin:

> Here is Capra, without the help of Riskin, back to his finest form [in Mr. Smith Goes to Washington] ....Now it is difficult to believe that Riskin's part was ever very important, for all the familiar qualities are here - the exciting close-ups, the sudden irrelevant humour, the delight...in the ordinary human face.[6]

Capra's own account of his close hand in the preparation of script and his readiness always to improvise at the last moment is quoted in Lewis Jacobs' "Capra at Work":

> 'I work right along with Robert Riskin, the writer. It takes three times as long to complete a workable script as it takes to shoot the picture. Even then I don't consider it iron-clad. I'm apt to change any sequence or incident...when it gets before the cameras.'[7]

This improvisational quality of Capra's directing has made screenplays of his films poor representations of the dialogue as it actually exists on screen:

> Glatzer: Even the dialogue [in American Madness] seems to be accelerated, with overlapping speakers, people cutting each other off, and so on. It's very cinematic....You anticipate Robert Altman's treatment of dialogue in some respects - and by forty years.
>
> Capra: ...It was just the way I felt about dialogue. We were constantly improvising, there were no rules. Everybody had their own way. We were maturing and we were discovering things.[8]

---

[6] From "A Director of Genius: Four Reviews", in Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, p.115.

[7] In Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, p.42.

[8] Richard Glatzer, "A Conversation with Frank Capra", in Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, p.28.

Therefore, although published screenplays are available for *It Happened One Night* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, in this thesis I have chosen to work with dialogue recorded as exactly as possible from the film itself.[9]

I could not have undertaken this thesis without the help of my supervisor Graham Petrie who made the arrangements which have enabled me to gain close viewing of the films involved in this thesis. I am also grateful for his kind advice and encouragement. Finally, thanks to my mother, husband and children for so freely offering their support and understanding during the completion of this thesis.

---

[9] A published screenplay of *It Happened One Night* is available in Lorraine Noble, ed., *Four Star Scripts* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1936). A published screenplay of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is available in Jerry Wald and Richard Macauley, eds., *The Best Pictures: 1939-1940* (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1940).

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

With the European discovery of America, America became the symbol not only of man's physical expansion, but also of man's mental capacity for advancement beyond the closed perimeters of his preconceptions. Furthermore, in America's later revolt from England, its assertion of democratic freedom and its pioneer settlements, America represented for European Romantics a return to a more vital and primal state. Thus America, in a very real and physical sense, was a symbol uniting both the concept of progress and the return to primitivism. The American advance westward marked man's increasing departure from static tradition and the healthy restoration of his primal, intuitive awareness. For much of its history, America was the symbol of the open universe:

> The former rancher and Rough Rider [Theodore Roosevelt] ...succeeded in catching the ear of his fellow countrymen primarily because his philosophy of the strenuous life ran with, rather than against, the main current of American life. We were an active rather than a contemplative people. Roosevelt gave verbal expression to a firmly held folk ideal. Americans had been on the move since the Susan Constant dropped anchor before Jamestown ....
>
> > Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
> > Healthy, free, and the world before me,
>
> Whitman had written many years before.[1]

---

[1] Robert E. Spiller, William Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby and Richard M. Ludwig, eds., Literary History of the United States (3rd ed., New York: Macmillan, 1946), pp.945-946.

But by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that American image of combined progress and individual independence became threatened by America's rapid industrialization:

> Americans at the turn of the century, for all their sense of safety, were troubled by insecurities within their national life. Western farmers, the Grangers, and the Populists, frightened by what they looked upon as ravening corporations whelped by industrialism, organized popular fronts of resistance.... muckrakers sounded the alarm that municipal corruption and corporate greed were threatening both the political and the economic foundations of democracy itself.[2]

> The individualism that had served as a primary assumption for Emerson, Whitman, and even Melville and Poe, was undoubtedly threatened....Well before the year 1900 government agencies, industrial corporations were all contributing to knowledge through specialization, planning, and cooperation. It was no longer apparent as it once seemed that the individual alone is the only or even the chief source of knowledge and light.[3]

The advancement of technology created a situation whereby progressive inventions ultimately promulgated uniformity of both objects and people.

Thorstein Veblen in The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) and The Theory of Business Enterprise (1904), came to regard "Modern business ...as ...a system which, with modern machinery, frustrated the instinctive creative urge in the worker to see and enjoy the fruits of his toil...."[4]

---

[2] Ibid., p.946.

[3] Ibid., p.969.

[4] Ibid., p.981-982.

At the turn of the century, confronting the old, ideal image of America as a land of independent experiment, was a new deterministic view of society in which man appeared a mere, helpless victim of a mechanistic process:

> Herbert Spencer, whose name ranked second only to that of Darwin...persuaded thousands of Americans, who thought of themselves as forward-looking, that society is an organism, that there is a law of progress leading in social as in biological development from the simple and homogeneous to the complex and heterogeneous....Spencer taught that society moves upward from the primitive hunting stage to the final triumph of the industrial stage....The social world of...Spencer rested squarely on determinism....
>
> Henry Adams dissented....[He] saw the importance of the new technology, but...suggested...that the harnessing of natural energy was putting men in chains as well as setting them free....He spoke of the modern man as being made to dance by the live wire he grasped....[5]

Furthermore, as America became a nation of increasing centralized power, the sense of regional independence necesarily diminished. The sense of physical expansiveness likewise contracted as industrialized cities drew together vast masses of men, who appeared to be employed, housed, entertained and fed, much as a body of unindividuated ants:

> Now I noticed that the skies were black with millions of people, pointed for those gates. What a roar they made, rushing through the air! The ground was as thick as ants with people, too - billions of them, I judge.
>
> I lit. I drifted up to a gate with a swarm of people, and when it was my turn the head clerk says,

---

[5] Ibid., pp.947-948.

in a businesslike way -
'Well, quick! Where are you from?'
'San Francisco,' says I.
'San Fran - what?' says he.[6]

This passage, taken from Mark Twain's "Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" (1907), appears largely inspired by that author's sensitivity to the individual's feeling of insignificance within the vast crowds of the city.

To an even greater extent, as horizons of personal opportunity contracted in the twenties and thirties, the sense of individual anonymity intensified:

> [In] the fifteen years following the stock-market crash...the psychology of unlimited opportunity swiftly [gave] ...way to the psychology of closed opportunity....
> Security in the domestic sphere could be had only on a new social basis, through a broad governmental program of interference, regulation, and planning. It was no longer reconcilable with the stark individualism once regarded as an American birthright.[7]
>
> In their bewilderment, the harassed population turned to the experts....Americans, long skeptical of the expert, now felt that their problems had attained a complexity which made it essential to mobilize the whole array of principles, facts, and ideas possessed by social sciences....[8]

---

[6] Mark Twain, The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain, Charles Neider, ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), p.568.
Future quotations from this book will be followed by bracketed page references.

[7] Spiller, Thorp, Johnson, Canby and Ludwig, eds., Literary History of the United States, p.1255.

[8] Ibid., p.1257.

America became by the 1930's a society in which loneliness was prevalent:

> There was...the loneliness of the individual lost in great crowds of men and women in a city to which he had usually come from somewhere else....His desire for personal experience was frustrated in the standardized life that seemed to be the price of success.[9]

The short stories of Mark Twain, written between 1865 and 1910, and Frank Capra's films of the 1930's bear a remarkable resemblance in their predominating concern with a society whose mechanized forms of communication have threatened to destroy the traditional American image of individual freedom and open, spontaneous action among men.

In examining this problem of modern American democracy the two artists move through strikingly similar phases. In the early work of both, the primitive perception of common people, children or animals is shown to shatter sophisticated abstractions and mechanical modes of expression through a simple openness to immediate reality. In later works, with this increasing focus upon the individuated consciousness, there is also a gradual sense of the artist's loss of faith in the validity of the external environment. While there is increasing delight in individual, experimental creativity, the self comes to be seen as a creative and destructive power within its own private realm - a realm in which

---

[9] Ibid., p.1130.

outside, independent reality has become meaningless.

Thus, from a fearful vision of the masses devouring the individual, there is a movement in the works of both Capra and Twain toward the image of a society enlightened by rebellious individual perception. From an initial celebration of vital primitivism, both Twain and Capra move increasingly towards a kind of transcendentalist viewpoint. This creates the dubiously triumphant reversal in which the masses become swallowed by the voracious power of the self.

The following chapters of this thesis will trace the development of this problem through a detailed examination of some of Frank Capra's major films of the 1930's - It Happened One Night (1934), Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (1936), Lost Horizon (1937), You Can't Take It with You (1938), and Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) - with special reference to the similar thematic evolution which takes place in Mark Twain's short stories.

CHAPTER TWO IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT AND THE SHORT STORIES OF MARK TWAIN

In Mark Twain's "Legend of the Capitoline Venus" (1869) the author depicts an ideological movement away from the dynamic and innovative west, towards the automatic, established atmosphere of the east. The untutored, primitive awareness of the character, "Arkansas ass", is replaced by lifeless systems which have relinquished original, instinctive perception for dull dependence upon static, business and cultural codes:

> 'I can't let my daughter marry a hash of love, art and starvation - I believe you have nothing else to offer.'
>
> 'Sir, I am poor I grant you. But is fame nothing? The Hon. Bellamy Foodle of Arkansas says that my new statue of America is a clever piece of sculpture....'
>
> 'Bosh! What does that Arkansas ass know about it? Fame's nothing - the market price of your marble scarecrow is the thing to look at. It took you six months to chisel it, and now you can't sell it for a hundred dollars.' (pp. 22-23)

It is only through the transformation of the "new statue of America" into the battered condition of traditional classical art that it meets the approval of the conservative east:

> 'And oh, Georgy, how divinely beautiful she [the statue] is!'
>
> 'Ah, yes - but nothing to what she was before that blessed John Smith broke her leg and battered her nose.' (p. 26)

Likewise, in the staid bureaucracy of Washington, as depicted in "The Facts of the Great Beef Contract" (1870), the constant observance of a "regular", "slow"

and "certain" routine removes all necessity of direct, spontaneous contact among people:

> 'Young man, why didn't the First Comptroller of the Corn-Beef Division tell me this?'
> 'He didn't know anything about the genuinness of your claim.'
> 'Why didn't the Second tell me? Why didn't the Third?....'
> 'None of them knew. We do things by routine here. You have followed the routine....It is the best way. It is the only way. It is very regular, and very slow, but it is very certain.' (p.45)

Within the remote realm of newspapers and secretarial "harems" <u>real</u> people and their particular problems are kept at comfortable distance:

> I laid seige to the Commissioner of Odds and Ends. To his clerk, rather - he was not there himself. There were sixteen beautiful young ladies in the room, writing in books, and there were seven well-favored young clerks showing them how....Two or three clerks that were reading the newspapers looked at me rather hard, but went on reading, and nobody said anything. (p.43)

Again, in "Journalism in Tennessee" (1869) the original, actual experience becomes of little importance in the ruthless process of mass communication. People and the issues which involve them are simply food for rapid consumption:

> He ran his eye down the pages....
> 'Thunder and lightning! Do you suppose my subscribers are going to stand such gruel as that? Give me the pen!'
> I never saw a pen scrape and scratch its way so viciously, or plough through another man's verbs and adjectives so relentlessly. (p.28)

> 'Now <u>that</u> is the way to write - peppery and to the point. Muck-and milk journalism gives me the fan-tods.' (p.29)

Writers and editors themselves lose all aspect of independent perception - reacting automatically in "mobs" like "hungry swarms" of "hornets":

> 'The paragraphs which I have written today...will wake up another nest of hornets. All that mob of editors will come - and they will come hungry too, and want somebody for breakfast.' (p.32)

Mass communication in "The Stolen White Elephant" (1882) is represented as a cannibalistic process whereby the fraudulent few live off the mindless, automated, public awe: " 'As to the newspapers, we must keep in with them. Fame, reputation, constant public mention - these are the detective's bread and butter'." (p.206) The narrator of this particular tale is portrayed as a self-effacing representative of the hypnotized masses, ready to enslave himself to the expert (in this case the detective), to be cowed by romantic mystique: "The more I had seen of the man the more I liked him and marveled over the mysterious wonders of his profession." (p.205)

Throughout much of Twain's early work there is the fearful image of the unimportance of the individual - his lack of identity and dignity, as he becomes woven, almost imperceptibly, into profitable material for commercial consumption:

> 'Parson Hagar belonged to the Western Reserve Hagars; prime family; his mother was a Watson; one of his sisters married a Wheeler; they settled in Morgan County, and he got nipped by the machinery in a carpet factory and went through in less than a

> quarter of a minute; his widder bought the piece of carpet that had his remains wove in....They didn't bury him - they planted one end, and let him stand up, same as a monument. And they nailed a sign on it and put - put on - put on it - sacred to - the m-e-m-o-r-y of fourteen y-a-r-d-s of three-ply car-pet - containing all that was - m-o-r-t-a-l- of - of - W-i-l-l-i-a-m- W-h-e-'

in "The Story of the Old Ram" (1872) p.81.

Against this image of a closed, mechanized universe, in which man's independence is peremptorily denied, Twain juxtaposes an alternative vision. Captain Ned for example is associated with the visionary ideal of America. He incorporates in his character the youthful inquisitiveness of a boy-sailor, displaying "eagle-eyed" openness to fresh experience and direct dealing with his fellow men:

> He was a stalwart, warm-hearted veteran, who had been a sailor nearly fifty years - a sailor from early boyhood. He was a rough, honest creature, full of pluck, and just as full of hard-headed simplicity, too. He hated trifling conventionalities - 'business' was the word, with him.

in "A Trial" (1872) pp.84-85.

In Captain Ned, Twain expresses his admiration and longing for the pragmatic simplicity and primitiveness which the "early days" of America seem to embody, the youthful rebellion against artificial formality and the courageous self-reliance of the individual. For example, Ned hangs a murderer and:

> When the history of this affair reached California (it was in the 'early days') it made a deal of talk, but it did not diminish the captain's popularity in any degree. It increased it, indeed.

> California had a population then that 'inflicted' justice after a fashion that was simplicity and primitiveness itself, and could therefore admire appreciatively when the same fashion was followed elsewhere. (p.89)

Like Ned, the character of Scotty in "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" (1872) similarly expresses the exploratory, courageous expression of the "pioneer small-fry":

> If his Sunday-school class progressed faster than the other classes, was it matter for wonder? I think not. He talked to his pioneer small-fry in a language they understood! It was my personal privilege, a month before he died, to hear him tell the beautiful story of Joseph and his brethren to his class 'without looking at the book'... as it fell, riddled with slang, from the lips of that grave, earnest teacher, and was listened to by his little learners with a consuming interest that showed that they were as unconscious as he was that any violence was being done to the sacred proprieties! (p.77)

Unlike the "pale theological student" (p.72), who withdraws from experience in protective, formal euphemism, Scotty's language is characterized by reckless determination to <u>touch</u> the living reality:

> 'Yes - kicked the bucket - '
> 'Ah - has departed to that mysterious country from whose bourne no traveller returns.'
> 'Return! I reckon not. Why, pard, he's dead!' (p.74)

It is distinguished by undaunted man to man contact:

> 'I think you're a square man, pard. I like you, and I'll lick any man that don't. I'll lick him till he can't tell himself from last year's corpse! Put it <u>there</u>!' [<u>Another fraternal handshake - and exit</u>] (p.76)

Twain reconciles his sense of America's lost <u>physical</u> frontier in the portrayal of an ever expanding

frontier of the consciousness, a universe of continual experiment, open in any age to brave, rebellious individuals of pioneer spirit.

For Twain, it is the insubordinate humour of the common man - the unpretentious, childlike humour of the barkeeper's raillery, the minstrel's mockery, the caricaturists's drawings - that has the potential to undercut the comfortable, mechanized driftings of a hypnotized society and to make communication a truly living process:

> the minstrels...dressed themselves as detectives and hunted the elephant on the stage in the most extravagant way. The caricaturists made pictures of detectives scanning the country with spyglasses ....When detectives called for a drink, the would-be facetious barkeep resurrected an obsolete form of expression and said, 'Will you have an eye-opener?' (p.213)

Amid the mechanical barrage of "pleasant" "praises" it is the "one contemptible exception" which has the capacity to prevent total, mass hypnosis:

> This [one, exceptional] sheet said, 'Great is the detective! He may be a little slow in finding a little thing like a mislaid elephant..., but he will find him at last - if he can get the man who mislaid him to show him the place!'

in "The Stolen White Elephant" (1882), p.216.

As in the short stories of Mark Twain, in Frank Capra's It Happened One Night (1934), there is similarly depicted the impersonality of modern communication. Near the opening of the film, it is significant that Peter, a modern news correspondent, is shown inside a glass booth, busily engaged in a long distance

telephone communication that isolates him from his gragarious drinking pals. Momentarily separated by this barrier of glass from the warm jostling of his companions, Peter is shown enclosed within an unfriendly world of commercial codes. The separate and alternating shots of Peter and the editor as they argue - seem to emphasize the cold distancing quality that predominates in the competitive business world.

In this early scene, Capra, like Twain, celebrates that rebellious, uninhibited, and drunkenly humorous spirit which breaks down artificial barriers and lifeless formalities. Like the heroes of Mark Twain's short stories - in contrast to the impersonal click of the editor's receiver as he angrily hangs up the telephone - Peter becomes increasingly associated with highly spontaneous, personal contact. Intoxicated and exuberant, Peter mockingly ridicules the boss's bigotted suppression of free expression:

> Peter: Hey listen, monkey-face, when you fired me, you fired the best news hound your filthy scandal sheet ever had.
> [Later] Peter: That was free verse, you gaboon.

For Peter, <u>real</u> news represents direct, personal encounter. Appropriately, Peter's drunken sympathizers, communicating largely by gestures of immediate contact - gregarious back-slapping, hand shaking etc. - herald Peter's new "kingship" by ripping apart the formalized, printed words of the newspaper as they sing "Long live

the king". Over his spontaneous existence Peter refuses to allow static interpretations to assert their control. He refuses to yield his chair on the bus to the rigid words of the printed page:

> Bus Driver: What do you think you're doing? The papers, the papers. What's the idea of throwin' them out?
> Peter: Oh, the papers. Yeah. It's a long story my friend. I never did like the idea of sitting on newspapers. I did it once and all the headlines came off on my white pants. On the level, it actually happened. Nobody bought a paper that day. They just followed me around over town and read the news over the seat of my pants.

Peter above all displays a rebellious, confident self-assertion, ever-ready to undo the mindless and mechanical. Boldly he mocks the bus driver's unoriginal monotony:

> Bus Driver: Oh, fresh guy, huh? What you need is a good sock on the nose.
> Peter: Listen, pardner, you may not like my nose, but I do. I always wear it out in the open where if anybody wants to take a sock at it, they can do it.
> Bus Driver: Oh yeah?
> Peter: Now that's a brilliant answer. Why didn't I think of it? Our conversation could've been over long ago.
> Bus Driver: Oh yeah?
> Peter: If you keep that up you're not gonna get anywhere.
> Bus Driver: Oh yeah?
> Peter: You got me. Yeah. [laughter of passengers]

Similarly, Peter knocks off balance the habitual pose of Shapely, that commercially oriented salesman of repetitive phrases, who automatically stereo-types and manipulates living beings; whose very name suggests a flashy exterior remote from a genuine inner force of being:

> Shapely: Hi sister. All alone? My name's Shapely. Might as well get acquainted; it's gonna be a long trip. Get's tiresome later on, especially for somebody like you. You look like you've got class. Yes sir, with a capital "K". And I'm the guy that knows class when he sees it, believe you me. Ask any of the boys. They'll tell you. Shapely sure knows how to pick 'em. Yes sir, Shapely's the name and that's the way I like em.... [Later] Shapely: You know, there's nothin I like better than to meet a high class mama that can snap 'em back at ya. 'Cause the colder they are, the hotter they get. That's what I always say. Yes sir, when a cold mama gets hot, boy how she sizzles....

Humorously, Peter's startling information neatly depicts the vacuity of the automatic gesture; Shapely's hand is revealed suddenly empty as he mechanically prepares to resume the cigar:

> Peter: There's a seat over there for you.
> Shapely: What's the idea?
> Peter: I'd like to sit next to my wife, if you don't mind.
> Shapely: Your wife?
> Peter: Yeah.
> Shapely: Oh. Yeah, Yeah. Sure. Excuse me. Sure. I was, uh, just tryna make things pleasant.... Excuse me....Ah, no offence, doc. [about to put the cigar in his mouth, he suddenly notices that his fingers are empty]

Ellen likewise is initially associated with the sterile realm of distanced, automatic communication. On the first stop-over, against a background of milling people, Ellen lounges languidly against the bus, mechanically assuming a static, lifeless pose, oblivious even to Peter's attempts to inform her of the theft of her luggage: "I don't know what you're raving about young man and, furthermore, I'm not interested." Appropriately

on the second stop-over, Peter's discovery of Ellen's identity is shown by a close-up shot of her newspaper picture, static and isolated within a rigid square. The fashionable artifice of the photographic pose (exposing mostly her elegant but uncommunicative back) contrasts vividly with the moving background of busy, talkative travellers. In contrast to Peter who includes the bus audience in his jokes, Ellen's correct formality of phrasing and conventional refinement of accent express enclosed reserve. Unwilling to acknowledge shared responsibility, Ellen demands that an entire busload await her arrival. Rejecting Peter's invitation to dine, she chooses to eat alone in the privacy of an exclusive hotel:

> Peter: How about breakfast?
> Ellen: [Looking into her mirror and straightening her appearance.] No. No thank-you. No. I'm going to the Windsor Hotel. [still absorbed in her own reflection]
> Peter: The Windsor? You'll never make it in time. We leave in half an hour.
> Ellen. Oh no, they'll wait for me. Driver, I'm going to be a few minutes late. Be sure to wait for me.

The progress of the night bus, however, presents the gradual destruction of the rigid barriers of Ellen's formal, waking existence. The station-attendant's shouts of "hot coffee", "hot dogs", and his "not-so-private" directions to washrooms - emphasize man's primal and universal needs, a sense of primitive wholeness into which Ellen is gradually re-immersed.

Capra, like Twain, links true progress with spontaneous freedom. For both authors real progress is marked by the ability of each individual to push beyond the mechanistic, conventional formula as it grows remote from natural impulse; real advancement is marked by the individual's ability to renew old social patterns by an ever-expanding, intuitive awareness of the environment.

For both Twain and Capra the traditional literary image of the journey becomes a useful metaphor for their characters' growth. It is a journey that is given the particularly American definition of progress, the sense of movement from the realm of established tradition into a process of expanding, spontaneous consciousness. In the works of both, images of forward progression are confronted by impressions of circularity, suggestive of a static universe in which, in the beginning, the end is predetermined. In "Cannibalism in the Cars" (1868) the train (symbol of progress, of the opening of the west) becomes stalled, surrounded by snow:

> The snow was deepening fast; and we knew, by the diminished speed of the train, that the engine was plowing through it with steadily increasing difficulty....
> we were captives in a snow-drift!....
> And worse than this, it was discovered that the last grand charge the engine had made upon the enemy had broken the fore-and-aft shaft of the driving-wheel! With a free track before us we should still have been helpless. (p.10)

The mechanical election jargon of the passengers, like-

wise, is shown to have grown deadened to its original, democratic force. Beneath the circuitous, automatic speeches living individuals are being slaughtered and devoured:

> Mr. Rogers of Missouri: 'Mr. President - The report being properly before the House now, I move to amend it by substituting for the name of Mr. Herrman that of Mr. Lucius Harris of St. Louis, who is well and honorably known to us all. I do not wish to be understood as casting the least reflection upon the high character and standing of the gentleman from Louisiana - far from it. I respect and esteem him as much as any gentleman here possibly can; but none of us can be blind to the fact that he has lost more flesh during the week that we have lain here than any among us - none of us can be blind to the fact that the committee has been derelict in its duty....' (p.13)

In "The Man Who Put Up at Gadsby's" (1880) there is again the image of muffling snow as a young man's instinct to move forward becomes trapped in the mindless circumlocution of the east. While the primitive urge to act personally and immediately is associated with western youth, the Washington journalist is linked with a wintry stasis of sophisticated abstraction:

> 'I'm one of the teachers of the high school - San Francisco. As soon as I heard the San Francisco postmastership was vacant, I made up my mind to get it - and here I am.' (p.149)

> Riley considered a while, and then said:
> 'You couln't stay...a day...well, say two days longer?'
> 'Bless your soul, no! It's not my style. I ain't a man to go fooling around - I'm a man that does things, I tell you.'
> The storm was raging, the thick snow blowing in gusts. Riley stood silent, apparently deep in a reverie, during a minute or more, then he looked up and said:

> 'Have you ever heard about that man who put up at Gadsby's once?...But I see you haven't.'

It is ultimately the deathly stillness of this remote reverie which surrounds and imprisons the initial vigour of the west:

> So saying, Riley blandly turned on his heel and left the astonished school-teacher there, a musing and motionless snow image shining in the broad glow of the street-lamp.
> He never got that post-office. (pp.152-153)

A similar disappearance of pioneer spirit occurs in "The Canvasser's Tale" (1876). Travel to "foreign countries" and "divine inflation" of language represent a drifting from the primal source of existence into the dream world of romantic conception, a theoretical realm remote from the substance of everyday living:

> During four years I flitted upon careless wing amid the beauteous gardens of the distant strand, if you will permit this form of speech..., for I perceive by your eyes that you too, sir, are gifted with divine inflation....
> I wrote and told him of one gentleman's vast collection of shells; another's noble collection of meerschaum pipes, another's elevating and refining collection of undescipherable autographs. Soon my letters yielded fruit. My uncle...began to neglect his great pork business; presently he wholly retired and turned an elegant leisure into a rabid search for curious things. (pp.122-123)

Likewise, in <u>It Happened One Night</u>, juxtaposed with an arrow-like, left-to-right movement is the image of lifeless circularity. The visually static circle confronts, on the screen, the image of progression in which movement is into the unknown.

The thematic dichotomy is established in the opening scene. Here, Ellen's circular, indecisive motion as she continuously turns from the camera to face the enclosing walls of the cabin, is vividly contrasted with the shot of the natural progress of a sailboat moving freely from left to right across an open expanse of sea and sky. As in "The Canvasser's Tale", Ellen's directionless movements are depicted as utterly isolated from her instinctual roots in life, both by her disgust with food, and her separation from her fellow travellers - suggested in the shot of the crew cut-off but listening on the other side of the door.

In contrast, deploring his daughter's artificial love-affair, Ellen's father recognizes the real joy which arises from primitive instinct: "He's no good and you know it. You married him only because I told you not to." "Have a nice piece of juicy steak. You don't have to eat it; just smell it. It's a poem." Significantly, it is the father's unpremeditated, natural response of anger - the slap - which initiates Ellen's own sudden leap from her circular confinement into the waves.

Appropriately, at this point, Ellen assumes on screen an increasing sense of progression. Her dive is shown in two shots: the shot of Ellen in left profile, facing the left side of the screen is succeeded by a view from the opposite angle, showing Ellen's preparation to leap as a visually more progressive, left-to-right

movement recalling the free forward motion suggested earlier by the sail-boat. The sense of advancement and growth become further heightened by Ellen's swimming motions which adopt, on screen, an upward motion from bottom to top as well as maintaining the predominant left-to-right course. Continuing the image of progression; as Ellen approaches the bus her profile is shown facing left-to-right while directly behind her is a sign bearing the prominent words "Night Bus" and an arrow which once more repeats the left-to-right sense of direction.

Significantly, this upward, left-to-right movement confronts in the next shot an old woman approaching from the opposite direction bearing the necessary ticket. Thus, in this sequence of shots is revealed a progression which is shown to be dependent on direct, personal contact.

Most emphasized in the image of the sign is not so much the particular destination of town or city but the progression into night, into the primitive realm one meets in sleep in which the waking distinctions and formalities become meaningless. Thus, despite Ellen's initial determination to avoid personal communication (she pointedly rejects a seat near Peter), under the influence of the night bus motion, a stranger comfortably falls asleep against her. Appropriately, as a humorous reminder of the pervasive necessity for personal contact the

observant Peter, feigning sleep, places his hand on the vacant seat adjoining his own; for Ellen to take this seat she must first take up the outstretched hand. Ultimately, in her own deep slumber Ellen's sophisticated formality vanishes. Rendered childlike by sleep she draws ever closer to Peter revealing a primal state of innocence in which human contact is spontaneous.

For both Twain and Capra, in much of their work, it is destruction which becomes linked with the sense of wholeness and fertility. Through destruction the Mississippi reveals the newness of creation:

> One who knows the Mississippi will promptly aver... that ten thousand River Commissions, with the minds of the world at their back, cannot tame that lawless stream, cannot curb it or confine it, cannot ...make it obey; cannot save a shore which it has sentenced; cannot bar its path with an obstruction which it will not tear down, dance over, and laugh at.[10]

> A cutoff plays havoc with boundary lines and jurisdictions: for instance, a man is living in the State of Mississippi today, a cutoff occurs tonight, and tomorrow the man finds himself and his land over on the other side of the river....Such a thing, happening in the upper river in the old times, could have transferred a slave from Missouri to Illinois and made a free man of him.[11]

In "The Diary of Adam and Eve" (1893, 1905) Twain rebels against the ideal of the eternal and complete, the paradise of no further desire, a closed universe of permanent, unalterable order. Here, the

---

[10] Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi, (New York: The New American Library, 1961) pp.172-173.

[11] Ibid., pp.14-15.

biblical conception of Eve as temptress is pitted against Twain's more flattering, pagan image of Eve as creative earth-mother whose continuously expansive and generative forces recognize no borders, no unalterable conventions.

In true pioneer spirit Eve adventurously seeks new territory, brushing aside encasing, traditional rules. Death itself becomes, not the formidable, frightening barrier, but simply an expansion of natural, creative processes:

> She says the snake advises her to try the fruit of that tree, and says the result will be a great and fine and noble education. I told her there would be another result, too - it would introduce death into the world. That was a mistake....it only gave her an idea - she could save the sick buzzard, and furnish fresh meat to the despondent lions and tigers. I advised her to keep away from the tree. She said she wouldn't. (p.275)

For Eve, the status of humanity is not to be regarded as static, secure or limited. Man's existence, in her eyes, is a continuous experiment:

> I feel like an experiment, I feel exactly like an experiment; it would be impossible for a person to feel more like an experiment than I do....
> Then if I am an experiment, am I the whole of it? No, I think not; I think the rest of it is part of it....Is my position assured, or do I have to watch it and take care of it? The latter, perhaps. Some instinct tells me that eternal vigilance is the price of supremacy. (p.281)

Life becomes, for her, a constant, wondrous creation, a constant discovery:

> She is all interest, eagerness, vivacity, the world is to her a charm, a wonder, a mystery, a joy; she can't speak for delight when she finds a new flower....

> If there is anything on the planet that she is not interested in it is not on my list....She has no discrimination, she takes to all..., she thinks they are all treasures, every new one is welcome.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Nothing ever satisfies her but demonstration, untested theories are not in her line, and she won't have them. It is the right spirit, I concede it; it attracts me; I feel the influence of it.... (pp.288-290)

Significantly, there is in Eve an awareness of the deadness which gradually overcomes man's existence as his perception becomes tied to an established, rational framework of rigid laws and certainties:

> If there wasn't anything to find out, it would be dull. Even trying to find out and not finding out is just as interesting as trying to find out and finding out, and I don't know but more so. The secret of the water was a treasure until I got it; then the excitement all went away, and I recognized a sense of loss.
>
> ...Such things make me sad; because by and by when I have found out everything there won't be any more excitements, and I do love excitements so! (p.291)

Far from being tragic, Adam's departure from the traditional paradise marks in man a new, playful adaptability and openness to experience. It represents Adam's escape from his own binding dependence upon the permanence of rules and possessions:

> Eve had eaten that fruit, and death was come into the world....I was obliged to eat them....It was against my principles, but I find that principles have no real force except when one is well fed.... after this we...collected some skins, and I made her patch together a couple of suits proper for public occasions. They are uncomfortable, it is true, but stylish, and that is the main point about clothes.... I find she is a good deal of a companion. I see I should be lonesome and depressed without her, now

> that I have lost my property. Another thing, she says it is ordered that we work for our living hereafter. She will be useful. I will superintend. (p.276)

It is at this point that Adam's love is free to expand beyond the artificial limitations of static perimeters: "Adam: Wheresoever she was, there was Eden." (p.294). And it is particularly significant that it is the law-breaking quality of humour which brings about the truly fruitful relationships in human existence. Adam's joking destruction of traditional laws and perspectives is dangerous, forbidden, yet wonderfully fruitful:

> I was thinking about the Falls, and I said to myself, 'How wonderful it is to see that vast body of water tumble down there!' Then in an instant a bright thought flashed into my head, and I let it fly, saying, 'It would be a deal more wonderful to see it tumble up there!' - and I was just about to kill myself with laughing at it when all nature broke loose in war and death and I had to flee for my life. 'There,' she said, with triumph, 'that is just it; the Serpent mentioned that very jest, and called it the First Chestnut, and said it was coeval with the creation.' (p.277)

Similarly, in "Was It Heaven? Or Hell?" (1902) Twain juxtaposes man's innate, instinctive love with an artificial abstraction. In contrast to a mother's maternal instinct ("lay your head upon my breast, and be at peace. If you had told a thousand lies-") (p.475), there is the two aunts' determination to live by an "ironbound", moral code, remote from primitive feeling:

> In [the house]...a lie had no place. In it a lie was unthinkable. In it speech was restricted to absolute truth, iron-bound truth, implacable and

> uncompromising truth, let the resulting consequences be what they might. (pp.472-473)

In this story, through the doctor, Twain urges abandonment of theoretical rules suggesting that it is only by risk of self and soul in the uncertain world of temptation that the cause of "goodness" can advance:

> 'Reform! Drop this mean and sordid and selfish devotion to the saving of your shabby little souls ....Risk your souls! risk them in good causes; then if you lose them, why should you care? Reform!' (p.478)

Throughout his work, Twain directs his tale to the spirit of youth in all men, that part in man not tied to pre-established convention. Appropriately, much of his work is in praise of animals, children, and the drunk or lowly creatures whose knowledge is based on an immediate irrational perception of experience. In "Some Learned Fables for Good Old Boys and Girls" (1875) - it is the humble Tumble-Bug that humorously ridicules the sober, sophisticated scientists who artificially impose conventional laws of organization upon fresh, unruly experience:

> 'Fellow scholars, this stately Mound is not a sepulcher, it is a monument!'
> A profound impression was produced by this but it was interrupted by rude and derisive laughter - and the Tumble-Bug appeared.
> 'A monument!' quoth he. 'A monument set up by a Mound Builder! Aye, so it is! So it is, indeed, to the shrewd keen eye of science; but to an ignorant poor devil who has never seen a college, it is not a Monument, strictly speaking, but is yet a most rich and noble property; and with your worship's good permission I will proceed to manufacture it into spheres of exceedings [sic] grace and -' (p.120)

In "A Dog's Tale" (1903) the "dogmatic" formality of language becomes society's comfortable preservation from the thrust of fresh experience. Twain depicts a situation in which both speaker and listener lose sight of meaning as they grow increasingly enslaved to hypnotic, empty form:

> whenever...there was a dogmatic gathering in the neighbourhood...She had one word which she always kept on hand...like a life-preserver, a kind of emergency word to strap on when she was likely to get washed overboard in a sudden way - that was the word Synonymous. When she happened to fetch out a long word...and...a stranger...hail[ed] and ask[ed] her to cash in...she would say, as calm as a summer's day, 'It's synonymous with supererogation.'...and go placidly about and skim away on the next tack, perfectly comfortable, you know, and leave that stranger looking profane and embarrassed, and the initiated slatting the floor with their tails in unison and their faces transfigured with a holy joy. (p.490)

For the lowly bitch, however, this weakness is limited only to a "vain" and "frivolous" game with words. Essentially she displays her ultimate freedom from static tradition and unforgiving memory. Open to the freshness of experience she responds with constructive, primitive, and non-rationalizing courage:

> She had a kind heart and gentle ways, and never harbored resentments for injuries done her, but put them easily out of her mind and forgot them;...and from her we learned also to be brave and prompt in time of danger, and not to run away but face the peril that threatened friend or stranger, and help him the best we could without stopping to think what the cost might be to us. And she taught us not by words only, but by example, and that is the best way and the surest and the most lasting. (p.490)

In contrast to the scientists, confined to their predetermined theories, the bitch has primitive access to the living moment and the freshness of wonder:

> Then they discussed optics....next they discussed plants, and that interested me, because in the summer Sadie and I had planted seeds...and after days and days a little shrub or a flower came up there, and it was a wonder how that could happen.... and I wished I could talk - I would have told those people about it and shown them how much I knew, and been all alive with the subject; but I didn't care for the optics; it was dull.... (p.496)

It is the rational scientists who, in the security of their theories, are numbed to awareness of the living phenomena:

> They discussed and experimented, and then suddenly the puppy shrieked....
> 'There, I've won - confess it! He's as blind as a bat!'
> And they all said:
> 'It's so - you've proved your theory, and suffering humanity owes you a great debt....'
> But I hardly saw or heard these things, for I ran at once to my little darling, and snuggled close to it...and I knew in my heart it was a comfort to it in its pain and trouble to feel its mother's touch.... (p.496)

As a loss of waking consciousness is shown to draw man closer to a basic sense of unity, so too, throughout Capra's film it is the sense of destruction of conventional security that elicits in the characters a reawakened, primal awareness of the environment. For Capra, like Twain, true progress is tied to the process of change and upset. It is with the sudden <u>forward progression</u> of the bus that Ellen first loses her balanced poise. Thrust into Peter's lap by the motion,

Ellen is significantly greeted with humorous reference to a sense of wholeness, to basic family harmony and the hospitality of the American homestead:

> Peter: [He gets out tobacco for a leisurely smoke, while Ellen sits stiffly forward on her seat.] If you asked me real, ah, nice, I might put that bag up there for you. [Ellen glares at him, then stands up to do it herself. There is a shot of the bus in the station, being waved ahead; then a shot of Ellen falling into Peter's lap.] Next time you drop in, bring your folks.

In the destruction of the established route - the washing-out of the bridge - there is once more the sense of primitive forces overriding the established and mechanically familiar. Whereas earlier, Ellen spent the day dining in isolation and escaping the rain she is now drawn into closer contact with natural elements and the primal need for shelter, warmth, and companionship:

> Peter: What'd you do all day?
> Ellen: Run in and out of doorways, trying to keep out of the rain.

As she stands outside the incapacitated bus, crouched beneath Peter's coat, the warm puffs of Ellen's breath in the rain emphasize a new, primitive, and vital openness to her environment.

Throughout the famous "walls of Jericho" scene it is out of a sense of flux and disintegration that there is generated a sense of reintegration and wholeness. In Ellen and Peter's exposure to the fluctuating elements the formally established barrier of the blanket is shown to become increasingly fragile. As artificial light is

extinguished, Peter's lifted window shade introduces the shimmering, moving light of rain by which Ellen's own body outline against the blanket becomes yet more fully delineated. Peter, significantly, identifies himself with the tremulous movement of natural renewal:

> Ellen: Who are you?
> Peter: Me? I'm the whip-poor-will who cries in the night. I'm the soft morning breeze that caresses your lovely face.

Appropriately at this point, from the alternating separate shots of Peter and Ellen the camera draws back to reveal the totality. The formidable barrier of the blanket which, in the alternating shots covers approximately one-half the screen is suddenly reduced; Ellen and Peter look toward one another separated by a mere, vertical line.[12]

---

[12] Juxtaposed with this scene of increasing spontaneous integration is the shot of Ellen's father, listening to the latest radio communication. Appropriately he is depicted next to an airplane window, overlooking earth through a haze of clouds; thus, a fitting expression of the remoteness of this mechanical attempt to communicate:

> Andrews' Companion: [Reading the message] no sign of your daughter yet. We'll continue to do everything possible.
> Andrews: Just the same as all the others. [Andrews presses a button and there is a shot of the controls]
> Pilot: Yes sir.
> Andrews: I thought I'd better tell you I was in a hurry to get to New York.

His airplane becomes, in the following shot, simply a meaningless buzz through which Ellen sleeps. Outside Ellen's own window, in contrast, the main sounds and images are of raking and sweeping - of men in touch with the earth. Significantly, it is to these sounds of primal, physical contact that Ellen finally awakens.

In donning Peter's pyjamas and robe Ellen portrays an increasing sense of primal harmony. The formal separation of clothes melt away; she becomes less isolated, not only from Peter, but from the many travellers outside likewise dressed in their bath robes. In gaining a sense of communal responsibility (she is angrily told off by a woman bather when she ignores the line-up) Ellen significantly adopts more and more the uninhibited nature of a child; mischievously she sticks out her tongue in immediate response to a young girl's similar gesture. The new toothbrush, the freshly pressed dress, the shower, her childlike, waking motions in bed, Pter's amusement with her small size and the uncombed state of her hair - all emphasize this rebirth into primitive, natural awareness:

> Peter: You're kinda little aren't ya...
> Ellen: Where's the shower?
> Peter: ...Your hair's cute like that. You should never comb it.

Capra portrays in Ellen a sense of wholeness which arises paradoxically out of her consciousness of impermanence, out of her increasing loss of security. It is out of danger - the fear of discovery by her father's agents - that Ellen breaks beyond established conceptions of self to enact the role of plumber's daughter. The excited hysteria of the performance indicates a personal involvement in the role which reaches far beyond simple caricature:

Peter: I don't care if it's the whole police department. They can't come bustin' in here, askin' questions to my wife.
Ellen: ...don't get too excited....the man just asked you a simple question.
Peter: Ah, is that so? Say how many times have I told you to stop buttin' in when I'm havin' an argument?
Ellen: Well you don't hafta lose your temper.
Peter: [He imitates rudely] You don't hafta lose your temper. That's what you said the other time. Everytime I try to protect ya. The other night at the Elks' dance, when that big Swede made a pass at ya.
Ellen: He didn't make a pass at me. I told ya a million times....

Peter: Ah, nuts. You're just like your old man. Once a plumber's daughter, always a plumber's daughter. [Ellen cries] Ah shut up.

[Later] Peter: [Ellen cries louder] Quit bawlin'. Quit bawlin'.

Out of improvisation new potential is discovered, initiating a progressive expansion into new modes of being:

Peter: We'll play the small town auditoriums....
Ellen: What about Cinderella...?

The works of both Twain and Capra frequently celebrate a fairy-tale world of irrational transformation - a realm free from the mundane laws of statistical averages. In "Luck" (1891) a simple, unpretentious blunderer becomes honoured as one of the "conspicuously illustrious English military names of this generation" (p.249):

He is just as good and sweet and loveable and unpretending as a man can be, but he doesn't know enough to come in when it rains....He is the supremest ass in the universe....he has littered his whole

> military life with blunders, and yet has never committed one that didn't make him a knight or a baronet or a lord or something. (pp.252-253)

In "The £1,000,000 Bank Note" (1893) a "ragged", "seedy and hungry" (p.315) youth is suddenly offered loan of a "million-pound bank-note" (p.316). To this impoverished gentleman comes the magical combination of love and wealth; as the lender ultimately is revealed as his sweetheart's father:

> My Portia's papa took that friendly and hospitable bill back to the Bank of England and cashed it; then the Bank of England canceled it and made him a present of it, and he gave it to us at our wedding, and it has always hung in its frame in the sacredest place in our home ever since. For it gave me my Portia. (p.332)

"Cecil Rhodes and the Shark" (1897) again presents a fantasy of improbable luck in which a newspaper in the belly of a shark brings to a penniless young man two hundred thousand pounds on the stock market. And, in "The Joke That Made Ed's Fortune" (1897) a youthful prank upon a trusting fool (The idea was, that one of the conspirators should offer Ed a letter of introduction to Commodore Vanderbilt, and trick him into delivering it.) (p.338) - brings to the youth "supreme command" of a "huge tobacco commerce" (p.340).

> They hardly uttered a whisper...but sat like petrifications and drank in the immortal romance. At last the tale was ended, and Ed said:
> "...And Charley Fairchild, you shall be my first assistant and right hand, because of your first class ability, and because you got me the letter, and for your father's sake who wrote it for me,

and to please Mr. Vanderbilt, who said it would!'[13] (p.342)

Much in the spirit of Twain, Capra depicts in Ellen a childlike delight in irrational transition. Ellen comes to rejoice in a realm of flux in which the rich financier's daughter may be transformed into the plumber's daughter and the cinder girl may become a princess.

Understandably, it is this fairy-tale atmosphere of "Capracorn" which several critics have found morally disatisfying in its conservatism and naivety.

It would be an injustice, however, to reduce the spirit of It Happened One Night to simply an acknowledgement of Capra's basic satisfaction with capitalism and its inherent inequalities. More importantly, it would miss the major thematic thrust of the film. In early apolitical work such as It Happened One Night the fantastic quality of the characters' expanding imaginations avoids the politically complacent solutions for which his later films are criticized.[14] The moving story

---

[13] In contrasting tone, in "A Dying Man's Confession" (1883) - a group of gentlemen are presented with the tempting windfall of another man's treasure, reputedly hidden in the town of Napoleon. This dishonest source of wealth, however, is utterly devastated by the capricious whim of the river:

'Why, hang it, don't you know? There isn't any Napoleon any more. Hasn't been for years. The Arkansas River burst through it, tore it all to rags, and emptied it into the Mississippi!' (p.238)

of the hungry mother and son in search of a more secure existence is scarcely glamorized by Ellen's financial contribution:

> Boy: I ain't ate nothin' since yesterday....
> Peter: What happened to your money?
> Boy: Ma spent it all on a ticket. We didn't know it was gonna be so much....he told us there was a job waitin' for her in New York. If we didn't go, she might lose it.

---

[14] A criticism of this nature is levelled against Frank Capra by Richard Griffith in the prologue to New Index Series No. 3, ed. Gavin Lambert (London: British Film Institute, n.d.):

> Many of America's most popular writers have never merged with the nation's intellectual groups. Coming to the city from farms and small towns, they have retained the values and viewpoint of the middle-class. ...It was in their eyes an epoch in invention, of 'healthy competition', of progress, of humanitarian reform. Above all it was thought of as an era of good feeling in which the 'classes' were hardly conscious of their identities. ...Such was the fantasy of goodwill created by middle-class writers and principally enunciated in The Saturday Evening Post, a magazine patently devoted to the interest of big business. The principle...on the screen, found its natural exponent in Frank Capra.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Wealth to Mr. Deeds ...is something to share, and after his disillusionment with his slick advisors, he uses it to give homeless farmers and labourers a chance to set up for themselves.... the Broadwayites are eventually moved by him...And since they are really men of goodwill at heart, they end by applauding....
>
> The thesis of this sentimental comedy was welcomed by huge sections of the American public. What need for the social reorganization proposed by the New Deal if prosperity and peace could be recovered by the redemption of the individual? This idea, absolving the middle-classes from realistic thinking about the forces which governed their lives has proved perennially popular. The stalemate implicit in it is indicated by Capra's subsequent work, all of which continues to exemplify the fantasy of goodwill.

Despite Ellen's actual wealth, Peter's suggestion that Ellen's generosity has left her, at least for the moment, without financial means, presents to the audience a reminder of an unsolved, American, social problem.

At this point in Capra's career, what marks true progress is a primal spontaneity that continually rejects and outreaches the bounds of static, pre-established rules of society. Interestingly, Capra's description of the making of the film reads much like this actual theme. Claudette Colbert he describes as a stubborn torrent of "tantrums - motivated by her antipathy towards me"[15]; and Clark Gable he depicts as highly conscious of his established status as a star, resentful of having been sent in "exile" from MGM to work temporarily in the "Siberia" of Columbia Pictures.[16] Capra claims however, that as the stars gradually relinquished concerns of established prestige they became so much at ease, that in the shooting of the bus scene they spontaneously joined in the song, becoming part of a joyous scene of unrehearsed antics.[17]

---

[15] Frank Capra, The Name Above the Title, (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p.186.

[16] Ibid., p.184.

[17] Capra gives this description in his book, The Name Above The Title, pp.188-189:

> As an example of our slap-happy ad-libbing I should mention the song 'The Daring Young Man on The Flying Trapeze'. ...In taking a close-up of the two hillbillies rehearsing, I noticed adjacent passengers spontaneously joined in the singing. It gave me a hint. Ordering several more cameras, I

Oh this maid that I loved, she was handsome,
And I tried all I knew, her to please,
But I never could please her one quarter so well
As the man on the flying trapeze.

Appropriately, in applauding the song of the "daring young man" the driver sends the entire bus load off the rigid, established road into the mud, "ten miles" from the usual mechanized systems of communication:

Peter: [Approaching the driver who is bent over the stuck wheel] You better phone for some help.
Driver: You can phone if you want, the nearest town is ten miles from here.

Once more Ellen is knocked off balance but unlike her early discomfiture at losing poise (as she falls into Peter's lap) Ellen now reveals herself utterly at ease in a state of change: "Thank the man for me, Peter. This is the first comfortable position I've been in all night."

---

covered all the passengers simultaneously with long, medium, and close shots (to get one "master sound track for all camera angles") and told the people 'No rehearsals. Just join in the singing in any way and at any time you feel like it.'

Truculent Gable and 'brat' Colbert sat next to each other, but intense mutual dislike still kept them poles apart....

One by one the passengers shed their inhibitions and became nutty showoffs. They sang, danced, made up their own verses....Gable lost his truculence - he joined in the singing. The 'brat' dropped her brattiness - she joined in the fun. I sat in my chair watching that busload of strangers shed more than their taboos....They were children again....

Significantly, preceding the lively spontaneity of the bus scene is Mr. Andrews' plea for results within the limited, established systems of modern, automated communication:

> Andrews: I want action...action!
> Detective: We can't do the impossible....
> [later]
> Andrews:...Brown, I want to make arrangements for a radio broadcast, right away. Coast-to-coast hook-up. Offer a reward for ten thousand dollars for any information leading to the whereabouts.... send the story to all the newspapers. Tell them the out-of-towns may not have a picture of her. Here, wire this to them. [he removes Ellen's photograph from the frame on his desk]

There seems heightened poignance in his cry for "action" as he hands over Ellen's static photograph to be mass-produced, automatically, throughout the nation. This plea is ironically juxtaposed in the next shot with the stilted result: the static, rigidly framed newspaper photo over which is bent the head of Shapely (shown in remote isolation from his singing fellow-travellers).

In contrast to Shapely's inhuman detachment are shots which depict a freely innovative and expanding form of communication. The musicians' initial love-song is followed by the presentation of "The Daring Young Man" in which, out of a variety of new singers, each adds to the song his own original, interpretive verse. A medium close shot of Ellen and Peter in smiling harmony with one another is followed by shots of the singing couple which include, in the frames, the surrounding array of other singing travellers. The sense of growing

organic unity is dramatically juxtaposed with the self-segregated Shapely, who, as he furtively peers at Ellen, is framed within the lowered brim of his hat and the rigid back of the seat. In this series of shots a vivid dichotomy is established between Ellen and Peter's new sense of wholeness (an expansive source of vitality to more and more) and a deadly, mechanical system of communication which artificially contracts human life into rigid, manipulable enclosures:

> Shapely [Touching Peter's arm]: Say, Buster, like to have a look at my paper? Travelling like this you kinda lose track of what's goin' on in the world. [There is a close-up shot of the front-page story, then a shot of Shapely stroking his chin] If I was to see that dame, you know what I'd do?
> Peter: No.
> Shapely: I'd go fifty-fifty with you.
> Peter: Why?
> Shapely: Because I don't believe in hoggin' it, see? A bird that figures that way always ends up behind the eight ball. That's what I always say.[18]

---

[18] It is appropriate irony that Shapely, who reduces people to manipulable stereotypes, is himself, manipulated and terrified by the slick clichés of the gangster film genre:

> Shapely: When your talkin' to old man Shapely you're talkin' to....
> Peter: You got a gat?
> Shapely: What?
> Peter: A gat, a gat. A rod. Any fireworks on ya?
> Shapely: [Taken back] No.
> Peter: That's all right. I can get an old machine gun....I'll have a talk with the killer....
> Shapely: [Frightened] Killer?
> Peter: Yeah, the big boy, the boss of the outfit.
> Shapely: You're not kiddin' or nothin'

Capra portrays, in Ellen and Peter, a fundamental and universal love which emanates from them and threatens to break apart the pre-established formalities of the social world about them. Through them, the motel owner is urged to act not on artificial business terms but on an underlying intuitive faith in his fellow human kind:

> Proprietor's wife: There you go, trusting people again. How many times did I tell you...?
> Proprietor: But he looked like a nice, upright young fellow, Ma.

Similarly, the man at the gas pump is induced by Peter to give up, temporarily, the practice of demanding abstract money, in exchange for a barter based on common needs:

> Peter: Look, all I'm askin' is enough to get me to New York. That battery's worth twenty-five dollars.
> Attendant: Yeah, but....
> Peter: Whatdya say?
> Attendant: I ain't got a hat.
> Peter: What?

> are ya?
> Peter: What else, stupid? You don't think we're after that reward....We're holdin' that dame for a million smackers.

Shapely reveals at this point, a very different self from the exterior, mechanical mask he usually assumes:

> Shapely: Say, I didn't know it was anything like this. [about to leave]
> Peter: [Roughly grabbing Shapely] What's a matter? Ya gettin' yella?
> Shapely: I'm a married man. I got a coupla kids....

For the time being, he too, is driven from his artificial pose in the commercial world. Running into the wilderness, he is shown losing his balance and falling into the natural vegetation of the earth.

Attendant: I ain't got a hat.
Peter: Well, ya got one now. Come on. Fill her up.

Under the influence of love, the distanced telephone conversation which introduces Peter in the opening of the film, gives way to face to face contact, as Peter begs the editor to forget his business position:

Peter: All I want is a thousand bucks.
Editor: A thousand....get outa here.
Peter: This is something you gotta do for me. I need it....
Editor: What's the thousand bucks for?
Peter: To tear down the walls of Jericho.... Stop being an editor for a moment.
Editor: Let me see that for a moment. [taking manuscript from Peter]

Although, after news of Ellen's return to Wesley, the editor frantically halts the printing of Peter's story, he, nevertheless, stops to muse over Peter's account. His decision to read the manuscript is depicted, significantly, as a retrieval of something thrown away; he reaches into the garbage can to retrieve not only the paper, but also his humanity.

In their escape from Shapely, the highly romantic setting into which Ellen and Peter move (through the woods and across a moonlit stream) represents, as in the motel scene, a movement into a world of collective and primal awareness. Ellen, at this point, returns in memory to her childhood, to a recovery of a sense of unity with her father:

Ellen: You know, this is the first time in years I've been piggybacked.

Peter: This isn't piggyback.
Ellen: Of course it is.
Peter: You're crazy.
Ellen: I remember distinctly my father taking me for a piggyback ride.

It is this primal consciousness which becomes linked with the real progress of America. For Peter the greatness of America's leaders lies in their refusal to become rigidified into sophisticated convention, in their ability to remain ever in touch with a sense of the daring playfulness of earliest youth: "Now you take Abraham Lincoln, for instance - a natural-born piggybacker. Where do you get off with that stuffed-shirt family of yours?" In Peter's eyes it is the inflexible attachment to a status of security and money which destroys this greatness: "I bet there isn't a good piggyback rider in your whole family. I've never known a rich man, yet, who could piggyback ride. You show me a good piggybacker and I'll show you a real human." The glittering water across which Ellen and Peter travel (like the shimmering rain outside the cabin) emphasizes the couple's heightening affinity with the primal realm of flux.

Through Peter, Ellen is immersed into a collective realm in which are the roots not only of herself but of her forbears. In a farm field beside the couple as they rest lie two old wagon wheels. These wheels, in their circularity and their age-old capacity as instruments of travel, suggest at once a sense of unity and an

image of timeless progression. They become a symbol of Ellen and Peter's new strength to move forward through their renewed harmony with the past.

Capra seems to suggest in this film that love, if it is to remain whole, must stand ever open to change. Throughout the film, it is a perpetual process of destruction and re-creation by which the sense of unity is achieved. Thus, as Ellen becomes increasingly attuned to her changing environment, it is Peter who is roused from his sense of masculine contentment. Peter's confidence in his rigidly-defined systems is utterly devastated by Ellen's unconventional but successful mode of hitch-hiking:

> Ellen: Suppose nobody stops for us.
> Peter: They'll stop alright. It's all a matter of knowing how to handle 'em.
> Ellen: You're an expert, I suppose.
> Peter: Expert, I'm goin' to write a book about it....
> Ellen: There's no end to your accomplishments is there?
> Peter: It's all a matter how you do it...now if you take number one, here. That's a short, jerky movement like this. That shows independence....
> [later, after Ellen stops a driver by showing off her leg]
> Ellen: Well, I've proved once and for all that the limb is mightier than the thumb.
> Peter: [Angrily] Why don't you take off all your clothes? You could stop forty cars.

Again, despite Ellen and Peter's movement toward the perfect romance, Ellen is shown to become once more enmeshed in conventional, static cynicism: "Well, I

guess that was his only interest in me - the reward." Once more Ellen is portrayed in terms of enclosed, circular images that recall the confinement of the opening scenes. Again Ellen becomes trapped within a mechanized system from which she must escape. Ellen and Wesley are depicted by the newspapers as isolated, circular photographs separated by a sensational reference to the autogyro: "GROOM TO LAND IN AUTOGYRO." Ellen's toast as she stands inside a circle of celebrants is appropriately in keeping with her new sense of static circularity: "Here's to the merry-go-round." Significantly, this whole retreat into mindless security is met by the father's uneasy awareness of his daughter's continuous need for expansion:

> Ellen: I've got to settle down. It doesn't matter how, or where or with whom..
> Andrews: You've changed, Ellie.[19]

The necessity for a constant renewal of man's perceptual world as it becomes artificially rationalized and remote from primitive experience is likewise expressed in "The Diary of Adam and Eve" (1893, 1905):

---

[19] This image of static, rigid enclosure is further emphasized by the shot of Peter, who, upon leaving Mr. Andrews' office not only remains emphatically outside the circle but, in contrast to its aimless circularity, moves in a direct, forward line of progression.

Wesley, in contrast, much to Andrews' fury, is so out of touch with his instincts that he scarcely is able to progress through a door, without doddering back and forth, waiting for another man to take the initiative.

"The secret of the water was a treasure until I got it; then the excitement all went away, and I recognized a sense of loss." (p.291)

Through Eve Twain suggests that the lost beauty of original perception is utterly revitalized through a courageous re-creation from the roots of imaginative inspiration:

> I know that the stars are not going to last...That sorrow will come - I know it. I mean to sit up every night and look at them as long as I can keep awake; and I will impress those sparkling fields on my memory, so that by and by when they are taken away I can by my fancy restore those lovely myriads to the black sky and make them sparkle again, and double them by the blur of my tears. (p.292)

Again in "The Californian's Tale" (1893) there is an image of the loss of youthful fertility which incorporates a kind of Persephone myth: the call for a constant imaginative renewal, a kind of spiritual return to the source of inspiration:

> 'She went to see her folks half a year after she was married, and on her way back, on a Saturday evening, the Indians captured her within five miles of this place, and she's never been heard of since.'
>
> 'And he lost his mind in consequence?'
>
> 'Never has been sane an hour since. But he only gets bad when that time of the year comes round. Then we begin to drop in here, three days before she's due, to encourage him up, and ask if he's heard from her, and Saturday we all come and fix up the house with flowers, and get everything ready for a dance. We've done it every year for nineteen years. The first Saturday there was twenty-seven of us, without counting the girls; there's only three of us now, and the girls are all gone. (p.272)

Despite Twain and Capra's similar recognition of the need for constant advancement and renewal there is a radical difference in the viewpoint of Capra in It Happened One Night and that of Twain in his "The Diary of Adam and Eve" and "The Californian's Tale". Whereas Capra's sense of renewal is founded within the "realistic", social milieu of the objective world; the lost stars in "The Diary of Adam and Eve" and the dead wife in "The Californian's Tale" are renewed only in imaginative form, through the inspiration of the individual, isolated from the physical world.

This gradual retreat into an enclosed realm of fantasy seems in many ways an outgrowth of Twain's increasing distrustfulness of crowds. In "A Horse's Tale (1906) religion - particularly Roman Catholicism with its emphasis on the masses, its call for man to renounce his personal will in a selfless participation in communal wholeness - becomes utterly diabolic. Such religion, in Twain's view, is a source of human regression, offering to man a body of conventions which overcome and constrict the goodness of individual inspiration and self-will:

> 'To me, Sage-Brush, man is most strange and unaccountable. Why should he treat dumb animals that way when they are not doing any harm?'
> 'Man is not always like that, Mongrel; he is kind enough when he is not excited by religion.'

'Is the bull-fight a religious service?'
'I think so. I have heard so. It is held on Sunday.' (p.556)

The bull-fight, in this story, represents a perverted religious communion in which the primitive and self-willed - the child, the horse, and the bull - are ravenously devoured by the uncontrollable masses:

'Sometimes a bull is timid....Then everybody despises him for his cowardice and wants him punished and made ridiculous; so they hough him from behind, and it is the funniest thing in the world to see him hobbling around on his severed legs; the whole vast house goes into hurricanes of laughter over it....When he has furnished all the sport he can, he is not any longer useful, and is killed.'
'Well, it is perfectly grand, Antonio, perfectly beautiful. Burning a nigger don't begin.' (p.555)[20]

---

[20] It is the child's assertion of individual, spontaneous love against the mob-tradition that becomes, for Twain, the true American symbol:

the bull had ripped him open and his bowels were dragging upon the ground and the bull was charging his swarm of pests again. Then came pealing through the air a bugle-call that froze my blood - "It is I, Soldier - come!'....Cathy was flying down through the massed people; she cleared the parapet at a bound, and sped towards that riderless horse, who staggered forward towards the remembered sound.... (p.561)

Her very speech becomes an image of the American west, expressive of a physical and psychological spaciousness in which each man stands, once again, an individual apart; a separate human will, free from the mechanized mob:

She was never conscious again in life...But she was happy, for she was far away under another sky, and comrading again with her Rangers, and her animal friends, and the soldiers. Their names fell softly and caressingly from her lips, one by one, with pauses between....Sometimes she smiled, saying nothing; sometimes she smiled when she uttered a name - such as Shekels, or BB, or Potter. (p.561)

In contrast, Capra in his early work suggests both his absorption of American Protestantism and his heritage of European Catholicism. Ellen's wedding ceremony, for example, portrays both Capra's faith in personal inspiration and his general optimism in society.

In her flight from the ceremony Ellen is shown to break open the pattern of static, circular images which dominate the populace.[21] In contrast to an attendant newsreel photographer - as he turns his camera circularly upon the scene - Ellen conveys once more the film's thematic, left-to-right sense of progression. Her veil streams outward like an arrow as she runs from the ceremony. No longer is Ellen part of the cameraman's limited circle. More importantly, she dramatically changes the course of the nation's eye. Now it is Ellen who directs the movement of the camera as she pushes outward beyond neat definitions into an unknown future.

---

[21] As Ellen approaches the altar, the cross in the foreground becomes centred solely on the face of the bride; thus emphasizing the highly personal quality of Ellen's decision to flee. And at the critical moment ("If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, will he now speak...") Ellen's father opens his mouth but movingly refrains from speech, thus making the decision wholly Ellen's.

CHAPTER THREE THE GROWTH OF PESSIMISM IN MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN AND THE SHORT STORIES OF MARK TWAIN

Despite the happy ending of It Happened One Night, the problem of the individual's ability to survive within an automated environment is far from resolved for Frank Capra. No longer in Mr. Deeds Goes to Town do man's physical horizons appear limitless. Major questions arise in this film concerning the power of the individual: can man truly wrestle with the problems of his society, without becoming a helpless victim trapped within the constricting pressures of his physical surroundings? Does man's only chance for freedom lie within the isolation of his own personal imagination?

In the procession of headlines that permeate this film, there is expressed Capra's central thematic concern with the insignificance of modern man within his society. In Capra's depiction of the progress of Babe's story from typewriter to printing press to reader, there is revealed a profound sense of the diminution of individual identity within America's mounting system of commercial enterprise. In her apartment, as Babe types out her news article about Deeds, it is the words, enlarged in close-up, which dominate the screen. The camera, as it pulls back to reveal the human typist

depicts a small, darkened silhouette reclining almost lower than the typewriter at which she works. On the couch beside Babe rests a caricatured drawing of a person - a face reduced to a few stark features, manipulated to suit the needs of the commercial artist. It is a drawing symbolic, not only of what Babe, as a newspaperwoman, had done to Deeds, but of the powerless woman Babe herself has become, caught up in the dictates of her commercial environment: "I can't write, Mabel. I don't know how." In preceding shots, against the close-up image of Babe's article, her hands begin to appear as mere superimposed objects, cut off from the identifiable, human body. Scenes of the printing room depict working men as small, unimportant figures, dwarfed by images of huge machines which spew forth papers far vaster in size than the figures of the men who produce them. Ultimately, the entire visual life of the screen seems generated by an uncontrollable, automatic mechanism of mass production. A screen-sized image of Babe's front-page story is followed by a rapid series of similar front-page close-ups. Out of the city streets, superimposed images of newspapers fly into the foreground, while, from a close-up shot of a laughing man's mouth, there emerges into the foreground yet another front-page story of Deeds' scandal. Here is established the image of a whole society, unable to express itself except in the repetetive clichés of its

commercial environment. Significantly, the clear strains of "For he's a jolly good fellow" which have begun the sequence become, by the end, like the distorted sounds of a run-down, mechanical record player. Pride in the individual has lost its meaning in this world of automation.

In the portrayal of the Semple nephew and his wife there is, again, Capra's biting criticism of a society which has let the power of mass media replace the presence of individual thought and personal communication. The angry words of Mrs. Semple ("A yokel. Nothing but a yokel....") - obviously derived from limited news accounts - are drowned by radio music, the volume of which is increased by a husband who flees human confrontation in thoughtless sleep behind the pages of a newspaper. Appropriately, the couple are depicted, as somewhat less than whole people. The woman, pacing furiously backward and forward, initially appears in a medium close-up as a pair of glamorously clad legs, exclusive of upper body. Similarly, the lounging feet of her husband - propped upon an elegant couch in the foreground - are, at first, the sole features of the husband to share this scene. The individual definitions of his face remain significantly obliterated beneath the pages of a newspaper, a paper that, literally, must be knocked from his grasp by the shouting spouse.

Likewise, in the presentation of Corny Cobb, Capra again portrays the insidious devastation of modern man's self-pride and integrity. Like Twain's William Wheeler, who in "The Story of the Old Ram"[1] becomes woven into lifeless material for commercial consumption, so too, Cobb, during his visit to Mandrake Falls, confides to Deeds that he feels little more than an inanimate object - a somewhat "glorified doormat" - in his limited role as buffer between fellow men:

> Cedar: Mr. Cobb's an ex newspaper man, an associate of the outfit..., a sort of buffer.
> Deeds: Buffer?
> Cobb: [Confidentially leaning towards Deeds] Yeah, a glorified doormat.
> Cedar: You see, rich people need someone to keep the crowds away. The world's full of pests....

As in the short stories of Twain, Capra's picture of modern, mechanized society in this film is characterized by dark images of crucifixion and cannibalism:

> Babe: [After talking to Deeds on the telephone] Mabel, that guy's either the dumbest, stupidest, most imbecilic idiot in the world, or else he's the grandest thing alive. I can't make him out. [She sits down beside a caricatured drawing of a man] I'm crucifying him.
> Mabel: [Still sketching one of her caricatures] People have been crucified before.
> Babe: Why do we have to do it?
> Mabel: You started out to be a successful newspaper woman, didn't you...?

---

[1] Twain, The Complete Short Stories, p.81.

Angrily Cobb points to the brutal destruction which Babe's newspaper has wrought upon Deeds:

> Cobb: [To Babe as she comes to visit Deeds in the "County Hospital"] As swell a guy as ever hit this town and you crucified him for a couple of stinking headlines....

The high-powered "pep talk" of Capra's newspaper editor to his employees strongly recalls the speech of Twain's editor in "Journalism in Tennessee"[2] who similarly depicts fellow humans as "cattle" for market, and events as food for consumption:

> Editor: He's news. Every time he blows his nose, it's news. A corn fed bull like that is hotter than hot coffee....What does he think about? ...Is he going to get married?... Is he smart? Is he dumb? A million angles. Use what little brains you've got, you imbecilic stupes....

Within his office, Capra's editor sits against a double set of Venetian blinds - the rigid, horizontal slats of which suggest the protracted, systematized perspective of the whole newspaper business; and, in particular, the business man's isolation, both from his human staff - who work on the other side of the shaded window behind him - and from the living city that lies beyond the neat divisions of his other shade. Significantly, as Babe announces Deeds' marriage proposal, the uncomprehending editor (presented on the extreme left of the screen) appears dramatically severed from Babe (on the extreme right) by this backdrop of blinds:

---

[2] Ibid., pp.28, 29, 32.

Babe: Last night he proposed to me. [Turning from the editor, who has sat down beside her; she looks towards the city through the shaded window]
Editor: Proposed to you? You mean he asked you to marry him?
Babe: Yes. [miserably]
Editor: Why Babe, that's terrific! 'Cinderella Man Woos Mystery Girl.' [Babe rises and walks away. Between them, as he continues his speech, are the rigid lines of the shades] 'Who Is The Mystery Girl?' [raising his hand as if visualizing the printed page]
Babe: Print one word of that and I'll blow your place up.

Only as the editor painstakingly adopts genuine, human sympathy, does the separating force of this linear background disappear. As the editor senses Babe's sadness the couple draw closer together until, as Babe sits on his knee, their communicating forms powerfully shut out the slatted "blinders" in the background, which have so dominated the editor's previously commercial outlook:

Editor: [Sitting down near Babe] Say, you haven't fallen for that mug, have you? [Babe sits down on his lap and, leaning her head on his shoulder, cries] Well I'll be. Ah, that's tough, Babe His voice much gentler . What are ya gonna do?

The world of writers, likewise, is represented as a continuous system of manipulation and utilization of people as objects. At "Tullio's", the waiter regards the famous poet upon whom he waits, as a fancy poodle:

Waiter: Brookfield's just come in.
Deeds: The poet? [Waiter nods] Where?
Waiter: ...at that big, round table. The one that looks like a poodle.

while the writers, in their turn, regard Deeds as the chance for a "couple of laughs", in a dull monotonous existence:

Brookfield: Well let's invite him over. We might get a couple of laughs. It's kinda dull around here.
Writer: It's always dull around here.

In this modern world of artificial commercial codes it is the town of Mandrake Falls and the simplicity of its hero, Longfellow, which become the source of salvation in Mr. Deeds. In contrast to the news editor - shielded from the outside world of real people by a pair of uniformly rigid blinds - the housekeeper, as she reads Deeds' simple Mother's Day poem, is depicted standing against a bright, white curtained window, through which clearly can be seen the living figures of passing people.

The cynically unimpressed Corny, on the other hand, as he listens to the poem, is presented seated against a darkened background of books, which in their gloom, re-emphasize his existence within the limited, lifeless world of abstraction - a world grown cold to the spontaneity of person-to-person interaction:

Housekeeper: [Enthusiastically] Isn't that beautiful? Isn't it a lovely sentiment?
Corny: [Cynically] Yeah.

Dressed in a wind-breaker, and smoothing his tousled hair, Deeds initially expresses the unsettled individualistic spirit of the American pioneer - a spirit that vividly opposes the restriction, conventional manners, and the formal business attire of the city lawyers. Cedar's self-introduction to Deeds - depicted

by a close-up shot of the formal printed words of a business card - is sharply contrasted with the excited cries of a dog, which announces Deeds' entrance. Directly behind Deeds, as he shakes hands with the visitors, there stands the ornamental likeness of a mountain lion - a creature untamed by the artificial codes of "civilized society".

Longfellow Deeds, like Peter Warne, resembles, at first, those early heroes of Mark Twain who possess the intuitive perceptions of animals and little children. To his New York collegues, Cedar gleefully announces that their prospective client is plainly "as naive as a child". Deeds' very name suggests a simple, empirical response to existence. In contrast to his visitor's obsession with abstract money, Deeds displays (like Capra's Peter and Mr. Andrews, and Twain's Captain Ned and Scotty) a primal joy in immediate sensory pleasures - the taste of "fresh orange layer cake...with that thick stuff on the top", and the playful sounds of the tuba:

> Cedar: [To Deeds as he puts the tuba to his mouth] I have good news for you, sir. Mr. Semple left a large fortune when he died. He left it to you, Mr. Deeds. Deducting the tax, it amounts to something like twenty million dollars. [Cedar leans over the seated Deeds who still rests his mouth on the tuba]
>
> Housekeeper: How about lunch? are the gentlemen going to stay or not?
>
> Deeds: [Enthusiastically] Of course they're going to stay. She's got some fresh, orange layer cake. You know with that thick stuff on the top. Sure, they don't want to go to the hotel. [here Deeds proceeds to play several humorous notes]

Significantly, Deeds explains that the mouthpieces of his tuba are forever falling into the active hands of little children: "Kids keep swipin' 'em all the time. They use 'em for bean shooters." And as the hero boards the departing train from Mandrake Falls, a loving child literally must be pulled from Deeds' shoulders.

In many ways however, there seems a note of pessimism in Capra's presentation of both Mandrake Falls and its hero. The fresh, pioneer spirit that Capra attempts to portray remains somehow superficial. In contrast to images of forward motion which dominate It Happened One Night, the depiction of Mandrake Falls emphasizes repetitive patterns of circularity, and impressions of stasis. The sense of progression, of movement into the future now becomes for Capra a threatening feature.

Unlike Capra's earlier concentration upon the forward motion of Ellen's bus, the depiction of Cobb and the lawyer's arrival at the Mandrake Falls station excludes all signs of moving trains. There is a direct cut from a shot of Cedar in his office to the city men, gathered circularly about the town's "welcome sign".[3] The attendant, himself, seems locked in a circular, repetitive patter, rhythmically picking up packages and

---

[3] Behind the sign and the men there is only the roof of the old-fashioned station, the trees, and the sky.

removing them; comfortably repeating the same phrases; and scarcely aware of the need for a new response:

Corny: [Pointing to station attendant] I spy a native. Let's ask him.

Cedar: [To attendant who is in process of picking up a parcel to take into the station] Good morning.

Attendant: [Continuing into the station with the parcel] Morning, neighbour, morning.

Corny: [Sarcastically] It's an excellent start. At least we've broken the ice.

Cedar: [To attendant who has returned to retrieve another parcel] I say my friend, do you know a fellow, name of Longfellow Deeds?

Attendant: [Lifting parcel] Deeds? Yes, sir. Yes, indeedee. Everyone knows Deeds. [Retreating with parcel into station]

Corny: Must be a game he's playing.

Cedar: [To attendant, who has returned again] We'd like to get in touch with him. It's very important.

Attendant: [Picking up another parcel] Who's that?

Cedar: Deeds. Who do you think I'm talking about?

Attendant: Oh, yes, Deeds. He's very democratic. You won't have any trouble at all. Talks to anybody. [walks away with parcel]

Corny: [To Cedar] The next time that jumping jack comes out, I'll straddle him, while you ask him a question.

Attendant: [Once more returning, he looks at the men blankly, as if he has never seen them before] Morning, neighbour.

Corny: [Grabbing attendant] Remember us? We were the fellows who were here a minute ago.

Attendant: Oh, yes. Yes, indeedee. Never forget a face.

Corny: [Tightly holding attendant, just as he is about to leave with another parcel] We've come all the way from New York to look up a fellow named Deeds. It's very important.

Attendant: You don't have to get rough, neighbour. All ya gotta do is ask.

Corny: Please pretend, for just one fleeting moment, that I'm asking. Where does he reside?

Attendant: Who?

Another Associate of Cedar's: Longfellow Deeds. Where does he live?

> Attendant: Oh, that's what you want. Well why didn't you say so in the first place, instead of beating around the bush? Those other fellows don't know what you're talking about....

This heightened stress upon permanance and repitition is further emphasized in the interior setting of Deeds' home. As the visitors stand at the door, through the glass to the left of the screen can be seen a stately, round, white column, expressive of a changeless classicism. A vase of spring-time daffodils to the right of the screen intimates a sense of renewal; but it is a renewal involving not so much innovative movement into the unknown future, as a safe, unchanging, cyclical rhythm. And appropriately, between pillar and daffodils stands an hour glass - a symbol of time which, in its very design, emphasizes retention of the past: the sand, having run to the bottom, returns to its source as the glass is upturned. Here is the image of the necessity to hold onto, to return to the past; not the paradoxically combined image both of reintegration with the past and of movement into the future, which Capra earlier establishes in his image of wagon wheels (see page 42, Chapter two, of this thesis).

In contrast to It Happened One Night which emphasized the need for expansion, Mr. Deeds, like Twain's last short story, "The Mysterious Stranger" (1916), shows a loss of faith in so called "progress":

> 'You perceive,' he said, 'that you have made continual progress. Cain did murder with a club; the Hebrews did their murders with javelins and swords; ... the Christian has added guns and gunpowder; a few centuries from now he will have so greatly improved the deadly effectiveness of his weapons of slaughter that all men will confess that without Christian civilization war must have remained a poor and trifling thing to the end of time.'
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'It is a remarkable progress....' (p.659)

The citizens of Mandrake Falls express a desire to remain settled firmly, to hold permanent a safe, unchanging mode of existence:

> Cedar: Well, incidentally, we'll have to get started. You'll have to pack.
> Deeds: What for?
> Cedar: You're going to New York with us.
> Housekeeper: When?
> Corny: This afternoon, four o'clock.
> Deeds: I don't think we got any suitcases.
> Housekeeper: We could borrow some from Mrs. Simpson. You know she went to Niagara Falls last year.
> Deeds: I'm kinda nervous. I never been away from Mandrake Falls in my life.

The housekeeper reads to the city visitors one of Deeds' poems, which urges man, "in mid-stream hesitating" not to forge ahead into the unknown future, but to return to the familiar security of mother's arms:

> When there's nowhere to turn, and your heart's filled with doubt,
> Don't stand in midstream hesitating,
> For you know that your mother's heart is crying out
> 'I'm waiting, my boy, I'm waiting'.

News of the inheritance is met by an heir wholly unimpressed, interested mainly in his customary pursuit of playing the tuba, and behind whom can be seen to pass, through the window, a slow moving horse and cart - a

means of conveyance which has remained basically unchanged for several thousand years:

> Cedar: [Leaning over Deeds, who is comfortably seated with his tuba] Perhaps you didn't hear what I said, Mr. Deeds. The whole Semple fortune goes to you. Twenty million dollars.
>
> Deeds: [Tranquilly] Oh yes, I heard you all right. Twenty million dollars. That's quite a lot.
>
> Corny: [Sarcastically] Oh, it'll do in a pinch.
>
> Deeds: Yes indeed. I wonder why he left me all that money? I don't need it. [he resumes playing the tuba]

Significantly, in an age of rapid technological advancement, Deeds is depicted as half-owner of a tallow works.

In contrast to the progressive quality of Ellen Andrew's journey, Longfellow's departure from Mandrake Falls is characterized by images which oppose all sense of progress. In the citizens' farewell celebration for Deeds, the straight line of the railroad, extending from left to right across the screen, becomes dramatically severed at right angles by the huge farewell banner which is carried spectacularly across the tracks by two townsmen. And, as the train moves slowly onwards surrounded by well-wishing townspeople, Capra emphasizes, not so much the excitement of advancement, as a nostalgic longing for the past. The camera, situated at the back of the train behind the waving hero, concentrates audience attention upon the town Deeds leaves behind. Inside the train, Deeds is depicted glumly seated, hand-on-chin, by a window - looking sideways, almost backwards - at the passing landscape. During the journey he is

enclosed by solid emblems of his past home-life. On his lap rests the lunch basket (prepared by a home-town girl). On the remainder of the seat, lodged closely against his body, is the familiar tuba.

Here is expressed, in Deeds, a kind of self-guardedness, which contrasts vividly with Peter Warne's playful, outward extension of his hand onto the bus seat, as he hopefully awaits Ellen's decision to sit down. In contrast to Peter's gregarious drinking bout with reporters in the early scene of It Happened One Night, Longfellow, in his state of isolation and self-preservation, refuses on the train offers of a cigar and drink from his new companions, Cedar and Corny.

Real progress (the sense of "becoming") is pictured in this film as something limited to an idyllic past - a past now rejected by modern society as a "wash-out":

> Babe: Well, there you are - Grant's Tomb. Hope you're not disappointed.
> Deeds: [Removing his hat] It's wonderful.
> Babe: To most people it's an awful let-down.
> Deeds: Uh?
> Babe: I say to most people it's a wash-out.
> Deeds: That depends on what they see.
> Babe: Now what do you see?
> Deeds: I see a small Ohio farm boy becoming a great soldier...and I can see that Ohio boy being inaugurated as president....

In their growing hatred for automated society, both Capra and Twain come to abandon their simple portraits of heroes and heroines in harmony with a changing physical world. The protagonists begin to

appear as especially inspired individuals whose intuitive perceptions make them largely independent of the whole mundane, time-bound, social and physical environment. In Twain's "The Mysterious Stranger", young Theodore Fischer, through his new revelations, becomes supernaturally independent of both time and distance:

> It was wonderful, the mastery Satan had over time and distance....We often went to the most distant parts of the globe with him, and stayed weeks and months, and yet were gone only a fraction of a second, as a rule. You could prove it by the clock. (p.661)

As he recognizes the meaninglessness, the inhumanity, the lack of progress in so-called civilized advances, Twain's youthful hero comes to perceive an ethereal beauty utterly beyond the gross, monotonous world:

> 'The first man was a hypocrite and a coward, qualities which have not yet failed in his line; it is the foundation upon which all civilizations have been built. Drink to their perpetuation! Drink to their augmentation! Drink to -' Then he [Satan] saw by our faces how much we were hurt, and he ... said gently: 'No, we will drink one another's health, and let civilization go.... we will drink [with]...wine which has not visited this world before.'
>
> We obeyed, and reached up and received the new cups as they descended....They were very brilliant and sparkling, and of every tint, and they were never still, but flowed to and fro in rich tides which met and broke and flashed out dainty explosions of enchanting color....But there is nothing to compare the wine with. We drank it, and felt a strange and witching ecstasy as of heaven go stealing through us.... (pp.660-661)

He comes to perceive ultimately, how all physical existence is a "dream", how nothing exists, save his own imaginative power:

> 'Life itself is only a vision, a dream'
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'Nothing exists; all is a dream. God - man - the world - the sun, the moon, the wilderness of stars - a dream; they have no existence. Nothing exists save empty space - and you!'
>
> 'I!'
>
> 'And you are not you - you have no body, no blood, no bones, you are but a thought....' (p.675)

Similarly despite the initially physical nature of Longfellow, Mr. Deeds (like the late work of Twain) recalls an American literary tradition of trancendentalism which seems to have arisen (both consciously and unconsciously) from an early American tradition of Puritan belief in a largely independent, personal inspiration:

> Transcendentalism emerged as a full-fledged movement of New England thought between 1815 and 1836....[It was] At its zenith in the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott - and ... challenge[d]... fresh speculation in Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To Puritanism...it owed...its pervasive moralism. Like all...early pioneers who sought freedom of conscience in a new land, the transcendentalists were disposed...to subordinate the aesthetic, intellectual, and even political and economic aspects of human nature to man's significance as a moral agent.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Its basic premise is that man is the spiritual center of the universe....Without denying outright the existence...of God or...brute matter, it nevertheless rejects them as exclusive principles of interpretation and prefers to explain man and his world...in terms of man himself.[4]

---

[4] Spiller, Thorp, Johnson, Canby and Ludwig, eds., Literary History of the United States, pp.346, 347 and 352.

Deeds' very name suggests not only Capra's vestige of fondness for the man of "deeds" - the man with a simple empirical response to existence - but also Capra's growing interest in the poetic idealist - the "Longfellow". Throughout much of this film, the playing of the tuba - which Deeds describes as the source of his poetic inspiration[5] - becomes a kind of transcendentalist image of the poet's necessary withdrawal from society:

> [A transcendentalist] assumption common to ... [Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne and Melville] is the belief that individual virtue and happiness depend upon self-realization ...[which], in turn, depends upon ... first, the expansive or self-transcending impulse of the self, its desire to embrace the whole world in the experience of a single moment ... and second, the contracting or self-asserting impulse of the individual, his desire to withdraw, to remain unique and separate, and to be responsible only to himself.[6]

During Deeds' initial meeting with Cedar, the conversation of the city visitors scarcely permeates Deeds' intense, personal absorption in his musical inst-

---

[5] The Poet Brookfield: Have you any particular characteristics when you are creating?....
[Later] Deeds: [As he defends himself in court] About my playing the tuba. It seems like a lotta fuss has been made about that....I don't see any harm in it. I play music whenever I want to concentrate.

[6] Spiller, Thorp, Johnson, Canby and Ludwig, eds., Literary History of the United States, p.353.

rument (see page 56 of this chapter). In New York City, when a telephone call from Madame Pomponi interrupts his solitary musical retreat, Deeds responds with a degree of anger and a refusal to communicate:

> Walter: [Entering Deeds' room as Deeds lies on the bed playing the tuba] I beg your pardon sir, ...Madam Pomponi's on the telephone.
> Deeds: Who?
> Walter: She says everything is set for the reception.
> Deeds: [Angrily] What do you mean, coming in here when I'm playing.
> Walter: But she's on the telephone, sir.
> Deeds: Get out. The evil finger's on you. [somewhat more playfully he chases Walter out]

Significantly, after rebuking his valet for interrupting his tuba playing, Deeds demonstrates to his servants the wonder of echoes. This delight in echoes (after Deeds' refusal to be interrupted) emphasizes the importance of creativity which emmanates not so much from man's environment as from man's inner self. In this scene Deeds gives to each individual a sense of wonder in the reverberating beauty of his own echo - a beauty which encompasses the entire being, setting it apart from the pattern of everyday existence. It is particularly noteworthy that Capra chooses to end his episode of echoes not with a harmonious group of echoes, but with particular focus upon an eccentric individual: the butler. After loftily dismissing the other servants, this gentleman listens again to the sound of his own echo and with pride and pleasure leads himself off, his hand comically extended to some figment of his own,

particular and impenetrable imagination:

> Deeds: [Leaning over the bannister, he shouts to his valet] Stop. [He makes an echoing sound] Did you hear that?
> Walter: What, sir? [Deeds repeats the sound] Why that's an echo, sir. [smiling with delight and wonder]
> Deeds: You try it.
> Walter: Me, sir? [Walter likewise makes an echoing sound]
> Deeds: Louder. [Walter repeats the sound more loudly as the butler approaches] You try it. [to the butler]
> Butler: Me, sir? [he too makes an echoing noise as another servant approaches]
> Deeds: Altogether. [they all make a sound] Again. [Deeds gestures with his arm as if conducting an orchestra as they all make their echoes] Let that be a lesson to you. [Deeds goes upstairs The Butler dismisses the others and, all alone, once more makes an echo. Then with pride and pleasure he walks off, holding out his hand]

One might question whether a brilliant film director who has set for himself incredibly high standards in his own field of art, would seriously regard the awful, postcard verse of Deeds as the work of true inspiration. Yet throughout his films, Capra emphasizes that the finest of human structures - whether political or artistic - are meaningless unless they are the expression of simple, genuine feeling. Smith declares in his filibuster in Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, "Rules are worth nothing if there's not common sense and human kindness behind them." Similarly, Deeds remarks to the famous poet, Brookfield, that, although his "poems are swell", his lack of human sympathy has made the poet a truly insignificant individual:

> I think your poems are swell, Mr. Brookfield, but I'm disappointed in you....I guess I found out that all famous people aren't big people.

For Capra, the truth of the universe is available to the most simple of men, provided that they remain open to the forces of their inner imagination:

> Mr. Average Man...was born free, divine, strong.... he is heir to all the bounties of God...with an inner capacity to take him as far as his imagination can dream or envision - providing he is free to dream and envision.[7]

And in his article, "Capra's Comic Sense", Robert Willson points to Deeds' simple love of "poetry and music" as part of that long-standing premise in Capra's work that innocents and fools are possessors of a profound intuition of the world about them:

> His innocents possess an intimacy with inanimate and nonhuman objects which the fallen...will never comprehend. Mr. Deeds understands his tuba, Mr. Smith his homing pigeons.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Deeds...in the midst of the hometown band, playing...his tuba, ...recall[s] the mood of the early Langdon comedies....his love of poetry and music is genuine and all-consuming. He has the unique gift of concentrating all his attention on these activities so completely that to others, more concerned with appearance or getting somewhere on time (in this sequence, the train is...symbolic of hurried modern civilization), he seems mad..[8]

But while adopting more and more a transcendentalist philosophy of individualism, Capra, at the same time, seems to be abandoning his early faith in the society of men at large. The ability to intuit goodness

---

[7] Capra, The Name Above the Title, p.519

[8] Glatzer and Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, pp.85,90.

now fails to seem for Capra a basic universal trait. It appears instead as a rare grace available, almost exclusively to Longfellow Deeds, the isolated citizens of Mandrake Falls, and more or less special characters like Cobb, Babe, the editor and the cynical writer - characters who, despite worldly sophistication still possess a precious intuition of simple virtue: Corny remarks to Deeds after he has thrown out the crooked lawyer for a fictitious common-law wife: "Lamb bites wolf. Beautiful!" Similarly, when Deeds succeeds in knocking out most of Brookfield's circle of writers, the admiring cynical writer exclaims, "The difference between them and me is that I know when I've been a skunk....Oh what a magnificent deflation of splendour!" And again, as Babe talks to Mabel of Deeds "goodness", there is revealed in Babe a sensitivity that appears to be lacking in Mabel:

> Babe: He's got goodness, Mabel, Do you know what that is?
> Mabel: Huh?
> Babe: No, of course you don't....

In contrast to these gifted individuals, a large number of characters in this film are presented as scarcely human. Madame Pomponi, for example, as her name suggests, remains throughout the film the epitomy of pompousness. In the final courtroom scene she exhibits nothing more than the stereo-typed pompousness which has characterized her from the start. "He threw us out

bodily, but bodily!" she proudly declares, gesturing indignantly with her massive, fur-draped body. The "crooked" lawyer for the common-law wife, appears an almost hellish figure in his absolutely unrelenting, aggressive onslaught to obtain money from Deeds. From his glasses there significantly glints a kind of fiery light, during his overpowering noisy tirade:

> Lawyer: [Bursting into the room as Deeds is being fitted for clothes, the lawyer shouts] I'm a little tired of being pushed around by you, Mr. Cedar. I don't care how important you are. [Shoving the tailor out of his way] Mr. Deeds, I represent Mrs. Semple.
> Deeds: Mrs. Semple?
> Lawyer: ...common-law wife. She has legal claim on the estate.

Deeds' body guards, likewise are presented as almost surrealistic figures, who not only dress alike, but respond with automatic reflexes and mechanically repititive phrases:

> Body-guards: [In unison] We're your body-guards.
> Deeds: Oh yeah?
> Body-guard: Yeah. Mr. Cobb said stick to your tail, no matter what.
> Deeds: That's very nice of Mr. Cobb, but I don't want anybody sticking to my tail, no matter what.
> Body-guard: Sorry, orders is orders....
> [Later] Body-guard: We gotta get ya up in the morning. We gotta put ya to bed at night.
> Second body-guard: Only it's all right. What we see, we don't see nottin', see?....
> Deeds: Will you do something for me, before we go out?
> Second body-guard: [Pulling out a gun] Sure.
> Body-guard: Put that away, Slug.

The lawyer, Cedar similarly appears throughout the film as a simple stereo-type - a villainous, unscrupulous,

money-oriented business-man who displays not a vestige of simple goodness:

> Cedar: [Restlessly pacing before his books during a meeting with his partners] Yes, I know, I know. A week's gone by and we haven't got power of attorney yet....
> [Later] Cedar: [With real vehemence] I can't strangle him [Deeds], can I?

This separation of a few, intuitively gifted beings from a society of unrealistic two-dimensional figures marks, in Mr. Deeds, a philosophical stance radically different from Capra's earlier It Happened One Night. In the earlier film minor characters are presented not so much as simple stereo-types, but rather as small cameos, in which the fluctuating processes of human thought are carefully explored. The motel proprietor, the gas station attendant, and the editor in It Happened One Night (all depicted in various stages of decision-making) are made to appear as understandable human beings (see pages 40-41, chapter two of this thesis). Even the obnoxious and mechanical Shapely is presented in such detail that his psychological movement from confidence to embarrassment, from a feeling of superiority to a state of fear, provide situations of humour with which the whole audience can identify (see footnote on page 39, chapter two of this thesis). The blustering Mr. Andrews, likewise is given several sides to his character. A rich and stubborn financier, he also is seen as a man of simple and unpretentious kindness. Recognizing his daughter's unhappi-

ness as she approaches the altar, he gently encourages her to flee, remarking that she could "make an old man happy".

It seems hardly surprising, therefore, that, despite the rave reviews which Mr. Deeds certainly evoked, the critic Alistair Cooke could see in Mr. Deeds a sign that Capra was "starting to make movies about themes instead of people":

> It has become almost a reflex with this critic when the word Capra is mentioned to....scribble the phrase 'engrossing affection for small American types'. Well, after Mr. Deeds, I'm not so sure. It has nothing as affectionate or authentic as... the Southampton wedding in It Happened One Night. And the judge in this picture, and the two old ladies from Maine, and any amount of other characters are all grand ideas but... they are more like Capra characters than Americans. ...Capra's is a great talent all right, but I have the uneasy feeling he's on his way out. He's starting to make movies about themes instead of people - Mr. Deeds is tremendous because the idea is taken charge of wholly by one person and one glorious part, Mr. Deeds himself. [8]

At this point in his film career Capra displays a kind of angry impatience with a society unsympathetic and alien to the inspired individual. In Mr. Deeds, as in Twain's short story, "The Mysterious Stranger", man's whole natural and human environment seems increasingly a hindrance, a prison to be overcome by the independent, imaginative creativity of the hero:

---

[8] This criticism of Alistair Cooke's is quoted by Richard Griffith in New Index Series No. 3, p.22.

'each act unfailingly begets an act, that act begets another, and so on to the end....'

. . . . . .

'man's circumstances and environment order it....'

. . . . . .

'He is a prisoner for life,' I said sorrowfully, 'and cannot get free.'

'No, of himself he cannot get away from the consequences of his first childish act. But I Satan can free him.' (pp.643-644)

'I Satan am but a dream - your dream, creature of your imagination....'

'I...have revealed you to yourself and set you free. Dream other dreams, and better!' (p.675)

Deeds' housekeeper confides to the city visitors that, for a bride, Longfellow rejects the real girls who live about him and longs for the ideal maiden of fairy-tales - the "damsel in distress". He confides to Babe just before he proposes that it is an "imaginary girl" which he hopes will mould the reality:

Deeds: Back in Mandrake Falls I used to always talk to a girl.

Babe: A girl?

Deeds: Oh, an imaginary one....She was beautiful....I'd always hoped that, someday, that imaginary girl would turn out to be real.

In the scene of Deeds' first meeting with Babe the hero at first seems to express, like Peter Warne, an openness to the whole living, natural world around him: upon leaving his mansion he removes his hat and joyfully rubs the falling rain into his hair. On closer inspection, however, the scene is far more idealistic than the earthy, rainy scenes of It Happened One Night. While Babe reclines in Deeds' arms the quiet falling rain, the pretty background of iron scrolls on the fence

behind them and the soft light partially illuminating Babe's soft-focused face - all create a sense of idyllic, ethereal beauty. Here is not the mundane, unifying quality of mud, wet clothes, and rutted earth that greet Ellen, Peter and the other passengers, as they leave the bus in search of common shelter at the motel.

That the particular circumstances of the temporal world never adequately express the hero's inspiration is vividly demonstrated as Deeds induces his stiff-moving butler to simulate the angel of his dreams. Such is his dissatisfaction with mundane reality, that even gold dishes seem not good enough . The unpredictability of real life becomes, to Deeds, a threat to be warded off superstitiously with salt:

> Deeds: [Entering dining room where butler is preparing the table] Gold, huh? Fourteen carat.
> Butler: Yes.
> Deeds: That the best you got?
> Butler: Yes, sir.
> Deeds: [He shakes out some salt and throws it over his shoulder] Those flowers are too high.... won't be able to see her.
> Butler: [To another servant] Get the smaller bowl....
> [later]
> Deeds: [Flowers are arranged and set on table] Sit over there, will you? [Deeds gestures towards the other chair. The butler sits down stiffly, as the other servant holds out the chair for him. Deeds, with elbow on table, looks thoughtful] You're too tall. Slink lower will you? [Awkwardly the butler moves himself lower] Lower. [The butler complies] Now forward. [Deeds gestures and the butler complies. Deeds is still thoughtful. Then both men lean forward, facing each other over the table]
> Butler: How's this, sir?
> Deeds: [Very serious] Perfect. Perfect.

Butler: I wish you luck, sir.
Deeds: Thank-you. Don't move a thing. Leave everything as it is. [the two men shake hands]

Significantly, behind Deeds and the butler as they shake hands in the hope of success, there stands the lifeless but perfectly formed statue of a woman. It is unalterable, idealistic perfection for which Deeds yearns: "Perfect. Perfect. Don't move a thing." And it is the real world of time which becomes a threat to his ideal visions:

Deeds: [Running into his bedroom] Walter, Walter, where are you!
Walter: Yes, sir. Has anything happened?
Deeds: Anything happened! I've got to get dressed. I can't meet her like this.
Walter: She isn't due for an hour, sir.
Deeds: An hour? What's an hour? You know how time flies....

As Babe falls deeper in love she is portrayed, like Ellen Andrews in It Happened One Night, as becoming more child-like.[9] But unlike Capra's earlier film, this child-like state is associated not so much with an increasing adventurousness and gregariousness with fellow men, as with a withdrawal to something isolated in the remote idealism of the past - her old hometown.

Babe: I'm from a small town too, you know. Probably smaller than Mandrake Falls....
[Later] Babe: Oh, it's a beautiful little town ....[The] row of poplar trees right along Main Street always smelled as if they just had a bath. I'd often thought about going back....

---

[9] "You're acting like a school girl," Mabel remarks to Babe as she prepares to quit her job because of her feelings for Deeds. Sitting on a park bench during a night-time excursion with Deeds, Babe, wearing an elf-like white collar and feather-topped hat, demonstrates her childhood talent for playing the drums.

It is significant that Babe's memories of childhood, of fresh renewing rain, take place at night, the time of dreams, in contrast to the actual dawn into which Ellen awakens (see page 31, chapter two of this thesis). In fact, in Mr. Deeds, all major, romantic scenes between Babe and Longfellow take place in a darkness or fog that visually isolates the lovers' fanciful, softly-lit faces from the darker surroundings of their physical and human environment; whereas in It Happened One Night there are, despite its title, a fair number of brightly-lit morning and daytime scenes, enhancing the recurrent theme of the characters' re-awakening to social and physical forces of their environment. In contrast to the earlier film which equates the heroine's freedom with her gradual re-integration with her fellow-men, in Mr. Deeds it is the lovers' ability to withdraw from the society of men that provides true freedom. During their night-time ride in the open bus Babe and Deeds are shown, for a moment, blissfully carefree; isolated from the darkened background of passengers, in soft, romantic light. Deeds gazes skyward, while a soft breeze ruffles Babe's hair. Ironically, however, it is while Deeds speaks of the need to make opera open and available to everyone, that the relationship of Deeds and Babe becomes threatened by the world of men about them. As Deeds touches Babe's hair and settles his arm about her there comes out of the anonymous darkness of the bus the

cynical, materialistic words of the passengers. At this point the wind stops, and one side of Babe's face becomes covered in shadow. No longer are the lovers face to face, locked in dreams. Between their heads appears the dark, intrusive figure of a passenger. Significantly, only as Deeds and Babe escape this busload of travellers does the sense of freedom return, and the wind again blow:

> Deeds: Well, I told them [the directors of the opera] I'd play along with them if they cut down expenses, lowered prices, and broadcast....
> [Later] Deeds: [Putting his arm around Babe] Gee, you look pretty tonight. [Babe smiles happily]
> Babe: What'd they say?
> Deeds: Uh? Oh, said I was crazy. Said I wanted to run it like a grocery store.
> Babe: What've they got to do?
> Deeds: [Touching her hair, and putting his arm around her] Do you always wear your hair like that?
> A woman's voice in the background: Isn't it a scream? Cinderella Man! The dope.
> Second woman's voice: I'd like to get my hooks into that guy.
> First woman's voice: Don't worry. Somebody's probably taking him for plenty. [Babe turns away from Deeds. Deeds turns his head the other way, looking behind at the passengers]
> Deeds: If they were men, I'd knock their heads together....
> [Later] Deeds: [One side of Babe's face disappears in the shadow of her hat] 'Cinderella Man.' Guess pretty soon everybody'll be calling me Cinderella Man. [the bus jostles them. The wind has stopped. Babe looks straight ahead. Deeds looks twice directly behind him. A dark, silent figure appears in the background between them]
> Babe: Uh, would you like to walk the rest of the way? It's so nice out. [as they leave the bus, Babe's hair once more begins to blow]

In the sudden transference of wealth to his "Cinderella Man", one sees in Capra, as in Twain, the desire to lend

his hero the magical power to rise above his physical world, to manipulate and transform a society essentially grown meaningless. Capra appears to exhibit, at this point a dwindling faith in the American environment. At no point does Deeds' inspired awareness appear drawn from his physical surroundings, as in the earlier It Happened One Night, in which it is the heroine's expansive environment which offersa means of personal development as she moves from the confinement of the cabin into the waves of the sea, and from the sea, ultimately onward to the forward-travelling bus.

A sense of alienation from setting is likewise apparent in the depiction of Babe. Never is she shown in real harmony with her physical world. Either she appears magically superior to it, or totally subordinated to it, as in the scene with the typewriter (see page 49 of this chapter).

Interestingly, it is Babe's desire to override the limiting forces of her environment which seems at the root of her business ambitions. During the editor's fierce tirade to his workers (see page 53 of this thesis) Babe sits aloof near the window making a little circle with string - an imaginative creation, releasing her, for the time-being, from the mechanical necessity about her. Significantly, her whole motivation for work is the promise of further escape:

Editor: [As Babe holds up her string circle] What's gotten into you Babe? I knew a time when you'd blast the town wide open....

Babe: [Still playing with the string] Oh, he's [Cobb] not gotten away with anything.

Editor: Listen, Babe, get me some stuff on this guy, and you can have -

Babe: Can I have a month's vacation? With pay? [she gets up from her seat and stands before the editor excitedly]

Editor: With pay.

Babe: [Rolling up the string] Leave four columns open on the front page tomorrow!

Later, as the editor excitedly reads Babe's story, Babe, sliding downwards in her chair, adopts an increasingly more detached pose. Quite uninvolved with the editor's enthusiasm, she absorbs herself instead in the performance of "magical" conjuring tricks. At this point, Babe allows neither her sympathy for Deeds, nor the responsibilities of her job, to hold for her any predominating sense of reality. She displays delight only in her own manipulative power over existence:

Editor: [Reading Babe's column at his desk, and laughing] "Cinderella Man". That's sensational, Babe, that's sensational.

Babe: [As he reads, the camera shows Babe, lying back in her chair. Effortlessly she flips a coin and pretends to make it disappear in her hand. She touches her nose and proceeds to pull forth an imaginary thread] It was high powered acting, believe you me. I was the world's sweetest ingenue....

[later]

Editor: [Excitedly] How'd you get the picture?

Babe: [Comfortably detached] Had the boys follow us....[as the editor continues to read enthusiastically, Babe again performs the trick with the coin, then comfortably tosses it into the air]

[later]

Editor: [Excitedly impatient] When are you gonna see him again?

Babe: [Unrushed] Oh, ah, my lunch hour. I'm a stenographer now, Mary Dawson. [she rises and mockingly curtseys]

Editor: [Admiringly] You're a genius, Babe, a genius.

Babe: [Flipping her coin, she walks around the editor's desk, swaggering]...even moved into Mabel Dawson's apartment, in case old snoopy Cobb starts looking around.

Editor: [Leaning towards her with excitement] We'll have the other newspapers going crazy!

Babe: [She exits aloofly] Oh, no. Our deal was a month's vacation.

Ultimately, unlike Ellen and Peter, Deeds and Babe, in their romantic excursions, move gradually further and further from the surroundings of their mundane, physical environment. Unable to communicate in any personal way with the literary snobs in "Tullio's" Deeds finally subdues them through actual elimination (physically knocking them out). Relieved of his inhibiting society, Deeds, and to some extent Babe, are free to enter into a journey of intoxicated fancy - a voyage beginning first with a traditional pilgrimage to Grant's Tomb, but soon carrying its travellers into fanciful regions, exotic and remote:

The Cynical Writer: [To Deeds who has just knocked out the other writers] Listen, hop aboard my magic carpet bag [He almost falls backwards and Deeds has to catch him], and I'll show you the sights that you've never seen before.

Deeds: Well, I'd kinda like to see Grant's Tomb and the Statue of Liberty.

Writer: Well, you'll not only see those, but before the night's through, you'll be leaning against the leaning tower of Pisa. We'll mount Mount Everest. I'll show you the pyramids and all the little pyramidies, leaping from sphynx to sphynx. [Babe laughs]

Much like Twain's young Theodor Fischer in "The Mysterious Stranger", Deeds, too, is taken by his guide into

realms presenting distant and ironic perspectives of society - perspectives in which fellow men appear as creatures alien and ludicrous - as objects of mirth:

> Writer: You play saloon with me, and I'll introduce you to every wit, every nit-wit and every half-wit in New York. We'll go on a twister that will make...the philosopher of Persia look like an anaemic on a goat's milk diet.
> Deeds: [Turning to Babe] That oughta be fun.
>
> Away in the night Satan came and roused me and said: 'Come with me. Where shall we go?'
> 'Anywhere - so it is with you.'
> Then there was a fierce glare of sunlight, and he said, 'This is China.'
> That was a grand surprise, and made me sort of drunk with vanity and gladness to think I had come so far.... (pp.639-640)
>
> He always spoke of men in the same indifferent way - just as one speaks of bricks and manure-piles and such things; you could see that they were of no consequence to him, one way or the other....
> he was bunching the most illustrious kings and conquerors and poets and prophets and pirates and beggers together - just a brick-pile.... (p.611)
>
> Two of the little workmen were quarreling, and in buzzing little bumblebee voices they were cursing and swearing at each other....then they locked themselves together in a life-and-death struggle. Satan reached out his hand and crushed the life out of them with his fingers, threw them away, wiped the red from his fingers... and went on talking.
> . . . . . .
> he went on talking...and worked his enchantments upon us again with that fatal music of his voice.... He made us forget everything....He made us drunk with the joy of being with him.... (pp.606, 607, 608)

From a restaurant in which they sit against a visible background of diners, Deeds and Babe move, on their next date, to an open-air bus, in which, in the darkness, the faces of fellow-passengers are scarcely discernable. And from the night-time solitude of Grant's

Tomb the lovers travel onward to a position high above Time Square - a point from which, as Deeds remarks, the bustling square is so small that "you can almost spit on it". At this point it seems highly ironic that Capra should depict his hero so far from the great city of men, just as he voices his concern that men should learn to like one another: "Why don't they try liking each other once in a while?"

Finally, during a stroll in which Deeds prepares to make his declaration of love, houses, traffic, street lights and people are all depicted blanketed in a screen of fog. All that is clearly visible are the softly-lit faces of the lovers. Other objects and people take on the quality of unreality; a passer-by emerges from the fog, only to vanish again as if never there. For a moment, even the lovers themselves, as they climb the stairs to Babe's apartment, appear as shadowy, darkened silhouettes, almost lost in the world of unreality. As they say good-bye, however, the couple appear in close-up, in radiant light. At this point, Babe and Deeds appear at the centre of reality - a reality overriding the flimsy, shadowy world which surrounds them. Significantly, Babe declares: "Don't let anybody hurt you again, ever. They can't anyway. You're much too real." As Babe reads Deeds' poem her face, in soft-focus, outlined in light, seems indeed that of an "angel divine" -

an angel which has momentarily come to visit an inferior world of darkness:

> Babe: I'd tramped the earth with a hopeless beam,
> Searching in vain for a glimpse of you,
> Then heaven thrust you at my very feet -
> A lovely angel, too lovely to woo.
> . . . . . .
> I'm handcuffed and speechless
> In your presence divine....

At this moment the love of Deeds and Babe - like the angelic love of Mark Twain's Satan - seems utterly "sublime", "infinitely" beyond the tiny, trivial world of men:

> 'Man's mind clumsily and tediously and laboriously patches little trivialities together....my mind creates!....'
> 'I think a poem, music....and it is there....'
> 'An angel's love is sublime, adorable, divine, beyond the imagination of man - infinitely beyond it....' (p.642)

Following this scene of heightened reality, comes Deeds' humorous, hasty departure marked by the clattering of a trash can. While such humour provides delightful relief from the intense romanticism of the film, it is often remote from the serious thematic aspects of the film (the serious love of Deeds and Babe seems cut-off from the mundane, humorous world of trash cans and passers-by). In <u>It Happened One Night</u>, in contrast, most of the humorous incidents act as integral aspects in the development of Ellen and Peter's love. For example, Ellen's comical appearance, as she dons Peter's large pyjamas and bath robe, and her mischievous gestures as she responds to fellow female bathers, provide for

the audience not simply humorous diversion, but express, also, Ellen's growing lack of self-concern, her increasing sense of oneness with both Peter and the human community about her. Unlike the romance of Deeds and Babe, Ellen and Peter's love is a love truly integrated with the rather humorous world about them.

Interestingly, however, in Mr. Deeds Capra refuses to pursue wholeheartedly this emerging theme of the hero's isolation from society. There remains in this film always a vestige of Capra's initial, emotional tie to the common people, which he displays in It Happened One Night. The tone of reality in Mr. Deeds fluctuates between Capra's interest in individual inspiration as something independent of physical surroundings, and his old, initial belief in the necessary and beneficial influence of the physical environment upon man's consciousness. Unlike Twain's uncompromising stance in "The Mysterious Stranger" Capra cannot allow himself, at this point, to accept without scruple the validity of a purely subjective universe - a universe based solely on the imaginative fancy of self, free from mundane contingencies of human values and moral commitments. Thus, following depictions of Babe and Deeds' flights of fancy there is portrayed Capra's moralistic sense of the hero and heroine's necessary commitment to the mundane environment in which they live.

In the editor's office, despite Babe's pride in her ability to control her environment (her swaggering ease, her manipulations of the coin, and her flippant refusal to form a close alliance with either the editor or Deeds), Babe ultimately is presented as tied to the earth. The coin falls earthward, despite Babe's dexterity. In the end, she must abandon her comfortable chair and seek for the coin on the floor - where the universal law of gravity has carried it.

Significantly as she prepares to leave her newspaper job, Babe rolls up the string out of which she has been making her fanciful circles. Capra reveals her, at this point, determined to put her new feelings of love face to face with the real world as it actually exists:

> Babe: I'm gonna tell the truth.
> Editor: [Incredulous] Tell him you're Babe Bennett? Tell him you've been making a stooge out of him?....
> [Later] Editor: I've seen people get into a rut like you before, but they always come back....
> [here as the editor attempts to dissuade Babe, she determinedly rolls up the string]

Following this scene, Deeds, too, is shown returning from a flight of fancy into mundane contact with everyday life. Lying in an attitude of dreamy languor upon his bed, as he recovers from his voyage with the cynical writer, Deeds initially is pictured as the lonely, heroic visionary: "Did Miss Dawson call yet? She's the lady in distress...." (Behind Deeds, his window frame significantly assumes the shape of a

large, darkened cross.) But as Deeds enters into conversation with the plain-spoken Walter, this highly romanticized image of the isolated hero is rapidly transformed. Here Deeds comes to view his night-time voyage of fantasy as a form of madness:

> Deeds: Don't be silly, Walter. I couldn't walk around on the streets without any clothes. I'd be arrested.
> Walter: That's what the two policemen said, sir. Said you and another gentleman kept walking up and down the street shouting, 'Back to nature. Clothes are a blight on civilization.'
> Deeds: Listen, Walter, if a man [the writer] ...calls up, tell him I'm not in. He may be a great author, but I think he's crazy. The man's crazy, Walter.

As he adopts this more mundane perspective, the window comes to possess a quite ordinary framework. No longer does it express the outlook of an isolated, romantic hero.

The fanciful self-isolation towards which Deeds has been moving now takes on a highly negative quality. Within his hero's obsession for idealisms, Capra comes to reveal an unpleasant latent lack of humanity, urgently in need of correction.

As Babe - caught in deception - desperately attempts explanation over the telephone, Deeds appears in a highly unflattering light. Poignantly contrasted with close-ups of Babe's frantic face are close-ups of Deeds - his face stony and rigid - as he coldly rejects the mortal destroyer of his dreams:

Deeds: Is it you who has been writing those articles about me?
Babe: [A close-up revealing her sad face] Why, I was just leaving. I'll be up there in a minute. Uh, yes I did, but I was just coming to explain. [A close-up of Deeds, shows his face stone-like, as he puts down the receiver. This is followed by a close-up of Babe, her face frantic] Listen, darling, wait a minute. I can explain. [a medium close-up shot shows Deeds - his whole body still rigid - as he hangs up the telephone]

Likewise, during the desperate struggle between his servants and a hungry intruder, Deeds is pictured again as coldly aloof and motionless. Appearing in separate, medium close-ups, high upon the stairs, and framed on either side by a rigid pillar, Deeds, like Mark Twain's Satan, looks down upon a scene of small and distant struggling men - a struggle initially presented on the screen from the disinterested hero's lofty point of view:

Intruder: [In a distant shot, the camera looks down upon a scene of servants, struggling with an intruder] I just wanted to see what a man looked like who can spend thousands of dollars on a party, while people around him were hungry....[a medium close-up of Deeds shows him standing motionless between two white pillars]
[later]
Deeds: [Another medium close-up of Deeds, unmoving on the stairs] What do you want? [cynically]
Intruder: [Still shown from Deeds' lofty point of view] ...a chance to feed a wife and kids. I'm a farmer. A job that's what I want.
Deeds: [Again motionless between the pillars, in a medium close-up shot] Farmer, huh? You're a moocher, that's what you are....

It is from this negative portrait of an isolated hero that Capra attempts to retrieve his earlier hero - the plain, pragmatic man of "Deeds" - the hero commited to his fellow men. Into the stilted perfection of Deeds'

romantic setting, Capra places at this point the unexpected, unpredictable presence of a living human being, a creature who brings with him all the variable qualities of real, temporal existence. Sitting at that "perfect, perfect" place prepared for the idyllic damsel in distress there dines, now, the dilapidated, hungry visitor, whose very real sounds of chewing and gulping contrast dramatically with the surroundings. Interestingly, as the two men sit at the table, the newcomer is depicted on the same side of the screen as that previously occupied by Deeds during his first meal with Babe at "Tullio's". Thus as Deeds once fed Babe (both physically and emotionally), so here, it is Deeds who becomes open to a perspective outside his own being as he gazes, hand on chin, at his ravenous guest.

As in the scene of Deeds' departure from the Mandrake Falls station, Deeds again becomes a hero surrounded by surging crowds. To approach the hero - embarked on his new, charitable farming project - the camera moves through vast crowds which continue on through the doorway, along the hall, to the very desk at which Deeds sits. Here, at last, Capra seems to have placed his hero within a real world of temporal limitations, of variables, imperfections, slow-downs, and exhaustion:

> Deeds: [Approaching Deeds, the camera moves through a vast body of men, stretching from the doorway, all the way up to his desk. A medium

close-up shows Deeds unshaven, with rumpled collar] How many does that make?

Cobb: Eight hundred and nineteen.

Deeds: [Wiping the perspiration from his face] Is that all? They've gone awful slow....[Speaking on the telephone] The water development seems okay. I don't like the road lay-out Jim. Come up tonight at ten....

An image of genuine harmony is conveyed as a man named Christian shares his sandwich with Deeds. A distant shot of masses of men, all hungrily regarding the sandwich, is followed by a medium close-up of Deeds, unable to chew at his realization of the hunger which every man feels.

Yet despite Capra's overt moralistic efforts to show his hero's growing harmony with mankind, Capra is never fully able to relinquish his central, emotional concern with the private man - the self isolated from society and threatened by its forces. On closer inspection, Deeds' acts of charity are portrayed essentially as a "one-man show". Zealously refusing both sleep and food, Deeds remains the sole, indispensable force of salvation, an almost Christ-like figure, reminiscent of the sleepless saviour in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Cobb: What about your knocking off?

Deeds: Not hungry. [A clock behind Deeds shows the time as twelve-thirty] I want to get through this work....

Cobb: What are ya tryna do? Keel over? You haven't been outa this house in two weeks.

In contrast to It Happened One Night, there is little real indication of the interdependence between hero and people that Capra seems so morally anxious to portray.

Medium close-ups, for the most part, dramatically isolate Deeds from the surrounding hungry and jobless masses. The fact that a woman prays for Deeds the hero dismisses tiredly with little comment:

> Deeds: [Taking an order form from Cobb] Thanks, I'll look them over later.
> An Applicant: [Standing gratefully and meekly before Deeds] Mr. Deeds, my wife wanted me to tell you, she prays for you every night.
> Deeds: Well, thanks. [turning to the next applicant]

At the point of Deeds' most intimate integration with the people (in which both Deeds and crowd partake, briefly, in a kind of breaking of bread) there comes also the hero's most profound rejection and betrayal, his moment of most intense isolation. Brushing aside a thankful spokesman of the crowd, there enter anonymous, robot-like policemen, who, with hats pulled down over their faces, mechanically and unsympathetically arrest the hero.

Unlike Peter Warne, who, in his distress, is able to appeal to the sympathy of a number of men in various walks of life (the motel proprietor, the gas station attendant, the newspaper boss), Deeds is forced from worldly activity by a totally unsympathetic, almost unreal opposition of stereo-typed enemies.

> Deeds: [Sitting back down at his desk, in anger] That's fine. Just because I want to give this money to the people who need it, they think I'm crazy. That's marvelous....

Cobb: We'll call Cedar.
Officer: As a matter of fact, I'm from Cedar's office. He represents the complainant. [Deeds, brooding and unspeaking, is shot from a downward angle. The officer begins to lift Deeds from his seat] Let's go. We're wastin' our time.
Deeds: I'll go, but get your hands off me. [with shoulders bent, he walks out amongst the murmuring crowd]

The image of the hero's harmony with mankind which Capra has so conscientiously attempted to portray is now shattered.

No longer is the image of the alienated, crucified victim rejected by Capra as a mere fanciful romantic pose. In the "County Hospital", in contrast to the backward and forward pacing of Cobb, Deeds is shown as a bent, silhouetted figure before an illuminated window, the frame of which forms behind Deeds the image of a huge, darkened cross. Now it is motion and worldly action which are rejected by the camera. After Cobb's departure, the camera rests for several dramatic moments on the unmoving, isolated figure of Deeds:

Cobb: [Pacing back and forth before Deeds. Deeds in contrast, remains a silent, dark, bent figure. Behind Deeds, the framework of the window forms a huge, black image of a cross] Whatya gonna do? Just sit back and let them railroad ya?.... [Leaning over Deeds, who still remains motionless] If you'd just let me get you a lawyer. You can't walk into that courtroom not being ready to protect yourself....Listen, pal, I know just how ya feel. A blonde in Syracuse put me through the same pace. I came out with a sour puss, but full of fight. Come on, you don't wanna lay down now....[Still no movement from Deeds. Cobb walks to the other side of Deeds and clenches his fist] You've gotta fight. [as Cobb leaves the room, Deeds remains unmoving, and the camera rests on his silent, motionless figure]

Stasis and retreat - once associated by Capra with mindless, automatic existence (see page 44, chapter two of this thesis) - now becomes the focus of meditative reverie for the audience. In contrast to Cobb who "came out...full of fight" when "a blonde in Syracuse put... [him] through the same pace", and Peter Warne who purposefully marches into Andrews' home, vociferously declaring his disgust with Ellen; the silence of Gary Cooper (an actor of characteristically few physical gestures) creates, in the audience, a sympathy drawn as much from the audience's personal imagination as from any specific, objective action of the actor. Ultimately, Mr. Deeds begins to foreshadow the ethereal, fantasied atmosphere of Capra's Lost Horizon.

Indeed, so overpowering does Capra's sense of the hero's isolation become, that there develops about Deeds an impermeable, cinematic aura of remoteness which overrides the whole ensuing narrative impact of the film. Despite the happy ending of the story, Deeds himself remains, from this point onward, an individualistic figure, forever isolated from the crowd he has come to save. Beyond the sacred solitude of Deeds, the outside world takes on a quality of indistinctness and unreality. Following the scene of Deeds' internment, the crowds (including Deeds' supporters) act not as independent, decision-making beings, but instead move en masse to vast automated rhythms. Accompanying the excited sounds of fast-paced music, a huge newspaper heading ("DEEDS

SANITY HEARING TODAY") is superimposed upon the image of whirring press machinery. Rapidly there follows the heading, "CINDERELLA MAN REFUSES ALL ATTEMPTS FOR DEFENSE", which is superimposed upon a series of men in the street, all reaching for newspapers. Then, against a background of militant farmers, there is overlaid the headlines, "FARMERS AROUSED AT EFFORTS TO BALK THEIR BENEFACTOR". And subsequently, another headline ("POLICE SURROUND COURTHOUSE IN ANTICIPATION OF OUTBREAK") is displayed against a background of surging crowds and a threatening police officer.

Even recognizable figures, such as Christian, respond in the courtroom not so much as autonomous beings but rather as the orchestrated rhythmic voices of a chorus which take their cues as precisely as clockwork:

> Judge: [Shouting to Cobb] Sit down, There will be no further interruptions -
> Individual of the crowd: [Shown in medium close-up] How about us Mr. Deeds?
> Christian: [Also shown in medium close-up] Yes, what about us, Mr. Deeds?
> Judge: Order. Order in the court.
> Third individual in the crowd: [In a medium close-up] Your not gonna leave us out in the cold? [Followed by a close-up of Deeds, motionless]
> Voice from the crowd: They can't frame ya, Mr. Deeds. [a close-up of Deeds, thoughtfully turning his head, followed by a distant shot of the whole crowd rising and shouting]

Medium close-ups of the suffering hero (his face turned bitterly away from the courtroom proceedings) dramatically isolate the intense "reality" of Deeds from that lesser reality of his surroundings:

> Babe: Certainly I wrote those articles. I was going to get a raise..., but I stopped writing them when I found what he was all about, when I realized how real he was. He could never fit in with our distorted viewpoints because he's honest, sincere and good. [a medium close-up at this point, presents Deeds' unmoving, silent profile]

During the hearing, the crowd of courtroom onlookers appear not so much as individuals involved in personal communication with Deeds, but rather as simple votes in support of the all important leader. They are portrayed, significantly, against a vast, bright background of square-paned windows, each square of which is clearly marked with a distinct, black "X". "No matter what system of government we have, there'll always be leaders and always be followers...," Deeds declares as he defends his charitable projects in the courtroom.

Deeds' efforts to reveal a basic unity between himself and the rest of society at this point assume only superficial effectiveness:

> Deeds:...if a man's crazy just because he plays the tuba, then somebody'd better look into it.... Of course, I don't see any harm in it. I play mine whenever I want to concentrate....everybody does something silly when they're thinking.

In contrast to the delight which Deeds feels in the playing of his tuba, the various people of the courtroom - as similar habits are discerned in themselves - show only anger or embarrasment, and determination to forgo such folly in the future. No real harmony is established:

> Deeds: the judge, here, is an "0" filler.... [a shot of the judge, pen on page]

> [Later] Deeds: [A brief shot of the crowd laughing] I don't see anything wrong, cause that helps you think. [A close-up of the judge's handiwork is followed by a shot of the judge, who hastily puts down the paper and covers his mouth in embarrassment] Other people are doodlers....
> [Later] Deeds: Dr. Van Hallar, here, can probably think of a long name for it, because he doodles all the time. [Sound of crowd laughing as Van Hallar is shown looking around angrily] ...That, ah, Mr. Semple, over there, is a nose-twitcher. [Shot of Semple twitching his nose, while his wife looks at him angrily and cracks her knuckles] The lady next to him is a knuckle cracker. [sound of crowd laughing]

More importantly, Deeds' blatant re-emphasis of the idiosyncracies of minor characters has the dramatic effect of keeping these two-dimensional figures tightly sealed within their stereo-typed roles. The cruelly ambitious Cedar, the pompous pedant, Van Hallar, and the nose-twitcher, Semple - all become increasingly more ludicrous, unpleasant and remote from the central, powerful figure of Deeds.

Despite the growing sympathy of judge and court-room crowd, Deeds significantly still feels the need to deal the vanquished Cedar a physical punch (an action which automatically recalls Deeds' punching of the writers before his retreat into fancy). Here, again, is suggested that distanced and pessimistic attitude toward humanity, expressed by Mark Twain in "The Mysterious Stranger". Like Twain, Capra creates an almost unreal body of people, all liable to become obliterated by the much more real and powerful hero::

> 'I myself [Satan] have no existence; I am but a dream - your dream, creature of your imagination. In a moment, you will have realized this, then you will banish me from your visions and I shall dissolve into the nothingness out of which you made me....' (p.675)

Vindicated and victorious at the hearing, Deeds remains an isolated being. His solemn face stands out, starkly alone, as he is carried joyfully upon the shoulders of the cheering crowd. Babe, too, at the moment of mass-rejoicing, seems a figure remote. Her excited face - anxiously seeking out Deeds - appears on the screen to toss precariously amidst heedless, anonymous waves of people.

In Mr. Deeds the final scene forms a sharp contrast with the last romantic scene of It Happened One Night. Only as Deeds locks behind him the swarming mass of admirers with strong, iron gates, are the lovers free to be united. With jacket torn and face perspiring and distracted, Deeds remains unsmiling even as he clasps Babe in his arms, until his nervous glances assure him that the crowds are, indeed, left behind. In It Happened One Night, in contrast, the presence of a thoughtful old man and his woman companion actually seem a kind of blessing on the tumbling "walls of Jericho". Standing beneath the spreading branches of a tree and holding a young dog and cat between them, these simple onlookers depict a kind of enduring fruitfulness of the common people, a fruitfulness that harbours and nourishes new life. The luxurious branches which spread abundantly

above the aging couple, form dancing shadows on Ellen and Peter's tumbled "walls". And, thus, in this earlier film, change and harmony seem fully reconciled. Deeds and Babe, by contrast, in their love, lock iron gates on the whole changing and moving physical world about them. Concentrating more and more heavily upon the power and insight of the individual, Capra shows, ultimately, a loss of faith in the whole, vast, shifting patterns of nature and society. He enters, like Twain in "The Mysterious Stranger", into extreme isolationism - a frontier of loneliness bounded by the exclusive limits of self:

> 'Strange! that you should not have suspected years ago - centuries, ages, eons, ago! - for you have existed, companionless, through all the eternities. Strange, indeed, that you should not have suspected that your universe and its contents were only dreams, visions, fiction!....' (p.675)

> 'It is all a dream - a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought - a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!' (p.676)

As Deeds and Babe embrace, their isolation seems heightened by the foolish words of the Falkner sisters - the only other people in the courtroom:

> First sister: [As the sisters watch the couple embrace] Still pixilated.
> Second sister: He sure is.

Here the limited, self-absorbed philosophy of the sisters ("why, everybody...is pixilated except us.") ironically seems an exaggerated expression of Capra's own movement towards a philosophy of radical individualism, as he

rejects all reality save that of the individuated imagination.

CHAPTER FOUR LOST HORIZON AND PART ONE: YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

The final scenes of Lost Horizon, in which Robert Conway - a sole, small figure - is shown battling his way through alien elements in search of the ideal vision, is, again, like the final scenes of Mr. Deeds, highly reminiscent of Mark Twain's frightening description of the isolated Theodor Fischer in "The Mysterious Stranger": "a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!" (p.676). And, as noted by John Baxter in his book, Hollywood in the Thirties, this image captures that growing, visionary spirit of individualism that has come most strongly to dominate Capra's work:

> Forced however by the rest of the group to leave, he alone survives, and the last shot shows him struggling back across the mountain, an infinitesimal figure spidering up the sheer cliff in a biting storm, determined to reach again his paradise....Lost Horizon is true Capra; in its acceptance of individuality as the noblest force in man, in its drawing of society in terms of a mob from which only the strong of spirit extricate themselves it is perhaps his purest and most coherent statement.[1]

Unlike the poetic, romantic dreams of Longfellow in Mr. Deeds, however, the Utopian visionary realms of Lost Horizon and You Can't Take It with You are much more concrete. No longer are images of perfection

---

[1] Ed. Peter Cowie, (New York: Paperback Library, 1970) pp.140-141.

presented as dreams which flicker and ultimately vanish in a world of harsher reality. In both these films the vision comes to assume a solidity that makes the temporal world of flux and progress seem a meaningless mirage. Conway - doubtful that there could actually exist a place where "the perfect body in perfect health" is the rule, where "sufficiency of everything" puts an end to crime - is comfortably reassured in Shangra-La by his gentle host:

> Chang: [To Conway] you who have dreamed and written so much about better worlds, why is it that you fail to recognize one of your own dreams when you see it?

Lost Horizon presents a world in which ideal perfection no longer is described as "A lovely angel, too lovely to woo". Instead, perfect beauty becomes in this film a tangible reality - a reality as solid as a gleaming aeroplane. It is Conway's temporal existence that here seems shadow:

> Conway: [To the girl, Sandra, with whom he falls in love] ...when we were on that plane, I was fascinated by the way the shadow followed us - that silly shadow racing along over mountains and valleys covering ten times the distance of the plane....I keep thinking that somehow you're that plane, and I'm that silly shadow. All my life I've been rushing up and down hills, leaping rivers, crashing over rocks, never dreaming that, one day, that beautiful thing in flight would land on this earth into my arms....

Similarly, in You Can't Take It with You the Vanderhof household represents a place in which people have truly "found" in real life "what everybody's

looking for":

> Tony: [Speaking admiringly to Alice about her family] It just seems that, in their own way, they've found what everybody's looking for. People spend their whole lives building castles in the air and, then, nothing ever comes of it.

Thus, Martin Vanderhof, like Chang, comfortingly assures an incredulous Poppins of the actual "reality" of his idyllic household:

> Martin Vanderhof: [Encouraging Poppins to leave the real estate firm and work on inventions at the Vanderhof house] Everybody at our place does just what he wants to do.
> Poppins: [Amazed] Really! That must be wonderful! [More seriously] But how would I live?
> Martin Vanderhof: Same way we do.... [Continuing] Martin Vanderhof: we toil a little, spin a little, have a barrel of fun....come on over and become a lily too.

In contrast to Mr. Deeds in which Capra attempts, momentarily, to bring his hero out of an idyllic realm into closer contact with the bitter realities of the world about him, in Lost Horizon and You Can't Take It with You Capra presents a far more determined, uncompromising attitude of "isolationism":

> Alice: [Explaining to Tony about her grandfather's retreat from the business world] He just suddenly left business one day. He just started up in the elevator one day, turned around, and came right down again....[He] never went back. He could have been a rich man but said he wasn't having any fun.

Content in his idyllic household, Martin Vanderhof ridicules the need to pay taxes for military intervention in outside, foreign affairs:

> Martin Vanderhof: [To the government agent from the internal revenue office] Well, what do I get for my money?....

Government Agent: [Appalled] The government gives you everything. It protects you.
Martin Vanderhof: From What?
Government Agent: Well, invasion. How do you think the government's going to keep up the army and navy and all those battleships?
Martin Vanderhof: Battleships? Last time we used battleships was in the Spanish American War, and what'd we get out of that?....

The movement of goods from one state to another, he regards as an affair concerning those immediately involved, not as a problem demanding the financial aid of outsiders:

Government Agent: if it weren't for interstate commerce, nothing could go from one state to another.
Martin Vanderhof: Well, why not? Have they got fences?

In similar vein, in Lost Horizon Chang joyfully points out to Conway the isolated position of the idyllic Shangra-La:

Chang: [To Conway as he looks for the first time, with transfixed awe, upon the valley of Shangra-La] You see, we are surrounded by mountains on every side - a strange phenomenon for which we are very grateful.

Later, Chang comments upon his peaceful community's complete inability to communicate "with the outside world", as Conway's brother, George, nervously insists upon the importance of contacting England:

George: All of England's waiting to hear about my brother.
Chang: [Smiling peacefully] Really? Well, as regards cabling, I'm afraid I can't help. Unfortunately we have no wireless here. As a matter of fact, we have no means of communication with the outside world.

Whereas Longfellow, in his good works, ultimately is forced to grapple with the elements of time, of

disappointment, and exhaustion (see pages 88-89, of this thesis), in both Lost Horizon and You Can't Take It with You, time has little meaning for men and women who live a truly fulfilled existence. As the anxious visitors discuss the possibility of contacting porters, Chang responds with unhelpful complacency about the length of time involved:

> Chang:...in that respect you're exceedingly fortunate. We are expecting a shipment from them [the porters] any time now.
> Alexander Lovett: [Suspiciously] Just what do you mean by "any time now"?
> Chang: Well, we've been expecting this particular shipment for the past two years.
> Chalmers Bryant: [Shocked] Two years!

Even the process of man's ageing has little obvious effect in idyllic Shangra-La.

> Chang: [To Conway] It is quite common, here, to live to be a very ripe old age....it is the absence of struggle in the way we live....
> [later in the film]
> The High Lama: [To Conway] by the world's standards...in the normal course of existence you can expect...thirty years of gradually diminishing activity....Here, however, in Shangra-La, by our standards, your life is just begun and may go on and on.

In this tranquil, isolated valley, where the native men herd sheep and their women pound clothes in the river, the whole concept of material and industrial progress remains of relatively little concern.

Similarly, in You Can't Take It with You as Alice gets ready for her date with Tony, no one in the Vanderhof household has any idea of the actual time.

Alice: Anybody know what time it is?
Mr. De Pinna: Well, it was five o'clock about two hours ago.
Alice: Oh, well, never mind....

Time, for the Vanderhof family, is a highly irrelevant factor in the pattern of life:

Alice: [Seeing Martin Vanderhof's delight at her gift of the harmonica] That's for your birthday.
Martin Vanderhof: My birthday? Well, how do you know when my birthday is? I don't even know, myself.
Alice: Any time I get an impulse to buy you a present, that's your birthday.

For the Vanderhofs, there seems nothing that corresponds to the business society's obsession with tight schedules and dead-lines:

Simon Vanderhof: [As he introduces Poppins, who has just left the high-tensioned, real estate business, to Mr. De Pinna and Mr. Sycamore] Mr. Poppins is going to stay with us awhile....
Poppins: Just for a short time, you see....
Mr. De Pinna: That's what I thought, that day nine years ago when I delivered the ice.
Poppins: Nine Years. My. Oh, you were the ice man.
[later in the film]
Essie: [Speaking about a letter from the internal revenue department] Where's Grandpa's letter, mother?"
Mrs. Sycamore: What dear?
Essie: I said, where's that letter that came for Grandpa last week? [stirring her candy]
Martin Vanderhof: Last week?
Mrs. Sycamore: Well, I don't know. I remember seeing the kittens with it.

The images of forward progression which characterize the heroine's growing sense of awareness in It Happened One Night, are replaced in Lost Horizon and You Can't Take It with You, by dominant circular images - images that create a sense of wholeness or completeness, making the idea of progress appear a meaningless concept.

On his arrival at Shangra-La, as Conway gazes upwards at the glistening buildings, he becomes enraptured by a girl who, dressed in white, stands upon a rounded balcony, bordered by circular columns. A closer shot of the girl reveals in her hands a bouquet of flowers which she turns in circular fashion before her. Later, as Conway departs from this haven, shots of the circling, spiralling stairs, up which the inhabitants of Shangra-La gracefully move as they take part in the High Lama's funeral ceremony, are juxtaposed with shots of Bob, George, and Maria as they proceed painfully in linear fashion along the ledge that leads away from Shangra-La into the stormy, outside world.

Likewise, in You Can't Take It with You, prior to the unexpected arrival of the Kirbys, the Vanderhof household becomes a fantastic system of twirling circles. Accompanied by Ed's xylophone and the stamping feet of the dance master, Kolenkhov, Essie begins her absurdly fanciful dance. Twirling round and round she moves first in a circular pattern that encompasses the dining-table. As her twirling body passes Rheba and Donald in the kitchen, they, too, begin to twirl. Moving once more into the front rooms, the circularity of Essie's turning body and outspread skirt become visually repeated in the circular shape of Grandpa's dart board and is transferred even to the crow, which likewise begins to turn in its own little circle on the table. The profusion

of circles reaches a climax as Rheba - rhythmically shaking her head - passes Essie to open the door. In a close-up shot of Rheba's face, even her eyes take on the appearance of great round circles as she discovers the dignified Kirbys standing in the doorway.[2]

Interestingly, as he moves from Lost Horizon to You Can't Take It with You, Capra's desire for an impenetrable circle of security increases. Despite the highly tangible quality that permeates much of Capra's depiction of Shangra-La, Capra's final picture of the Utopian settlement grows vague. There lingers the suggestion that Conway's glimpse of the ideal world is something perhaps never to be fully regained in temporal life. A distant shot of Conway's small figure, struggling against the vastness of mountains, is succeeded by a medium close-up of the familiar marker signifying the opening to Shangra-La. Beyond it shines a soft glowing light. At this point, the medium close-up of Conway's startled look of joy is replaced by an almost ethereal, final image, in which shining, tossing bells are superimposed upon the gleaming buildings of the long-sought lamasery. Here, in this concluding shot, it becomes wholly uncertain whether the hero's

---

[2] The circular impressions in both Shangra-La and the Vanderhof household are reminiscent of Capra's earlier depiction of the idyllic Mandrake Falls in Mr. Deeds.

dream is physical reality or ephemeral vision.

Whereas in Lost Horizon Bob Conway, his brother, George, and the unhappy Russian girl, Maria, are depicted as beings of free-will, whose freedom of choice leads them ultimately away from paradise[3], in You Can't Take It with You Capra creates the tight, rhythmical quality of a Walt Disney cartoon, locking his characters much more securely into mechanical patterns of safe inevitability. Tony remarks to Alice after meeting her family that, "Living with them must be like living in a world of Walt Disney." The small Mr. Poppins with his bald head, broad smile, and timidity has the striking appearance of a child-like dwarf from Walt Disney's Snow White; while Alice's sister, Essie, displays remarkable resemblance to that cartoon's heroine, as she dances about the house, handing out "love-dream" candies to members of the household. Appropriately, Poppins, De Pinna and Sycamore work in the cellar to the happy music of "Whistle While You Work" - a song sung by the Disney dwarfs.

---

[3] George: [In a sudden angry outburst at dinner] You may not know it, but you're all prisoners here.... Well I don't intend to be a prisoner....
[later in the film]
Conway: [To the disillusioned Maria] You mean to tell me you want to leave Shangra-La?
Maria: I'll die if I have to stay here another minute. I've waited a long time for this chance to go and you're not going to stop me now....

In contrast to the lurking element of uncertainty in Lost Horizon, throughout You Can't Take It with You the warm humour of the Vanderhof household emmanates from a safe, anticipated pattern of repetition. Regular explosions from the work-shop unfailingly knock down the "Home, sweet home" wall plaque - a plaque constantly being returned to position by the women members of the family. With similar repetitiveness, Poppins is depicted as continually popping forth in surprising masks, much in the manner of his own, home-made, mechanical creatures; while Kolenkhov habitually asserts that much of the world "stinks", repeatedly accepts invitations to dinner, and regularly cajoles the housemaid into doing his laundry.

Unlike the vague conclusion of Lost Horizon, the unequivocally happy ending of You Can't Take It with You stems from a perfect restoration of the film's rhythmical design following Alice's move to Connecticut and Martin Vanderhof's decision to sell the house. In the end, Essie pirouettes once more to the music of Ed's xylophone (this time accompanied by the harmony of Martin Vanderhof and Mr. Kirby's harmonicas). Tony and Alice again swing round and round in their dance of the "Big Apple". And Martin Vanderhof is able to conclude during grace at the dinner table that everything is back to normal, that, as usual, the family has absorbed a few more converts from the hectic business world outside:

> Martin Vanderhof: Well, Sir, here we are again. We've had quite a time of it, lately, but it seems as if the worst of it is over....Alice is going to marry Tony. Mr. Kirby, who's turned out to be a very good egg, sold us back our house. He'll probably forget all about big deals for a while. Nobody on our block has to move. And with right handling, I think we can even thaw out Mrs. Kirby, here....

As opposed to the indefinite conclusion of Lost Horizon, this final harmonious image of the family, circularly gathered about the table, fully eliminates all thought of temporal uncertainty and struggle.

PART TWO: MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON

In contrast to Capra's increasing trend toward "isolationism" and fantasy - as displayed in his movement from Mr. Deeds to Lost Horizon, to You Can't Take It with You - Mr. Smith Goes to Washington seems to suggest, at last, a new daring involvement with real-life situations. In this film, the director's careful research has given to even the smallest physical details of the senate remarkable veracity; while Jean Arthur's accurate depiction of political processes to fledgling senator, Smith, is generally regarded by critics as a brilliant lesson in American politics:

> The scenes in the Senate rise above the rest, with the Chamber meticulously recreated and every word of the ritualistic procedure authentic, except for party and state affiliations. Though he is today regarded as a sentimental fabulist, Capra's main impact in the thirties was as a realistic director; the veracity in Smith is still astonishing, and Jean Arthur's explanation of how Congress works, or doesn't, should be in civic texts.[4]

The introductory paragraph of Mr. Smith which announces that "names, characters, and incidents" are "fictitious" and that "similarity to any name, character, or incident" is "unintentional"; appears to underline this new veracity in Capra's work.

In addition, Mr. Smith seems to suggest, once more, a bold, renewed faith in the rejuvenating processes

---

[4] Stephen Handzo, "Under Capracorn", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975), p.170.

of the changing physical world - a faith reminiscent of the early It Happened One Night. It presents a world in which the power of youth has the capacity to lend new vitality to the tired stagnation of an older generation. Early in the film, juxtaposed with the scene of Governor Hopper's pathetic cowardice before boss Taylor[5], is a scene in which Hopper's own children stand up, one by one, to issue their bold tirade against the father's weakness. "Why don't you listen to your children, for a change?" significantly asks the exasperated mother, as they exhort their father to "stand up like a man", to take progressive action - in short, to choose a fine, recognized leader of youth like Jefferson Smith. For a moment, the boldness of youth seems to penetrate even Hopper, as, with daring toss of a coin, he decides suddenly to take his chance upon their youthful hero.

Likewise, later in the film, following Jefferson's presentation of his bill for the creation of a national boys' camp, it is the enthusiasm of children as they applaud their youthful senator-hero from the gallery, which rouses the body of older senators from sleepy lethargy into warm, life-like applause.

---

[5] Hopper, seated in the foreground, is dominated by the physically massive form of Taylor, who, towering above him, issues orders. Only momentarily does the timid Hopper rise to deliver a differing opinion: "I won't send Horace Miller." But in obvious nervousness he hastily resumes his seat.

Thus, in this film, it is the mechanistic world of the lifeless, older generation which Capra pits against an upcoming surge of youthful individualism. Scenes of the human anonymity within Taylor's machine-dominated empire, are contrasted with highly personalized scenes of independent children, who boldly fight against the devastating "smear-campaign" against Smith. Juxtaposed with a medium close-up of Smith's mother, as she takes down Saunders' news story, encircled by the young faces of energetic boys, are shots of Taylor's press room which depict men as small, insignificant figures, shot from above. A scene of "whooping" boys (mostly shown in medium close-up) who scramble about setting type in energetic, independent fashion, is succeeded by a shot of Taylor's press room in which a small figure, shown in long-shot, roams through a vast room of machinery, wordlessly transferring a written message to his fellow, insect-like worker. In subsequent shots of Taylor's press room, machinery and paper cover the entire screen, as the camera follows a vast movement of papers which travel from floor-level upward to the ceiling, and on through a mechanism that stretches across the great height of the ceiling.

In contrast to these impersonal, repetitive images of whirling paper and machinery, Capra depicts, through the boys, a youthful renewal, a fresh awakening. The delivery of the "Boy Stuff" paper is introduced

first by the image of a rooster crowing against a turning weather vane, followed by a medium close-up of a young boy blowing his trumpet before a background of fluttering, sunlit leaves.

But despite this apparent exuberance of Capra in the rejuvenating processes of life, the film on closer inspection offers surprisingly little real foundation for this initial enthusiasm. In contrast to It Happened One Night, man's movement into future in this film is depicted ultimately as an imprisoning factor, which gradually destroys the early idealism of boyhood.

The scene of Jeff's train journey to Washington becomes a poignant comment upon this destructiveness of time. As Senator Paine reminisces with Jeff on the train about the ideals which both he [Paine]and Jeff's father once shared, his words are accompanied by sad, nostalgic music,- by a tune suggestive of the old, pioneer west: "[He] always kept...[his] hat on his head, ready to do battle....[He was a] champion of lost causes....We were a team." Significantly, as he continues to speak of his own lost past, there line up against Paine on his seat large, dark bars of shadows - shadows which grow increasingly more heavy as Joe admits the hopelessness of man's personal ideals in the face of "large organization":

Jeff: one man against a large organization can't get very far, can he?
Paine: [Sadly] No.

The image of this forward-moving train which introduces Joe's conversation, is accompanied, initially by the lingering tune, "Auld Lang Syne"[5] - a tune which inevitably conjures forth a recollection of the lyrics: "Should old acquaintance be forgot". As the journey continues, however, the wistful tune is replaced by the impersonal, clicking sounds of the train's onrushing, progressive movement, heightening the devastating sense of the inevitable destructiveness of time and progress.

Gradually overcoming the original optimism of this film is a growing sense of an expanding, commercial industrialism, that is closing off America's once promising horizons. In Capra's depiction of the children's campaign, the machinations of adult enterprise are shown to become increasingly more powerful, more brutal, until the idealistic campaign of the children comes virtually to a halt.

An image of a youth mounting steps to deliver "Boy Stuff", accompanied by the simple strains of "Clementine", is followed by the image of an approaching truck, out of which emerges an anonymous figure (his hat

---

[5] This music is held over from the previous scene in which a celebratory banquet is given in Smith's honour.

pulled low over his face) - a man who proceeds to snatch papers from a child's little wagon. Subsequent shots display the total ransacking of the children's press room and the brutal slapping of a child by Taylor's impersonal henchmen. From a vision of a child's wagon being over-run and crushed by a fast-driven truck, Capra moves on to a scene in which children, themselves, are injured, as a powerful truck upsets a carload of young people. The simple, cheerful tune of "Clementine", which, at the beginning of this sequence accompanies youthful newspaper deliveries, has turned, by the end, into the heavy notes of despair and gloom: "[There are] children hurt, all over the city! Tell Jeff to Stop!" frantically urges Smith's mother over the telephone to Saunders.

Thus, despite the initial tone of enthusiasm in Mr. Smith, it is obvious that Capra no longer regards his environment as an ever-expanding opportunity for human advancement. In the progression of his work from It Happened One Night Capra depicts a world in which both the physical and psychological horizons of his characters have become increasingly contracted. Unlike the rich Mr. Andrews of It Happened One Night, there lies no heart of gold beneath the tough, villainous Taylor exterior; there is present in Taylor's stark portrait no room for personal redemption. There remains no physical space left untouched by big-business corruption -

no idyllic, remote Mandrake Falls. The big-business machine has moved into America's small towns and villages.[6] Replacing the sentimental postcards and horse and carts of Mandrake Falls, are riot-squad policemen and massive communications programs. At one point, shadowy figures of policemen turn great hoses of water upon placard-bearing citizens, as they proclaim Smith's innocence. This shot, significantly, is followed by an image of a machine-driven float, whose giant, printed banner ("SMITH HAS DISGRACED OUR STATE") covers the entire screen, allowing no space on screen for the presence of people.

The fresh, open retreat of prairie air and grass which Smith yearns to offer America's youth, is here depicted as a commodity bought and sold by corrupt business men, eager to make a profit from expensive government projects:

> Smith: [Speaking to Saunders of his plan for a national boys' camp] I've been over every single foot of it.... [There is] the wind leaning on the tall grass. [There are] lazy streams down in the meadows, angry little midgets of water up in the mountain, cattle moving down the mountain....You know, everybody oughta have some of that stuff.... [Later] Smith: [During his filibuster] it seems like a good idea to me to get boys out of the cities and stuffy basements for a couple months out of the year, and build their bodies and minds for man-sized jobs....But, of course, if you've got to build a dam

---

[6] In Mr. Deeds this seems foreshadowed by Arthur's threats to quit the tallow works for more money.

> where that boy's camp oughta be, to get some graft to pay off some political army, that's a different thing....

Unlike It Happened One Night, in which the heroine's re-integration with her natural and social environment reawakens in her a primal vitality, it appears in Mr. Smith increasingly harder for man to work out his vital childhood dreams and ideals in real, physical existence. Significantly, in response to Jeff's shock at Paine's corruption, the older senator remarks:

> You've been living in a boy's world. Stay there. This is a man's world. It's a brutal world. You've got to check your ideals outside, like leaving your rubbers....You can take my word for it. That's how things are....

Throughout the film, ominous references occur, concerning the need to fight for causes, already pessimistically described as "lost". On the train journey to Washington, Senator Paine refers to Jeff's father as a man "always...ready to do battle", a "champion of lost causes." Again, seemingly defeated in the senate by the protesting telegrams from his own state, Smith hoarsely whispers:

> [Looking at Joseph Paine] I guess this is just another lost cause, Mr. Paine. All you people don't know about lost causes. Mr. Paine does. He said once, they were the only ones worth fighting for...and you know that you fight for the lost causes harder than for any others. Yes, you even die for them....

Increasing the sense of futile idealism, Smith frequently is described in this film as "Don Quixote". Saunders, as she awaits Jeff's presentation of his bill, points him out to reporter, Diz, as "Don Quixote Smith,

man with a bill". This expression is evoked again by Saunders as she bemoans Smith's gullibility in the hands of Paine's socialite daughter:

> Saunders: [To Diz, sarcastically imitating Susan Paine's voice] I'll turn my glamour on him.
> Diz: The dupes are going to inherit the world anyway.
> Saunders: I wonder if Don Quixote hasn't got something on all of us....[I]wonder if it isn't a curse to go through life wised up.

And as Senator Paine attempts to discourage Jeff's interest in the Willow Creek Dam, there is, once more, a reference to the idealistic, windmill-fighting hero of Cervantes:

> Jeff: [To Senator Paine] That's just the point. There are a hundred other places that really need the water.
> Paine: You're fighting windmills....

With Capra's vision of a world in which the horizons have become increasingly contracted, it is hardly surprising that he turns more and more fervently to the emblems of America's greatness, to the statues, the monuments, the pictures; in what appears a desparate attempt to evoke from them the vitality that has vanished from actual, contemporary America.

During Jefferson's tour of Washington, for example, as he gazes at the massive statue of Thomas Jefferson, the camera poignantly draws back to reveal a bar of shadows which seem to form a kind of communal link between the visage of this president of the past and his living, youthful namesake. The historic portrait of the Declaration of Independence, likewise, appears to

come visually alive, as Capra superimposes upon its surface the moving image of signing hands. Again, during Smith's sight-seeing tour, the engraved words of the Constitution appear as giant close-ups superimposed upon the moving image of a tolling bell.

In Mr. Smith, it is neither images of the present nor of the future that Capra holds forth as encouragement to his youthful hero, but symbols of an historic past. Jeff points out proudly that it is "Daniel Webster's desk" at which he will sit. Later, as Jefferson describes his plans for the boys' camp with Saunders, there appears directly behind him a picture of a horse-drawn coach, on either side of which is mounted a glowing torch. In the background on the sound track can be heard a nostalgic tune, reminiscent of the old, American west:

> Jeff: [Gazing out the window at the night-time view of the Capitol dome] That's what's got to be in it.
> Saunders: On paper?
> Jeff: I want to make that come alive for every boy, and all lighted-up like that too....Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books. Men should hold it up every day of their lives.... [against the historic painting he holds up his hands, as though he were grasping a tangible object]

Again, following Smith's devastating denunciation by the slanders of the Taylor-machine, Saunders encourages the hero with bold images of America's past, as he sits dejectedly in the Lincoln Memorial:

> Jeff: What do you expect me to do, an honorary stooge like me against the Taylors...machines and lies?

> Saunders: Your friend, Mr. Lincoln had his Taylors and Paines....All the good in the world came from fools like that with faith....You didn't just have faith in Paine or any other living man. You had faith in something bigger than that....

And, on leaving the Memorial, Jeff, in his excitement, waves familiarly to the Lincoln statue; after which, for a few moments, the camera rests dramatically upon the historic figure, as though awaiting the patriarch's essential blessing.

The conclusion of the film powerfully points to Capra's increasing rejection of common, contemporary existence. As demonstrated by Meyer Levin in a review in Esquire, January 1940, Capra completely rejects or overlooks the perfect opportunity which the plot allows for Capra to affirm his faith in the common people. During Jeff's filibuster, men far beyond Taylor's machine-like grip are free to hear Jeff's words and rally round his cause. In the gallery Capra displays an important, national broadcaster who sends forth Smith's message to millions of men totally outside the tight repression of Jeff's home-state:

> [Capra] muffs or throws away a very simple opportunity for an effective, affirmative solution of the play's crisis.
>
> Mr. Smith's tycoon controls a state - but what of the nation? Capra shows us Mr. Kaltenborn (in person), at the microphone, broadcasting the news of the thrilling filibuster to a presumably nation-wide audience, only a small proportion of which has been shut off by Taylor and his friends; we are shown how the press gallery becomes convinced of Mr. Smith's truth, and how the tone of the news despatches changes, until, we presume, newspapers

> all over the country, except in his own state, are headlining the news of his Galahad attack upon the malefactors of great wealth.
>
> ...we must assume that Mr. Smith's appeal to the public for backing would arouse great response, outside his own state, response sufficient enough to expose and overcome the manipulated localized public opinion as delivered by Mr. Taylor and the (tarnished) Silver Knight.
>
> This factor is entirely omitted in the film; and by its omission Mr. Capra slights one of the safeguards of American democracy: the spread and largeness of America. It is not easy to fool all of the people even some of the time.[7]

Capra turns away, however, from a seemingly imminent solution in a rallying act of the people, and chooses, instead, the spectacular, almost miraculous resolution of Senator Paine's unexpected confession during a sudden suicide attempt.[8]

The final visual image of the hero in Mr. Smith underlines most emphatically Capra's growing transcendentalist perspective - a perspective more and more remote from the successes and failures of temporal existence. Despite Jeff's vindication, the last image of Smith on screen shows him as a collapsed body, carried

---

[7] Meyer Levin, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington", in Stanely Kauffmann with Bruce Henstell eds., American Film Criticism (Liveright: New York, 1972), p.381.

[8] It seems particularly significant that Smith must be saved by a man who feels forced to quit his own earthly existence in order to live up to a higher ideal. Attempting to shoot himself, Paine shouts, "I'm not fit to live....I'm not fit for office...." In Capra's It Happened One Night, in contrast, the heroine is redeemed by resilient characters very much rooted in physical life - characters like Peter, who despite their reversals are determined to go on living.

forth from beneath bundles of unsympathetic telegrams. Here Jefferson, like Deeds, appears a kind of isolated, Christ-like savior - his truth, his idealism rejected by the heedless people of contemporary society.[9]

Thus, in a film that has the potential of being one of Capra's most topical, realistic films - a film most hopeful of the future of contemporary society - Capra turns instead to a philosophy of remote idealism. Here in Mr. Smith there is displayed in miniature, a process of philosophical development that has been evolving throughout the body of Mark Twain's short stories and Frank Capra's films of the 1930's. In a pattern corresponding to that of Mr. Smith, both artists have moved in their works from early exhilaration in America's expanding horizons, towards an awareness of the individual's growing insignificance within a country increasingly industrialized, increasingly controlled by the machinery of centralized government. Out of this depressing perspective there has arisen in the works of both, an intensified re-affirmation of individual man's creativity - a triumph, however, shaded in pessimism. For both Twain and Capra, it is ultimately only in a realm remote from the world of physical reality that ideal visions of the individual are able to survive.

---

[9] Appropriately, in the final stages of his filibuster, as he speaks of the need to fight for the cause that is "lost", there appears in the background directly parallel to Jeff's tired, stooped back, the image of a great, dark cross.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

Baxter, John. Hollywood in the Thirties. General editor, Peter Cowie. New York: Paperback Library, 1970.

Capra, Frank. The Name Above the Title. New York: Bantam Books, 1972.

Griffith, Richard. New Index Series No. 3. Edited by Gavin Lambert. London: The British Film Institute, n.d.

Spiller, Robert E., Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, Richard M. Ludwig, ed. Literary History of the United States. Third edition, Revised. New York: Macmillan, 1963.

Twain, Mark. The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain. Edited by Charles Neider. Garden City: Doubleday, 1957.

--------Life on the Mississippi. New York: New American Library, 1961.

ARTICLES AND PARTS OF BOOKS

American Film Institute. "Frank Capra: 'One Man - One Film' ", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.

Glatzer, Richard. "A Conversation with Frank Capra", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.

Greene, Graham. "A Director of Genius: Four Reviews", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.

Handzo, Stephen. "Under Capracorn", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.

Jacobs, Lewis. "Capra at Work", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.

Levin, Meyer. "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington", in Stanley Kauffman with Bruce Henstell, eds., American Film Criticism. New York: Liveright, 1972.

Pechter, William. "American Madness", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.

Raeburn, John. The introduction to Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.

---------"American Madness and American Values", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra, Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.

Willson, Robert. "Capra's Comic Sense", in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, eds., Frank Capra. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1975.